

RIO+ 20 CONFERENCE: IMPLICATIONS FOR AGRICULTURE AND HEALTH OF "THE FUTURE WE WANT"

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The [UN Conference on Sustainable Development \(UNCSD\)](#), commonly called Rio+20, due to its anniversary with the [1992 Rio Declaration](#) on Environment and Development took place in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil 20-22 June 2012. Two main themes for the were agreed for the Conference: the green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication, and Institutional Framework for Sustainable Development. In this context the Conference highlighted [seven areas](#) which need priority attention including food security and sustainable agriculture, decent jobs, energy, sustainable cities, water, oceans and disaster readiness.

"THE FUTURE WE WANT"

The outcome document of the RIO+20 Conference, called "The Future We Want"¹, is an affirmation of the centrality of sustainable development. During Rio+20 the heads of State and Government and high level representatives renewed their commitment to address sustainable development at all levels, through an integration of economic, environment and social policies and actions. Rio+20 addressed the process for developing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to strengthen the institutional frameworks for sustainable development in a post 2015 Millenium Development Goals (MDGs) framework.

"The future we want" requires that countries, major groups and the UN system increase efforts for the achievement of sustainable development. In the aftermath of Rio+20 countries, major groups and the UN system will need to assess the significance of the outcome document and mobilize the necessary resources to ensure means of implementation related to financing, technology transfer, capacity building, equitable trade and any other commitments.

FOOD SECURITY, NUTRITION AND SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE

Rio+20 reaffirmed the existing commitments regarding the right to access safe, sufficient and nutritious food for present and future generations in line with the Five Rome Principles for Sustainable Global Food Security and through national, regional and global food security and nutrition strategies.

The conference emphasized the need to revitalize the agricultural and rural development sectors in an economically, socially and environmentally sustainable manner. It was recognized the importance of better address the needs of rural communities through, inter-alia, enhancing access by agricultural producers, in particular small producers, women, indigenous peoples and people living in vulnerable situations, to credit and other financial services, markets, secure land tenure, health care, social services, education, training, knowledge and appropriate and affordable technologies, including for efficient irrigation, reuse of treated wastewater and water harvesting and storage. The conference recognized the importance of traditional sustainable agricultural practices, including traditional seed supply systems, for many indigenous peoples and local communities. The need of empowering rural women as critical agents for enhancing agricultural and rural development and food security and nutrition was reiterated.

The conference reaffirmed that climate change is one of the greatest challenges of our time, and that all countries, particularly developing countries, are already experiencing increased impacts, including persistent drought and extreme weather events, sea-level rise, coastal erosion and ocean acidification, further threatening food security and efforts to eradicate poverty and achieve sustainable development. The conference emphasized that adaptation to climate change represents an immediate and urgent global priority

¹ <http://www.uncsd2012.org/thefuturewewant.html>

Rio+20 resolved to increase sustainable agricultural production and productivity globally, including through improving the functioning of markets and trading systems and strengthening international cooperation, particularly for developing countries, by increasing public and private investment in sustainable agriculture, land management and rural development. It was stressed the need to significantly reduce post-harvest and other food losses and waste throughout the food supply chain.

Key areas for investment include sustainable agricultural practices; rural infrastructure, storage capacities and technologies; R&D on sustainable agricultural technologies; development of agricultural cooperatives and value chains; and strengthening urban-rural linkages.

The conference reaffirmed the necessity to promote, enhance and support more sustainable agriculture, including crops, livestock, forestry, fisheries and aquaculture, that improves food security, eradicates hunger and is economically viable, while conserving land, water, plant and animal genetic resources, biodiversity and ecosystems and enhancing resilience to climate change and natural disasters. The need to maintain natural ecological processes that support food production systems was recognized.

Rio+20 stressed the need to enhance sustainable livestock production systems, including through improving pasture land and irrigation schemes in line with national policies, legislation, rules and regulations, enhanced sustainable water management systems, and efforts to eradicate and prevent the spread of animal diseases, recognizing that the livelihoods of farmers, including pastoralists, and the health of livestock are closely related.

The crucial role of healthy marine ecosystems, sustainable fisheries and sustainable aquaculture for food security and nutrition and in providing for the livelihoods of millions of people was particularly stressed and further discussed in the outcome document section of oceans.

The conference committed to take action to enhance agricultural research, extension services, training and education to improve agricultural productivity and sustainability through the voluntary sharing of knowledge and good practices and called for the strengthening of international cooperation on agricultural research for development. It was resolved to improve access to information and knowledge including through new information and communications technologies that empower farmers to achieving sustainable agricultural production.

Rio+20 reaffirmed the relevance of the Committee on World Food Security including through its role in facilitating country-initiated assessments on sustainable food production and food security. The conference stressed the need to address the causes of excessive food price volatility, including its structural causes, and the need to manage the risks and their consequences for global food security and nutrition. International organizations, private sector actors and Governments were urged to ensure the public dissemination of timely and quality food market information products.

The conference recognized that universal, rules-based, open, non-discriminatory and equitable multilateral trading system will promote agricultural and rural development in developing countries and contribute to world food security. The conference urged national, regional and international strategies to promote the participation of farmers, especially smallholder farmers, including women, in community, domestic, regional and international markets.

HEALTH

RIO+20 reaffirmed the importance of health as a precondition for and an outcome and indicator of all three dimensions of sustainable development (environmental, social and economical). In fact, the conference goals of sustainable development can only be achieved in the absence of a high prevalence of debilitating communicable and non-communicable diseases, and where populations can reach a state of physical, mental and social well-being. Action on the social and environmental determinants of health, both for the poor and the vulnerable and for the entire population, is important to create inclusive, equitable, economically productive and healthy societies. In this context, the conference called for the full realization of the right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. The outcome document includes a holistic view of health and wellbeing that encompasses a variety of established and emergent health priorities².

Rio+20 recognized the importance of universal health coverage to enhancing health, social cohesion and sustainable human and economic development. The conference pledged to strengthen health systems towards the provision of equitable universal coverage and called for the involvement of all relevant actors for coordinated multi-sectoral action to address urgently the health needs of the world's population. The conference committed to redouble efforts to achieve universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support, as well as to renewing and strengthening the fight against malaria, tuberculosis and neglected tropical diseases.

Rio+20 recognized that the global burden and threat of non-communicable diseases constitutes one of the major challenges for sustainable development in the twenty-first century. Countries committed to strengthen health systems towards the provision of equitable, universal coverage and promote affordable access to prevention, treatment, care and support related to non-communicable diseases, especially cancer, cardiovascular diseases, chronic respiratory diseases and diabetes. They also committed to establish or strengthen multi-sectoral national policies for the prevention and control of non-communicable diseases. It was recognized that reducing air, water and chemical pollution leads to positive effects on health.

Rio+20 called for further collaboration and cooperation at the national and international levels to strengthen health systems through increased health financing, recruitment, development and training and retention of the health workforce, through improved distribution and access to safe, affordable, effective and quality medicines, vaccines and medical technologies, and through improving health infrastructure. The conference supported the leadership role of the WHO as the directing and coordinating authority on international health work.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

One of the main challenges in the Rio+20 process was reconciling different approaches to the next phase of the global development agenda: post MGDs or post 2015 framework. The Rio+20 outcome document agrees to start a process to develop Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that complement the MDGs and address issues that were not sufficiently embraced in the MDGs. Work on this agenda was done under the guidance of the UN Secretary General to have the issue driven by an intergovernmental process under the General Assembly. Passed to this year's General Assembly is the task of establishing a representative "open working group" that will guide development of the SDGs. A key challenge is to develop SDGs in the framework of equity, social inclusion and within planetary boundaries and to commit the necessary resources for implementation. There was decision to establish an intergovernmental process under the General Assembly to propose options for an effective Sustainable Development Financing Strategy.

² Population, sexual and reproductive health and gender issues were also addressed on the health section of the outcome document but are not covered here.

MEANS OF IMPLEMENTATION

The "Means of Implementation" section of the outcome document was one most difficult to resolve in Rio+20 since the conference has been prepared and held against the backdrop of the economic and financial crises, a range of natural disasters and human-induced catastrophes such as climate change. The good intentions contained in "the future we want" need clear and strong commitments to be implemented through financing, technology transfer, capacity building, equitable trade and other commitments.

Rio+20 called on all countries to prioritize sustainable development in the allocation of resources in accordance with national priorities and needs, and recognized the crucial importance of enhancing financial support from all sources for sustainable development for all countries, in particular developing countries. The conference recognized the importance of international, regional and national financial mechanisms, including those accessible to sub-national and local authorities, to the implementation of sustainable development programs, and called for their strengthening and implementation. The need for significant mobilization of resources from a variety of sources, and effective use of financing was recognized.

The conference agreed to establish an intergovernmental process under the auspices of the General Assembly, with technical support from the United Nations system and in open and broad consultation with relevant international and regional financial institutions and other relevant stakeholders. The process will assess financing needs, consider the effectiveness, consistency and synergies of existing instruments and frameworks, and evaluate additional initiatives, with a view to preparing a report proposing options on an effective sustainable development financing strategy to facilitate the mobilization of resources and their effective use in achieving sustainable development objectives.

The announcement of "Rio+, the World Centre for Sustainable Development" in which the Brazilian government will be actively engaged is an important contribution to increased and enhanced efforts for capacity development and the sharing of knowledge. PAHO/WHO through its regional and country programs has an important role in promoting and facilitating the sharing and transfer of successful sustainable development knowledge and capacity building to address the nexus between sustainable agriculture, food and nutrition security and health.