



Civil Society and Knowledge Community: Dialogues around Institutional Framework for Sustainable Development (IFSD)

Joint side event by The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI) and the International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth (IPC-IG)

The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD), commonly known as the Rio+20, will be held in Rio de Janeiro in June 2012 and marks twenty years since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) or the Earth Summit held in 1992. The Conference is seen to contribute to a renewed opportunity to strengthen global political commitment for sustainable development, assess progress and gaps in already agreed commitments and address new emerging challenges.

Agenda 21 states that a fundamental prerequisite for the achievement of sustainable development is broad public participation in decision-making towards which there is a need for new forms of participation of nine 'major groups'¹ that include non-governmental organizations and the scientific and technological community. 'Civil society' and 'knowledge community' could be considered as two groupings that cut across these various groups. The recent UNCSD Zero Draft of the outcome document also mentions the meaningful role at all levels that the major groups² can play in sustainable development with the support of universal access to information and communications technologies (ICT). ICT is a crucial catalyst in providing access to and exchange of information. It is important to enable all members of civil society to be actively engaged in sustainable development by incorporating their specific knowledge and

¹ Agenda 21 major groups include: Local Authorities, Women, Children & Youth, Indigenous People, Non-Governmental Organizations, Trade Unions, Business & Industry, Scientific & Technological Community and Farmers.

² Major groups include women, children and youth, indigenous peoples, non-governmental organisations, local authorities, workers and trade unions, business and industry, the scientific and technological community, and farmers

practical know-how into national and local policy making. Section III of Agenda 21 recognizes the critical role of governance at the local, regional, national and global levels as well as the broad public in decision making for advancing sustainable development.

The civil society has been instrumental in effective implementation of programmes and also in ensuring transparency as watchdogs for the community. Knowledge institutions can engage in in-depth research activities and design innovations within a trans-disciplinary and collaborative framework and play a key role in making and influencing policy locally and globally. These institutions and organizations use the media and direct contacts with politicians, civil servants and other organizations in the policy community to disseminate their work and attempt to influence the government as well as wider public debate. Since 1992, active civil society and knowledge institutions in India have worked together and played an important role in processes around several landmark legislations through campaigns that are underpinned by 'rights based' approaches. Some of these legislations pertain to the right to information, right to food security through public distribution system and the right to employment.

Efforts in other part of the South mirror the Indian experience and are also different. On the right to food, Brazil and South Africa's approach differ slightly. The Brazilian food security policy agenda has focused increasingly on production models based on family farming and agro-ecological practices and South Africa's approach directs equity and social-economic sustainability efforts through support to household production (Souza and Chmielewska, 2011)³. Agricultural cooperatives have also been recognized as an important mechanism by the FAO for agricultural development, food security and poverty reduction. These cooperatives increase the bargaining power and share of available resources of the small farmers.

In other countries, the advances of rights within an institutional framework for sustainable development touches on access to and benefits from the conservation of forest resources, equity stakes in local mining operations and reaffirmation of the rights to consultation and participation (Prior Informed Consent). Additionally, research has expanded the understanding of how institutions and related operational frameworks work and do not work

³ Dimensions of Inclusive Development, Poverty in Focus #23, pp.31. Available from <http://www.ipc-undp.org/pub/IPCPovertyInFocus23.pdf/>,

including the effectiveness of development aid and finance and more recently, the governance of climate finance.

The role of civil society and knowledge institutions is crucial in the debates around IFSD and there is a need to assign them adequate space in the design and operationalizing of sustainable development frameworks and related activities. Their role exists at all levels – international, regional, national, sub-national and local – and may be increasingly mobilized and organized through innovative methods. So far, partnerships registered with the Commission on Sustainable Development have been limited in terms of geographical scope with local level accounting for only 1.4% of the total partnerships⁴ indicating the very least a lack of visibility of local initiatives. Yet, undeniably, many innovations start at the local level and there is renewed attention to scaling up local development innovations and mainstream key lessons learnt. Both civil society and knowledge institutions play a key role in identifying, securing and translating such innovations. While there has also been moderate success in terms of getting visibility of major groups including farmer groups, women groups, workers and trade unions and youth groups, major Groups need to be increasingly mobilized on issues related to sustainable development through innovative methods at all levels and across all typologies.

There should also be strengthening of networks of innovators and social entrepreneurs with provision of support (possibly using a model similar to the Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research) and efforts for forming and funding more cross-cultural teams and relationships, to promote knowledge sharing across both North-South as well as South-South. India believes that the world can benefit by sharing experiences in the field of ‘inclusive growth’, thus promoting international cooperation. The India-UNIDO programme of cooperation helps in building up partnerships for sustainable development and promoting South-South cooperation amongst African, Asian and Latin American countries. India has signed a MOU with Brazil and South Africa to provide a framework for trilateral cooperation in the areas of environmental management and sustainable development in the global agenda. The

⁴ CSD, DESA, May 2011

UNCSD Zero Draft of the outcome document also recognizes strengthening of and need to support South-South cooperation and triangular cooperation.

The Second Preparatory Committee report⁵ of the Secretary-General recognized that a comprehensive overview of the institutional framework for sustainable development would be incomplete without accounting for the growth in informal arrangements, voluntary agreements, networks and civil society arrangements, in many instances established by non-state actors. Until now, however the debate on IFSD has focused largely on addressing the key issue of institutional reforms within the United Nations System – for example the Commission on Sustainable Development, Global Environment Fund and United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). Little attention has been paid to other elements of the institutional framework including informal institutions.

When looking beyond the limited framework and discussion about UN agencies and the multilateral framework, some interesting questions arise:

- 1) What is the potential contribution of the ongoing dialogue on IFSD in strengthening the networks for ensuring equity through informal groups including civil society and knowledge institutions?
- 2) What has been the contribution of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and knowledge networks/ collaborations on the structure of the institutional framework that has evolved?
- 3) In the context of climate finance, what is the role of CSOs in over-seeing the climate finance effectiveness in developing countries?
- 4) How could the role of CSOs and knowledge community (including South-South learning) be enhanced for democratic participation in decision-making?
- 5) How do citizens define their modes of engagement with the state and other interest groups and use different forms of collective action. What, for example, are the lessons from the Occupy Movement and the Arab Spring? Should we be more flexible in considering social mobilization which is revolutionary and game-changing but does not always need to be permanent?

⁵ UN 2011, Para 92

6) What are the formal (and informal) channels of participation to promote more inclusive citizenship and facilitate the realization of political and socio-economic rights?

7) In this regard, in order to fulfill the sustainable development agenda and promote government-driven, what specific actions can be designed to ensure integrated decision making at all levels / across major groups?

In view of the above, TERI and IPC-IG will be organizing a side event during Rio+20 in June, 2012, that has the objective to stimulate discussion on the above questions. A select group of representatives from CSOs and knowledge institutions will be invited and efforts will be made to harness in best possible manner the diverse knowledge and experience of the participants, accommodating different opinions and interests and providing the tools and the space for productive brainstorming of future role and direction of CSOs in the context of the IFSD.

The event will be organized in the form of a panel discussion including time for an open discussion. The results of the discussion will be presented in the form of a synthesis paper to which the participants will contribute. The outcome of this dialogue will also contribute to the civil society and media capacity building activities that are being undertaken by International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth (IPC-IG), under the Poverty Group, Bureau for Development Policy, UNDP that is based in Brasilia, Brazil as well as contribute to the trans-disciplinary knowledge activities undertaken by The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI), New Delhi, India. The proposed outcomes will inform our continued joint work relating to inclusive approaches and inclusiveness as the cornerstone of equitable and sustainable development.

USEFUL INFORMATION

WEBPAGES

Rio+20

<http://www.uncsd2012.org>

Side event

<http://www.uncsd2012.org/rio20/index.php?page=view&type=1000&nr=315&menu=126>

Logistic information

<http://www.uncsd2012.org/rio20/logistics.html>

http://www.rio20.gov.br/useful_information

MAP

Layout of Riocentro Convention Center, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

The side event will be held at the Pavilion 3 (Green)

