

NTS Insight August 2012

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## Rio+20 Incorporated? Assessing diplomatic outcomes and private sector actions on sustainable development

*The May 2012 NTS Alert entitled 'Back to the future: Is Rio+20 a 1992 redux or is there cause for optimism?' explored the prospects for the June 2012 UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), arguing that negotiators would struggle to reach consequential agreements but that the meeting would find value through non-state channels. This NTS Insight picks up where the NTS Alert left off. It highlights the emergence of the private sector as a significant driver of innovation and action on sustainability, but notes that optimism on this front must be tempered by caution, as the motivations of the private sector vary widely. Thus, robust official conference outcomes must still be considered relevant for sending signals to a range of stakeholders.*

By J. Jackson Ewing and Tarun Gopalakrishnan



*Conference officials celebrate agreement on The future we want, the primary outcome document of the 2012 UN Conference on Sustainable Development. While this negotiated agreement has met with both disappointment and guarded praise, the legacy of Rio+20 may be largely formed by activities that took place outside of official channels.*

*Credit: UN Photo / Eskinder Debebe.*

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### Introduction

Responses to the June 2012 UN Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD, or Rio+20; also known as the Earth Summit) in Rio de Janeiro have ranged from tepid acceptance to considerable criticism. Relative optimists have noted as positive developments the commitment to specific Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the strengthening of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), the encouragement of sustainability reporting and growth measurements, and the bolstering of science in policymaking (Llana, 2012).

With many of its outcomes still to be solidified in subsequent meetings, Rio+20 is being framed

- Consortium of NTS Studies in Asia Website
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Recommended citation: Ewing, J. Jackson and Tarun Gopalakrishnan, 2012, 'Rio+20 Incorporated? Assessing diplomatic outcomes and private sector actions on sustainable development', *NTS Insight*, August, Singapore: RSIS Centre for Non-Traditional Security (NTS) Studies.

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by some, including UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, as the beginning, rather than the realisation, of a pathway towards more sustainable economic and social systems (Rio+20 a "failure of leadership", 2012). Twenty years on from the first global Earth Summit, this is a curious slant; and many see the meetings as little more than a hollow shell. Over 1,000 non-governmental organisations (NGOs), institutions and individuals have signed a petition calling the outcome of the meetings 'The Future We Don't Want' (a pointed reference to Rio+20's outcome document, *The future we want*). They cite failures to remove fossil fuel subsidies, adequately protect oceans, and address women's reproductive health among others. A delegation of youth organisations dramatically walked out of the Rio+20 conference in protest and elder statespersons of the environmental movement, from Fernando Cardoso to Gro Harlem Brundtland, have decried the conference's shortcomings (Rio+20 is not the response, 2012).

However, despite an overall lack of enthusiastic responses, as well as widespread exasperation from environmental non-governmental organisations (ENGOs) and frustration on the part of many countries, Rio+20 may yet leave its mark as the tipping point for private sector action on sustainable development. Non-state, particularly private sector, involvement has been

largely heralded following Rio+20, and there is evidence to suggest that the conference's most compelling stories took place outside the main negotiating halls. This NTS Insight reacts to Rio+20 by comparing and juxtaposing developments in the official negotiations with those emerging from the sidelines of the conference (with emphasis given to activities from the private sector). It concludes by questioning the relationship between the official and the less formalised outcomes, both for the future of sustainable development and environmental summitry.

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## Rio+20: Expectations and process

### Development priorities with a political focus

Momentum towards Rio+20 began in earnest with UN General Assembly resolution 64/236 of 2009, which saw states reaffirm the need to use Rio+20 to more effectively balance economic development, social well-being and environmental protection agendas (UNGA, 2010). In a statement representative of developing world concerns, Brazilian Foreign Minister Antonio Patriota stated that '[t]he summit can't just be about the environment ... it has to be about development' (Prada and Chestney, 2012). Patriota's statement reflects a growing juxtaposition of environmental and development concerns that has been increasingly apparent since the 2010 Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in Cancun. Panel Chair for the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Ottmar Edenhofer, for example, described the 2010 negotiations as 'not a climate conference, but one of the largest *economic* conferences since the Second World War ... One has to free oneself from the illusion that international climate policy is environmental policy. This has almost nothing to do with environmental policy anymore' (Potter, 2010; translated from German, emphasis added).

Rio+20 followed a similar path, with the primacy of economic and social policies becoming quickly apparent.<sup>1</sup> Excessive focus on the environment was gently criticised by the European Commission, which wanted to update national sustainable development strategies that 'have often been too strictly environmental' (UNCSD, 2012a: response to question B-12). Apart from widening the vision for Rio+20 outputs, it was anticipated that the emphasis on development could lead to fresh approaches to issues that have been a source of contention at other climate negotiations. More importantly, the development emphasis resonated with the insistence of developing countries that social and economic advancement not fall victim to the cause of environmental stewardship. These trends lent themselves to politically rather than legally focused deliberations.

From the outset, Rio+20 sought to 'secure renewed *political* commitment for sustainable development' and to create a 'focused *political* document' (UNGA, 2010: para. 20; emphases added). Tangibly, the governments of Colombia, Guatemala and Peru labelled the envisioned SDGs as 'concrete ways of grounding' the political commitment, and it was proposed that Rio+20 be a forum for agreeing on a set of sustainable development objectives, among them combating poverty and, in initial proposals, changing consumption patterns (MFR Colombia, 2011a, 2011b). Governments thus largely skirted the goals that have defined much of the ongoing UNFCCC process, such as the signing of treaties or binding commitments. Unsurprisingly, government statements leading to Rio+20 reflected the political interests underpinning the negotiations and contributed to the sense that binding legal frameworks would not be in the offing (Horner, 2012).

### The institutional framework for sustainable development

In the absence of binding agreements, the need to strengthen the institutional framework for environmental governance became one of two themes for the conference (the other being the green economy, discussed in the next section). The emphasis on developing an integrated framework for sustainable development flowed from Chapter XI of the 2002 Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, which 'highlighted the need to enhance the integration of sustainable development in the activities of all relevant United Nations agencies, programmes and funds, and the international financial institutions' (UNCSD, 2012b). This seemingly necessitated moving beyond nebulous political

agreements and towards a more concrete framework. Sha Zukang, head of the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, and later Secretary-General of Rio+20, articulated this when he stated that 'the world might need something more than a negotiated declaration of political commitment to advance the implementation of [the] sustainable development agenda' (Bureau of the Preparatory Process for the UNCSD, 2011). Developing an institutional framework was thus more than an ideological aspiration but rather a hoped-for Rio+20 outcome.

Pre-Rio+20 discussions of an institutional framework centred upon how best to re-align existing institutions to balance economic, social and environmental priorities and how any such efforts should be implemented. There was relative consensus that 'reforms to institutional arrangements could be based on the existing structure, while enhancing coordination, coherence, and synergies' (UNCSD, 2012c). There were a variety of inputs on how to update these existing structures. Some states favoured strengthening institutions such as the UN Commission on Sustainable Development and/or the UNEP, while others sought to create a new umbrella organisation to coordinate the work of UN bodies.

With any organisational frame, however, there was recognition that international bodies must set up effective mechanisms to help developing countries achieve sustainable development targets. Such discussions largely mirrored the debates about 'green funding' that have been common at climate change negotiations. The broad objective was to create an international regime in which developing nations are incentivised to meet sustainable development targets through 'technology transfer' and 'adequate and predictable financing' (UNCSD, 2012c). Statements by China (2011), India (2011) and Brazil (2011) during the Rio+20 lead-up highlight these requirements as priorities in a workable institutional framework, and reflect the insistence of developing state actors that new frameworks facilitate the flow of technology and finance deemed essential for entering into targets and/or commitments.

## A green economy

The second primary theme of Rio+20 was the so-called green economy, which self-referentially sits at the intersection of environmental and economic concerns. While the overarching aim of the green economy is to achieve sustainable patterns of production and consumption, the concept does not lend itself to precise definition. It was agreed that the concept should not replace sustainable development as a goal, but should rather be seen as a vehicle for achieving broad sustainability aims. This being said, and despite trumpeting by the European Union (EU), definitional ambiguities surrounding the green economy mired conversations both leading up to and during the Rio+20 process (Llana, 2012), and revealed key spaces between leading developing- and developed-country positions.

The influential Group of 77 (G-77) developing-world coalition remained firm that poverty alleviation must be a priority for sustainable development strategies. Meanwhile, stakeholders from developed states such as the US, while acknowledging the importance of focusing on the poor, also highlighted the need to adopt market mechanisms. Developing and developed states found some common ground on the issue of trade protectionism, arguing that protectionism needed to be reduced as part of the drive towards a green economy. Yet another oft-repeated viewpoint was that nations should be left to determine their priorities and not fall victim to one-size-fits-all approaches. This flexibility would presumably extend to areas of trade regulation, subsidies and so forth which are at the crux of the protectionism issue.

Largely because of such obscurities, and trade protectionism provides only one example, it remained unclear what a global commitment to the green economy – accompanied by a roadmap defining concrete steps at the international and national level, as well as a best practice guide of actions, instruments, indicators, case studies and policies – would actually entail.

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## The official Rio+20 outcomes

### Examining *The future we want*

Rio+20 was plagued by significant pre-emptory diplomatic posturing and deficient prioritisation by some of the world's most influential players. One observer lamented the 'weeks [spent] haggling over even the most anodyne wording' and it was reported that ultimately the Brazilian host delegation resorted to 'ramming' through a version of the so-called Zero Draft (the Rio+20 negotiating document) by incorporating only universally agreed suggestions (Lean, 2012). The lack of any pronounced diplomatic breakthroughs was worsened by the non-attendance of several prominent world leaders including US President Barack Obama and UK Prime Minister David Cameron. This stood in stark contrast to the large high-level representation enjoyed by the original Earth Summit in 1992. The presence of global leaders at a nearby Group of 20 (G-20) meeting on financial reforms further provided an emotive signal as to the place of sustainable development in the hierarchy of international priorities.

The primary outcome of Rio+20 is a document titled *The future we want* (UN, 2012). The document, as earlier noted, represents a degree of progress. The real test of the document however lies not in what was said but what was left out. In the context of the green economy, the Zero Draft specifically outlines a framework for action which acknowledges that making 'significant progress towards building green economies will require new investments, new skills formation, technology development, transfer and access, and capacity building in all countries' (UNCSD, 2012e: para. 42). States *agree* to specific commitments towards an international framework for greening economies. The section disappears in the final document, which contents itself with *recognising* the benefits of the green economy approach and takes

great pains to prioritise national sovereignty in implementation (UN, 2012). Meanwhile, once-lauded concepts such as 'natural capital' failed to make the final agreement, and proposals for new GDP measurements were left vague even in the Zero Draft.

The institutional framework section of *The future we want* shows greater substance. The final text contains a concrete agreement for the establishment of a 'universal intergovernmental high-level political forum' which would eventually replace the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (UN, 2012: para. 84). Ongoing intergovernmental discussions could be a boon for sustainable development, provided that the Rio+20 mandate is further defined and adequately empowered by future meetings on the topic at the UN General Assembly. The monitoring and evaluation of these agreements will remain key. However, the proposal in the Zero Draft to use the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) as a monitoring agency for sustainable development (UNCSD, 2012e: para. 48) was eventually sacrificed for strengthening the ECOSOC 'within its mandate under the [UN] Charter' (UN, 2012: para. 83). This ensured that one of the strongest international forums will continue to escape committing to an overtly environmental focus.

The Colombian proposal on SDGs was largely adopted as it was, possibly because it did not require a definition of positions at this point in time. The document merely agrees to initiate a process towards drafting the SDGs in concert with the process to re-work the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015 (MFR Colombia, 2011a, 2011b).

## Matching outcomes against aspirations

Sha Zukang outlined his aspirations for the conference by saying that 'Rio+20 must be the place where decisions on the future of the planet are made for the next 10 or 20 years. It cannot be another talk shop. World leaders need to adopt an ambitious and yet practical outcome that equals the magnitude of today's challenges' (Zhang, 2012). By this measurement, Rio+20 is somewhat wanting. *The future we want* does not shift any paradigms; sustainable development as a concept has been around for a long while. Nor do the official outcomes make concrete commitments to furthering the cause of such development. Voluntary commitments from states are likewise underwhelming; around 20 nations registered a total of less than 50 commitments (UNCSD, 2012d).

More generally, Rio+20 sought to move beyond the intractability of climate change negotiations to develop consensus around the three pillars (social, economic, environmental) of sustainable development. Given that climate change discourse menacingly centres upon preventing a destructive future, shifting the discussion towards progressive and proactive methods of development has a logical attractiveness. The negotiations avoided impasse and found a modicum of success in the form of *The future we want*, but did so through non-committal and thus uncontentious wording, putting off questions about implementation to future meetings and chasing a white whale in the form of the green economy. This latter proved to be a less than an ideal choice for framing discussions on sustainable development, and led to a devolving discussion about whether 'Western' economic models ought to be updated or fundamentally re-thought.

In the wake of Rio+20, key questions remain about how to manage the interconnecting goals of economic progress, environmental stewardship and social responsibility. This is unsurprising; there had been few recent signs that Rio+20 would be the place for a paradigmatic shift in development approaches. Moreover, negotiations would have been difficult even without this enthusiasm deficit. Rio+20's predecessor, the 1992 Earth Summit, was viewed by many as signalling such a shift, and its lukewarm legacy serves as a cautionary point about the difficulty of reforming fundamental elements of international systems (Ewing, 2012b). Progress in international environmental negotiations will continue to be non-linear, subject to fits and starts, and captive to prevailing global trends and domestic political climates.

Less predictable are the movements of non-state actors involved in the sustainable development equation. These stakeholders, particularly those coming from the private sector, pursued tracks at Rio+20 that reveal important lessons for current global environmental summitry, and provide cues to the likely future of sustainable development paradigms.



*Representatives from multiple youth organisations 'walk out' of the Rio+20 meetings in protest against what many viewed as an unambitious, ineffectual and co-opted negotiation process.*

*Credit: youthpolicy.org.*

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## Sidelines to frontline: The private sector

### Business as (un)usual?

In stark contrast to the dissatisfaction voiced through media and ENGO channels, the private sector emerged from Rio+20 with a range of positive narratives emphasising their own importance and unique capabilities. While the meeting was spurned (for the G-20) by many of the

world's most influential heads of state, and with ministers of finance, commerce and planning few and far between, Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) of multinationals teemed the Rio sidelines (Bigg, 2012). The private sector provided key players to meetings both before and during Rio+20, such as the Rio+20 Corporate Sustainability Forum, and gatherings hosted by the World Business Council for Sustainable Development, the European Economic and Social Committee, and Business Action for Sustainable Development. Other initiatives such as the UN High-level Group on Sustainable Energy for All brought together diverse actors from the business, finance, government and civil society sectors in relatively informal, or at least non-binding, forums for discussion. The Green Industry Platform, co-organised by the UN Industrial Development Organization and the UNEP, exemplified the strange bedfellows that define Rio's second tier. The Platform counts among its signatories companies from Microsoft to Bangladesh's Viyellatex Group, and countries from Switzerland to Nigeria. All told, over 700 voluntary commitments estimated to be worth more than USD500 billion in actions emerged from these avenues at Rio+20 (Hohnen, 2012).



*Steve Waygood (left), Chief Responsible Investment Officer at Aviva Investors, speaks at the Rio+20 sideline launch of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) report, Sustainable return on investment: The business case for a green economy. Joined by Mark Lee (right), Executive Director of SustainAbility, Waygood was one voice among many from the private sector promoting more sustainable business practices.*

*Credit: UN Photo / Nicole Algranti.*

These private sector efforts coalesced around several basic points, the first of which was that private sector action is essential to the earnest and effective pursuit of sustainable development. This sentiment converged neatly with Rio+20's official negotiated outcomes, which emphasised at various points the need for multi-stakeholder collaboration and private sector involvement. Specifically, *The future we want* states that sustainable development 'can only be achieved with a broad alliance of people, governments, civil society and private sector' (UN, 2012: para. 13). The document goes on to recognise the 'important tool of public-private partnerships', support 'national regulatory and policy frameworks that enable business and industry to advance sustainable development initiatives', and 'urge governments to create enabling environments that facilitate public and private sector investment in relevant and needed cleaner energy technologies' (UN, 2012: paras 46 and 127).

Such platitudinous official statements about private sector engagement notwithstanding, there was also a palpable sense in Rio that the private sector has the capacity to take action, and is doing so, in the absence of momentous diplomatic accords. The

perceived poor track record of officially negotiated strategies during preceding decades gave oxygen to these sentiments (Ewing 2012b). Tom Bigg (2012) of the International Institute for Environment and Development juxtaposes diplomatic shortcomings with the emergent private sector:

If anything, the Summit constituted a step back in the decades-long effort that started with the Brundtland Commission in the late 1980s, to place equity, sufficiency and international collaboration at the heart of global and national policy ... By contrast, heads of corporations such as Unilever, Puma, and the biggest Brazilian companies were ubiquitous in Rio, some bullishly asserting that if governments won't take steps to fix global problems then they will step into the gap.

Frances Beinecke of the US-based National Resources Defense Council was even more explicit about the need for private sector and civil society actors to overcome diplomatic quagmires when she stated that Rio+20 outcomes show that 'we can't rely only on the slow wheels of bureaucracy and government negotiators to address the urgent problems facing our planet. We must start doing it ourselves, and Rio proved that we are' (Davidson, 2012).

To buttress these so-called bullish assertions, private sector actors cited independent actions that have had tangible implications for sustainability. Tensie Whelan and Paul Polman (2012), respectively President of the Rainbow Alliance and CEO of Unilever, declared in a joint editorial that '[i]n the years since the first Earth Summit, businesses and NGOs like ours have been working to scale up sustainable resource use and engage producers and communities worldwide', a process which is 'quietly transforming global markets' and has led to 'three percent of the world's working forests, 10 percent of the world's tea production and 15 percent of the world's bananas' coming under sustainable management. They claim that Unilever and hundreds of other global businesses are 'committed to sourcing 100 percent of the commodities they use' from certified sustainable sources, and conclude that Rio processes have thus 'sensibly evolved away from government decree and turned toward the private sector to build a green economy that can implement sustainability on a global scale' (Whelan and Polman, 2012).

Such successes are presented as a contrast to the seemingly intractable diplomatic debates of environmental summitry and also suggest that channels outside of official negotiations hold promise as incubators of innovation and collaboration (Andonova and Hoffman, 2012; Ewing, 2012b). The Rio+20 meetings provided the private sector with a substantial platform to highlight their technological solutions and to share their ideas on addressing sustainability challenges (Vorhies, 2012). UNEP Head Achim Steiner acknowledged these possibilities when he stated that while 'we can't claim on any major indicators that we've turned the corner ... underneath the global meta-level of

analysis [Rio+20 facilitated] extraordinary innovation' (Bigg, 2012). Such innovation and collaborative opportunities were seen by many to transcend any official negotiated outcomes.

Despite such claims of parallel progress, however, private sector voices at Rio+20 were unambiguous in their calls for clear signals from policymaking communities. Whelan and Polman (2012), for example, urged delegates 'to provide a framework to design and fund incentives for sustainable production and consumption – one that supports investments in environmental and social improvements', stating that such a framework could mobilise billions in private investment. Bruno Berthon, Global Managing Director for Accenture Sustainability Services, extended this sentiment beyond Rio+20 by calling for delegates to create a more efficient and impactful global environmental organisation, citing the six currently operating international conventions on biodiversity as an example of the convulsion and disorganisation that can be crippling for private sector action (Vorhies, 2012).

In sum, it was the *positioning* of the private sector vis-à-vis the negotiation process that came to realise greater maturity at Rio+20. If the 1992 Earth Summit was about governments calling on non-state actors to alter their behaviour, Rio+20 saw many private sector players calling on governments to join them in creating further progress (Bendell, 2011). Despite this maturation, however, it is clear that entrenched private sector dynamics, including those that are anathema to sustainable development, will not dissipate quietly.

### What's in it for the private sector?

There are reasons for both caution and optimism when evaluating the Rio+20 private sector narratives. There are certainly disparate motives for the proactive positions of different private sector actors, ranging from altruistic social responsibility to disingenuous greenwashing; and exploring plausible private sector intentions remains vital for assessing the sector's likely contributions to SDGs.

The most direct and digestible reason for private sector interest centres on the premise that sustainability measures would lead to cost savings for businesses. The day-to-day operations of multinationals are often energy- and resource-intensive when measured in aggregate; and emphasising efficiency in production as well as in distribution and marketing chains presents relatively uncontentious low-hanging fruit. Moreover, introducing efficiencies through sustainable practices can not only improve corporate bottom-lines but also reduce environmental stresses, making it an easy sell strategically.

Private sector actors also have a vested interest in being first-movers in emergent sustainability industries. Businesses targeting renewable energy; the energy efficiency of buildings; water, forest and soil conservation; agriculture and food security; ocean ecosystem and fishery monitoring; sustainable waste management; natural resource extraction and the like all have a stake in building networks, being exposed to new technologies and approaches, and promoting sustainable policies (Bendell, 2011). Rio+20, and other global environmental summits, provides an ideal venue for meeting these objectives. Here again, potential profits line up readily with environmental stewardship.

Further, private sector actors have a reputational stake in appearing to be socially and by extension environmentally responsible. As environmental awareness increases among consumers, driven in no small part by international environmental summitry, incentives emerge for businesses to appear to support sustainability. In an ideal scenario, this contributes to symbiotic interactions in which sustainability lends companies greater efficiency and robustness in their operations while allowing customers to enjoy products that are consistent with their social and environmental values. More cynically, the desire to project a pro-sustainability image could lead to incomplete or deceptive information about business practices, or to actions that focus on the most visible forms of sustainable practices over the most beneficial.

Finally, the most difficult yet important area for analysing private sector action deals with their larger strategic outlooks regarding profitable environmental systems and resources. Some businesses may show an interest in avoiding levels of environmental degradation and resource exhaustion that can undermine their operations in the longer term. In the words of Andrew Deutz of Nature Conservancy, '[m]any of the businesses [at Rio+20] are recognizing that environmental degradation can be a major business risk if they don't deal with it' (Llana, 2012). By couching issues in terms of 'risk', businesses are placing environmental concerns in familiar territory. Given that private sector resource extraction for short-term economic gains has long been criticised as environmentally untenable (WCED, 1987), movements towards longer-term strategic environmental considerations are a boon for sustainable development. Conversely, however, perverse incentives for rapidly and unsustainably exploiting resources and environmental systems remain entrenched (Brand, 2012; Ewing, 2012b). Many companies will continue to subjugate environmental and social factors to



*A worker in central Thailand inspects panels on the largest solar photovoltaic project in the world. Emergent industries such as those relating to renewable energy can bring profits for companies that find a strategic niche and take advantage of incentives that promote more sustainable production practices.*

*Credit: Asian Development Bank.*

bottom-line interests, a reality that contrasts directly with the integrative principles of sustainability.

A thread running through these factors impelling private sector action is the rejection of notions that slower growth and lower consumption should feature in the push for sustainability. A report published by the World Business Council for Sustainable Development, which was chaired by the CEOs of DuPont and Procter & Gamble, encapsulates this sentiment, arguing that a model based on no-growth and low-consumption cannot improve the quality of life for citizens around the world (Holliday and Pepper, 2012). Such contentions promote expanding consumer choice to include more sustainable products, but have little to no truck with asking people to get by with less. The doing well (making profit) by doing good (being environmentally and socially progressive) model implicitly emphasises economic growth and profit seeking. Such approaches are met with trepidation by those who argue that reining in consumption and exorbitant lifestyles are imperative for achieving sustainability (Monbiot, 2012; Skidelsky, 2012). Given that sustainable production *and* consumption featured heavily in Rio+20 discussions, this important debate over whether sustainability can be achieved by relying on consumption-promoting approaches (favoured by private sector interests) will certainly continue.

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## Conclusion

The 1992 Earth Summit sought to shift the priorities of governments and peoples by fully integrating environmental dimensions into decision-making in every sphere of activity (UN, 1993). This arguably did not happen (Ewing, 2012b). At Rio+20, it was again apparent that there are clear limitations to official high-level diplomacy, yet signs of action were visible in more pluralistic, inclusive and unbound parallel channels.

The official negotiations at Rio+20 made modest contributions to more sustainable social and economic systems for the future, but they also converged on a relatively low common denominator to reach compromise among parties with widely diverging interests. This process echoes that of the 2010 Cancun and 2011 Durban climate change negotiations, which avoided 'failure' by mitigating expectations, moving incrementally and delaying highly contentious decisions (Ewing, 2011, 2012a). Such approaches should not be lamented outright. International diplomacy that addresses issues as fundamental to the organisation of societies as sustainability is bound to experience discord. The inherent limits to the negotiation process are not set to wane – despite the sometimes vitriolic criticisms from the ENGO community and frustration from state and non-state voices calling for stronger action.

This reality fuels the sense that private sector actions can and must supplement, extend and at times circumvent and usurp official negotiating platforms for true shifts towards sustainability to take hold. There are reasons for cautious optimism along these fronts, as the presence of influential business leaders at Rio+20 and the wealth of agreements reached and connections made demonstrate. However, this does not mean that the quest for internationally recognised norms and regulations is antiquated or irrelevant. The motivations of private sector actors in investing in sustainable development initiatives are varied, and questions exist as to the extent to which their interests converge with public goals. Governments should therefore send clear signals to these actors, and there must exist enforceable statutes to effectively guide and modify their actions. Such structural forces are essential for nudging countries, organisations and peoples, which are at the same time interconnected and disparate, towards broadly constructed common development goals.

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## Note

1. For example, stakeholders from the European Commission, in completing a series of questionnaires during the lead-up to Rio+20, used the words 'sustainable', 'development', 'economic' and 'social' far more than either 'climate' or 'environment' (UNCSD, 2012a).

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