

# UNEP, UN-DESA, GEC, SF host planning conference on stakeholder engagement for post-Rio and post-2015



From 20-21 October, at Pace University in New York City, the United Nations Environment Programme ([UNEP](#)), the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs ([UN-DESA](#)), in partnership with civil society organizations [Green Economy Coalition](#) and [Stakeholder Forum](#) held an event entitled "Post-Rio to Post-2015: Planning International Stakeholder Engagement." Co-chaired by Oliver Greenfield of the Green Economy Coalition and Farooq Ullah of Stakeholder Forum, the conference aimed to identify key entry points for stakeholders and to inform stakeholder advocacy on the processes following up to the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development ("Rio+20") and the [post-2015 development agenda](#).

The event featured working groups and panel discussions, bringing together Major Groups and other stakeholders, UN officials, and government representatives to discuss and strategize the implementation of Rio+20, particularly the intergovernmental process towards Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)) and the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) on sustainable development governance, and its integration with the upcoming post-2015 development agenda. Additionally, discussions focused on the green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication and the 10-year Framework of Programmes on sustainable consumption and production ([10YFP on SCP](#)).

As part of the initial framing of the discussion, Jorge Lagunas Celis of the Permanent Mission of Mexico to the United Nations posed four key challenges: convergence between the post-2015/post-MDG process, the SDGs, and financing for sustainable development; creating a universal and aspirational framework; ensuring inclusivity and the integration of green growth; and effectiveness, particularly regarding

the means of implementation and international cooperation for the new frameworks agreed.

A panel discussion on the first day brought together David O'Connor, Chief of the Policy Analysis and Network Branch of the Division for Sustainable Development, UN DESA; Jeffery Huffines of CIVICUS World Alliance for Citizen Participation, an organizing partner for the NGO Major Group; Pedro Telles of Vitae Civilis; and Alexander Juras, Chief of UNEP's Major Groups and Stakeholders Branch. Panelists advocated setting a clear and aspirational agenda and of including broad stakeholder involvement in all steps of the process, as well as the importance of clear and effective messaging to encourage public participation and the integration of the environment and development tracks. The speakers emphasized the need to advocate for coherence in campaigning in and outside the UN, particularly around the intergovernmental process on SDGs.

Inclusivity and equity, as essential guiding principles for stakeholder engagement in these processes and for the upcoming development agenda(s) itself, were raised by several participants, including Lobi Redhawk of the Grey Panthers and Pedro Telles. Ensuring the participation of marginalized people and grassroots voices, bringing those "still missing" to the formalized institutional setting remains an important and significant challenge. Essential to this effort, according to Jeffery Huffines, are capacity-building and the provision of resources by the UN system to bring people from the margins into the centre of deliberations.

Two sessions of breakout groups addressed the five themes of the conference, and reported back to the group. The [sustainable development governance](#) group, facilitated by Lalanath De Silva of The Access Initiative, World Resources Institute, emphasized the need for transparency and inclusionary practices and particularly focused on the HLPF. Mapping out the potential structure of the HLPF, the group suggested that the governing body report to both the General Assembly and to ECOSOC, and that it meet every few years with Heads of States and include a Major Groups and Stakeholders forum, on the model of UNEP's annual Governing Council meeting. The Forum should include, according to this conception, dialogues at national, regional, and international levels, including all stakeholders: UN agencies, governments, civil society organizations, academic experts, and both the sustainable development and poverty eradication constituencies.

The group on [SDGs/post-2015](#), facilitated by Paul Quintos of IBON International, addressed the content and scope of the SDGs and the need for a transformational vision therein, potentially one based on the buen vivir concept of holistic well-being. Given the wide range of issues, criteria for prioritization is necessary; Beyond2015 has formulated initial suggestions, while the Civil Society Reflection Group shared a framework for goals. The group stressed that no matter what the content of the SDGs, international human rights norms and standards should be their absolute minimum and foundation. They also mentioned the myriad of overlapping consultation processes on post-2015 and the need to claim the right to participate not just in these consultations but in the decision-making and crafting of the development agenda at national, regional, and global levels.

Oliver Greenfield chaired the group on [green economies for sustainable development](#), which focused on implementing the agenda including the social dimension, in an equitable, fair, inclusive, and participatory manner. Moving forward this agenda after its perceived failure of messaging at Rio+20 was an important consideration for this group, which highlighted UNEP's new Partnership for Action on Green Economy (PAGE) framework and the need to encourage a formal process for civil society/stakeholder engagement therein.

On the [10YFP on SCP](#), which was facilitated by Aleksandra Nastesha of We Canada / One Earth, participants emphasized the relative advantage of this well-defined process, which began ten years ago and was already officially adopted at Rio+20. The group stressed the importance of stakeholders positioning themselves to play an active role in this platform, including through feeding success stories into a global clearinghouse mechanism.

Finally, the working group on [implementation and delivery](#) was facilitated by Sascha Gabizon of Women in Europe for a Common Future, an organizing partner for the Women's Major Group. Providing an overview of the stipulations for financing for sustainable development, technology, voluntary commitments, capacity-building, and trade as outlined in the Rio+20 Outcome Document The Future We Want, the group focused on the importance of monitoring the implementation of these commitments. Other entry points for stakeholder advocacy include pushing for the achievement of official development aid commitments, the implementation of a financial transactions tax, the closing of tax havens, the diversion of fossil fuel subsidies and other unsustainable financial incentives, and new

potential global taxes including on the chemical and extractive industries.

On the second day of the conference, Debra Jones of Save the Children, co-chair of the Beyond2015 UN Working Group, and Chantal Line Carpentier, Major Groups Programme Coordinator at UN DESA's Division for Sustainable Development, presented overviews of the post-2015 and SDGs processes and their opportunities for stakeholder engagement. Priorities raised include the formulation of a content position, the merging of the two processes, the formal and meaningful participation of civil society, national government ownership and accountability on delivery, and the avoidance of overloading, of overt prescription or vagueness, and donor centrism. The Major Groups proposal for a Multi-stakeholder Advisory Group (MAG) for the Open Working Group (OWG) on SDGs was raised as one potential interface for the codification of stakeholder participation in the OWG's methods of work (see the [think piece](#) prepared by Chantal Line Carpentier).

During the question and answer period after these presentations, several participants called attention to potential gaps in the ongoing processes; in particular, the issue of the imbalance of the UN Development Group-led national consultations, which are scheduled to take place at this point only in developing countries; if SDGs are going to be universal, Sascha Gabizon inquired, how can we ensure that consultations are carried out also in developed countries? Additionally, Chantal Line Carpentier and later Jeffery Huffines raised the issue of ensuring meaningful civil society participation in UN-led consultations that require a quick turnaround, where organizations' limits of capacity preclude true inclusivity.

Breaking into working groups again, participants identified potential actions for three groups: stakeholders, UN agencies, and governments. The strategies formulated, which will be incorporated into the outcomes of the conference and shared with UNEP's Governing Council in February and the 20th and probably final session of the Commission on Sustainable Development in May, included the codification of stakeholder participation, including potentially through the vehicle of the Major Groups system, in the SDGs and post-2015 processes and in the HLPF. Recognizing the intrinsic linkages between the sustainable development and poverty eradication agendas, in acknowledgement of the inherent necessity of environmental system preservation in human development, formed one theme of the discussion and an action step for all three actors. For stakeholders, participants pointed out the

unique window of opportunity to build coherence, and perhaps even consensus, on “big-picture” priorities in the post-Rio and post-2015 processes. Supporting these strategies with fundraising and successful lobbying for effective engagement was also raised.

Budgeting for bringing marginalized groups to the discussions was identified as an action step for UN agencies, while groups emphasized the responsibility of governments to commit to financing and organizing national-level platforms for stakeholder engagement on the post-2015 and post-Rio processes. The importance of integration, effective communication, and awareness-raising was emphasized by several groups, as well as the necessity for participatory, transparent, inclusive, and effective processes at all levels. Finally, the question was raised of how to incorporate cross-cutting issues, including gender and inequalities, into this framework and the processes themselves.

During the afternoon session, Brice Lalonde, the Executive Coordinator for Rio+20, made a special address that focused on the need for implementation of the Rio conference. He raised the difficulties of the intergovernmental process and the new trend of Secretariat initiatives, including Sustainable Energy for All, as perhaps more effective than internationally-agreed outcomes. Financing for development and the way forward for green economy, “defeated” in Rio due to a misunderstanding, will also be priorities going forward. Mr. Lalonde raised the issue of the registry of commitments and how the political paradigm can be shifted towards accountability for what has been pledged. Heralding the example of the report produced by the Secretary-General’s High-Level Panel on Global Sustainability in January 2012, he raised the hope for “cross-fertilization” between the Secretary-General’s High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda and the intergovernmental process.

The closing plenary reiterated the need for ever-greater inclusivity, including within stakeholder groups themselves, and increasing mobilization among networks and constituencies to build trust and share information. Finally, the co-chairs concluded by identifying the need to address institutional, ideological, and intellectual barriers to increase coordination towards a single, coherent outcome for post-Rio and post-2015.

## **More Information and Resources**

[Conference Programme](#) [Background Papers](#) [Think Pieces](#)

## **See Also**

The World We Want 2015 [website](#) on the post-2015 development agenda Contribute to a [civil society consultation](#) on human development and jobs and livelihoods by 26 October for the High-level Panel on Post-2015