Which future we want

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There was a long expectation to the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development – the so-called Rio+20. Preparatory negotiations had a sense of a real dialogue and willingness to find common ground. Few key deliverables would make a difference: defining sustainable development goals (SDGs) as a central feature of a post-2015 development framework, exploring green economy policy options to advance sustainable development and eradicate poverty, and to make decisions on key elements of the international institutions needed to support such governance. There was a vast array of topics to be addressed under such umbrella: food security and sustainable agriculture, energy, oceans, gender equality and women's empowerment, and education. The necessary means of implementing action were on the table, including initiatives to strengthen financing, technology transfer and capacity building. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon urged as a priority for a new model that offers growth and social inclusion, also more respectful of the planet's finite resources. Stakeholders were encouraged to make and implement voluntary commitments at Rio+20 in order to get to what the main document stated in its title: *The future we want*.

However, as the conference started, the pace of the talks did not accelerate accordingly. Official negotiations could not match the demands from the civil society, as shown by the Rio Dialogues. An initiative of the hosting Brazilian Government, supported by the United Nations, the Dialogues attempted to create a bridge between major groups (social networks, the business community and other stakeholders) and the official proceedings of Rio+20.

The United Nations Conference for the Sustainable Development or *Rio+20*, celebrates the 20th anniversary of the Earth Summit and the 40th of the Stockholm UN Conference on Human Environment. In 1972, developing nations trumpeted their right to pollute, in order to catch up with levels of development of the OECD countries. In 1992, the major concern was to define the worldwide environmental status. Important agreement aroused from this Conference, adopted by over 178 governments: the Agenda 21 (an action plan to address human impacts on environment), the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). In 2002, governments agreed at the World

Summit for Sustainable Development in the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation to reaffirm their commitments on Agenda 21 efforts.

Since 1992, the world population has grown up 27% or 1.5 billion, from 5.5 billion to 7 billion of people, while the CO_2 emissions raised up 36%, from 22 billion to 30 billion tonnes per year. Along the population growth, the food and energy demand also intensified other social issues, such as equity, extreme poverty and lack of access to basic resources, which enhanced the current Conference discussion on a sustainable development perspective. The Rio+20 Conference aimed to renew the political commitment to sustainable development, analyse its progress, identify implementation gaps, and address new challenges. In order, theses efforts envisage finding an alternative to overcome the damages imposed by the consumption, the unrestrained development and the urbanizations, at least some of it, as most of the harm is probably irreversible. Contributing to announce the urgency of this matter, the United Nations Environnmntal Programme – UNEP - launched the GEO-5 (Global Environmental Outlook), a report which assessed 90 of the most important environmental objectives around, pointing out the failure of the countries to reach goals and target established until that moment, since only 4 out of that total have made significant progress. The document was launched two weeks before the Conference, the opportunity was also used to consequently urge the government to create more ambitious targets or even toughen the ones already in progress, which have been mostly not completed.

The UNCSD was focused on two themes: (a) a green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication; and (b) the institutional framework for sustainable development. These two when unraveled could result in basically any topics related to development, environment, economy or social aspects. Indeed one common concern among experts in the preconference moment was that the “poverty eradication” would be applied as an excuse to avoid discussing the interrelated consequences of the unsustainable development.

However, the controversy around the potential of the so called “green economy” was actually one point that created great polemic. Synthesized as way to present a new perspective to analyze the close relation between economy and sustainability green economy is seen differently when considered by the various segments. Several governments and international organizations, as UN, present green economy as a tool to pursuit the intra and intergenerational equity, since it implies in attributing relevance to all economic, social and environmental objectives when deciding policies, in the both public and private sectors.

Following this pattern, each time more companies become adherents of this view. They noticed that it might not only be a model of production that would take into account the environmental limitations, it could be a way to increase the production and to produce more efficiently with global support. In other words, it has finally been realized that green economy can bring a refreshing boost in the development, which is great valued in such times of crisis. A more participative model would create new investments, improved technologies and a renewed economic euphoria, all important factors in the attempt to restore the economic growth and control.

Nevertheless, a great part of the civil society, reunited at the People's Summit, and some States tended to decline the transition to the green economy as a miraculous alternative to the world's situation. Many question the efficacy of strategies based on the market, emphasizing that the human aspect should also be considered as an integrated aspect to define the directions to be followed. They accused this solution of being only an alternative to save the capitalism, representing the maintenance of the current patterns of consumption and the monetization of the natural resources, therefore, claiming the persistence of accumulated wealth in the hands of the corporations. Furthermore, internationally, they affirmed that it could affect negatively the low-development countries by the exposure to greater vulnerabilities.

The main product of the Rio+20, through its institutional aspect was the document The *Future We Want*, signed by the States. It was a result of a series of negotiation between the UN members, also with contributions sent by the civil society and other organizations. Basically the declaration was celebrated for not bringing major regressions. The important decisions to respond the situation that is confirmed at every moment by new scientific data were left for the future, since the main resolution summarizes the process that will still define the Sustainable Development Goals to replace the Millennium Development Goals after 2015.

The document was considered a victory to the multilateralism by the organizers; it included the position of the several parts that participated in the negotiation process and accordingly would have demonstrated the inclination of States to consider the relevance of the theme. In the words of the Brazilian negotiator André Corrêa do Lago, it represented "the consensus that the world needs to change", aside this obvious assertive, President Dilma Roussef called it a "starting point" from which we may demand progress from the nations. We have fully agreement that mandatory targets based on specific and measurable objectives have a rather higher rate of success, as indicated in GEO-5. However, the document signed in

the Conference did not establish mandatory goals or specific commitments for the States that is why many considered it insufficient in the ambit of People's Summit.

Several major groups engaged into side-events at Rio+20. An important major group was present in the event were the subnational governments. Not only taking part in the national delegation for the Conference, states, regions and cities participated in the whole process that composed the Rio+20. It was incredible to notice how relevant these actors have become lately. During that short week, subnational governments articulated themselves in meetings and activities to discuss and exchange local practices, also discussing the very own themes of the Conference. Under these circumstances, is increasing the theory of how these governmental unities outside the national level may contribute positively to the determination of effective instruments in the composition of a new paradigm of development. There are at least two fundamental roles that subnational governmental must play in this context. First they are the direct responsible for delivering concrete policies to be applied in their level, and in this sense they have been particularly important in institutionalizing the common expectations for cleaner and low-carbon actions. Besides, subnational governments must induce and ensure that the urban and regional development features are included in the national agenda. This spirit for mobilization was attested in the encounters of international networks, such as the Climate Group, nrg4SD and ICLEI, where the regions participated by promoting commitments among its members through the signature of declarations.

A major piece in the Rio20 puzzle was the future of multilateralism and international governance, especially in the environmental area. There was no consensus on the borderline between international law and national sovereignty. The tip of this iceberg was the discussion of how to strengthen the role of UNEP. The recognizably low-funded and underpowered UN Program got a push at Rio+20, what might be considered a key accomplishment by some but yet a move falling short of upgrading to a specialized agency. The text drafted in Rio calls for UNEP's financial situation to be strengthened, although not specifying how. As a U.N. program, UNEP relies on "voluntary" funding, while specialized agencies such as the World Health Organization, like the U.N. itself, are financed through "assessed contributions" from member states. The promotion of Nairobi, Kenya-based UNEP up the U.N. hierarchy was long proposed by European countries but opposed by the United States.

The official document of Rio+20, conversely to previous conferences, was political but not mandatory. Many heads of state did not attend the Conference, more concerned with the economic crisis, electoral campaigns and other topics that reinforce strong domestic hostility to action on climate and other environmental issues. Brazilian negotiators were

accused of using strong-arm tactics at Rio+20 to secure a deal before heads of state start arrived. The ghost of the Copenhagen Climate Change talks — which ended with disappointment and recriminations — was still present, driving the attempt to force through an agreement, despite risks it could backfire. Other delegates were more sympathetic to Brazil's efforts to reach a compromise. Europe, South Korea and Japan would like to see more concrete goals, timelines and measures to achieve a green economy, countering the risks posed by degrading ecosystems and diminishing resources that could be approaching a tipping point. New Zealand pushed for more ambition on issue like the removal of fossil fuel subsidies.

In the end, consensus brought about some proposals to strengthen UNEP, manage the world's oceans and establish sustainable development goals, what appeared to mark progress after weeks of procedural wrangling and divisions between rich and developing nations. Civil society has criticized the watered-down final document, weak to lift people out of poverty and stop environmental degradation. Expected to advance in relation to previous commitments – especially those from Rio 92 - the recognition of these in the final text was considered a victory.

Twenty years after Rio and Forty after Stockholm, it is still unclear what future we want.