



UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) Defending Sustainable Development Agenda in Nepal: Civil Society Concerns

The current dominant market-driven development paradigm that places profits before peoples is expropriating the Nepalese hills, mountains and forests, putting the lives and livelihoods of the very local communities- the people guarding nature - into perplexity, uncertainty and anxiety.



Landscape of a village at the lap of the Annapurna range, Nepal

Photo source: www.globeimages.net

What Concerns us in the Context of Rio+20 Summit?

Nepal, the land of Greater Himalayas - mountains, hills and plains serving as water towers for greater parts of Asia - with its nature harbouring rich biodiversity and pristine forests is however, suffering from environmental degradation and over exploitation of natural resources, including poverty, hunger, malnutrition, gender injustice, conflict and political instability, leading to further marginalisation of its peoples in terms of both economic, social and cultural rights as well as civil and political rights. The current bleak scenario is thus absolutely detrimental to the attainment of sustainable development and poverty eradication in the country.

Nepal has also fallen into a volatile political trap since the mid-1990s; particularly from 2006, it is under transition in several aspects

INSIDE

Foreword

1. What Concerns Us in the Context of Rio+20 Summit?
2. Sustainable Development and Green Economy
3. Defending Sustainable Development and Human Rights:
Nepalese Civil Society's Engagement in Rio+20 Process
4. Nepalese Civil Society Calls to the Nepalese State and the Rio+20 Process

References

Foreword

The world is desperately waiting to witness the outcome of the 2012 UN Conference on Sustainable Development or the Rio+20 scheduled on 20-22 June 2012 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. This Conference is of great political significance for it will be adopting the future plan of action towards achieving sustainable development which in turn will ensure the protection and survival of this planet and its peoples. The dominant neo-liberal, top-down development paradigm that has been ravaging the Mother Earth and its vulnerable and marginalised peoples must change. It is clear to all that the very countries, institutions and system that are responsible for creating the ongoing multiple crises are now at the forefront of crafting the agenda of sustainable development in their own terms – in the form of the Green Economy. The current concept of the Green Economy is being challenged mainly by civil society groups; representative of the peoples, for it defines commodification of nature through privatisation and corporatisation of the commons. People globally are standing up to defend their rights and safeguard the nature for the present and for the future.

In this context, Rural Reconstruction Nepal (RRN) as a movement for ensuring Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, led and co-ordinated the civil society process in Nepal towards the Rio+20. RRN is also the member organisation of the South Asia Alliance for Poverty Eradication (SAAPE) and LDC Watch, both regional and global civil society platforms campaigning and advocating towards the interests of the peoples vis-a-vis today's neo-liberal globalisation which undermines the rights of peoples.

Series of sub-national civil society consultations were organised with the participation of representatives from the peasant movement, workers union, women's movement, community forest user groups, drinking water user groups, indigenous communities, Dalits, the handicapped, the media et al. The sub-national consultations culminated at a national civil society consultation participated again by a broad-based civil society as well as by the government, the UN and international organisations. The outcomes of these consultations are compiled in this report with urgent calls to action to the Government of Nepal and the international community who will be participating and committing at the Rio+20. We are very happy to share this civil society agenda with you vis-à-vis sustainable development and the Green Economy. We hope that this report will be of help to chart out the sustainable development agenda in Nepal which ensures the rights of the Nepalese people, eventually leading to poverty eradication in the country.

We acknowledge the contributions of all participants who engaged in this process, especially for their valuable comments and critique, without which this document would not have taken the current form. We express our sincere gratitude to the National Planning Commission (NPC) of Nepal and the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) for collaborating and supporting in this noble endeavour. Finally, Dr Sarba Raj Khadka, Dr Netra Prasad Timsina, Mr Charles Pradhan, Ms Usha Koirala, Mr Ratna Karki, Mr Birendra Adhikari, Ms Prerna Bomzan, Mr Praman Adhikari, Mr Som Rai, Ms Sayam Moktan, Mr Pami Gautam, Ms Sumnima Dewan, and other friends of RRN deserve special appreciation for their contributions towards organising the civil society consultations and preparing this important document.

In conclusion, your further inputs and feedback will be very constructive in our continued engagement on the sustainable development agenda beyond the Rio+20.

Thank you,

Arjun Karki, PhD
President

including the protracted peace process. Such uncertainties and instability have undermined the peoples' universal Right to Development, failing not only the national development targets but also the internationally agreed development goals, such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Nepal is at the forefront of acute vulnerability to the impacts of climate change crisis, although she is one of the least Green House Gas emitting countries – only 0.025% of global emissions – thus, exerting

negligible ecological foot print. Increased frequencies of landslides, floods, droughts, heat stress, glacial lake outburst floods (GLOFs) and other human-induced natural calamities are some of the key impacts of climate change phenomena experienced by the Nepalese people. An emerging issue, therefore, is of internal migration heading towards ethnic strife for competition for livelihoods as well as for cultural identity in the changed social fabric. Additionally, external migration is also another rising problematic phenomenon. The current

dominant market-driven development paradigm that places profits before peoples is expropriating the Nepalese hills, mountains and forests, putting the very lives and livelihoods of the local communities- the people guarding nature - into perplexity, uncertainty and anxiety. The livelihoods of these people based on local knowledge and traditional wisdom is in jeopardy, and thus, the very notion of sustainable development, human rights, equity, peace, justice and poverty eradication are a far cry largely in rural Nepal.

Agriculture being the mainstay of the Nepalese economy, the aforementioned harmful effects of climate change induced by the market-led development paradigm is depriving the bulk of the rural population of their livelihoods, condemning them to perpetual poverty. Moreover, Nepal being one of the least developed, landlocked, conflict affected, mountainous countries with low income, weak human resources and economic vulnerability, she finds hard time coping with the climate change crisis that is being experienced increasingly in recent decades (various reports of LDC Watch, undated). Additionally, the decade long armed conflict (1996-2006) followed by prolonged political transition not only destabilised the political system but also impacted the social, economic and environmental situation of the country, including food security (Seddon and Adhikari, 2003; Acharya, 2009).

The above scenario makes it clear that a country like Nepal has been paying an exorbitantly high price for the unrestrained consumerism in the developed countries. As rising concern over climate change prompts the search for solutions, it is increasingly being recognised that in order for efforts to combat climate change be real and effective, they will have to be integrated into the broader context of social equity and economic development for reducing poverty, and environmental conservation – the three pillars of sustainable development. Thus, the core tenet of sustainable development is the integration of economic, social and environmental concerns in development policy-making and its implementation.

Against this background, the Rio+20 Summit



Photo source: www.pratishgurung.com

Avalanche in Annapurna triggered a destructive flood in the Seti River of western Nepal

is an opportunity for us to voice our pro-people concerns and draw global attention towards rehabilitating our fragile nature, ecosystems and biodiversity. Nepal must raise its voice against the injustices it has been facing and call upon the developed countries to assist the least developed countries in their struggle to achieve sustainable development which is the only development paradigm that would ensure economic development, environmental conservation and social equity. This key call for a true sustainable development that safeguards both nature and peoples’ rights, was echoed by the Nepalese civil society at the interactive civil society consultations organised at local, sub-national and national levels towards the preparation of the Rio+20 Summit.

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2.0 Sustainable Development and Green Economy

The very concept of sustainable development was put forward for the first time in the 1987 Gro Harlem Brundtland Commission’s Report named “Our Common Future,” which defined sustainable development as “a development which meets the needs of current generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. The report also provided the momentum for the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), also known as the Earth Summit or the Rio Summit. Twenty years later, and a decade after the World Summit on Sustainable Development that took place in Johannesburg in 2002, the world’s attention is gearing towards Rio de



Dr. Arjun Karki (right) addressing the National Civil Society Consultation on Rio+20

Rio+20 aims at bringing about a real change by setting a new development agenda that galvanises progress towards a sustainable future; the overarching theme of the Conference being “The Future We Want”.

Janeiro for the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD) or the Rio+20 Summit that is scheduled on 20-22 June 2012, where the international community will adopt the future agenda of sustainable development. It is deemed to be a Conference of the highest political level with the participation of Heads of State and Government, the UN system, inter-governmental agencies, parliamentarians, civil society, private sector and the media. The stakes are very high as the outcome will be the adoption of a focused political document. There is also a high expectation that the world leaders will endorse the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which have been envisaged to be a part of the post-2015 UN development agenda.

Rio+20 aims at bringing about a real change by setting a new development agenda that galvanises progress towards a sustainable future; the overarching theme of the Conference being “**The Future We Want**”. The Conference focuses on two major themes:

- a) *A green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication, and*
- b) *The institutional framework for sustainable development.*

Agenda 21 of the 1992 Earth Summit

recognises that the commitment and genuine involvement of all social groups is critical to the effective implementation of the objectives, policies and mechanisms agreed by governments in all programme areas of Agenda 21. Similarly, in the context of Rio+20, it is very important for civil society as a key stakeholder to influence the agenda of Green Economy making it pro-poor and pro-people that promotes equity and justice rather than a commodity for the corporate and private sectors. Countries and other stakeholders opposing it have been arguing that the Green Economy is a ploy of the neo-liberal, market-centric, capitalist countries representing the transnational corporations and the international financial sector, which would in turn transform nature into a commodity - measured, valued, appropriated and traded under a mercantilist model. With the focus on the Green Economy agenda, it is worrying that the Rio Principles of 1992 and its Conventions that places human beings and human rights at the centre of the development agenda would be totally abandoned. Without the active intervention of civil society, there is thus a danger that the Green Economy may further undermine the rights to food, water, energy, atmosphere, land, seed and ecosystems. The very right to life and livelihoods offered by our Mother Earth is in jeopardy. It is imperative that civil



Participants of the National Civil Society Consultation on Rio+20

society put forward the alternative pro-people agenda on the Green Economy. In this context, civil society organisations from around the globe are also actively engaged in the “Peoples’ Summit for the Social and Environmental Justice in Defense of the Commons” scheduled on 15-23 June 2012 in Rio de Janeiro.

It has been four decades that the international community recognised the relationship between environment and human development and more than two decades in accepting sustainable development as the most appropriate form of development that would ensure economic development, environmental conservation and social equity. However, to date, the Rio Principles and Agenda 21 have not been properly implemented and little has been done to change patterns of production and consumption that pollute and erode the environment contributing to climate change. And, on the other hand, market-oriented policies still govern the donor-recipient relationship in the global partnership for development.

We live in a world where 50% of carbon emissions are generated by 13% of the population, and top 20% of the population enjoys more than 70% of the total income and those in the bottom quintile get only 2% of global income (Social Watch, 2012). The

current unsustainable patterns of production and consumption as well as stark income inequalities across and within countries have weakened the strong pillars of sustainable development.

3.0 Defending Sustainable Development and Human Rights: Nepalese Civil Society’s Engagement in Rio+20 Process

Rural Reconstruction Nepal (RRN) has coordinated national and sub-national civil society consultations towards the Rio+20 Summit. Sub-national consultations were organised in Morang, Chitwan, Banke and Kaski districts, whereas national consultation was organised in the Kathmandu valley. Both, in sub-national and national interactions, representatives of peasant movement, worker unions, natural resource user groups, sexual minorities, indigenous people, women movement, Dalits, community-based organisations, human rights organisations, community forest user groups, drinking water user groups, the media, NGOs working with different social groups such as children, bonded labourers and people with disabilities, actively participated and reflected their concerns in the ongoing debate on sustainable development and the Green Economy. High-level officials from the government, the UN

Land plotting and land grabbing; a widespread speculative market phenomenon has become the major factor for displacing people from the agriculture sector which is seriously challenging food security and food sovereignty of the Nepalese people.



Hand loomed fabric from Allo plants (Eastern Nepal)

Lack of implementation of commitments at both national and international levels has exacerbated poverty, social injustice and environmental degradation and hence, Rio+20 should be action-oriented with no more rhetoric.

and other international organisations also shared their views on sustainable development and the Green Economy at the national consultation in Kathmandu on 3 June 2012. The views and concerns that emerged out of the national and sub-national deliberations are summarised in this document.

The participants have underscored conflict resolution, peace and political stability as the prerequisite for achieving sustainable development and poverty eradication in Nepal. Strong high-level political commitment at the national level is required to provide political leadership and action-oriented programmes as well as monitoring mechanisms so as to achieve sustainable development. Development must ensure conservation, management and utilisation of local resources. Community-based Natural Resources Management (CBNRM) has proved to be an appropriate approach for sustainable development- for example; the community forestry approach in Nepal has been considered a successful sustainable rural development programme in the country. The community forestry approach has been the basis for the emergence and growth of grassroots civil society organisations such as the federation of community forestry users who has been playing an effective watchdog role in conserving the local forest resources and

promoting peoples' rights to the local resources. It must be noted that the Rio+20 UN official document has recognised the community forestry of Nepal as one of the eight successful stories throughout the world in the field of promoting sustainable development.

The participants also highlighted that the Green Economy should be people-centered and largely support the livelihoods of the peoples creating decent jobs and employment. It should not interfere with the sovereignty and human rights of the Nepalese people including the sovereignty of Nepal. It was highlighted that the key agriculture sector has been largely undermined by the government, receiving a mere 3% of the national annual budget with no subsidies and incentives being provided to small farmers. On the other hand, land plotting and land grabbing; a widespread speculative market phenomenon has become the major factor for displacing people from the agriculture sector which is seriously challenging food security and food sovereignty of the Nepalese people.

Social equity has been argued to be one of the pillars of sustainable development. However, the issues raised by the participants made it clear that the marginalised and vulnerable groups are still discriminated both in representation at policy formulation levels as well as in their



Father preparing his son for schooling in Eastern Nepal

share of resources. Access to agricultural land and agricultural services by small farmers and landless agricultural labourers has been one of the major challenges for achieving sustainable development in Nepal. Similarly, right to property and land ownership of women has also been an issue of gender justice and equity in Nepal while feminisation of agriculture has added more work load to the women in rural areas. It is in reference to huge external migration of males, resting the burden of growing agriculture and household chores on women's shoulders.

In recent days, unregulated spreading of genetically engineered seeds and other planting materials has increased the dependency on the corporate companies and unpredictability in the agricultural production. The increasing corporatisation and commodification of agriculture policy of Nepal has resulted in loss of sovereignty of our small farmers coupled with increasing threat to biodiversity, food security and traditional wisdom.

4.0 Nepalese Civil Society Calls to the Nepalese State and the Rio+20 Process

Nepal has been a party to various international conventions and treaties related to human rights and development. The Nepalese state has considered the 1992

Earth Summit and its follow up meetings - Rio+20 being one - as important fora for promoting Nepal's agenda on sustainable development. Nepalese people feel a desperate need for a radical change in the development paradigm compared with the development that has been witnessed throughout the history in Nepal. Nepal's participation in Rio+20 must, therefore, focus on implementation and achievement of sustainable development and strengthening of institutional arrangements in accordance with Rio Principles. Nepal, as the current Chair of LDC Group, must demand for the implementation of the "common but differentiated responsibility" which is one of the cornerstones of sustainable development.

Conflict resolution, peace and political stability as mentioned before are linked to sustainable development; furthermore, conflict is often the symptom of deprivation and denial of right to development. Lack of implementation of commitments at both national and international levels has exacerbated poverty, social injustice and environmental degradation and hence, Rio+20 should be action-oriented with no more rhetoric.

Under these circumstances, we demand for the following urgent actions from the Government of Nepal as well as the international community at the Rio+20:

The people of Nepal demand is one of social justice and human rights for all, and recognition of the need to balance the three pillars of sustainable development - environmental, social and economic sustainability.



Chebang girls in a remote village of Chitwan District

The notion of Green Economy should adhere to a country's sovereignty and respect country ownership and country processes.

1. Even with the frequent mass movements in Nepal, we have been increasingly experiencing the 'business as usual' approach by the Government which has been the bottleneck for sustainable development. We are witnessing the recurring political and economic crises leading to deeper inequality, violent conflict, displacement and marginalisation of the vulnerable and excluded communities. We demand political commitment from both the government as well as political parties to ensure peace and stability, the prerequisites for achieving sustainable development.
2. In order to translate the universal principles of development at the national level, the Government should adopt binding commitments to policy coherence for sustainability as well as strategies for implementation and monitoring.
3. Address the livelihoods needs of the people – food, shelter, health, and decent jobs - first. We demand social protection for all. Put into practice the constitutional provision of food sovereignty in order to promote sustainable development in Nepal. Immediately halt land grabbing and land plotting for speculative markets.
4. Duly recognise the best practices in sustainable development promoted by the Government and civil society, such as, community forestry, and scale it up .
5. Prioritise education as an integral sustainable development tool.
6. Discourage market-oriented chemical-driven agriculture. No genetically modified organisms should get entry into the Nepalese agriculture system. Conserve land races of plants and animals to the benefit of local people. Local seeds and germplasms are the building blocks on which sustainable development is galvanised.
7. Our State is increasingly being dominated by the corporate world undermining the rights of its own people, therefore, we urge our State to work on the needs and priorities of its people rather than profits of the corporate world.
8. Encourage and nurture local economic and social models of development that increase the resilience of communities to face the adverse impacts of the ongoing regional and global interlinked crises - climate, financial, food, energy. Institutionalise and incorporate such successful models into government policies.
9. The future that the people of Nepal demand is one of social justice and human rights for all, and recognition of the need to balance the three pillars of sustainable development – environmental, social and economic sustainability. The development approach must address adequately the needs and priorities of women, Dalits, handicapped, and other so far excluded and marginalised sections of the society.
10. We strongly urge to adhere to the principle of 'polluter pays', so that Nepal as the negligible polluter stops bearing the brunt of the climate crisis. Uphold the "Principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibility" and "Precautionary Principle".
11. We call for legally binding commitments to reduce global greenhouse gas emissions by 45% by 2020 and 80% by 2050 from pre-industrial levels to guarantee that global mean temperatures stay below 1.5° Celsius, in accordance with the principle of common but differentiated responsibility, to ensure continued survival of both peoples and Mother Earth.

12. Duly recognise that LDCs, LLDCs and mountainous countries like Nepal are in need of urgent new and additional funds for adaptation and mitigation actions under the principle of historical responsibility.
13. The development partners must commit to new and additional funding, which must be non-debt creating. LDCs should receive special treatment in terms of accessing financial resources.
14. The parties must not come together and pledge some commitments on ad-hoc basis, but it should be a consistent process-based system which could be monitored regularly. In this context, the state parties must chart out the follow-up strategies after the Rio+20. We oppose the summit as a "Talking Club" and urge to transform it into an "Action Club".
15. We are very much concerned about the current consumerist lifestyle that uses greater amount of resources causing faster depletion of natural stock. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that we stop imitating such self-destructing lifestyle.
16. To materialise the sustainable development agenda, we see the necessity of South-South, South-North and triangular cooperation mechanisms in place, so Rio+20 must affirm this.
17. We urge the South Asian governments to devise effective policy and action plan to protect the mountains and conserve the resources they harbour. Mountains are the lifeblood for the people in the region in terms of supply of water (mountains are the water towers) and energy, biological diversity, natural beauty and rich cultural heritage, among others.
18. The notion of Green Economy should adhere to a country's sovereignty and

respect country ownership and country processes. It should not be imposed and should not be directed by the tentacles of neo-liberal corporate globalisation. The developed countries must not dictate protecting their greens and exploiting the greens of our countries in the name of green economy. No commodification of nature, and no to 'greed economy'.

19. No back-tracking on the Rio Principles which puts human beings and human rights at the centre of sustainable development.

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Mountains are the lifeblood for the people in the region in terms of supply of water (mountains are the water towers) and energy, biological diversity, natural beauty and rich cultural heritage, among others.

List of Participants of the National Civil Society Consultation on Rio+20

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Rural Reconstruction Nepal (RRN), established in 1989, is a Nepali non-government, social development organisation involved in rural development, action-oriented research and policy advocacy focusing on peasants, poor women, dalits and indigenous nationalities, and other vulnerable communities through the process of facilitation, social mobilisation, empowerment and self-organisation. RRN's work is based on the four-fold approach of rural reconstruction covering education to combat illiteracy and empower people to access their rights; sustainable livelihood to fight poverty; health to prevent disease, and self-government to overcome civic inertia.