Introduction

In 1992 the world’s Heads of State met at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro. They said they wanted to form a global partnership for sustainable development. They said they wanted a world where people’s needs would be met without destroying the basis of life for future generations. They said they would reduce and eliminate unsustainable methods of production and consumption. They acknowledged that the developed world puts the greatest pressure on the global environment and thus had the greatest responsibility for solutions. Now, twenty years later the Heads of State have met again in Rio de Janeiro. Unfortunately, this time optimism was soured by political expediency and economic realities. It is a combination of crises (food, energy, climate, financial, economic and social) which has led to increased inequality, exclusion, violence, worsening of conflicts, forced migration, the impoverishment of a growing number of people.¹

Since 1972 world conferences have been convened in venues around the world - in Stockholm, Mexico, New York, Johannesburg and many more; conventions, treaties, agreements and protocols have been signed – some are binding, others non-binding – all in an effort to address unsustainable practices and their impact on planet Earth. At Rio in 1992 world leaders were optimistic and made strong commitments to ensuring a sustainable future for all. Despite those measures, the decline of ecosystems has accelerated, climate change has escalated, natural disasters have intensified, desertification has extended, oceans continue to be used as massive waste dumps, the air is increasingly polluted, rivers, streams, mountains and forests are exploited and more than a billion people live in extreme poverty.

Twenty years after the 1992 Earth Summit, we are witnessing intense confrontations and competing interests among negotiating governments, and an absence of vision and leadership for guiding global sustainable development work for current and future generations – at a time of the fiercest economic, social and ecological conditions for this planet and its species.²

The Rio+20 UN Conference on Sustainable Development was another attempt to arrive at commitments by the world’s governments to accept responsibility for environmental protection, sustainable use of nature’s products, intergenerational equity, economic justice, equitable and just participation in international forums by the most vulnerable peoples and nations, and the eradication of poverty now in our current situation and for future generations.
IPA Representation

The International Presentation Association representatives at Rio+20 were

i. Sr Marcela Alejandro Cruz Barrios pbvm – Chile
ii. Sr Elizabeth Lee pbvm – Canada
iii. Sr Rosemary Grundy pbvm – Australia
iv. Ms Mary-Ann Greaney (Associate) – New Zealand
v. Mr Tamai Mafuse (Associate) – Zimbabwe
vi. Ms Stephanie Campbell – who requested to be included with the IPA representatives – Australia.

In preparation for the Rio+20 Conference, a number of gatherings of Presentation Sisters around the world were held to reflect on the major issues that confront Earth Community. The International Presentation Association Submission to Rio+20 Compilation Document, prepared by Joan Power pbvm (Australia) outlines IPA’s expectations of inclusions in the Outcome Document – The Future We Want – agreed to by the Heads of State at the Rio+20 Conference. The General Content section of the IPA document outlined a set of principles that IPA considered should underlie a Green Economy within the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication. In brief, the principles outlined are:

♦ respect for life that includes the laws of nature and affirming the interdependence of all life forms on earth and the dependence of the human species on a healthy ecosystem

♦ the green economy recognises the relationship between gender equality and sustainable development and women’s role as change agents and community builders

♦ importance of education: all stakeholders need to be educated holistically, from cradle to grave, on the inter-relatedness of the three pillars of development: social, economic and environmental

♦ a green economy acknowledges that there are common and differential responsibilities

♦ good management of forests is essential to the development of a green economy.

Section (c) of the IPA submission addresses the implementation of Sustainable Development and how to close the implementation gap by relevant actors – Governments, Major Groups, UN system, IFIs etc.

The Section - Special Element, identifies those elements considered by IPA to be necessary to secure renewed political commitment for sustainable development, assessing the progress to date and remaining gaps in the implementation of the outcomes of the major summits on sustainable development, and addressing new and emerging challenges. Special elements could include:

⇒ energy
⇒ food security and sustainable agriculture
⇒ technology transfer
⇒ water
⇒ oceans
⇒ sustainable urbanisation
⇒ sustainable consumption and production
⇒ natural disaster preparedness and climate change adaption
⇒ biodiversity

Emerging challenges were identified:

♦ farming
♦ resource exploitation
♦ tax on financial transactions

IPA proposed the following elements of an agreement that could be included in the outcome document in regard to the Green Economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication:

♦ Integrating the Green Economy with Poverty Eradication
Integrating the Green Economy with Food Security
Integrating the Green Economy with Energy Security
Developing a framework for financial requirements and mobilisation.

**Institutional Arrangements – Governance.** IPA stated:

The Governance that emerges from Rio+20 Conference must be critiqued on the following formula: Is it a triple win? ... for the economy AND all people AND the environment.

**Preparatory Days before Rio+20 Conference – 11-21 June 2012**

*The RioCentro venue* was at a Convention centre complex at the edge of the Rio de Janeiro. The original centre was expanded into five pavilions that were venues for specified use at Rio+20 by official Government Delegations, the Major Groups of Civil Society, Media organisations, the main Conference area set aside for the Heads of States gathering area, and a large food hall. Extra facilities were available at the adjacent Athletes Centre. In the lead-up days to the conference activities included:

- Registrations
- Side events addressing a plethora of topics related to the Conference agenda
- Government delegations meetings to refine the wording of the draft outcome document – *The Future We Want* – for approval by the Heads of States
- Some preliminary briefings provided by designated leaders of the Major Groups of Civil Society.

**Major Groups**

In *Agenda 21*, the action plan document from the 1992 Earth Summit, members of Civil Society were organised into nine Major Groups:

- Indigenous Peoples
- Women
- Children and Youth
- NGOs
- Business and Industry
- Trade Unions
- Local Government Authorities
- Science and Technology
- Farmers

At the Rio+20 Conference, the Major Groups had representatives as observers to the main conference deliberations.

**The People’s Summit**

*The People’s Summit for Social and Environmental Justice in Defence of the Commons* was held from June 15 to 23. It was located in Alterro do Flamengo Park – a considerable distance from the RioCentro. Two hundred Civil Society groups, including environmentalists, unions, religious groups and indigenous tribes, took part in the nine-day event. The Brazilian Government provided $5million in funding for the summit to facilitate adequate platforms for groups to express their views, and for demonstrations of green practices such as recycling, composting and food productions. Artists and performers showcased their works through indigenous peoples’ dance and drum rituals, posters, puppets, live performances, raising awareness on environmental and social protection. A large sculpture installation poignantly depicted the current plight of Planet Earth in the final stages of life through, stylised crucifixions of vulnerable species. In brightly illuminated showrooms, green entrepreneurs displayed sustainable business ideas, demonstrating ingenious ways to make money and save resources.
During the Preparation Days

Each day IPA representatives attended events and side events at the RioCentro and the People’s Summit. Civil Society representatives were given observer status at the meetings of the Delegations representatives who worked to refine the Draft Outcome Document for presentation to Heads of State. Sections of the Draft Document were bracketed, indicating that they were considered controversial and required discussion and negotiation. Betty Rae Lee, Mary-Ann Greaney and Rosemary Grundy attended the Delegations Session that dealt with Small Island Developing States (SIDS) deemed vulnerable because of rising sea levels resulting from Climate Change. This discussion was amicable and little was changed in the Draft Document.

In various preparatory sessions, the received terminology for the Conference was debated. Terms that were analysed and debated included:

- **Sustainable development**: It was posited that in the United Nations understanding, *development* refers to economic growth, connected to increased consumption through unlimited acquisition of products that are the stuff of accumulation. *Development* may then be a contra-indicator of *sustainability*. The biggest danger is that we will continue business as usual. If we measure growth, we must factor in the true costs. Traditional growth, growth, growth is totally irresponsible.

- **Green Economy**: The Green Economy results in improved wellbeing and social equity, while significantly reducing risks and ecological scarcity (UNEP Definition).

  Market economists use the term *Green Economy* to describe strategies that use market mechanisms to counter environmental damage. At the root of this particular green economy model is the belief that people will only value something if it has a price tag... that is, the market-based mode. This model treats nature as a commodity and tells us that we can buy our way out of climate change.

  The term is intellectually dubious in its perception, and politically loaded.

- **Food Security**: This is a euphemism for corporate land grabbing that is putting small holder farmers out of business. Our analysis is that it is a false solution and in reality it is a legitimization of land grabs, water grabs and seed grabs from their rightful populations and small holder farmers.

The term preferred by some interest groups is *Food Sovereignty*, which implies that small landowning farmers have a sovereign right to their lands and their livelihoods, and deserve protection from absorption by large agribusiness corporations. *Food Security* was promoted by the Women’s Major Group, and the Farmers’ Major Group representing groups of small landholder farmers.


In excess of 170 Heads of State attended the Rio+20 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development. The absence of several high profile leaders was noted. These included US President Barak Obama, British Prime Minister David Cameron, German Chancellor, Angela Merkel and Prime Minister of Canada Stephen Harper. Their absence was interpreted as an indicator of a low priority being given to the Conference. Heads of large States such as France, and China were in attendance. The Conference was opened by the Secretary General. The Conference venue was Pavilion 5 of the RioCentro.

A limited number of Secondary passes were available to Civil Society participants to access the Conference venue as observers to the proceedings. Other room were made available for “spill-over” observers, and large screens were provided throughout RioCentro for all participants to view the Conference.
First on the agenda was a film entitled “The State of the Planet”, following which Brittany Trilford, a 17-year-old New Zealand girl, was called to the podium to deliver her address as an ordinary citizen, a voice of youth, demanding action on sustainability. Statements from her speech included:

I stand here with fire in my heart. I’m confused and angry at the state of the world. We are here to solve the problems that we have caused as a collective, to ensure that we have a future.

We, the next generation, demand change. We demand action so that we have a future and have it guaranteed. We trust that you will, in the next 72 hours, put our interests ahead of all other interests and boldly do the right thing.

Brittany challenged leaders to strive for solutions that would inspire hope: I am here to fight for my future. That is why I’m here. I would like to end by asking you to consider why you are here and what you can do here. I would like you to ask yourselves: Are you here to save face? Or are you here to save us?”

The President of Brazil, Dilma Vana Rousseff, welcomed the Heads of State. The formalities included the election of the President of the Conference, Adoption of Rules of Procedure, Adoption of the Agenda, the Organisation of the Work and related processes. Heads of State were allocated 5 minutes to address the Conference. Most of them far exceeded the allotted time frame. Some speeches were inspiring, some challenging, some improbable. These speeches continued throughout the three days of the Conference.

Parallel with the delivery of Statements by the Heads of State other events were scheduled, including:

- A High Level Round Table of Rapporteurs whose task was described as - Looking at the Way Forward in Implementing the Expected Outcomes of the Conference
- A Credentials Committee working on the text of the Outcome Document
- A Partnership Forum
- Side Events.

**Major Groups Briefings**

The Major Groups held daily briefings during the Conference. The reports from the Major Groups representatives provided an informed understanding of the debates. A daily publication titled *Outreach* provided articles connected to the progress of deliberations at the Conference as well as articles on a variety of topics under discussion.

**Individual Government announcements**

- Leaders from Indonesia, the Seychelles, Colombia, Granada, Antigua, Australia and Barbuda attended a Blue Economy event hosted by The Nature Conservancy. Here, Prime Minister Julia Gillard announced that Australia would commit $33 million to help developing countries in the Asia-Pacific to sustainably manage their oceans, fisheries and coasts.
- At a high-level event on 21 June, women Heads of State and Government signed a Call to Action with concrete policy recommendations on integrating gender equality and women’s empowerment in all sustainable development frameworks.
- At a special side event hosted by Prime Minister Julia Gillard who announced the development of a global indigenous land and sea managers network, where indigenous knowledge could be shared. The network includes indigenous peoples from New Zealand, Brazil, Norway and Australia.
- US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton made several announcements on the final day of the Conference – 22 June, including:
  - A US initiative to leverage private financing for clean energy projects in Africa
  - Partnerships with Brazil on developing sustainable cities
An international program to stop deforestation
- $2 billion in commitments to the UN’s Sustainable Energy For All program.

- Australia committed to establish the world's largest network of marine reserves, which will ring the country and cover more than 3 million square kilometres of waters to protect reefs and marine life. The Australian Government committed an additional $8 million towards the Coral Triangle Initiative and up to $25 million to the Pacific Oceanscape Framework. The Coral Triangle Initiative on Coral Reefs, Fisheries and Food Security was formed in 2009 by the six Coral Triangle governments. The extra funding, announced by Prime Minister Gillard, will assist countries across the Asia Pacific to improve the management of their oceans and coast.

- UK Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg announced that starting next April, all companies that list on the London Stock Exchange will be required to publish their greenhouse gas emissions in corporate earnings reports.

- Environment Minister Peter Kent stated that the Canadian government has invested billions of dollars in recent years to support clean energy development while taking steps toward phasing out fossil fuel subsidies. He said Canada is still committed to the phase-out goal reached with other partners among the G20 economies.

- Many other government leaders outlined initiatives for sustainable protection of the environment that had been taken within their national jurisdictions. These included promotion of water and land management and renewable energy options, supports provided to low-income citizens in meeting electricity and water costs, carbon pricing, and more.

- At a special briefing of the Australian delegation and NGOs, Prime Minister Gillard focused on the Blue Economy initiatives, but would not be drawn on the continued practices of mining companies, especially those engaged in the production of fossil fuels and their impact on the natural environment.

Other government negotiations were conducted, especially in bilateral partnerships. Keeping track of these throughout the Conference was not achievable.

**UN Secretary General & UN System Heads of Departments Briefing**

The Major Groups alerted Civil Society to a special event that was organised by the UN Secretary General, Ban Ki-Moon. As there was no spill-over room for this event, priority was given to those who arrived first at the room. Betty Rae Lee, Stephanie Campbell and Rosemary Grundy attended this session. It was an information session about the work of the various UN agencies with a specific focus on their commitment to work for Sustainable Development. The UN department represented were from UNDESA, UN Environment Program, UN Development Program, UN Women, UNICEF, World Food Program, the WTO, UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, UN University. The topics that were covered included:

- Social Protection
- Education & Employment
- Science and Technology
- Food programs & Food Security
- Population projections
- Peace & Middle East specific concerns
- Health
- Movement of peoples – migrants and refugees
- Water & Sanitation
- Climate Change
- Energy
- Financial security
It was an informative session, giving an insight into the extent of the work of the UN around the world.

**Actions of commitment and hope – Women’s Rio+20 Good Practice Awards**

Organised by Women International for a Common Future (Germany), the good practice awards were granted to 16 women who have initiated programmes for sustainable futures in their communities. There were five categories of the awards with three prizes in each category:

1) Food Sovereignty  
2) Climate Adaptation  
3) Decent Jobs & Health  
4) Water and Sanitation  
5) Sustainable Energy


Recipients of the awards were residents of:

- The Republic of Guinea  
- Benin  
- Uganda  
- Ecuador  
- Uzbekistan  
- Bangladesh  
- South Africa  
- Brazil  
- Kenya  
- India  
- Guatemala  
- Vietnam

It was an atmosphere of celebration of achievement, tears and laughter, as each recipient was given a personal gift, a certificate, and a cheque for $1000 towards their work.

**The Outcome Document – The Future We Want**

The 50-page document was divided into six major sections:

I. Our Common Vision  
II. Renewing Political Commitment  
III. Green Economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication  
IV. Institutional framework for sustainable development  
V. Framework for action and follow-up  
VI. Means of implementation

Sub-sections of these topics addressed more specific issues. In total there were 283 statements in the text, referring to a broad spectrum of issues related to environmental sustainability. It is noted that the five Principles and all the issues recommended by IPA for inclusion as Special Elements are addressed in the text. The Principles that IPA believe should underlie a Green Economy within the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication were included as follows:

- **Respect for life** – In Statement 39 of The Future We Want, Heads of States acknowledge the term Mother Earth, and note that some countries recognise the rights of nature. A number of sided events hosted by Governments, NGOs, and Business groups addressed the Respect for Life issue, from the perspectives of rights across Earth communities. IBON International stated:
The transition to sustainable development pathways requires the democratization of access and control over productive resources and “environmental space” within and between countries to ensure that the needs of all, especially the poor and marginalized, are met without breaching ecological limits. This implies a shift in property rights regimes towards greater emphasis on more democratic, cooperative, and community-based forms of resource ownership and stewardship.

The United Nations Research Institute for Social Development states:

The groups and populations likely to be most harmed by climate change are the least responsible for causing it and have limited resources to cope with the consequences. This “double injustice” becomes a triple injustice when the costs of green economy transition negatively impact low-income and other vulnerable groups.

Statement 40 from The Future We Want –

We call for holistic and integrated approaches to sustainable development which will guide humanity to live in harmony with nature and lead to efforts to restore the health and integrity of the Earth’s ecosystem.

The Statements on Human Health 138 to 146, describe health as a contributing aspect of Sustainable Development. However there is no mention in the document of Respect for Life as such.

- Gender Equality and Women’s Role. The major section on Gender issues is in Statements 236-244, with minor references in other parts of the document. Strong critique of the weak commitment to gender equality was distributed by UN Women and DAWN:

In Agenda 21 there were around 170 references to gender and an entire chapter on women. In The Future We Want there are only around 50, and we see these being watered down and used as negotiating chips by majority states. It is not primarily a simple matter of gender mentions, either, but rather an unfortunate willingness by some states to allow operational references into the thematic and cross-sectoral issues subsections, with the result that there are elements of the text that are far weaker than those in existing international agreements on gender equality and women’s empowerment.

Governments are compromising long-time and agreed international agreements on gender equality and women’s human rights. South states are concentrating on their ‘big ticket’ items of finance, trade and ODA with little interest to incorporate a gender analysis into these macroeconomic issues. Instead gender is relegated to the periphery of the negotiations. So a minority of states (with strong support of an observer state – the Holy See) that oppose women’s equality are taking advantage of this moment to push their minority agenda. They have been prominent in the gender and health discussion and whenever gender is negotiated in the text.

- Importance of Education. This is addressed in Statements 229-235. There is a focus on primary education to be made universally available in developing countries, and a recognition that education beyond the primary level is necessary. There is recognition that younger generations are the custodians of the future, and that therefore education systems should prepare young people to engage in sustainable development studies through improved capacity of education systems, through enhanced teacher training, the development of curricula, the development of training programmes that prepare students for careers in fields related to sustainability, and more effective use of information and communication technologies. There is also encouragement of higher educational institutions in developing countries to increase research activity for a sustainable future.

- Common but Differentiated Responsibilities: To quote DAWN:

The text has been peppered with the principle of ‘common but differentiated responsibility’ (CBDR) by the G77, along with repeated references to ‘voluntary and mutually agreed’ aspect of technology transfer by JUSCANZ – (Japan, United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand) – members. It remains to be seen how these
foundational concepts that posit social equity and historical accountability against a commoditised and privatised development regime are reflected in the outcome document.xv

*Forests – a key part of ecological infrastructure.* Forests are addressed in Statements 193-196 of *The Future We Want.*

Several government delegations and Civil Society Organisations addressed issues concerning forests in side events. The governments of Brazil, Malaysia, Nepal, Finland and Sweden sponsored side events and companies such as International Network for Bamboo and Rattan (INBAR) organised side events.

*In tropical regions, an important part of a green economy approach is the development of a low-carbon, forest-based economy that values standing forest and improves livelihoods for forest-based communities. In the Amazon region and in Borneo, at the sub-national level, Acre in Brazil and Sabah in Malaysia in particular present two important case studies of moving towards green growth pathways.* xvi

There is agreement on values of protecting forests, biodiversity and human communities in forests, though there was little evidence of commitment in statements such as:

*Forest products play a key role in a green economy. For instance they provide construction material for zero-energy buildings and replace other resources for products and energy for environmental and scarcity reasons. It is essential to mobilise these products in complete harmony with globally agreed objectives to halt the deterioration of biodiversity, as well improving social justice and respect for people directly dependant on forests.* xvii

It is to be applauded that *The Future We Want* is the first international document that “recognizes” the importance of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Until now, international agreements, such as under the UNFCCC, CBD, and others, only “note” the UN Declaration. Statement 52 of *The Future We Want* recognizes local livelihoods as important contributions to sustainable development, referring to small-scale farmers, fishers, pastoralists, and foresters. This is the first time that pastoralism is recognized in a UN document. Hunters and gatherers who often constitute the most marginalized and weakest indigenous peoples, are however not mentioned.xviii

While these inclusions give some reassurance, it is deeply concerning to read them in the document in very significantly understated language.

The final draft of the document presented the Heads of State was variously described as weak, timid, a compromise, with glimmers of hope.

The UN Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon said the document would guide the world on to a more sustainable path: *Our job now is to create a critical mass. The road ahead is long and hard.* The Secretary General of Rio+20 Conference on Sustainable Development declared:

*The outcome document agreed upon by member states on Thursday was a "compromise" text that inevitably pleased some and disappointed many others.* xx

It was believed that the Credentials Committee, working on the text of the Outcome Document was under political pressure:

*Brazil artfully – and, according to some delegates, aggressively – pushed through the compromise text, thereby avoiding the conflict and chaos that marked the Copenhagen climate conference in 2009. But that also left heads of state and ministers with little but a ceremonial function, wasting an opportunity for political leaders to press for a more ambitious outcome.*xx

The document was subjected to scrutiny by many non-government organisations and media outlets, and in most instances it was found wanting:

*Every conceivable element of the sustainable development agenda was offered space. The environmental side was no exception. Water got six paragraphs, energy five, cities four, mountains three,*
transport two and so on. Oceans somehow seized 19 paragraphs including the only new commitment: “to take action by 2025 to achieve significant reductions in marine debris”. Issues that are the subject of negotiations in other fora received cursory attention. Climate change was awarded three paragraphs which managed to express “profound alarm” and “grave concern” but not much else.

Fossil fuel subsidies were tucked away in a couple of paragraphs on sustainable production and consumption, including this example of the highly cautious, negotiation-speak of the document: “Countries reaffirm the commitments they have made to phase out harmful and inefficient fossil fuel subsidies that encourage wasteful consumption and undermine sustainable development. We invite others to consider rationalizing inefficient fossil fuel subsidies…”

The language of the document underlines the weakness of commitment to action by the Heads of States. The following word graph highlights this…

Such generalities represent a massive step back from the so-called Zero Draft Document that was published in January 2012 and was based on inputs from a wide variety of stakeholders from around the world. So many “contentious” issues in the Zero Draft Document were deleted from the final draft.

**Major Groups**

The Major Groups that worked tirelessly during both the preparatory sessions and produced their response statements to the Conference. Four of them are quoted here:

i. **From the Indigenous Peoples Major Group:**

   At the Indigenous Kari-Oca venue minutes from the over 500 grassroots Indigenous Peoples held their own summit, ceremonies, events, press conferences and gatherings, and wrote their own The Declaration of Kari-Oca, condemning the UN agenda: “We see the goals of UNCSO Rio+20, the ‘Green Economy’ and its premise that the world can only ‘save’ nature by commodifying its life-giving capacities as a continuation of the colonialism that Indigenous Peoples and our Mother Earth have faced and resisted for 520 years.”

ii. **From the Women’s Major Group.** Concerns that were raised included:

   a. The roll-back of women’s rights
b. A lack-lustre right to a Healthy Environment

c. Halting Land-grabbing, ensuring Women’s control and access to Natural Resources

d. The contradictions of a Green Economy

Women demand “no-go Zones’ for mining, agrofuel and forestry companies. In order to ensure that women, indigenous peoples and local communities have access and control over water resources, women call for no privatization of water sources. We believe that a “green economy” will be no more than “green washing” if it is not firmly planted in a legally binding implementation of the precautionary principle. xxiv

iii. From the NGO Major Group Statement

You cannot have a document entitled The Future We Want without any mention of planetary boundaries, tipping points, or the Earth’s carrying capacity. The text as it stands is completely out of touch with reality. Countries are failing to find resources to implement sustainable development, using the economic crisis as an excuse, while at the same time spending hundreds of billions of dollars subsidising the fossil fuel industry, the most profitable industry in the world. The first thing you can do is eliminate existing harmful subsidies, especially fossil fuel subsidies, which was voted as the number one issue during the civil society dialogue. xxv

iv. From Science and Technology Major Group

Despite many studies and recommendations from the scientific community, and various references to the importance of research and technology in the current Rio+20 outcome text, the Rio+20 process has not systematically taken up research findings. It has ignored those on strengthening governance and improving policy processes, and those from natural sciences that provide clear evidence for the need for urgent and transformative change. xxvi

Government leaders declared, “We are determined to reinvigorate political will and to raise the level of commitment by the international community to move the sustainable development agenda forward...” This can be viewed as little more than a cover-up of an unavoidable truth— that many governments have effectively abdicated their responsibility in the face of grave danger for humanity and for Planet Earth.

Among the strongest statements was that of George Monbiot in The Guardian Weekly:

The earth’s living systems are collapsing, and the leaders of some of the most powerful nations – the US, the UK, Germany, Russia – could not be bothered to turn up and discuss it. Those who did attend the Earth summit in Rio recently solemnly agreed to keep stoking the destructive fires: 16 times in their text they pledged to pursue “sustainable growth”, the primary cause of the biosphere’s losses.

The efforts of governments are concentrated not on defending the living Earth from destruction, but on defending the machine that is destroying it. The machine greatly enriches the economic elite, while insulating the political elite from the mass movements it might otherwise confront. xxvii

Where Does Hope Lie?

Why should we bother, if the inevitable destination is the loss of so much of what we hold dear: the forests, the brooks, the wetlands, the coral reefs, the sea ice, the glaciers, the birdsong and the night chorus, the sort and steady climate which has treated us kindly for so long? xxviii

Then, drawing from the new prophets of hope who nourish our Presentation glimpses at life:

The eyes of the future are looking back at us
and they are praying for us to see beyond our own time.

They are kneeling with hands clasped
that we might act with restraint,
that we might leave room for the life
that is destined to come.
To protect what is wild is to protect what is gentle.
Perhaps the wildness we fear
is the pause
between our own heartbeats,
the silent space that says we live only by grace.
Wilderness lives by this same grace.
Wild mercy is in our hands.

Betty Rae Lee pbvm expresses the inspiring insight that made it imperative for us to be at Rio –

Being at Rio+20 among so many who believe in what we hold sacred was, in itself, worth the trip. The bravery of those in developing countries and those under oppressive regimes infused in me the courage to continue to walk with both feet, one rooted in ‘on the ground’ action among those who have been made poor, and the other, to continue to be involved in movements that seek to liberate people and nature.

One could not but savour those breath-taking moments, when a leader declared:

People will mobilise themselves to make sure that the world we pass on to our children and grandchildren is safe, equitable, prosperous and sustainable. The legacy of Rio+20 will not be the document you endorse – it will be the mobilization of people to build the future they desire.

11-year-old Ta’Kaya Blaney, showed up wearing a traditional First Nations woven headdress and burst into a song she wrote about saving the Earth. She said her message was simple.

“We can’t keep waiting till tomorrow to change because that’s what we’ve been doing for 100 years. We must be the change,” she said.

The vibrant determination of the Major Groups indicated a “seeing” beyond seemingly insurmountable obstacles:

A Global Citizens Movement is the collective response towards transitioning to a sustainable world. All sections of society must find common ground for collective action that can bring about the transformation required to ensure the wellbeing of all on the planets – humans as well as nature. For this, a new sense of ethics, values and spirituality must be seeded within current and future generations through a redesigned system of learning, education and enlightenment.

It was during the discussions, panels, and briefings shared among Major Groups and NGO bodies, that greatest energy was felt. It was in those conversations that the values, the hopes and dreams that we express as members of IPA were heard and understood. Our passion for justice, for the rights of the most vulnerable people that walk the planet, for the most marginalized people – poor, women, indigenous, children, those lacking human rights and Earth herself - was communicated in a common language of desire that this world will be transformed.

Going beyond GDP

Currently GDP measures income, but not equality, it measures growth, but not destruction, and it ignores values like social cohesion and the environment. Governments, businesses and probably most people rely on it as an indicator of wellbeing. In addressing the measurement of wealth, we are also considering the lack of wealth, the lack of human dignity.

Wellbeing/Happiness

At the Rio+20 Conference, Prime Minister Kinzang Dorji of Bhutan presented a compelling argument against using GDP as measure of human well-being:
Sustainable development means survival. It is about how we, as a species must live within the bounds of what nature can provide. Sustainable development is not a choice. It is an absolute necessity. It is neither an ideal beyond the reach of the poor nor a threat to the rich and affluent. When we have, in varying degrees and with growing efficiency, stripped earth of its remaining capacity to support life, where will be no judge or jury to separate rich from poor, the north from the south, or the more guilty from the less. Most human problems arise from one single reason: the failure to stay on the path of true happiness. Happiness causes us to live well, for living well is the wellspring of happiness. And wellbeing, we realize, is not about accumulating or consuming material wealth. It is about cultivating and enjoying good health and knowledge; peace, security and justice; equality and meaningful relationships.

This was the Prime Minister’s proposal for achieving Sustainability.

Valuing Natural Capital

Natural capital is the land, air, water, living organisms and all formations of the Earth’s biosphere that provide us with ecosystem goods and services imperative for survival and well-being. Furthermore, it is the basis for all human economic activity.

The expected outcome is better decision-making for managing, preserving and enhancing natural environments. Moreover, identifying and quantifying natural capital and its ecosystem goods and services provides additional economic rationale for effective natural resources management.

The notion of “valuing” the natural may well be fraught with financial overtones. As queried earlier, Can we put a price tag on nature? Rio+20 addressed growing concern that GDP may have outlived its usefulness in a world where natural resource scarcity, pollution and social exclusion are also becoming drivers of whether a nation’s wealth is a reliable indicator for measuring progress.

Corporations make sustainability pledges

The UN Global Compact (UNGC) recorded two hundred corporate pledges on sustainability by the Summit’s end. Ranging in scope from carbon neutrality or major GHG reductions (e.g. Microsoft, Unilever) to publicly disclosing environmental data (e.g. NAB) to addressing food security (e.g. DuPont) to water management (e.g. Coca Cola, Pepsi, Levi Strauss), the voluntary commitments made have the potential to make significant dents in corporate contributions to climate change and social impact. Following the UNGC’s focus on time-bound, measurable commitments, businesses which voiced sustainability commitments during Rio+20 are expected to be held accountable through public disclosure of and annual reporting against those commitments.

Given that large corporations carry more economic wealth than the countries in which they operate, and given that their accumulated wealth has been significantly acquired at the expense of other people and the environment, these pledges may well be a strategy for increasing their own wealth, and at whose expense it is yet to be seen. In his speech to the Conference Ecuadorian President Rafael Correa called on the richest countries to compensate poor nations for damage caused by climate change. Should such compensation be required of corporations? Simon Upton’s discussion, quoted below, is pertinent:

Changing Pace: Public policy options to scale and accelerate business action towards Vision 2050 is the World Business Council for Sustainable Development’s incredibly ambitious picture of where the world has to be by 2050: zero waste, near zero net energy buildings, low carbon mobility, doubled food production with much lower inputs, etc. But the big change is not so much in their aspirations as in their target audience. They used to explicitly exclude telling governments what to do. Now, governments are seen to be laggards and they are calling for a much more robust and transparent public policy framework.

They outline a policy accelerator which involves setting goals, communicating and educating, regulating, reforming budgets, investing, monitoring and coordinating. It is, for business, a radical message for
governments. It is worth looking at the explanatory section of the document in its entirety, but here is a flavour: “Since the 80s, the notion spread that less government intervention is better for business and economic growth. Yet the resulting deregulated world, with its weak financial and multilateral governance, has a mixed record of progress. It also accumulates economic distress, social tensions and increased environmental risks. It deals badly with the magnitude, depth and urgency of our systemic challenges.”

**Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration**

Principle 10 keeps the flames of hope on this issue alive. Principle 10 states that environmental issues are best handled with participation of all relevant stakeholders, with access to information and access to justice. Better known as the environmental democracy principle, it also states that access to information and judicial and administrative proceedings are necessary in order to ensure meaningful participation in decision-making. Principle 10 has spawned laws providing access to environmental information in over 100 countries, public participation provisions in over 120 countries and environmental courts and tribunals in over 44 countries. The Future We Want document mandates in clause 88(h) that UNEP “ensures the active participation of all relevant stakeholders” exploring ‘new mechanisms’. The term ‘ensure’ gives UNEP a strong mandate to take steps to improve implementation of Principle 10 including through a global Convention.

**The bold possibility of Sustainable Development Goals**

Economist Jeffrey Sachs concentrated on the potential of proposed but yet-to-be-created Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to revolutionise the ways we measure collective well-being. Arguing that Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is an anachronistic measurement of well-being, Sachs believes the SDGs “could be transformative,” representing the possibility of improved metrics for life-satisfaction and well-being if they are agreed by the 2013 Special Assembly for the final review of the Millennium Development Goals. A globally accepted measure of country performance not inherently tied to financial markets? Now that’s an idea worth 20 years’ wait.

Rio+20 delivered a process for sustainable development goals (SDGs), to be integrated into the United Nations development agenda beyond 2015 when the Millennium Development Goals are scheduled for completion. Given the interconnected challenges of poverty eradication, environmental sustainability, and equitable distribution of limited natural resources, it is necessary for these two tracks to converge into a single framework. It is hoped to bring all nations – rich and poor – into cooperative target setting across a range of challenges from water and land to food waste around the globe.

**Institutional Arrangements**

The General Assembly remains the chief deliberative policy-making and representative organ of the United Nations. ECOSOC will be strengthened within its Charter mandate as a principal organ in the integrated and coordinated follow-up of the outcomes of all major UN Conferences and summits in the economic, social, environmental and related fields. Rio+20 agreed to strengthen and “upgrade” UNEP in order to strengthen the environmental pillar of sustainable development. The decisions include addressing the limited membership of UNEP which currently stands at 58 Member States into a body with universal membership of its Governing Council while increasing UNEP’s financial resources by an increased allocation from the UN’s regular budget. Rio+20 also calls on the next UN General Assembly session to strengthen UNEP’s ability to assist member States at the regional and national level and to build on its science-policy interface.

Among potentially promising developments, was recognition by the governments that "fundamental changes in the way societies consume and produce are indispensable for achieving global sustainable development". This appeared to mean different things to different people. EU officials suggest it could lead to a shift of taxes so workers pay less and polluters and landfill operators pay more. Hillary Clinton said it...
should be reflected in the way products are advertised and packaged. All nations "reaffirmed" commitments to phase out harmful fossil fuel subsidies.

**Finance**

Finance is addressed in Section VI of the document – Means of Implementation. Statements 253-268 address financial matters. *The Future We Want*:

- Calls on countries to prioritize Sustainable Development in the allocation of resources
- Recognizes the need to mobilize resources
- Recognizes the fulfilment of ODA – Official Development Assistance through which voluntary donors assist Developing Countries, and welcomes initiative to improve ODA
- Notes significant changes to the aid architecture with contributions through private investment, trade and new development actors
- Recognizes the important achievements of the Global Environmental Facility (GEF)
- Considers that innovative financing mechanisms can make positive contributions
- Recognizes that a dynamic, inclusive, well-functioning, socially and environmentally responsible private sector is valuable instrument that can offer a crucial contribution.

The NGO Committee on Financing For Development in its submission to Rio+20 made four Statements:

1. That outcomes policies and actions on financing for Sustainable Development should be based on human rights within a framework for action that is equitable and transparent
2. That the United Nations must be recognized as the only legitimate forum for policy creation concerning sustainable development, and financing for implementation of these polices
3. The FFD NGO Committee calls for a sovereign debt workout mechanism that is fair, transparent and independent
4. The FFD NGO Committee calls for the adoption of a Financial Transaction Tax whose revenue is directed specifically for development and the mitigation of climate change. Such a FTT would provide a new long-term, stable, and accountable source of revenue for developing countries.

In *The Future We Want* document, the action agreed upon is to establish an intergovernmental process under the UN General Assembly, with technical support from the UN System, and in open and broad consultation with relevant international and regional financial institutions and other relevant stakeholders. The process will

- assess financial needs
- consider the effectiveness, consistency and synergies of existing instruments and frameworks
- and evaluate additional initiatives,

with a view to prepare a report proposing options on an effective Sustainable Development Financing Strategy to facilitate the mobilization of resources and their effective use in achieving sustainable development objective.

An intergovernmental committee, comprising thirty experts nominated by regional groups, with equitable geographical representation, will implement this process, concluding its work by 2014.
It scarcely needs comment that this commitment by the Heads of State is far less clearly-defined than that of the NGO Committee on Financing for Development.

**Recommendation to establish Ombudspersons for Future Generations**

IBON International, an NGO that engages in capacity development for human rights and democracy, has recommended and Office of Ombudspersons be established for future generations. **Sustainable development implies that the current generation has obligations to safeguard and lay down the conditions for the well-being and progress of future generations. Therefore it is crucial to institute a paradigm shift in the understanding of stakeholders in sustainable development by expanding these to include future generations.** The Major Group of Children and Young People were clear in their requests to have their rights to dignity upheld now and in the future, and that the rights of nature preserved for the health and well-being of all who share this planet. Imagine a world in which Attenborough’s films were all stored in museums for the children of the future to discover a world lost to them.

While *The Future We Want* recognizes that the younger generations are the custodians of the future, there is no clear commitment by the Heads of State that they will set in process any mechanism for facilitating future generations in assuming their very onerous responsibilities for the sustainability of planet Earth and its many communities.

George Monbiot makes three suggestions for at least delaying the destructive processes we are currently imposing on the planet:

1. **Draw out the losses over as long a period as possible, to allow our children and grandchildren to experience some of the delight in the natural world and of the peaceful, unharried lives with which we have been blessed.**
2. **Preserve what we can in the hope that conditions might change.**
3. **While we may have no influence over decisions made elsewhere, there is plenty that can be done within our own borders. Re-wilding – the mass restoration of ecosystems – offers the best hope we have of creating refuges for the natural world.**

**The dark side of reality**

The serious implications of working for Environmental Protection, Poverty Eradication and justice for Planet Earth and marginalized human communities was starkly demonstrated in the days immediately following Rio+20 – United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development.

On Friday June 22, the same day Heads of States signed the conference’s final document of commitment on two fishermen and environmental activists, Almir Nogueira and João Luiz Telles, went missing from their homes. They were residents of a coastal village on Mauá beach on Guanabara Bay. Nogueira’s body was discovered two days later, tied to his boat which was sunk in the waters off a local beach. Telles was found dead on June 25, washed up onshore in a nearby municipality. He was tied hand and foot in foetal position. Alexandre Anderson, head of the Associação Homens e Mulheres do Mar (AHOMAR) is currently receiving police protection. The murder victims were leading members of AHOMAR, an association of some 2,000 artisanal fisherfolk who are fighting against pollution of the bay that has been their home, workplace and the source of their livelihood for generations. Guanabara Bay is heavily polluted with untreated sewage and contaminants from refineries and other industries close to its shores, and the environment is suffering.

AHOMAR raises awareness of the social and environmental impact of big industries, and tries to prevent the companies from killing off the fish on which they depend. The association has been complaining since 2007 about pollution from construction of the huge Complexo Petroquímico (COMPER, a petrochemical complex) of the state of Rio de Janeiro.
The fishing boats have not returned to their usual occupation since the murders. No one dares to go to sea, which paradoxically used to be a “haven” for fishermen when “something bad happened at home or onshore,” Anderson said. “Now our only road is to the cemetery.”

Prophetic Imagination

For those who believe in the future of Planet Earth and the future of continuing generations of Earth’s communities, the challenges are indeed fraught with risk and disillusion, but for those who have eyes to see, there is a “beyond” to the obstacles, and a “life” beyond death-dealing. For those with Judaic faith, for those with Christian faith, for those with Islamic faith, indeed for the mystics of the whole earth community, the greatest challenge is the prophetic challenge where the outcome is more compelling than the risk. Prophetic words are drawing us beyond our domestic ennui into an always more hopeful vitality. The prophets of the past and those among us now continue to appeal to our imaginations:

*The people we later recognize as prophets are also poets. They reframe what is at stake in chaotic times.*

*Today as we take risks for the sake of something greater than our separate, individual lives, we are feeling graced by other beings and by Earth itself.*

*When you get over yourself, and you see beyond your own ego, you discover that who you are is not separate from the very impulse that is driving the creative process, and you begin to understand that as the impulse, you are definitely here for a reason.*

*To move forward we must recognize that in the midst of a magnificent diversity of cultures and life forms we are one human family and one Earth community with a common destiny. We must join together to bring forth a sustainable global society founded on respect for nature, universal human rights, economic justice, and a culture of peace.*

Indeed, there were prophetic voices and actions at Rio+20. The determination to continue lies with those who will love beyond the boundaries.

*Rosemary Grundy pbvm
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