

Requirements Regarding the Final Declaration of the Rio+20 Summit VENRO Statement

The final declaration of the Rio+20 Summit “The Future We Want” emphasises in its vision “full participation of civil society”. In order to ensure that the “We” in the final document not only meets governments' expectations but also demands of civil society organizations, VENRO calls for the inclusion of the following aspects:

Vision and commitment

In the draft final declaration governments commit themselves to fostering continuous economic growth and to strengthening technology transfer on the basis of mutually agreed conditions. They acknowledge the positive role companies play in ensuring sustainable development.

From VENRO's perspective the final declaration should make it clear that companies can have a negative impact on sustainable development. Governments should oblige companies to work within the earth's natural boundaries (“planetary boundaries”) while at the same time striving for social and ecological justice on the basis of human rights.

In accordance with the principle of a common but differential responsibility, industrial countries must commit themselves to contributing to technology transfer, for example by means of introducing more flexible patent rights. This principle stipulates that it is the common responsibility of all countries on earth to protect our planet. This responsibility is however different for each country in respect to their different levels of environmental degradation.

Green Economy

The draft final declaration lists several documents which are to provide an orientation for the Green Economy.

From VENRO's perspective the three Rio conventions, as well as the objectives of economic activity within planetary boundaries, are missing from the draft.

The draft final declaration “encourages” private companies to offer workers and employees access to social and health protection, “invites” industry to develop more sustainable product chains and emphasises the central role of *public-private partnerships*.

In *VENRO's* opinion a Green Economy can only contribute to sustainable development if the private sector pledges to observe workers' basic rights and offers a binding commitment to comply with human rights and social and environmental standards in their product and supply chains.

Institutional framework for sustainable development

The document provides two main alternatives to the future role of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). Both aim to strengthen the institution. The more moderate one assumes universal membership and secure financing, whereas the more ambitious one also calls for an upgrade to a UN special organization comparable to the UN Food and Agriculture organization (FAO) and the World Health organization (WHO). The unsatisfactory status quo would thus only persist if no agreement is reached – this would be the result of the shared reservation of Russia and Canada.

VENRO supports the following proposal: The final document should commit to an upgrade of UNEP to a full UN special organization. Only then will UNEP be able to tackle growing challenges and support developing countries in particular. Almost all states today have fully functioning Ministries of Environment but no environmental programmes. Thus, the UN should consider this.

In addition, **VENRO supports** efforts to replace the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) with a Sustainable Development Council which would report directly to the UN General Assembly. Following the example of the UN Human Rights Council, this council would regularly measure, verify and report on the success of the implementation of objectives and strategies of sustainable development.

In VENRO's opinion the idea of establishing a United Nations High Commissioner for sustainable development and the rights of future generations is important to give the UN sustainability system a face and more weight when calling for UN institutions and member states to implement coherent policies.

Poverty reduction

Although poverty reduction is described in the vision statement as the overarching objective of sustainable development and the “biggest global challenge”, the text only provides three short main explanations as to how poverty can be effectively tackled. It emphasises that poverty reduction should have priority in the UN agenda.

From VENRO's perspective the final declaration must emphasize the obligation of all states that have signed human rights agreements to tackle extreme poverty and to immediately implement peoples' rights to food, water, health, education and decent housing. “The Future We Want” must define a deadline for the state community to overcome extreme poverty. Considering the fact that relatively few financial resources are required to achieve this objective, the year 2020 is not overly ambitious.

Agriculture and food security

The draft final declaration emphasizes the important role of increased private and public investment in agriculture and rural development, listing several specific technologies, for example efficient irrigation systems, infrastructural investment and storage capacities.

From VENRO's perspective emphasis should be placed on investments that immediately foster food security for poor households and increase income opportunities for farmers without the environment being adversely affected. This requires improved access of small producers to resources such as land, water and seeds, but also to credit and markets.

Water

The draft final declaration merely adheres to existing Millennium Development Goal (MDG) agreements, and thus rejects opportunities to take the discussion process to the highest level in respect to post-MDG objectives for global water supply and sanitation systems.

VENRO supports the objective of providing all people – marginalized people in particular – with clean and affordable drinking water and sanitary systems by 2030 without any form of discrimination and in sufficient quantities in order to protect individual dignity and health. In addition, the final declaration should use the *agreed language* of existing UN resolutions.

In respect to environmental degradation through municipal and industrial waste water, the draft final declaration merely envisages improvements in existing national laws and master plan guidelines.

From VENRO's perspective the final declaration should not be associated with national legislation or master plan guidelines.

Health

The draft final declaration emphasises that health is a prerequisite for sustainable development.

From VENRO's perspective the final declaration should also refer to the United Nations commitments made in 2011 to tackle HIV/Aids, calling for universal access, and should also include health related MDGs. Universal access or universal degree of health services coverage must apply to all diseases. The final declaration needs to point out health risks associated with climate change and provide decisive guidelines to allow health systems and poor populations to adapt to the effects of climate change.

Energy

The draft final declaration acknowledges the role of availability of and access to sustainable energy as a precondition for development and poverty reduction, as well as in the fight against a dangerous climate change. In the context of the initiative *sustainable energy for all*, it calls for financial and institutional support for the provision of and access to sustainable energy. Barriers to public and private investments in the necessary restructuring of the energy sector are to be eliminated.

VENRO goes even further: Development of renewable energy should be accompanied by increased research, education and public awareness raising. Efforts should be made to mobilize adequate financial resources for fostering modern energies and to plan the development of renewable energies and energy efficiency measures in a participatory and fair manner so they can be oriented to the needs of those affected.

Tourism

The draft final declaration overestimates the benefits that existing forms and concepts of tourism have for development. Tourism can contribute to international understanding and development, but it is at the same time a very vulnerable industry. Air and ship travel considerably contribute to climate change. The projected quantitative growth of tourism thus thwarts its sustainability. In some parts of the world, tourism leads to expulsion, water predation, and is marked by lacking participation or insecure working conditions.

From VENRO's perspective tourism requires a paradigm shift. A new concept must include benefits for hosts and decry human rights violations.

Oceans

According to the final declaration, marine protection zones are to be expanded considerably. This applies to coastal areas in particular, and would be realized by means of effective management systems that safeguard biological diversity in maritime environments.

VENRO demands equal participation of the coastal population when it comes to decisions on enlargement of coastal maritime protection zones. In developing countries in particular, management plans must incorporate traditional rights to access fishing resources and existing protection systems. In addition, they must give priority to the right to food of a population that depends on this protein-rich resource.

Disaster risk reduction

Disaster prevention is an independent topic of the final declaration. Therefore the topic is given sufficient weight in respect to its contribution to sustainable development.

However, VENRO points out that disaster prevention as a cross-cutting issue should be incorporated not only in areas such as urban planning and water but also other topics, such as poverty reduction, food security, energy, health and desertification.

Biodiversity

The final declaration recognises the contribution of indigenous peoples to biodiversity conservation.

VENRO supports this recognition. In addition, states should commit themselves to implementing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

The draft final declaration encourages investments that foster the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity.

VENRO shares this aspect. However, it must be added that governments need to take appropriate measures to prevent investments that might impact negatively on the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity.

Desertification

The draft final declaration emphasises the fact that soil contributes to economic growth, sustainable agriculture and food security. However, it provides very few indications as to which actors and investments are necessary to prevent soil degradation. The reference to the Changwon initiative suggests that the focus is on private investments.

From VENRO's perspective soil should be referred to first and foremost as a factor that secures livelihood. It is important to identify instruments and initiatives that help states to support local populations in their fight against desertification and soil degradation.

Mining

The draft final declaration rightly stresses the great importance of extractive resources for the world and industrial production. They can above all, from an economic and social perspective, boost development in poor countries that are rich in raw materials. To achieve this, negative social and ecological impacts must be prevented or minimized, and appropriate measures must be taken to strengthen positive impacts.

VENRO, however, points out the need for people living in these production areas to be included in the early stages of mining projects and for their voices to be heard. In order to minimize social and environmental risks we need to use the best available materials handling technology (not *low cost production*). Companies must commit themselves to observing human rights, as well as international environmental and social standards, in countries rich in raw materials. Furthermore, appropriate steps must be taken to ensure that future mining projects do not violate human rights.

Gender equality and women's empowerment

Gender positions in the final declaration are insufficient. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) do not refer to gender goals specified in the Millennium Development Goals.

From VENRO's perspective SDGs should include gender justice and women's *empowerment* and focus on respect for women's roles in environmental issues. VENRO demands equal access to resources, land and property rights, technology, water and waste management. Human and women's rights must be respected. In addition, gender mainstreaming should be addressed by the SDGs.

The final declaration should explicitly point out that all forms of violence are serious obstacles to gender equality and sustainable development. Thus, all forms of violence (structural, gender-specific and as a result of conflicts/wars) must be addressed in the context of gender equality and the promotion of women. More emphasis should be laid on equal participation of women in conflict transformation, peace negotiation and reconstruction.

Sustainable Development Goals – SDGs

The draft final declaration points out that SDGs should be based on the Millennium Declaration, the UN Charter and principles of international law. In addition, they should be compatible with the Rio principles and contribute to the implementation of Agenda 21 and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, including poverty eradication and protection of natural resources.

VENRO emphasises that SDGs are also based on human rights and should respect planetary boundaries. In addition, they should implement, besides other Rio principles, the principle of a common but differential responsibility in particular, and contribute to social justice and environmental protection.

The draft final declaration mentions possible policy areas for the SDGs.

From VENRO's perspective possible objectives for sustainable development should include technology transfer, political participation and human security.

Technology transfer

The draft final declaration calls for the role of intellectual property rights to be examined in respect to access of developing countries to environmentally friendly technologies.

From VENRO's perspective in future, the focus will be on rebalancing intellectual property rights and the public interest in the use of inventions, in particular when it comes to access of the poor to affordable medicine.

According to the document, the states agree with the idea of funding transfer of environmentally friendly technologies through voluntary financial contributions.

In addition, states should take measures to provide developing countries with preferential access to environmentally friendly technologies.

Trade

The draft final declaration assumes that an open and non-discriminatory trade system, as well as trade liberalisation, is beneficial for all countries, in particular in the area of non-tariff barriers.

From VENRO's perspective the international trade system needs to be reviewed, in particular in respect to its ecologically and socially negative impacts. It must also be oriented towards sustainable development.

The final declaration calls for a fast and ambitious conclusion of the Doha Round.

VENRO however believes that Doha Round negotiations on a further world trade liberalisation should be immediately ended without result, as they have been deadlocked for years. Instead, a negotiation mandate for a world trade regime which aims to achieve global sustainable development should be agreed on.

The draft final declaration acknowledges the need to continue negotiations with the WTO on liberalisation of environmental goods and services.

In VENRO's opinion it should acknowledge instead that current negotiations on liberalisation of environmental goods and services cannot contribute to sustainable development.

Decent work

The final declaration recognises the importance of decent work for people in formal and informal working relations. It calls on the responsibility of social partners to protect workers' rights - women and migrant workers' rights in particular - and calls on the international community to launch an employment programme. However, it is not very clear in pointing out opportunities for an employment policy focusing on jobs in the areas environmental protection and green technology.

Here, VENRO recognises the need for a clear positioning to tackle the global employment crisis in a coherent manner. VENRO would like the declaration to refer to existing international legally binding agreements, such as the UN International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families or conventions of the International Labour Organization (ILO) concerning Migrant Workers (C97), the Home Work Convention (C177) and the ILO Convention on Indigenous Peoples (C169). The final declaration also falls short of recognizing the ILO as a specialized agency of the United Nations which proves its leading role through concepts of decent work as well as in its approach to promoting youth employment and strengthening informal-workers' rights.

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