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Arab NGO Network for Development
شبكة المنظمات العربية غير الحكومية للتنمية

Submission

Presented by the Arab NGO Network for Development

Contribution to the Zero Draft Document Rio+20

Beirut 1st of November 2011

About ANND (www.annd.org):

The Arab NGO Network for Development (ANND) is a regional organization concerned mainly with social and economic policies and rights in the Arab region. ANND's interest in the Rio process comes from its deep commitment towards sustainable development and its framework declared back in 1992 during the original earth summit. ANND has been following up the evolution of this process, and initiating outputs for this concern in order to influence public policies in the region and strengthen the political commitment of the governments in the region towards sustainable development and Agenda 21.



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Based on the outcomes of the Regional Multi-Stakeholder Consultation in the Arab Region in preparation for the Rio+20 Summit (held in Beirut, Lebanon on 12 & 13 October 2011)

Introduction:

The Earth Summit held almost 20 years ago in Rio affirmed that achieving sustainable development strongly depends on the comprehensive understanding linking three core pillars including the environmental, economic, and social policies. It underlined the need to adopt different consumption and productive patterns on one hand and to strengthen the international cooperation based on the core principle of "common but differential responsibility". Eight years later the Millennium Declaration reaffirmed the importance of global partnership for development affirming four main pillars: 1) trade justice 2) debt relief 3) aid effectiveness and 4) transfer of technology.

The agenda 21, as one of the main outcomes of Rio (1992) highlighted the nexus between sustainable development and democratic governance in order to protect human rights, to protect citizenship and to build the state of rights and the rule of law. The Arab peoples' revolutions and uprisings which erupted first in Tunisia in December 2010 also reflect the interlink between sustainable development, democratic governance, and freedom.

Moreover, the Agenda 21 and the Millennium Declaration explicitly confirmed the link between sustainable development and peace and security, as prerequisite to guarantee economic and social rights. Whilst the Arab region is continuously witnessing wars, crisis and conflicts since six decades as a result of the violation of international law and the inability to implement agreed international resolutions. It is obvious that just and sustainable peace cannot be achieved unless the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination is being respected.

The following submission is based on a two days Regional Multi-stockholders consultation organised (in Lebanon on 12-13 October 2011) by the Arab NGO Network for Development (ANND), in cooperation with the Issam Fares Institute for public Policies and International Affairs (IFI), the Mediterranean Information Office for Environment, Culture and Sustainable Development (MIO-ECSDE), in coordination with the UN Economic and Social Commission for West Asia (ESCWA) and Regional Office for West Asia for the UN Environmental Program (ROWA-UNEP).

The submission highlights the following:

- Any consensus on the concept of the 'Green Economy' should fully integrate the previously established consensus on Sustainable Development.
- Any roadmap towards a 'Green Economy' cannot be conceived outside the existing consensus towards Sustainable Development and necessitate a revitalization of global partnership for sustainable development.



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- Beyond mere economic growth and towards sustainable development; there is a need to re-establish the role of the state in sustainable development processes
- Partnership arrangements or other implementation tools emerging from the Rio+20 process must integrate coherent and inclusive strategies that do not allow for "parallel" decision making structures.
- Expected outcomes from the Summit

I) Any consensus on the concept of the 'Green Economy' should fully integrate the previously established consensus on Sustainable Development.

The 'Green Economy' concept should be approached solely within the context of accepted and consensual definitions of Sustainable Development. The concept of Sustainable Development, as it emerged from the 1992 UN conference in Rio, had a comprehensive agenda. Since then, however, the concept has been shrinking as political commitment towards sustainable development diminished. New processes emerged and were claimed to have the same spirit of Agenda 21. It is in this environment that the two general themes of the coming Rio+20 Summit, "green economy" and "institutional framework", dominate the preparatory discussions towards the Summit.

Steps should be taken to ensure that the 'Green Economy' concept does not become a step backwards from the initial commitments to Agenda 21, even as it strives to encompass a new approach to presenting the global sustainability problematic. This cannot be achieved without a wider understanding of sustainable development, which encompasses a revision of the overall production and consumption trends in the world today, and to which rights, equity, fairness, and common but differentiated responsibilities are central. This would necessitate re-orienting investment, trade, and finance policies to focus on these objectives, including harnessing regional cooperation on these fronts towards increasing production and demand at the regional level.

Such an approach is crucial in terms of working towards recovering from the current financial and economic crisis, including restoring growth in the employment markets and generation of decent jobs, as well as the stability in the markets of basic products. Indeed, divergence from the path of sustainable development and the commitments previously undertaken is contributing to weakening the global economy. These concerns need to be addressed while taking into consideration the urgency of the situation that the world sustainability faces as well as the differentiated responsibilities and capacities in the current context, both globally between developed and developing countries and nationally among the well endowed and the marginalized and impoverished.

II) Any roadmap towards a 'Green Economy' cannot be conceived outside the existing consensus towards Sustainable Development and necessitate a revitalization of global partnership for sustainable development.

The global economy already suffers from production and consumption patterns that unsustainably exploit natural resources, leading to serious environmental and ecological problems and exacerbating inequalities among the peoples of the world. Such plunder remains dominant today, and problems such as climate change, soil

degradation, and water scarcity emerged as global threats to biodiversity, food sovereignty and security, and livelihoods of various communities around the world, and overall right to development.

This situation is made all the more dangerous because of weakly managed unsustainable energy policies that have only exacerbated the global threat of climate change, in addition to endangering water and food security through such technologies as first generation bio-fuels that needlessly create a competition between energy and food. Higher adaptation of environmental friendly sustainable techniques, like wind or solar energy, including public and private investment in these fields is essential.

Furthermore, of all natural resources, water is the most strategic, and its mismanagement threatens the world's population. Energy efficiency, water security and food security are closely intertwined and cannot be viewed separately. This issue is pressing the arid Arab Region, where most countries' water supply depends on expensive energy-intensive processes, leading to further resource waste because of the lack of basic expertise or oversight at the regional and local level. Resource management can only be enhanced by ensuring that access to freshwater remains a basic human right. With the basic rights of the most vulnerable secured, they can be empowered to be more resource-efficient and active contributors to the development process, while guaranteeing local and traditional livelihoods.

Thus, it is essential to re-evaluate existing policies on water usage and energy generation, to ensure that exhaustible resources are used in a just and sustainable manner. Enhancing inter-regional investments and cooperation in this field is essential.

A revitalized global partnership for sustainable development should address the ways in which global governance, including the ways in which trade, investment, and finance relations often favour rich-countries at the expense of poor country livelihoods and divert resources from development and rights focused objectives. Accordingly, it is essential to re-evaluate existing policies and trade agreements that contradict the concept of Sustainable Development and address the structural imbalance of power distribution in the global economy that is tilted to privilege the few. For example, international trade rules should not be used as tools to fight against public support directed towards developing alternative energy sources and technologies, nor for trade protectionism, nor blocking the use of new 'environmental' technologies by developing country peoples. Besides, it is crucial to review national regulations to address the absence/ or weakness of policies that frame and support sustainable development, including for example national regulations around food sovereignty and security as well as regulations related to new technologies and transfer of technologies. Such revisions would help address the threat to ecosystems and biodiversity posed by land degradation and water pollution. When it comes to new technologies, enforcing the "precautionary principle" is essential in order to avoid the risks and challenges posed by unproven technologies¹.

¹ Without clear guidance or adoption mechanisms, developing economies risk ending up as a dumping ground for polluting and unsustainable technologies, and thus subsidizing the move of the developed world

Moreover, international development cooperation has an important role in supporting processes of sustainable development that national state and non-state actors establish. Aid and development effectiveness, that can re-enforce and not weaken sustainable development processes, need to be de-linked from foreign policy objectives or militarization processes as well as foreign policy conditionality that skew the economic and social context to serve specific interests or orthodox economic models. Aid and development effectiveness serving sustainable development necessitate focusing on democratic national ownership and meaningful and systematic participation by civil society, re-enforced by multiple accountability systems.

III) Beyond mere economic growth and towards sustainable development; there is a need to re-establish the role of the state in sustainable development processes

Poverty incidence is rising in the Arab region, along other developing countries, while economic growth is being achieved in many of the same countries. Poverty is being manifested more viciously among rural populations whose livelihoods often depend on agriculture.

Policy makers in developing countries have often prioritized integration in the global economy through trade and investment liberalization, borrowing, expansion for privatization deals and public-private partnerships, overall economic deregulation, and over-focus on macro-economic stability. Concurrently, national productive capacities have been marginalized along with the national development project generally, which includes addressing inequalities, empowering people through employment generation and wages, and establishing comprehensive rights-based social plans. This further weakened developing countries, increasing their dependence on food imports, and exacerbating their vulnerability to external shocks. Accordingly, we saw countries achieve economic growth, while poverty, unemployment, and inequities were on the rise.

The limits of such an approach were laid bare during the people's revolutions in the Arab region. Indeed, economic and social policies defined from the top-down have often only been exacerbating inequalities, poverty, and unemployment, while economic growth numbers were overstated by oil-exports, without proper re-distribution policies and mechanisms or local empowerment.

Nowadays, it is evident that the process of rolling back government's role in economic matters need reconsideration, in order to arrive at an effective balance

towards the real Green Economy. Without proper institutions for the assessment and evaluation of technologies, the developed world risks becoming the test bed of unproven technologies, with unexpected consequences. An example is the controversy in the medical field, with many developed world patients acting as guinea pigs for medicines. The risk on the larger scale is related to the adoption of such new technologies such as Nanotechnology, Geo-Engineering, and Synthetic Biology, before they are validated, in violation of the traditional principle of "Precaution".

between the role of the state as a regulator and facilitator and the role of market stakeholders. It is evident that developing countries need to move away from their exclusive focus on economic growth, towards increased emphasis on economic development based on a broader “rights-based” perspective.

Within this context, there is a need for unpacking the concept of “Public-Private-Partnerships” (PPPs) and evaluating the development benefits from experiences in this area. Far too often, PPPs tend to be nothing but disguised privatization or concessions measures, especially where legal and institutional frameworks are weak. With no valid consensus on what they constitute, PPPs face very uncertain results and can hinge on economic processes, social rights, and sustainable development objectives. This is especially significant at the time when PPPs are being promoted in countries where corruption and mismanagement are clearly evident. Indeed, during the past decades, there have been vast instances of transfer of public assets into private ownership, of concessions on the exploitation of natural resources, and of attribution of public service contracts to private firms that have been implemented with very little accountability. The dangers of this approach were demonstrated by the financial crisis.

IV) Partnership arrangements or other implementation tools emerging from the Rio+20 process must integrate coherent and inclusive strategies that do not allow for “parallel” decision making structures

The Rio+20 process and Summit offer an important opportunity to revive the focus of Sustainable Development. This will reinforce the drive, initiated in 1992, towards a reform of development paradigms that integrate coherent strategies for reviving productive sectors and capacities in developing countries, including agriculture and industry, along competitive niche services sectors.

Both developing and developed countries need strengthened institutions that operate within intraregional and intra-thematic coordination and cooperation, with a focus on “bottom-up” participatory governance. Intraregional and intra-thematic coordination and cooperation on sustainable development should be improved among regional commissions and international funds, programmes, agencies, and development banks, in coordination with United Nations institutions. Institutions should be empowered to focus on promoting sustainable development through a balanced integration of its economic, social and environmental dimensions that is not beholden to “donor-defined” agenda. The mobilization of technical and financial assistance should facilitate the implementation of regionally and sub-regionally agreed sustainable development programmes and projects, with a focus on the empowerment of local stakeholder. This will rest on strengthened governmental institutions that are transparent and accountable to key multi-stakeholders.

Through coordination structures at the national and local level, they should also foster full public participation in sustainable development policy formulation and implementation. Indeed, any implementation requires policies and mechanisms that ensure the involvement of local stakeholders, represented in various forms of civil society groups and constituency groups, including women, indigenous people, and

people with special abilities, who are empowered to make and implement decisions that often concern them primarily.

V) Expected outcomes from the Summit

It is expected and strongly requested that the Rio+20 process and Summit result in adopting internationally agreed and time bound commitments with clear strategies for their achievement. The conference should deal with how these outcomes will fall within the global governance scene today, including the relation of the outcomes to the closely correlated processes taking place globally whether climate change negotiations, trade negotiations, aid effectiveness negotiations among others. The conference ought to deal and clarify the responsibilities of the global governance institutions towards the agreed outcomes, including the UN agencies, IMF, WB, WTO, among others. Such an outcome necessitates the genuine engagement and political will from countries around the world, manifested in the involvement of government leaders at the highest level along with widespread engagement of civil society stakeholders and constituencies. In our view, we highly recommend the establishment of "Sustainable Development Council", on par with such other institutions as the Security Council, the Human Rights Council, and the Economic and Social Council. This international governance body will have the authority to monitor the implementation of Sustainable Development initiatives of member states, where its resolutions are binding, and legitimacy and authority cannot be broken by politically powerful states.