

Focus :

ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

ROUNDTABLE

[GE8]

Grand Auditorium
Palais Brongniart

Thursday, September
20, 2012

RIO + 20 : REVIEW AND OUTLOOK

MAIN FINDINGS

The Rio+20 final document is disappointing because it contains very few decisions and is in no way binding, neither for states nor for companies, and important topics such as access to energy for the most impoverished are not dealt with. Furthermore, the Summit was not able to set up an international organisation for the environment. Nevertheless, the final document was signed by all countries present, and has managed to include three important achievements: the green and fair economy was recognised as one of the key tools in sustainable development; the importance of the sustainable development goals for the post-2015 period was acknowledged; and civil society and local authorities gained consultative status. Finally, Rio+20 was a space for meeting and dialogue and a large space was set aside for non-governmental stakeholders. It is now important to continue to try to convince our leaders that the environment and economic development must and can work together, and questions must be asked about the impact that we can have as citizens, businesses and NGOs.

SPEAKERS

Dominique Campana

Director of International Action, ADEME

Alban Jacquin

Sustainability Performance & Communities
Director, Schneider Electric

Jean-François Julliard

Executive Director, Greenpeace France

Tancrede Voituriez

Director of the Governance programme, IDDRI

MODERATOR

Gilles Berhault

Chairman, Comité 21/ Sustainable Development
Advisor to the Scientific Director, Institut Mines
Télécom

SUMMARY OF INTERVENTIONS

Introduction to Rio+20

Gilles Berhault explains that the United Nations conference on sustainable development at Rio de Janeiro, or rather Rio+20, is a summit of heads of state and government from 130-140 countries, which is part of the set of global summits on environment and development which have been held since the Earth Summit in 1992. This conference, which led to the creation of Agenda 21 and several conventions on the climate and biodiversity, was the event which allowed for the transition from the concept of "development and environment" towards the notion of sustainable development, and was a key moment in the history of international collaboration. Twenty years later, the Rio+20 summit has been created with the aim of preparing the agenda for the next twenty years, with the challenge of spreading approaches which strive for sustainable development.

Feedback on Rio+20

Gilles Berhault points out that although the final text was contested, it has the benefit of having been signed by all countries present at the summit. However, Rio+20 was not simply a summit for heads of state – civil society organisations contributed to Draft 0, which acted as a basis for intergovernmental negotiations. 50,000 civil society representatives were present at the People's Summit, displaying more rapid action capabilities than the governments. Two main subjects were dealt with: global governance of the environment and of the green economy. The slogan was "the future we want", with the idea of collective building a central one. France contributed by leading Comité 21. A well-constructed dynamic was presented at the French pavilion, which received a visit from the French President and more than 10,000 people. Rio+20 was useful as a space for meeting and for dialogue. However, it is time for Europeans to change their mindset and to stop thinking that they alone are the bearers of truth.

Dominique Campana notes that ADEME is a public institution under the supervision of the Ministry of Ecology and the Ministry for Research. In Rio, ADEME was in charge of leading and facilitating the exchanges between the different stakeholders by organising parallel events which allowed civil society stakeholders to meet up. In this way, the culmination of Rio was the meeting between a large number of stakeholders who were able to discuss solutions and to exchange good practices which were to be spread further. Visits were organised, such as to the electricity

supplier of the State of Rio, Light, which has set up a support scheme for favela inhabitants, helping them to pay their bills. The scheme involves collecting waste which can then be weighed on the spot, with the equivalent amount of money being automatically deducted from the person's bill.

Alban Jacquin points out that a business that is seeking to be profitable looks for levers of long-lasting growth. She explains that the culture of Schneider Electric is to ask how one can contribute to solving global issues, an obligation for all businesses in the 21st century. In Rio, Schneider Electric shared its vision on these large issues with other civil society actors, particularly in terms of energy efficiency and access to clean energy for the 1.3 billion people in the world that are deprived of it. She also presented a number of concrete actions, such as setting up smart grids in the Amazon, allowing electricity to be supplied to two villages, and a joint venture with the Grameen Foundation, for developing solutions to replace oil lamps in Bangladesh. Schneider Electric's sustainable development approach is that of attempting to innovate by providing business expertise, technology and project management capabilities. Rio+20 was not a complete failure because civil society and companies managed to play a role and shared concrete, effective, sustainable and profitable solutions.

Jean-François Julliard explains that since Copenhagen, Greenpeace has been participating to a lesser degree in large international summits of this type, since it does not see a great deal of use in doing so. Traditionally, Greenpeace has participated mainly by sending official delegations and by working to create awareness among the public and the media. For example, in Rio, Greenpeace led a campaign on the Arctic and against deforestation.

Tancrede Voituriez believes that the Rio text has a weak direct impact because it contains very few decisions without bringing about the creation of new rights, and it aims to change behaviour in an indirect manner. Previous texts from Rio in 1992 and Johannesburg in 2002 had the same effect of raising awareness, which goes significantly further than the legal effects in the strict sense. The weakness of the Rio text can nonetheless be explained by the lack of collective ambition, aside from that which led to the definition of the sustainable development goals.

The shortfalls of Rio+20

Alban Jacquin explains that there is no time to wait for a definition of the green economy and believes that the fact that the Rio+20 text is not binding, partly as a result of the European sovereign debt crisis, is truly

frustrating. He also condemns the fact that questions of sustainability are often relegated as being secondary to financial issues, highlighting the fact that sustainable development has a dual benefit, since it is not only sustainable but also profitable. Therefore, it is important to consider that energy efficiency is not only good for the environment but also beneficial in reducing costs, particularly at a time of economic crisis. Consumer education should be carried out in order to avoid energy waste, which is already considerable in homes and even more of an issue at the city level.

According to **Dominique Campana**, the Rio+20 text reflects three important achievements: the recognition of the green and fair economy, or rather the fact that more growth is needed with fewer natural resources as a key tool for sustainable development; the importance attributed to the post-2015 sustainable development goals and the participation of civil society and local authorities, which now have consultative status and no longer simply observer status. Nevertheless, the question of access to energy for the most impoverished is practically absent from the text, and the summit did not achieve the creation of a global institution for the environment.

Jean-François Julliard believes that the role attributed to civil society was one of the few positive highlights of Rio+20. A true link has been created between the environment and social justice, and bridges have been built between associations that focus on the environment and development. Nevertheless, waiting twenty years to obtain a text at this high level is a waste of time. The final document is indeed full of good intentions, such as saving the planet and fighting against poverty, but it does not contain any measure to reach these aims. Furthermore, it is not binding for states nor for companies, and certain measures, such as the caps on subsidies for fossil fuels for 2030 or 2050 which were presented in the initial document, have disappeared from the final text. The UN machine will not allow for steps forward to be made and regional alliances are much more useful and effective.

Gilles Berhault notes the presence of the principle of national sovereignty in the text which has been drawn up by Brazil, and notes the absence of links between Rio+20 and the Conference on the environment in France.

Tancrede Voituriez points out that the Brazilian approach to negotiation consisted of withdrawing all troublesome parties from the text, including the ideas which came out of the civil society consultation process, in order to avoid having to face a disagreement. That which was lacking at Rio+20 was the preparation for a compromise, as is done at the WTO. There was not enough time available and work done. The Secretary General of the United Nations adopted risk-averse behaviour. The

text is weak because it does not oblige governments in any way. The conference on the environment in France did not use the Rio+20 text because it did not include political ambitions. Moreover, a very French vision of environmental problems prevailed at this conference since no foreign stakeholders were present.

Strategies for the future

Dominique Campana sees the following as necessary: setting up the World Environment Organisation; giving more meaning to the Rio+20 text by completing it and making it more specific; multiplying the successful experiences of local authorities, such as creating regional climate-energy plans or making energy-positive buildings more widespread and continuing to communicate with and to carry out discussions with all civil society actors.

Alban Jacquin believes that questions should continue to be asked about the impact that one can have as a citizen, a business or an NGO, and that specific initiatives should be led which have a financial, ecological and social impact, and that efforts should be made in communicating, exchanging and recognising success.

Jean-François Julliard points out that we should continue to convince our leaders that the environment and economic development must and should work together, and that no steps forward are possible without binding measures.

Gilles Berhault concludes by saying that the true difficulty lies in the governance of the public good which is the environment.

SUMMARY OF DEBATE WITH THE AUDIENCE

The Rio+20 vision presented during the debate was very European. The perception of green growth was actually a sceptical one from developing countries. At the same time, the role of the UN is to maintain peace around the world, in a context in which environmental problems are becoming a source of conflicts. The UN is the only way to move forward together.

Alban Jacquin explains that emerging economies have understood that it is in their interest to grow in a green, sustainable and virtuous manner. Emerging economies have a responsibility, since they are the ones that will grow the most over the next few years (85% of

GDP growth in the next 30 years will come from India and China).

For **Dominique Campana**, a strong point for Rio+20 was the question of sustainable cities, which includes the problems of transport and energy efficient buildings.

However, according to **Tancredi Voituriez**, the UN machine does not go through with its ideas, and the SDGs are the only experiment which will allow for an optimistic sheen to be painted over the last 20 years which have been spent adrift. Sustainable development was invented precisely in order to reduce the global opposition between North and South: poor countries want development and rich countries want the environment, but the two are not necessarily compatible, as we seem to rediscover during each negotiation process – sustainable development is a political question.

REPORTER

Berenika Kramer

MORE ON THIS TOPIC

- Agence de l'Environnement et de la Maitrise de l'Energie (ADEME) : www.ademe.fr
- Greenpeace : www.greenpeace.org/france/fr
- Jeffrey D Sachs, « From Millennium Development Goals to Sustainable Development Goals », Lancet 2012; 379: 2206–11 : www.convergences2015.org/Content/biblio/Jeffrey%20SACHS%20%282012%29From%20MDGs%20to%20SDGs.pdf