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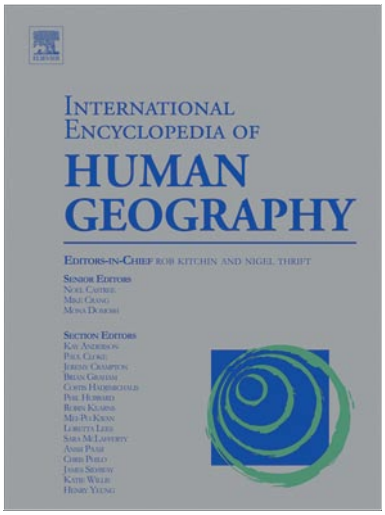

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Rio Summit*

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Glossary

Civil Society The sphere or space between individuals and the state and/or market.

Civil Society Organizations Voluntary civic and social organizations as differentiated from state and commercial organizations and institutions.

Destatization A major outcome of globalization whereby civil society and regional authority develop as state power wanes.

Glocalization A process of rescaling in which a simultaneous shift occurs upward toward the supranational scale (e.g., North American Free Trade Agreement and European Union) and downward toward the local or global, products and services tailored to local places.

Governance The processes and systems through which organizations and society operate.

Sustainable Development "Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" – World Commission on Environment and Development (1987).

Introduction

The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), widely known as the Rio Earth Summit, convened 3–14 June 1992 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The Rio Summit focused on developing a global framework for addressing environmental degradation through sustainable development. Through the participation of both state and nonstate actors, the main themes and agendas of the Rio Summit were condensed into several documents and institutional mechanisms. The documents provided guidance for communities worldwide who desired to integrate sustainable development goals into their governance structure. The main documents produced at the Summit include Agenda 21, the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, the Statement of Forest Principles, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, and the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity. The Summit hosted a record 172 108 governmental officials, 2400 representatives of nongovernmental organizations, and 17 000 attendees at a parallel nongovernmental organization (NGO) forum. With an estimated 10 000 journalists on site, the widely reported Summit was heard by millions of people around the world.

Global Events on Environment and Development Pre-Rio

The 1972 Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment was the predecessor to the Rio Earth Summit and one of the first mega conferences to tackle questions of environment and development at a global scale. One of main outcomes of the Stockholm Conference was the Declaration of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, which outlines a series of principles and proclamations that aims to both "inspire and guide the peoples of the world in the preservation and enhancement of the human environment" (United Nations Environment Programme 2006). Although the declaration clearly recognizes the sovereignty of each nation, stated under principle 21, it also strongly encourages each country to cooperate at an international scale to help protect and enhance the human environment. Finding the balance between state sovereignty and transnational responsibility was crucial to the success of the Stockholm talks and continues to play a fundamental role in negotiating global environmental governance regimes.

Although the Stockholm Conference addressed myriad topics, one of the central debates that transcended the meetings centered on development and poverty. The question of whether development and economic growth are inherently destructive to the environment created sharp divisions between pro-growth advocates and those concerned about the negative consequences of unchecked economic growth. These debates, in many cases, accentuated the polarization of governments from the Global North and South, and more generally, between pro-growth governments and NGOs advocating for limits to growth.

More than a decade later, the Commission on Environment and Development was established to reflect on the escalating environmental crisis and devise a global agenda for change. The 1984 commission, also known as the Brundtland Commission after the chair, Norwegian

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Prime Minister Gro Harlam Brundtland, produced the widely received and provocative document *Our Common Future*, which decried the world's failure to achieve sustainable development and outlined several far-reaching actions that needed to occur to mitigate anticipated environmental disaster. This document was instrumental for laying the foundation for the topics to be discussed at the Rio Summit and for shaking up the global community to convene another global summit.

On 22 December 1989, the United Nations General Assembly called for a global meeting that would address the issues raised in the Brundtland Report. The aim of the meeting was to formulate strategies to stop and reverse the effects of global environmental degradation "in the context of increased national and international efforts to promote sustainable and environmentally sound development in all countries." This meeting would come to be known as the Rio Earth Summit.

The Rio Summit, Agenda 21, and the Millennium Development Goals

The Rio Summit was unlike other UN conferences, in terms of its large scale, public nature, and wide-ranging topics. The Summit hosted state leaders from across the globe (representing 172 governments and 108 heads of state) as well as 2400 NGO representatives. The Summit attendees collaborated on innovative ways to address pressing environmental concerns and largely focused on the need for broad-based, environmentally-focused sustainable development.

The Rio Summit set a precedent for greater civic engagement by allowing increased participation from NGOs and nonstate actors. The increased presence of civil society in both the pre-conferences and the Summit itself was indicative of a widening in governance structures in the global arena, which continues today. The greater participation of NGOs also left an indelible mark on the proceedings and accords – the legacy of the Summit. The immense number of participants and journalists at the Summit further launched the concept of sustainable development into the public discourse and sparked the world's interest in environment and development issues.

The Rio Summit also set the agenda for all subsequent UN conferences examining the interconnections between human rights, population, health, social and economic development, and environmental sustainability. Regional and international development policies were explicitly developed with consideration of environmental and economic impacts. These discussions led to critical examinations of the environmental and health impacts of common household agents such as gasoline and pesticides. Similarly, the Summit focused awareness on the increasing scarcity of freshwater and diminishing fishing resources and explored ways to replace fossil fuels with alternative energies such as wind, solar, and water.

Attempting to find economic-based solutions to environmental problems gave rise to other issues at the Summit, including global equity, governance, and North–South relationships. In particular, North–South relationships weighed heavily on discussions of poverty eradication, access to resources, and global aid. Some argue, for example, that the development policies in which the northern 'industrialized' countries are positioned as the grantors and providers of technical expertise and the southern 'less-developed countries' are positioned as the grantees and recipients of information reinforce neocolonial relationships. These relationships, although often developed in an attempt to 'level the playing field' between the Global North and the Global South, arguably reify northern privilege and silence southern voices. Throughout the last 30 years, the UN and other development agencies have worked toward developing a more equal global representation in development. However, despite these efforts, the Global South continues to be a minority in global forums (as discussed below in 'progress since Rio').

Agenda 21

The Rio Summit was successful at moving beyond mere discussions of development and the environment. As a direct result of the Summit, three major agreements (ratified by 108 governments) and two legally binding conventions substantiated the talks. The agreements included Agenda 21, the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, and the Statement of Forest Principles. The conventions included the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Convention on Biological Diversity. As a way to support the implementation of these wide-ranging sustainable development goals and commit to the discussions of the Summit, the UN created three institutional bodies the UN Commission on Sustainable Development, the Interagency Committee on Sustainable Development, and the High-level Advisory Board on Sustainable Development.

The most widely cited of the documents produced at the Summit is Agenda 21's Declaration on Sustainable Development, which builds on the 1972 Stockholm Declaration and reaffirms the commitment to environment through multiscalar cooperation (international, national, local, civil society). Agenda 21, adopted on the last day of the Rio Summit (14 June 1992), is a comprehensive program of action implemented by governments, civil society, development agencies, UN organizations, and independent sector groups where human and economic activity affects the environment. The premise behind Agenda 21 is that wider

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socioeconomic issues need to be addressed to stave off environmental degradation. The document broadens the charge of ecosystem protection to wider issues including poverty, hunger, sickness, and illiteracy. Further, it promotes a coordinated and far-reaching approach to environmental management, as stated in the preamble to Agenda 21: "No nation can achieve this on its own. Together we can – in a global partnership for sustainable development."

Although the wider agenda of the document is designed for international collaboration, the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (UNCSD) encourages each country to identify individual strategies to implement goals which will work within their nation-state framework. These individual goals, known as the National Sustainable Development Strategies (NSDSs), clarify priorities and sustainable development efforts at a national level. Furthermore, within each country, the responsibilities of translating Agenda 21 to the local level has manifested into a program called Local Agenda 21 (LA21). LA21 recognizes that local communities are a major group that can implement a global planning process for sustainability through their own programs and initiatives. For example, Chapter 28 of Agenda 21 identifies the importance of local governments in fulfilling sustainable development objectives:

> Local authorities construct, operate and maintain economic, social and environmental infrastructure, oversee planning processes, establish local environmental policies and regulations, and assist in implementing national and sub-national environmental policies. As the level of governance closest to the people, they play a vital role in educating, mobilising and responding to the public to promote sustainable development. (Agenda 21, Chapter 28.1)

Simply, LA21 attempts to embody the adage 'think globally, act locally'. This downshifting or devolution of responsibilities to the local level has been met with varied results, however. For example, active LA21 programs are found in countries such as Australia and Japan, but other countries such as China, have been reticent to adopt such plans. Although LA21 is a tool to help implement the goals and principles outlined at the Rio Summit, and then later reinforced at the Johannesburg Summit (as Action 21), it is by no means a quick fix to complicated international environmental governance issues.

Millennium Development Goals

Other mechanisms aimed at implementing the goals outlined in Agenda 21 include the Program for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21 (1997), the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (also known as the International Development Goals) (2000), and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (2002). The MDGs are a compiled version of agenda items identified by international conferences and summits held throughout the 1990s – including Rio's Agenda 21. The goals were set as part of the UN's Millennium Conference held in New York City, which aimed at galvanizing efforts to meet the needs of the world's poorest people. The MDGs provide a common framework for measuring development progress and encourage those participating within the UN system to work coherently together. The goals are organized into eight categories and include several quantitative indicators to be achieved by the target date of 2015. The goals include (1) eradicate extreme poverty and hunger; (2) achieve universal primary education; (3) promote gender equality and empower women; (4) reduce child mortality; (5) improve maternal health; combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases; (7) ensure environmental sustainability; and (8) develop a global partnership for development.

Progress since Rio

There has been some progress of note since Rio in achieving the Agenda 21 plan of action and the MDGs. The percentage of the world's grinding poor fell from one-quarter to one-fifth of the world's population. Although there are more than 2 billion nutrition-deficient people, the world faces minimal food scarcity. And the sometimes recalcitrant US administration recently announced a 50% (US$5 billion) increase in US foreign-aid spending over 3 years.

However, there is plenty of bad news regarding progress since Rio in environmental and human indicators. Population grew from approximately 5 billion to 6 billion people as the number of people who earn less than US$2 per day increased by tens of millions. Carbon emissions have increased nearly 10% (nearly 20% in US). HIV has exploded in sub-Saharan Africa (20–40% infection rate in southern African nations). And increasingly, uneven development is implicated in desertification, the plummeting of fish stocks, widespread drought and salinization, and wildlife species disappearing at unprecedented rates, much of these due to tropical deforestation claiming approximately 200 000 square kilometers every year. Yet the political commitment of the world's wealthiest nations, particularly the US, to reversing these processes remains far from matching the cost they exact on society. The US' proposed aid increase brings its foreign-aid package to not even one-fifth the 1992 pledge to earmark 0.7% of annual gross domestic product (GDP) to foreign assistance. This amounts to less than 1 billion dollars a month; a meager sum next to a US military budget in excess of 1 billion dollars per day. At

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the Rio Earth Summit 10 years prior, the world's richest nations committed to halve poverty by 2007, to eradicate hunger, reduce under-five mortality by two-thirds, and to enroll all children in school. The UN estimates the cost of achieving these goals at between 40–60 billion dollars over the amount that would be produced from the 0.7% commitment – merely several weeks worth of US military spending or one-sixth of what the West spends to subsidize its farmers. In an attempt to rectify some of these problems, and lack of international commitment in solving them, the UN convened a summit 10 years after Rio, the 2002 Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD).

The WSSD, which convened from 26 August 2002 to 4 September 2002 in Johannesburg, South Africa, aimed at assessing developments since the Rio Earth Summit and reinforcing multilateral commitments to sustainable development. More than 20 000 participants, from governmental (representing 180 countries) and NGOs, the private sector, and the scientific community addressed increasing challenges in environmental degradation and sustainable development. The large number of unmet accords inherited from the 1992 Rio Summit – due to flaccid commitment by the wealthiest nations to mobilize around these concerns and in no small part to the US government's failure to participate in key global treaties (such as the Kyoto Accord) – called for significant structural changes at the 2002 Johannesburg Summit. One change was to revisit the accords some changes include halving the proportion of people that lack access to clean water or proper sanitation and restoring depleted fisheries by 2015. In reassessing progress in the MDGs and Agenda 21 since Rio, Summit organizers also decided to strengthen collaborations beyond government. Sectors explicitly included were business, women and children, trade unions, indigenous, local nongovernmental groups, farmers, and the scientific community. Most saliently, the organizers included a parallel event to strengthen civil society participation, the Stakeholders Forum Implementation Conference.

Global Environmental Governance

Civil Society Representation

The number of NGOs participating in UN-sponsored events has increased drastically since Stockholm. Fewer than 300 NGOs participated in the 1972 Stockholm Conference on the Environment. Twenty years later at the Rio Summit, 2400 NGOs were officially registered and 17 000 representatives attended a parallel summit specifically for NGO participants. Estimates suggest that since Rio, a growing tens of thousands of NGOs participate in UN conferences through lobbying, policy formulation, and monitoring/implementing international accords.

Despite the rapid growth in the number of NGOs participating in UN conferences, a long road remains to attain a truly global civil society. Civil representation has remained unbalanced geographically, with most donor money consolidated among northern NGOs. At Rio, despite the ample participation, NGOs were considered ancillary collaborators to states and largely remained distant from the central politics shaping Agenda 21. Similarly, in Johannesburg, the main conference remained closed and the heightened security and hour's drive between the NGO and government sectors compromised the ability for civil society to fully participate in the UN Summit. Furthermore, for both NGOs and states, differences between developed and developing economies, and wealthy and poor remain primary divisions claimed by stakeholders in UN conferences. Myriad and fragmented interests continue to balkanize civil society organization (CSO) efforts as they operate at UN conferences. States still dominate agendas. And governments inconsistently welcome CSO participation. These inequities, though abated since Stockholm, are still significant factors in CSO participation, representation, and voice within global environmental governance.

Despite these persistent shortcomings, the recent swell in CSO involvement at global decision-making forums, including UN conferences, is rich with implications for shifting dynamics in global political processes and representation. For example, many argue that the roles and goals of NGOs have significantly expanded. This increase in capacity makes them more significant players in the global governance arena. Furthermore, with large international institutions such as The World Bank and the UN promoting economic and human development through CSOs, important questions emerge regarding representation of local interests and implications for 'trickle-up' decision making.

Civil Society at the WSSD: The Stakeholders Forum Implementation Conference

A significant example of increased capacity of civil society and 'trickle-up' decision making is the UN-sponsored Implementation Conference: Stakeholder Action for Our Common Future (IC), which immediately preceded the WSSD. The IC represented a new approach to civic engagement and was designed to mobilize stakeholder participation and facilitate the implementation of commitments established in Rio and embodied in Agenda 21. The organizers of the conference, the UK-based Stakeholders Forum for Our Common Future, hoped that integrating civil society at an international level might reverse disappointing trends since Rio. By including stakeholders in the planning and implementations process,

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the organizers also hoped for a better record for achieving proposed international accords. The IC met in Johannesburg for three days subsequent to the WSSD, with 331 representatives from 50 countries, and had four main theme groups and 24 subgroups.

A central idea of the IC was the belief that partnerships and stakeholders can create solutions regardless of the level of involvement of individual state governments. The IC was designed as a forum for stakeholders to identify, prioritize, and commit to tangible action plans. The IC, as defined by the organizers, was about "action, not about lobbying governments." By providing a physical space for civilian organizations to dialog, the IC sought to foster concrete partnerships that transcended the Johannesburg meetings. Specifically, the IC aimed to (1) bring global attention to the burgeoning stakeholder movement and (2) influence the decision making at the WSSD and the language of WSSD documents.

A novel approach at the WSSD was the concept of 'Type II' agreements that brought public, private, and civil actors in partnership. These agreements were developed by delegates at the IC and resulted in formal partnerships between NGOs, intergovernmental organizations, private companies, and scientific institutions. The Type II agreements aimed at enabling stakeholders to advance concrete contributions toward the official outcomes of the WSSD covenant. This new form of governance widens the scope of participation to include both private and public sectors, from multiple scales of governance, to align themselves with international environmental and developmental organizations. Whether this increasingly neoliberal governance structure is indicative of an increased social responsibility in the business sector, or a co-opting of nongovernmental and governmental organizations to conform to business elites, is open to debate.

Although this was a laudable first attempt at engaging civil society at a global scale and widening the dialog for stakeholders at mega international conferences, structural changes need to occur if the IC and other subsequent fora are to meet their goals. In order for civil society representation to be truly strengthened, and the IC to achieve its stated goals, structural changes need to occur. For example, the participant representation at the conference failed to faithfully reflect the geographic diversity that was expected at a global civil society event. The IC drew a large number of participants from North America and Europe; however, representations from Asia, the Middle East, and South America were largely underrepresented (Figure 1). Large disparities also occurred within Africa. Unsurprisingly, South Africa was very well represented; however, Western and Central Africa had sparse representation. Limited institutional capacity within these southern regions poses challenges for future conferences where equitable representation is desired (Carr and Norman, 2008).

Figure 1 Implementation conference participation based on country population. Reproduced from Carr, D. and Norman, E. (2008). Global civil society? The Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development. *Geoforum* 39 (1), 358–371, with permission from Elsevier.

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The increase of nonstate actors and CSOs in the global environmental community points to significant changes within the world governance structure. Scholars have pointed to trends of 'hollowing out of the state' in which the functions of government are transferred to other parties through the rescaling of the state to nonstate institutions (e.g., private sector, NGOs, voluntary organizations). Similarly, these shifts in governance are sometimes referred to as 'glocalization', a simultaneous shift in power upward toward the supranational and downward toward to the local. However, an increase in governance does not necessitate the loss of government power as if it were a zero-sum game. Despite the increase in nonstate actors in decision making and political influence, governance is still considered 'in the shadow of government' with the state as a key sphere of influence.

Thus, the changes in global environmental governance structures, as exemplified by the trends in UN environmental summits to include nonstate actors, is not necessarily indicative of a weakening of state sovereignty as originally predicated by former secretary general of the UN Boutros Boutros-Ghali when he called for a restructuring of the UN. Nor does this new structure lead to a borderless world, where globalized economies erase nation-state delineations as famously described by Japanese businessman Kenichi Ohmae in the *The End of a Nation-State*. Rather, this change in global environmental structure should be seen as a 'widening' of the nation-state to include greater participation of civil society, a trend that continues to play out in the global environmental arena.

See also: Aid; Civil Society; Development I; Development II; Environment; Governance; International Organizations; Nongovernmental Organizations; Sustainable Development.

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