



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
18 May 2012
**ADVANCE UNEDITED
VERSION**

Original: English

Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

Statement of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in the context of the Rio + 20 Conference (June 2012) on “The Green Economy in the Context of Sustainable Development and Poverty Eradication”*

1. Ten years ago, on the eve of the meeting of the Preparatory Committee for the World Summit on Sustainable Development (Bali 2002), the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (the Committee) issued a statement on sustainable development, emphasizing the need to uphold the principles bearing on human rights contained, inter alia, in the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, in the Habitat Agenda, and in other specific instruments on international cooperation.
2. Ten years on, and 20 years after the Rio Conference on Environment and Development 1992 (UNCED), a stocktaking of achievements and setbacks and an outlook to the future will be undertaken at the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio + 20).
3. The draft of the final declaration entitled “The Future We Want” (Zero Draft) is presently under discussion. In this regard, while recognizing the concept of a green economy as highlighted in the Zero Draft, the Committee emphasizes the need to integrate the green economy in the broader concept of sustainable development, which encompasses social development, together with economic growth and environmental protection, and thus has close linkages with economic, social and cultural rights. The Committee stresses the importance of upholding the balanced Rio Declaration approach.
4. The Zero Draft goals undoubtedly are important factors of any sound economy and provide guidance for policy choices. However, the Zero Draft does not take full account of the human rights dimensions of these goals, as enshrined in the provisions of, inter alia, the two International Covenants on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and on Civil and Political Rights (1966), the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the UN Declaration on the Right to Development (1986), as well as the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action (1993), the Millennium Declaration (2000), the World Summit Outcome Document (2005), the MDG Review Outcome Document (2005), the General Assembly Resolution “Keeping the Promise: United to achieve the Millennium Development Goals” (2010) and the Outcome of the Fourth United Nations Conference on Least Developed Countries (2011).

* Adopted by the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights at its forty-eighth session.

5. Many provisions of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (the Covenant) link with environment and sustainable development, and the Committee in its dialogue with States parties has regularly stressed the inter-linkages of specific economic, social and cultural rights, as well as the right to development, with the sustainability of environmental protection and development efforts.

6. While highlighting the relevance of certain specific provisions of the Covenant to sustainable development in the dialogue with States parties to the Covenant, the Committee emphasizes, inter alia:

(a) The importance of international cooperation for the promotion of economic, social and cultural rights and sustainable development [art. 2 (1)]. In this regard, the Committee stresses the importance of raising Official Development Assistance (ODA) contributions to 0.7 per cent of Gross National Income (GNI) and ensuring that ODA promotes sustainable development by adopting a human rights-based approach to development;

(b) The role of women in environmental conservation and proper use and management of natural resources, as well as the disproportionately negative impact and burden on women when natural resources are depleted and the environment is damaged (art. 3 and 11, among other provisions of the Covenant) ;

(c) The obligation to ensure a healthy working environment [art.7 (b)];

(d) The obligation to avoid adverse environmental effects on the right to food of its population [art. 11 (2) a] and, in particular the need to fully assess the impacts of newly developed green technologies in the area of energy and in relation to access to food and water. The Committee also emphasizes the adverse implications for the right to food of cases of land grabbing and over-exploitation of fisheries, which not only have detrimental effects on environmental sustainability but also gravely affect the livelihood of present and future generations.

(e) The need to conserve the natural habitat and sustainable uses of natural resources as elements of the enjoyment of the right to health [art.12] and, in particular, access to safe and potable water and the prevention of water degradation and pollution that affect the right to health. Furthermore, the sanitation situation and the collection and disposal of hazardous waste have implications not only for the environment but can also potentially cause epidemics and water-borne diseases and thus negatively affect the right to health.

(f) The linkages between bio-diversity conservation and (i) potential advances in pharmacology and medicine which are crucial to promote the right to health (art.12); and (ii) the cultural rights of indigenous peoples and local communities, including the protection of their traditional knowledge rights [art.15].

(g) The importance of carefully balancing the requirements of the green economy with obligations under the Covenant to respect, protect and fulfil the rights of forest dwellers and indigenous peoples to their ancestral lands and traditional culture and, in particular, deforestation measures taken without the prior informed consent of forest dwellers and indigenous peoples that directly affect their rights. The protection of their rights is deeply linked to the protection of the environment and their natural habitat, without which such communities are threatened with disappearance.

(h) The importance of States parties to the Covenant ensuring that development efforts meet the rights of the beneficiaries of development. In this context, in 2011, on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the UN Declaration on the Right to Development, the Committee adopted a Statement on the Importance and Relevance of the Right to Development.

(i) The importance that States parties to the Covenant live up to their responsibility to ensure that the corporate sector observe the Rio principles as they bear on all the rights under the Covenant, as stressed by the Committee in its 2011 Statement on the obligations of States Parties regarding the corporate sector and economic, social and cultural rights.

7. The Committee encourages the participants in the Rio + 20 World Conference to adopt recommendations for making not only environmental impact assessments, but also human rights assessments when policies are adopted and implemented that affect the human environment and may lead, for example, to forced displacement for ecological reasons.

8. The Committee further calls upon participants in the Rio+20 Summit to advance the integration of sustainable development and economic, social and cultural rights. To this end, it invites all participants to:

- reaffirm the principles enunciated in the Rio Declaration;
- reaffirm the right to development;
- ensure that the new concept of the green economy (which does not specifically incorporate social development) is intrinsically linked to the comprehensive concept of sustainable development; and
- integrate a human rights dimension into the Outcome Document, and in particular, refer to the rights under the Covenant.

9. The Committee remains convinced that a green economy without strong human rights linkages would not yield lasting benefits, and consequently calls upon the World Conference to make the necessary changes to the Zero Draft.
