

# **Framework position<sup>1</sup> of ACT Alliance and its ecumenical partners<sup>2</sup> on Rio + 20 – United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development 2012**

## **A. Main message: More of the same is not enough**

ACT Alliance together with its ecumenical partners, APRODEV and the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance<sup>3</sup>, seek to challenge the current international political and economic paradigm in two respects: its reliance on endless economic growth and consumption and its assumption of development as something quantitative and concrete. ACT Alliance hopes the UN Rio +20 process contributes to a needed fundamental shift in global politics.

Our views are based on political, moral and ethical grounds, but supported by the empirical evidence we, our members and their partners, collect every day in the work of long-term development and humanitarian assistance programmes across the world.

ACT Alliance argues for a strong outcome document from Rio, which supports such a thorough paradigm change. Such a document would include time bound, accountable and solid commitments, which demonstrate a credible path forward, to enable sustainable development that guarantees a life in dignity for everybody based on human rights, equity, nature conservancy and the sustainable use of natural resources.

This is more than urgent in 2012, after the UN climate change negotiations<sup>4</sup> in December 2011 agreed to a time frame that is too slow and ambitions that were too low for the world to avoid a rise of global temperature above 2 degrees Celsius, after the failure of reaching the 2010 target to decelerate the loss rate of biodiversity, and with the “deadline” of the UN Millennium Development Goals less than three years away while a billion people continue to go hungry.

It is the time to begin a discussion about the reasons behind these failures and about the misconceived notion of development which has led to the current crises.

### **1. *Endless economic growth and consumption must stop***

ACT Alliance envisions a world that achieves sustainable development and where all human beings live and thrive in dignity and a secure environment.

Currently, the dominant economic and political paradigm is based on endless growth, accelerated consumption and short term financial gains, which has proven not to be ecologically sustainable, resulting in increased human suffering. The inequality and injustice lies in the fact that those who benefit from the outcomes of this paradigm cause suffering to those in need.

---

<sup>1</sup> This framework position provides the basis for the ACT Alliance - its members, forums and secretariat - as well as the ecumenical family at large, to advocate, reflect, share and interact with regard to the UNCSD Rio + 20 Summit and the draft outcome documents. It is utilizing, but is broader than, the joint ACT-APRODEV submission to the zero draft of the UN.

<sup>2</sup> APRODEV and the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance

<sup>3</sup> Further in this document, whenever "ACT Alliance" is used it refers to all three organizations.

<sup>4</sup> UNFCCC COP17, Durban

The High Level Panel on Global Sustainability stated in January 2012 that *“Achieving sustainability requires us to transform the global economy. Tinkering on the margins will not do the job.”*<sup>5</sup>

ACT Alliance strongly supports this view. With incremental shifts, Rio’s pursuit of sustainable development remains superficial and unable to satisfy the needs of the most vulnerable people.

The zero draft of “The Future We Want” outcome document fails to pave the way to the paradigm shift that is needed. It utilizes the concept ‘green economy’ in a manner that perpetuates the model of economic growth with no clear red line for the preservation of nature and natural resources, for a human rights approach or an equity perspective. This is not the break from the existing economic model that the planet needs.

We propose that Rio + 20 commit to a profound shift in sections I and II of the outcome document by incorporating the following sentences:

*“Bearing in mind that the current economic system is ecologically unsustainable with a disproportionately negative impact on the most vulnerable people, we commit to taking steps for a comprehensive transition to sustainable development by 2030. We agree that this requires immediate action with regard to changes in attitudes, consumption and production patterns as well as economic and financial policies and practices. Recognizing that the time to take bold action is now, we agree to commitments, actions and time-bound targets as outlined in this declaration.”*

This commitment should then be reflected throughout the document in all of the following chapters.

## **2. Participation of the powerless must begin**

ACT Alliance’s vision is sustainable development with a decent life for all, that includes the right to participate in all decisions that impact their lives.

The current trend of international development policy seems to be raising the importance of easily demonstrated practical results and impact indicators. The existing MDGs and their quantitative monitoring system have already fallen short of the complexity of human development and human dignity that ACT Alliance wants to promote. The newer trends, demonstrated by, for instance, the Busan Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation<sup>6</sup>, emphasise quick-fix solutions even more. ACT Alliance believes such quick-fixes are not sustainable as development is about participation and accountability.

Currently, structures of oligarchy, despotism, oppression and weak governance systems deny the rights of those without economic or political weight in too many countries. Despite the strong language in various UN and other declarations about the importance of human rights, democracy

---

<sup>5</sup> United Nations Secretary-General’s High-level Panel on Global Sustainability (2012). Resilient People, Resilient Planet: A future worth choosing. New York: United Nations.

[http://www.un.org/gsp/sites/default/files/attachments/GSPReport\\_unformatted\\_30Jan.pdf](http://www.un.org/gsp/sites/default/files/attachments/GSPReport_unformatted_30Jan.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> November-December 2011

and good governance, the possibilities for civil society to influence government policies is being increasingly restricted by governments in many countries<sup>7</sup>.

It is essential that Rio + 20 explicitly emphasises the fulfilment of human rights, gender equality and participation of all, especially for the poor and marginalized. This includes an enabling environment for civil society and empowerment and accountability as foundations for sustainable development and poverty eradication. Transition to participatory and free societies with empowerment for marginalised and vulnerable people is a more long-term and non-quantitative process than the current paradigm of green economy as contained in the zero draft suggests.

It is also crucial that governments in Rio recognise that sustainable development and poverty reduction will not be possible without consistent and coherent policy and behavioural change in the wealthy and powerful sections of our global community, so that all public policies are considered from the point of view of their impacts on equity, human rights, peoples participation, conservation of nature, and the sustainable use of natural resources.

ACT Alliance proposes that Rio + 20 commit to people's participation in all political and economic decision-making that affects them by including the following sentences in sections I and II of the outcome document:

*“Committing to setting up national consultation processes on national policies and increasing support to civil society actors to ensure their free and active involvement”.*

*“Committing to a process for the establishment of a global development framework after the MDGs end in 2015, which includes the responsibility of developed countries to assess the impacts of their actions on the rights of poor people.”*

These commitments should then be reflected throughout the document in all of the following chapters.

---

<sup>7</sup> see eg. Shrinking Political Space of Civil Society Action, ACT Alliance, July 2011 : <http://www.actalliance.org/resources/publications/Shrinking-political-space-of-civil-society-action.pdf/view>

## B. More detailed expectations

### ***Rio + 20 must commit to low carbon development for all and access to energy for the poor***

ACT Alliance aims for concrete commitments with time frames for 2020, 2030 and 2040 that chart a path for zero-carbon development for industrialized countries and low-carbon development for all developing countries by 2050.

Despite evidence of the causes of climate change and its catastrophic impact on the poorest people, the climate change mitigation negotiations on cutting greenhouse gas emissions under the UNFCCC have so far yielded very little. They lack ambition and the drive to move the entire world into clean development.

Rio+20 is a chance for the world to restore trust and to guide the climate change debates on to the right path by making additional commitments that would go beyond or supplement the UNFCCC commitments. Developed countries must raise the emission cuts targets by at the very least 40% by 2020 based on 1990 levels as recommended by the IPCC, and develop zero-carbon development strategies.

Today, more than 1.4 billion people in the world do not have access to electricity and 2.7 billion people, mainly women, cook on open wood, dung or charcoal fires. Eighty-five percent of those without electricity live in rural areas<sup>8</sup>. It is widely recognised that without access to modern energy services, such as electricity and modern fuels, it is highly unlikely that any of the MDG objectives will be achieved. Many developing countries have an abundance of renewable energy sources and have huge scope for improving energy efficiency. In short, they can be supported to leapfrog fossil fuel based economies towards low-carbon sustainable energy, while at the same time preserving biological diversity and promoting human rights, especially the rights of Indigenous Peoples as codified in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

In a world characterised by massive energy poverty, Rio +20 must set a new agenda and, in addition to looking into ways to transform global energy needs, focus on access to clean energy for the world's poor.

Access to energy in developing countries, transforming energy and other consumption patterns in developed countries, and redefining the economy in terms of justice and equity must form part of the Rio + 20 outcome.

While supporting joint public-private investments to a certain degree in adequate frameworks and for certain countries, this financial model will have to be supplemented by a grant-based system to ensure the poorest people are not left behind but enjoy a clear benefit according to their needs.

Wording proposed for the Rio + 20 outcome document:

*“Agreeing to expand energy access to the poorest, to shift to renewable energy, to increase energy efficiency and to support this with mainly public grant finance, so that by 2030 universal access to modern energy services is achieved; clean, reliable and affordable energy services for cooking and heating, lighting, communication and productive uses.”*

*“Committing to a path for zero-carbon development for industrialised countries and low carbon development for all developing countries by 2050, with clear benchmarks for 2020, 2030 and 2040 to reduce the carbon emissions and increase sustainability of our economic structures while, at the same time, preserving biological diversity and promoting human rights, especially the rights of Indigenous Peoples as codified in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).”*

### **Rio + 20 must make strong commitments on finance for change**

ACT Alliance emphasises that development, climate change mitigation, adaptation and loss and damage as well as a transition to a sustainable economy, require substantial amounts of public and private funds.

Currently, there are several voluntary indications and aims of governments to provide for such financing, as well as several innovative and practicable proposals, that should urgently be implemented. However, with governments focusing on reacting to the financial crisis, the necessary additional investments for sustainable development are not being realized.

It is time to tie all developed countries to the minimum target of 0.7% of GNI for Official Development Assistance (ODA). Commitments to climate finance from public sources must be quickly put together from sources additional to ODA and, to fulfil the commitments made under the UNFCCC and to enable the Green Climate Fund to become a reality.

Based on equity and social justice, governments in the Global South should equally commit to raising the tax to GDP ratio to 15%.<sup>9</sup> Governments have a responsibility to raise domestic revenue in a progressive and equitable manner, implementing tax policies that reflect environmental externalities and encourage investment in sustainable development.

At Rio+20, governments should reaffirm commitments made in the Monterrey Consensus, the Doha review summit and the UN MDGs on domestic resource mobilisation. By challenging tax abuse evasion by multinational companies, developing countries could secure an additional \$160bn for development.<sup>10</sup> Committing to country-by-country disclosure of financial information by multinational enterprises to increase accountability and curb tax abuse would be good step forward.

*Wording proposed for the Rio + 20 outcome document:*

*“The developed countries commit to contributing 0,7% of their GNI to Official Development Assistance, while developing countries commit to raising tax revenue equivalent to 15% of GDP, and applying it principally to national sustainable development needs.*

*“We reaffirm our commitments on domestic resource mobilisation agreed in Monterrey, Doha and UN MDG Summit in 2010 and commit to requiring country-by-country disclosure of financial information by multinational enterprises registered in our countries.”*

<sup>9</sup> ActionAid (2009) *Accounting for poverty: How international tax rules keep people poor*, London: ActionAid.

<sup>10</sup> Christian Aid (2008) *Death and Taxes: the true toll of tax dodging*, London: Christian Aid

### ***Rio + 20 must agree to regulate the private sector***

ACT Alliance believes that private economic activity, a key source of livelihoods for millions of people, has crucial societal and economic impacts which must be regulated to ensure its benefits are equitably shared.

A common denominator in the current discussions on climate change, development cooperation and green economy is the high level of focus on the private sector. It is seen as the key sector to advance innovation, create wealth, income and jobs and mobilise domestic resources and in turn contribute to poverty eradication.

Rio + 20 should pay attention to the heterogeneity of the private sector, in which the micro-, small, medium and informal sector enterprises are a key source of livelihoods for millions of poor people.. The potential and challenges of various for-profit -actors are not the same. Large and multinational companies provide income to workers all over the world. Unfortunately, there are too many examples of harmful impacts from private sector involvement in developing countries, especially by multinational companies or their chain of subcontractors. Due to their economic power, they have extraordinary political influence on the shaping of policy frameworks that favour their profit-making capacity. Often there seem to be unrealistic expectations of ‘trickle-down’ benefits from private sector activities to the wider society, especially within a public-private partnership.

Rio + 20 should, in its push for a green economy, commit simultaneously to regulations supporting and ensuring social equity, respecting human rights and ecological limits. It should commit to a consultative process that would conclude regulatory guidelines at the international level.

The OECD guidelines for multi-national enterprises, the FAO guidelines on land tenure, and principles of corporate social responsibility and decent work, should become binding for companies benefiting from investment agreements, let alone public financial support. Important current processes of international law, such as the Maastricht Principles on Extraterritorial Obligations of States in the area of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights<sup>11</sup> or the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights<sup>12</sup> as well as initiatives such as the Extractive industries Transparency Initiative, should be the basis of these regulations.

Wording proposed for the Rio + 20 outcome document:

*“We commit to launch an open and consultative process with all relevant stakeholders, utilising the experience and best practice of various existing initiatives, to develop a regulatory system to ensure and support social equity, respect for human rights and the ecological limits of private sector engagement activity.”*

<sup>11</sup> Adopted by a academic and CSO consortium in September 2011.

<sup>12</sup> endorsed by the UN Human Rights Council in June 2011.

## ***Rio + 20 must improve people's resilience to disasters***

ACT Alliance considers resilience and disaster risk reduction to be essential priorities in a world that is failing to address risk drivers like climate change, poverty, unplanned urbanisation and ecosystem decline, exposing people to natural hazards that destroy millions of lives and livelihoods.

The statistics speak for themselves. In 2010, 373 natural disasters killed over 296,800 people, affected 208 million and cost nearly US\$110 billion.<sup>13</sup> Yet as research by the UN, NGOs and World Bank shows, investment in disaster prevention is much cheaper, in some cases between a quarter and 1/14 of the cost.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, disaster management and response that build on local experience and capacity have been shown to deliver faster, more effective and resilient emergency response.

Disaster risk reduction and response management must continue to be addressed in the context of sustainable development and prioritised within the post-2015 development agenda. The UN SG has made prevention of disasters one of five priorities. To ensure that the impact of disasters and how to prevent and respond effectively to them is incorporated into the follow-up to the MDGs a high level panel should be appointed to undertake a global review of disaster prevention and response and their implications for post-2015 resilient development. To effectively address natural hazard risk and vulnerability and ensure more resilient communities, States must make political commitments at Rio + 20 that recognise the centrality of disaster management to sustainable development and to implement the concrete actions.

Rio + 20 should commit states to institutionalise multi-sectoral coordinating mechanisms such as National Platforms for Disaster Management (NDMAs) that integrate disaster and climate risk management in different sectors. Current and emerging risks need to be addressed systematically and as a matter of urgency. Governments should commit to increase investments in disaster risk reduction through sufficient funds of their national budget and other funding mechanisms and revenue dedicated to DRR.

Rio + 20 should emphasise the need to mainstream disaster reduction and climate change adaptation into country development strategies and public budgets. It should recognise the need to establish national disaster loss databases that account for disaster loss and damage, the importance of institutionalising risk assessments and the need to establish capacity development institutions for training, research, and information sharing at country, sub-regional and regional levels. Above all governments must make local communities themselves a central part of DRR strategies addressing the different gender needs and develop self-protection and collective coping capacities. Finally, it is important that governments ensure that infrastructure meets disaster resilient design standards and that recovery efforts adopt a building back better approach.

Wording proposed for the Rio + 20 outcome document:

---

<sup>13</sup> Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters

<sup>14</sup> Oxfam Briefing on the Horn of Africa Drought and DRR page 3 <http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/download?id=426066&variant=text&dl=http://oxfamilibrary.openrepository.com/oxfam/bitstream/10546/143690/4/drr-horn-africa-300911-en.pdf.txt>

*“Recognising the importance of disaster risk reduction and disaster response to building communities with long-term resilience to natural hazards, we call on the UN SG to appoint a high level panel to lead a global review of disaster prevention and response to feed into the post-2015 agenda”*

*“We affirm our commitments to the Hyogo Framework for Action on Disaster Risk Reduction and agree to increase efforts to achieve a world free from preventable disaster risk in the next decade.*

International debate since the 2008 food crises has aimed to find new solutions, but has continued with an old paradigm: increasing external inputs and emphasising participation in global food commodity markets. Locally based, socially just and participatory solutions are much more effective in implement the rights to adequate, healthy and culturally appropriate food as well as to water and sanitation.

Rio + 20 should recognise and commit to invest in agro-ecological food production, which has been proven to support people’s empowerment and increase yields, and thus the right to food. It should recognise the need to build on the experience and wisdom of smallholder farmers, strengthening food security and food sovereignty at the local level, as well as the need to radically reduce greenhouse gas emissions from agriculture. Rio + 20 should further recognize the importance of improving small-scale rain-fed agriculture that most of the world’s rural poor depend on. This should be done through support of better rainwater harvesting and management rather than prioritizing the expansion of large-scale irrigation and storage.

Governments need to recognise that global food production is threatened by climate change and that smallholder farmers, especially women and indigenous people, who are extremely vulnerable to climate change, produce the majority of the world’s food. Rio + 20 should, while recognising the need for context-specific national and regional agricultural policies, reiterate that UNFCCC grant a standalone work program for agriculture to fully address all of the implicated dimensions, including the rights of the smallholder farmer, and food security.

Rio + 20 should commit to ending trade-distorting agricultural subsidies of developed countries that endanger farmers in developing countries. It should reaffirm developed countries’ commitment to support agriculture, by defining a special emphasis on smallholder and indigenous farmers, infrastructure for storage as well as processing and transportation to minimise post-harvest food losses.

It should reconfirm governments’ commitment to support the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) – the most democratic and legitimate space of global food governance - and mandate it to develop a work plan specifying indicators for progress towards the implementation of the IAASTD findings with adequate follow up mechanisms at national level. We are grateful for the opportunity to engage with this process through the Civil Society Mechanism (CSM) that has been created for civil society and social movements.

Governments should commit at Rio + 20 commit to adopting and implementing the IAASTD<sup>15</sup> recommendations and to feeding the findings of this report into their decision-making within the

---

<sup>15</sup> International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development : <http://www.agassessment.org/>

CFS, as well as to Comprehensive Assessment of Water Management in Agriculture<sup>16</sup> (CAWMA) – highlighting the importance of “upgrading” rain-fed agriculture.

Wording proposed for the Rio + 20 outcome document:

*“We give the UN Committee on World Food Security (CFS) a mandate to develop a work plan to implement the IAASTD findings and call for all countries to establish their own structures for following up on the IAASTD recommendations.”*

Wording of the zero draft that should be kept as it is currently is (Section 67): *“We underline the importance of the right to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation as a human right that is essential for the full enjoyment of life and all human rights. Furthermore, we highlight the critical importance of water resources for sustainable development, including poverty and hunger eradication, public health, food security, hydropower, agriculture and rural development.”*

### **C. Our vision for the Rio + 20 outcome document**

1. It ensures that the ‘common but differentiated responsibilities’ (CBDR) principle enhances the lives of all peoples, preserves our common planet and promotes inter- and intra-generational equity.
2. It agrees on a process leading to a global framework for sustainable development with ambitious progress indicators. The framework focuses on human rights, empowerment and accountability, on building social and human welfare, on preserving nature and natural resources and on building economic wealth within the limits of our planet. The process has to be transparent, participatory and accountable to citizens via social monitoring mechanisms.
3. It articulates a vision of a sustainable economy that makes poverty eradication, equity human rights, the preservation of nature and resilience central - not supplementary – to subsequent policy and action.

---

<sup>16</sup> [http://www.iwmi.cgiar.org/Assessment/About\\_the\\_CA/index.htm](http://www.iwmi.cgiar.org/Assessment/About_the_CA/index.htm)