

What will happen at Rio+20?

What is at stake?

How can we prepare for it?

Proposals for a Citizen Project

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“It always seems impossible until it is done”

Nelson Mandela

Foreword

This document begins with considerations on the historical context of which Rio+20 is a part. Anyone or any people, by the way, can set down their own chronology with more importance given to some events than to others.

Without meaning to provide an overstretched historical perspective on the current period with a view to Rio+20, at the start of this paper we look back on the French Revolution and the early nineteenth-century Napoleonic Wars. Some may wonder: Why go back 200 years? In fact, this focus is necessary in order to appreciate the historical context and to see Rio+20 in May 2012, not as a simply evanescent event, but as a key stage in the roads we are building. In any event, calling to mind the storming of the Bastille is only a benchmark, after which we jump straight to the current context. Again, others may find other historical benchmarks.

The second part introduces the actors who will be at Rio+20, the challenges at stake, the themes to be debated, and the ethical pillars that will be the backdrop of the process.

The third and last part sets out a few specific tasks to be completed and proposes a flexible framework of initiatives intended to set in motion a collective and participatory dynamics.

This paper is a working document that can be used, modified, and enhanced through everyone's contributions.

Best regards, for the FnWG team,

Gustavo Marín

Prelude

July 14, 1789 *The walls of the Bastille, the supreme symbol of absolute and arbitrary power, crumble and fall as they are taken apart by a triumphant people playing out one of the most memorable events in history.*

July 14, 1809 *Twenty years to the day after the storming of the Bastille, a small man dressed in grey makes a victorious entry into Vienna's Schönbrunn Palace. A few days earlier his army devastated the Austrian Empire on the plains of Wagram and he has just signed an armistice with his enemy. Napoleon is now the master of Europe. Not since Charlemagne has a single individual held so formidable an influence over events and so daunting a power over the populations of the European continent.*

In the interim, the fierce energy of the people that had generated one of the greatest people's revolutions in history had been promptly turned into an delusional quest for total domination, by men who sought first to deconstruct society and reconstruct it in its most absolute purity, then to conquer vast territories.

June 4 and November 9, 1989 *Two hundred years after the storming of the Bastille, on both sides of the Eurasian continent, men and women refuse absolute and arbitrary power once again. On Tiananmen Square, a people's revolt is brutally repressed. On the other hand, in Berlin, yet another wall of*

shame collapses under the blows of demonstrators fervently seeking to end the absurdity of the totalitarian yoke.

***December 2009** Twenty years after these events, which, each in its way, had upset the course of history, a large conference is held in Copenhagen on climate warming. Far from resulting in an agreement worthy of the stakes, what the conference does above all is shed light on the fierceness of the power struggles opposing the incumbent global powers and the emerging world. In the middle, the United Nations shows its inability to manage latent conflicts among the leaders of a few competing powers while the rest of the participants, and the whole world, look on, powerless, at what appears in everyone's eyes to be an acknowledgment of failure*

1. Rio+20 as part of a long history

The history of our societies has all too often been confined to a power struggle. For the class struggle perceived by Marx and Engels as the driving force underlying the evolution of all our societies, we will rather substitute a perpetual and constantly renewed struggle between minorities aiming either to preserve the benefits of their status quo, or seeking to reverse or to reinforce their status to achieve even greater benefits. Does not the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* state, precisely, that “[a]ll previous historical movements were movements of minorities, or in the interest of minorities”?

Today, twenty years after the end of the fierce power struggle constituted by the Cold War, and after all the hope that the end of this conflict inspired, our leaders are evidently still being guided by their former reflexes, and power is obviously and lastingly still in their hands. It may be true that other elements, including disruptive ones, are weighing upon our destiny, but to face these diffuse, undefined, sometimes amorphous influences, the traditional paths of power, for better or for worse, are still holding the keys to our present, and perhaps to our future.

It may also be true that the arrival of new actors vying for the leading roles can sometimes give the impression of a healthy rebirth. All the same, does the emergence of Brazil, India, and South Africa, or the reemergence of China and Russia breathe new life into a state of mind that might be able to renew the architecture of world governance, or is this no more than a superficial and rough makeover intended to conceal the increasingly deeper cracks of an old, decaying building?

New actors bursting onto the scene often come with hubris, the unchecked arrogance of those who, after a long waiting period, are finally admitted into the exclusive club of the great of this world. Of late, neither China nor Brazil, at least not their senior representatives, has been capable of avoiding this pitfall, the same that has engulfed all those who, before them, had reached the rank of great power. “. . . [T]he injuries which [men] ward off from themselves,” warned Machiavelli, “they inflict upon others, as though there were a necessity either to oppress or to be oppressed.”

There are the idealists, who see in power a means, albeit imperfect, to make civilization progress, and then there are the realists, who consider power, often much to their regret, as an end in itself, the ultimate end of any political process. A glance at the history of humankind shows us that although the realism of the Kautilyas, Hobbeses and Machiavellis of this world allows us to maintain a reasonable balance between expectations and practices, we can also observe that a good dose of idealism is indispensable for things to change, move on, and progress.

The twentieth century produced more disillusionment than called for. It had blown a wind of realism into everyone's mind before the great 1989 opening produced a radical change in direction. After 1991, in particular at the 1992 Rio Summit, everything seemed possible. In fact, the sudden retreat of the World War III specter allowed us, for the first time, to think seriously about the health of the planet, whereas until then only humankind's had monopolized our attention.

Logically, this new momentum came with some self-cynicism, sparked by the new idea that at the end of the day, man is responsible for all the planet's hardships, those hardships we were all suddenly discovering when the veil of nuclear threat, the great Cold War threat, was lifted. In fact, a radical ecologism would develop, one that practically forgot humans to the benefit of a nearly exclusive concern for the Earth, no matter that the first principle of the Rio Declaration stipulated that "[h]uman beings [were] at the centre of concerns for sustainable development." It would not be long, however, before the Millennium Development Goals would reestablish some balance

on the subject, again, with an optimism that would engender expectations that were excessively high in light of the means that would be committed to them, and with logical consequences in terms of completion of these goals.

But back to 1992. Although the themes discussed at the Rio Summit were not new—a first Earth Summit had already been held twenty years earlier in Stockholm, and a second one in Nairobi in 1982—this was the most serious initiative to date and by far the most ambitious one in terms of protecting the environment, with in particular the 2,500 recommendations spelled out in the *Agenda 21* program of action. Although organized under the UN umbrella, and therefore indirectly or directly by its Member States, the Rio Summit had somehow nevertheless succeeded in giving civil society significant space. And yet, ten years later, in Johannesburg, the machine was seen to be faltering in a meeting misdirected to the Middle East problem, which announced the power struggle that would, in a way, later paralyze the Copenhagen meeting.

After a fashion, the repeated failures that followed the Rio success can probably be attributed, partly, to the increasingly high expectations that each of these summits engendered. The idealism that provoked the liberating thrust of 1992 has now been trumped by a certain cynicism—reflecting a disappointed idealism—now threatening to suffocate every major conference on the environment. It would now therefore be wise to take a good dose of realism when considering the problems, so that what was gained can be preserved and capitalized upon before a new creative thrust should once again project us toward the future.

2. The stakes

Until recently, problems of the order of identity have largely dominated our collective awareness. Whence do we come? Who is “we”? These are our nagging questions. After several centuries of conflict, after several periods of colonization of rare brutality, at a moment when the notion of border makes less and less sense as much from a political point of view as from an economic or cultural one, the answer to these questions, provided that there are any answers at all, is important to help us understand who we are. But at the precise moment when countries, such as France and Germany in particular, are raising the identity issue to the rank of national debate, it appears that this debate is pointedly outdated.

Because what is developing with force and vigor is the awareness of a global community. And this emerging awareness is not seeking to know who we are, nor whence we come. Its quest is other. The question to which it would like to find the answer, the question, too, that is already in a way defining the presence and the nature of this collective awareness is: **Who do we wish to be and what do we wish to become?**

Bringing about a collective awareness along with the emergence of a global community, however, although it may seem an obvious outcome in this new history unfolding before our very eyes, is working against the political and economic dynamics that are still guiding the world in the twenty-first

century. Here, the nation-state, the current guarantor of the stability and security of our societies, becomes a force recalcitrant to any change that might make it obsolete or weaken its influence and its power. As for the capitalist market, this faceless force of which the only *raison d'être* is to make profits, increasingly greater profits, its agents and eulogists come up as natural opponents fearing the emergence of a global community eager to repair the injustice and inequalities that are an impediment to its collective awareness.

With this negative energy, the contradictions of which are in a way revealed within the United Nations organization—which can sort of be seen as the positive side of this energy—the march of history is in danger of stumbling at any moment.

In 1992, everything seemed possible. External forces, we could practically say reactionary forces, however, worked actively to reestablish the former order as well as they could. From American neoconservatives convinced that they were pursuing their success in new theaters to Chinese leaders eager to take the place of the USSR as the ultimate rampart against hyperpower, those still playing by the old rules of the game stepped up vigorously to redefine the new order on the foundations of the former one. And, to some extent, they have succeeded.

But history often has a force and a power that are very difficult and even dangerous to repress. In the nineteenth century, there were diplomats who tried to reestablish the former order at the 1815 Congress of Vienna, but new

forces, the scope of which was difficult to perceive at the time, would eventually destroy the new/old edifice, which was unable to contain the violence that was unleashed and would engulf Europe, then the rest of the world. Those who today ardently wish a new departure based on the foundations of the past should draw lessons from this chapter in history, as they are running the risk of losing everything, once again.

Because since 1992, mentalities have changed, changed greatly in fact, something governments have rarely properly appreciated. And these deep changes, which affect our way of thinking, are ready and poised to be materialized in the institutions and in practices. It is this moving from thought to action that is difficult.

So, twenty years after the Rio summit, after the vicissitudes of the 1990s and the 2000s, often clouded by the threat of terrorism—a threat blown out of proportion by governments when, in fact, it is not much of a threat in itself except to carefree living in a few rare privileged countries—now is the time to act.

Rio 92 laid out the fundamental facts of the problem perfectly, but it was only a step, albeit essential, in a long-term process that is still today in its very initial stages. From this point of view, Rio+20 is another step and it is important not see it, as was the case in Copenhagen, as a decisive moment for humankind, a sort of all-or-nothing situation where the future of the planet will be played out in a few days.

Rio+20 will not be decisive. But the summit will constitute an important moment, at the very least as an exercise in education. We therefore need to remain ambitious for the overall project but modest in terms of the specific expectations that will be bred by the debates. Neither should we believe or expect that all the citizens of the world will suddenly agree. On the contrary: it is the disagreements that will determine the implementation of major projects.

On the other hand, it is fundamental that Rio+20 be a step forward. This means that the summit should not be once again captured by an external event, by a competition among major powers, by the domestic problems of a country or a region, or by any kind of outburst of emotions.

Ideally, the Summit should produce a pluricultural vision of the political and ethical foundations that will be able to transform the architecture of world governance and reinforce the feeling of belonging in a developing global community. It goes without saying that such a vision is also necessary to make significant progress on the various issues that will be on the floor in Rio 2012. Finally, it is imperative here that the stakeholders reflect the diversity of the participants. This implies that the participants actually participate. That they should not be relegated again, for the most part, to the position of powerless spectators.

To achieve this, Rio+20 needs to be prepared beforehand. We first need to get a good grasp of the nature of the stakes and a good understanding of how the Summit will develop, then to anticipate what will happen afterward. It is

obviously necessary to make sure that there will be a balance between the official stakeholders and the stakeholders of a vast civil society that is already planning to meet in Rio in May 2012: it is important to encourage the dynamics of non-entitled networks that wish to open a space for the citizens of the world without waiting for the states to decide. In short, to make sure that they have their own voice.

In view of this preliminary phase in preparation of the Rio+20 Summit and of its implementation, we need to keep in mind: the three actors that will be present; the three models that will be put to the floor and the three challenges that will be raised; and three basic values that will serve as the roadmap for this preparation.

Three actors:

1. The governments assembled at the official conference organized by the UN (called the “Earth Summit”);
2. The NGOs of the UN system (grouped together at the “Stakeholder Forum”);
3. Civil-society organizations: social movements, organization networks, independent scientists, unions, youth organizations, NGOs, etc. (assembled at a “Peoples' Summit,” which will not be just a side event, but is called to be a fundamental actor at Rio+20).

Three models, three questions

1. An economic model: What new “green economy” do we need in order to eradicate, or at least reduce poverty?
2. A political model: How to build a new world governance?
3. An ethical model: What humankind do we wish to achieve?

Three challenges

1. Managing climate change
2. Designing a new world-governance architecture
3. Changing the civilization model.

Three values

1. Sustainability
2. Solidarity
3. Responsibility

3. Implementing the preliminary phase

Goals

- To take an additional step toward the awareness and the feeling of a world community of actors starting their march toward Rio+20 (and beyond, for the transition to a sustainable world) through continuous and structured information sharing.
- To invite all actors wishing to contribute to the Rio+20 process to present their actions and initiatives, to share their essential proposals, and to connect freely with other actors in the community.
- To make it easy to navigate in the complexity of initiatives, to make things legible by structuring the diversity of contributions and actors (including preliminary events, such as seminars, workshops, dialogue tables, etc.) around the Summit, the latest news, the major themes of action, geocultural areas (georeferencing), the strategies for change, and the proposals.
- To set up a facilitation dynamics for the community that could be called “On the Road to Rio+20” by circulating a multilingual newsletter, mobilizing continent-based representatives to relay information, and producing videos.

Proposal Papers

- Develop Proposal Papers for three priority themes, starting from the thematic framework set out by the UN's Sustainable Development Commission and integrating it into a more consistent vision:
- 1. What “green economy” do we need in order to defeat poverty in the world? - *Proposals for the implementation of sustainable societies in the early twenty-first century.*
- 2. What mechanisms and what organization structures from the local to the global can bring about a “green economy” that will be able to contribute to eradicating poverty and to redefining regulation between states and societies? - *Proposals for a new world-governance architecture.*
- 3. On which values, which ethical foundations, should the development of new lifestyles be based and the foundations be laid for a new civilization in order to face the dangers of the current world and open new perspectives for the human adventure at the beginning of the twenty-first century? - *Proposals for a Peoples' Charter.*

Ways to proceed

* *Support meetings in the five continents* facilitated by civil-society networks and movements in connection with political leaders and UN agencies, scientists, and company heads.

** Organize an international seminar in November 2011 in Rio*

- Bring together, in November 2011 in Rio, around a Chinese-Brazilian core, about thirty actors and researchers to discuss and complete the documents that will be circulated in the form of Proposal Papers at Rio+20 in May 2012.

** Launch an interactive platform*

- Provide content management in at least 4 languages: English, Portuguese, Spanish, and French. See also how to disseminate documents in Chinese and other large languages.

- Design articulations between social-networking tools, database management, network facilitation, and georeferencing.

- Seek out associations with tools currently in use and consider economies of scale: A fact-sheet database, Elgg, Lorea, Jappix, Ming, Sympa, OpenStreetMap (+ links with Facebook and Twitter).

- Develop attractive ergonomics and graphics that will integrate the image. Privilege simplicity of use (limit the need of online help).

- Set up an editorial team with a good technical and conceptual level to manage the translations, facilitation, harmonization, and organization of the contents.

* *Organize media coverage:* printed press, television and the Internet, with the participation of public figures willing to foreground the collectively developed proposals.

Schedule

- Collective development of a reference document to serve as guideline for the work: October-November 2010.
- Design and test an interactive platform: late 2010 and early 2011.
- Launch at the end of the first quarter of 2011.
- Intensive facilitation between the first quarter of 2011 and mid-2012.