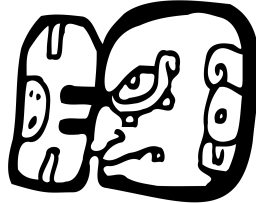


# DAWN SPEAKS TRUTH TO POWER AT RIO+20!

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**Ixchal is a sharp and wise Mayan goddess. One of her signs is the rainbow as her wisdom comes from the fertility of the earth. She would find little to celebrate and much to correct, in the final days of the Rio+20 negotiations on sustainable development.**

With so much at stake it is wise to take a moment for a deeper reflection on this historic conference and the current state of the proposed outcome document, “The Future We Want”. As women from the economic South how do we assess key convergences, divergences and contradictions shaping the inter-governmental deliberations? What are our bottom lines and hopes as we speak truth to power?

We set the stage of this assessment by quoting a statement by over 150 young women activists from Africa, Asia, the Pacific, Latin America & the Caribbean, that DAWN gathered over the past two years in a series of regional meetings to strengthen policy analysis and advocacy on the nexus between gender, economic and ecological justice.

*“We reject models based on extractivism and current production and consumption patterns that do not contemplate an integral vision of development... We need policies and programs that empower communities and individuals, rather than exposing us to market assault and the changes in climate that affect land, livelihoods, handicrafts, indigenous medicines, staple food, symbolic wealth and our caring social relationships that include women’s informal networks of mutual support.”*

## **The Political Theatre of Rio+20**

Twenty years after the 1992 Earth Summit, we are witnessing intense confrontations and competing interests among negotiating governments, and an absence of vision and leadership for guiding global sustainable development work for current and future generations - at a time of the fiercest economic, social and ecological conditions for this planet and its species.

Whether the expected 130 heads of State and thousands of government and UN officials, and civil society advocates in the Rio+20 process can boldly advance human rights and shape global policy to reduce poverty, increase peoples wellbeing, and advance social equity, environmental sustainability, and economic justice must be our core question.

If the strength and 'staying power' of a paradigm depends on its ability to hold its place in the midst of alternative powerful narratives, there are certainly great geopolitical and development challenges ahead for states negotiating through this global Rio+20 process, whether they are representing the interests of north, south, transition, BRICS, G77, JUSCANZ, small island states, landlocked states, and more. This does not end at Rio+20 either, as the implementation of any agreement will be as politically sensitive as the guiding policy. However, what is also becoming very clear is that state parties must get it right, and with greatest urgency.

## **Gender Lite**

In the historic agreement adopted at the Earth Summit in 1992 - Agenda 21 - there were around 170 references to gender and an entire chapter on women. In the latest version of 'The Future We Want' there are only around 50, and we see these being watered down and used as negotiating chips by majority of states. It is not primarily a simple matter of gender mentions either, but rather an unfortunate willingness by some states to allow operational references into the thematic and cross-sectoral issues sub-sections, with the result that there are elements of text that are far weaker than those in existing international agreements on gender equality and women's empowerment.

Governments are compromising long-time and agreed international agreements on gender equality and women's human rights including sexual and reproductive health and rights. South states are concentrating on their 'big ticket' items of finance, trade and ODA with little interest to incorporate a gender analysis into these macroeconomic issues. Instead gender is relegated to the periphery of the negotiations. So a minority of states (with the strong support of an observer state – the Holy See) that oppose women's equality are taking advantage of this moment to push their minority agenda. They have been prominent in the gender and health discussion and whenever gender is negotiated in the text.

## **Good Set, Bad Script**

The preambular paragraphs of the draft Rio+20 Outcome document, 'The Future We Want' offers a vision of people-centred sustainable development built on the UN Charter and with a core of democracy, good governance and rule of law. There is also much in this vision-setting section that signals international willingness and cooperation toward a future of equity and rights based sustainable development. All states agree, for example, on the need for balanced attention to the economic, social and environmental pillars of sustainable development.

Thereafter though, things fall apart and quickly. Very early in the second section that affirms specific Rio Principles and existing commitments arising from Agenda 21 (1992), the Convention on Sustainable Development (CSD) and other international development and human rights agreements, and the threads really start to fray.

Early divergences include how the north and south view the human right to food, including a spurious textual argument about whether the right to food must be packaged within a 'right to an adequate standard of living' (which seems to be code for northern states protecting their lifestyle in the context of economic crisis, while over 2.5 billion people in the south live on less than \$2 per day).

Then the northern so-called developed states of EU, USA, Japan, Canada, Australia and New Zealand also push back on what they view as a lack of southern state commitment to democracy, rule of law and gender equality. This is not without cause, as attested to by the freedom fights of people throughout the world, including in the Middle East and Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and in the so-called transition states of Eastern Europe, the Federated States of Russia and elsewhere. However, northern states could certainly be accused of living in glass houses, as the wars and conflicts across the world are founded, fired and fuelled by massive military- industrial-state complexes with a core in these north states, while the most profound impacts are of course felt in the south.

Throughout the text further fissures and cracks appear with little recognition that the depth of these philosophical, historically accumulated, material and political divergences within and between negotiating blocks are the real story of this Rio+20. On some areas there is substantial retrogression, and the overall antagonistic tone of the negotiations is making progress elusive. One south negotiator spoke openly of, 'three hundred years of stolen resources, and a need to now define sustainable development for ourselves.' Another south negotiator shocked a large plenary by objecting to north-introduced finance and trade related text based, he said, on 'another white revolution'.

### **North Distorts the Narrative, South Objects**

Negotiations on the key green economy and IFSD sections are well and truly stuck because of the lack of agreement on key and linked aspects of finance, trade, technology transfer and aid.

The sustainable development paradigm is being narrowed to the so-called 'green economy' that is skewed toward the economic pillar, emphasising growth over equitable development and without any ecological limits. This reductionist approach is being challenged by a small but vocal group of ALBA states that insist on affirming diverse visions, models and approaches to development as well as the policy space to integrate all three dimensions of sustainable development.

The text has been peppered with the principle of 'common but differentiated responsibility' (CBDR) by the G77, along with repeated references to 'voluntary and mutually agreed' aspects of technology transfer by various JUSCANZ members. It remains to be seen how these foundational concepts that posit social equity and historical accountability against a commoditised and privatised development regime are reflected in the outcome document.

There are also serious and unresolved issues around textual reference to the precautionary principle. These divergences occur because of the contradictions in south and north positions on privatisation of development regimes today, simultaneous with changing state uptake of extractive industry and other climate mitigation focused technology.

In the trade and finance discussions, states cannot seem to move past a deep divide on the very nature of ODA in this post global financial crisis era. The US and EU state that they wish to fundamentally change the nature of ODA. The US objected to the G77 introduced strong text on increased ODA, counterpointing that this

obviously would necessitate an expanded G8 or G20 group, where non-traditional donors (unnamed but obviously referring to the BRICS states) would be far more responsible for aid contributions to other south states, and expanding on the existing group of donor states. Throughout negotiations the US and other North states also referred often and variously to mobilisation of financial development resources from expanded foreign direct investment, domestic investment, domestic revenue generation, trade, private charities, foundations, and remittances.

The US called for fundamental changes to ODA systems and this in turn elicited a tougher and stronger response from G77, stalling and holding overly firm on large portion of text wherever there was the slightest chance it could impact on other sections. They also openly accused the G77 of skewing the picture of donor commitments, saying that they are delivering in excess of their existing commitments, especially in Africa.

The finance and trade sections remain blocked and the G77 flatly refuses to negotiate further on trade and aid. They are holding fast to their fuller narrative on poverty eradication and maximum development for the widest population, with a continued focus 'on developing countries'. Meanwhile, smaller south states including LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS are no further ahead on ODA and aid for trade, and indeed as many are in the throes of negotiating other regional and national negotiations on multilateral and bilateral trade with EU and others, this is a serious concern with only days of negotiations to go.

While no new financing is on the table, governments are deliberating on launching a process under the UN General Assembly toward a Sustainable Development Financing Strategy. Meanwhile, northern states continue to be more directive on the issue of ODA by linking it to possible sustainable development goals (SDGs). These goals are being touted as one of the most important outcomes of Rio+20. The EU is pushing for concrete goals, targets and timelines. The G77 meanwhile is only prepared to negotiate on a process to launch a process within the General Assembly, with full transparency and participation of all developing states. They continue to insist that any SDGs must incorporate specific reference to all Rio Principles and in particular CBDR in coherence with Agenda 21 and JPOI.

## **Harsh New Realities**

Through the combined effects of climate change, overexploitation, pollution and habitat loss, we are near to or are tracking the worst-case scenarios from IPCC and other predictions. Some impacts are showing up as predicted, but many are faster than anticipated, and many only just starting to accelerate, showing negative and positive synergistic impacts that are difficult to predict. We cannot any longer depend on the resilience of the ocean against the scale of negative human activities, including fisheries, pollution and habitat destruction.

Climate change is increasing the overall damage. While some species are trying to extend their population and range of movement and into deeper and/or cooler waters in response; this is not possible for some species. Shifts in currents and temperatures further break down stressed food webs, and again decrease resilience. We see accompanying population reductions, die-offs, and extinctions in far too many marine species throughout the planet.

The contradictory nature of the G77 positions on extractive industries is illustrative here, where they are forced at one and the same time to show strength on environmental sustainability for member states including territorial integrity for small island states, while at the same time trying to resist further regulatory text on public-private mining contracts.

This type of contradictory positioning manifests in policy frameworks that draws an imaginary line between territorial waters and the high seas with the latter requiring increased protection and the former is profit driven and therefore relaxes regulation. This is entirely incoherent.

On the one hand a likeminded group consisting of South Africa, Maldives, Brazil, Nauru, Micronesia, India, Chile, Trinidad and Tobago, Peru, Ecuador, Monaco, Argentina, Philippines, Fiji, Barbados and Uruguay have shown leadership in Rio+20 by breaking with wider G77 and northern positions to propose support and resources for an urgent implementing agreement to UNCLOS to address the conservation and sustainable use of BBNJ.

On the other hand, using a rationale of sovereignty and economic growth, G77 called for the deletion of any reference to mining industries being managed, regulated and taxed and on improving revenue and contract transparency.

### **Social Movements Exit Stage Left?**

*“It is the evolution of values shaped by social movements and historical shifts that determine the course of change from existing to new paradigms.”*  
Gita Sen and Anita Nayar, DAWN.

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In these last few days of negotiations before the text is done and dusted we call on the world’s governments to incorporate civil societies visions and proposals for a sustainable development that is firmly rooted in equity, ecological sustainability, and respect for universal human rights, including gender equality. It is time to move from this theatrical pretense to real action.

