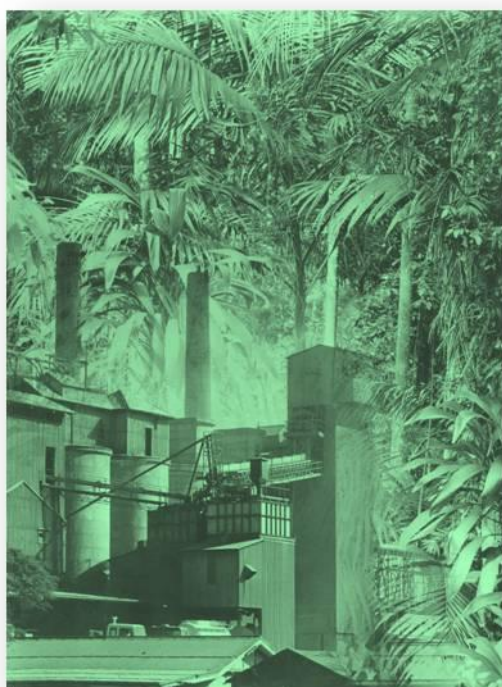


Climate Change - From the G20, Australia to COP20, Peru: *Sustainable Development as a Cornerstone of the Decision-making Framework of the Draft Universal Climate Agreement at Lima?*



By *Dr Ted Christie – 30 November 2014*



1.0 Following the Brisbane Summit on 15, 16 November 2014, a G20 Leaders' Communiqué was released that summarised points of agreement between them.

2.0 In terms of climate change, The G20 Leaders agreed *“to support strong and effective action to address climate change. Consistent with the UNFCCC and its agreed outcomes, our actions will support sustainable development, economic growth, and certainty for business and investment”*: Para. 19.

3.0 Following the G20 Brisbane Summit, a poll was conducted by Galaxy Research for the *Brisbane Courier-Mail*; the results were published on 22 November 2014. One question asked: **“What should G20 Nations make as their number one priority?”** In response, **52%** of those polled supported *“Economic growth and creating jobs”*; **27%** *“Reducing carbon emissions”*; **18%** *“Promoting international trade”*; and **3%** were uncommitted.

4.0 These poll results raise concern whether the concept of sustainable development has been effectively translated by climate scientists, legislators and policy-makers into the language and practical experiences of everyday life?

5.0 Any consideration of the option to focus on “**jobs OR the climate environment**” is a throwback to the past i.e. prior to 1987: The year *Our Common Future* (“The Brundtland Report”) was published by the World Commission on Environment and Development. *Our Common Future* was significant because it represents the global origin for sustainable development.

6.0 From 1987, UN directions have continued to build on *Our Common Future*’s foundation for sustainable development; through international declarations in 1992 e.g. the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development (“*sustainable development principles*”) and Agenda 21 (“*a future global plan of action for sustainable development*”).

7.0 UN international climate change treaties e.g. *UNFCCC (1992)* and the *Kyoto Protocol (1997)*, clearly illustrate the UN’s lead role in recognizing and promoting sustainable development as crucial in action for climate change.

8.0 At a press conference, on the first day of the November 2014 G20 Summit at Brisbane, Australia, the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon “highlighted the need for global action in three critical areas namely: promoting inclusive growth and decent jobs, meeting the climate challenge and providing financing for sustainable development;” and:-

“We must pursue an agenda that advances sustainability, addresses inequalities and generates decent jobs, especially for young people.”

9.0 Adopting **sustainable development** as a cornerstone for of the decision-making framework for taking action for climate change, in drafting the new Universal Climate Agreement at Lima, is consistent with the above comments of the UN Secretary-General. It means replacing the past “standard” of “**jobs OR the climate environment**” with the sustainable option of “**jobs AND the climate environment**”.

10.0 Sustainable development, as a scientific concept, is not a new idea or practice. *Diffusion* (or “spread”) of sustainable development is not in issue. It has been effectively communicated, over time, by the UN - as well as through the series of Assessment Reports prepared by the IPCC.

11.0 Rather, the problem is the *extent and rate of adoption of sustainable development* by UN Member States.

12.0 How can this problem be offset and so facilitate negotiations as Lima?

13.0 Firstly, one long-standing tenet of science needs to be recognized as a “fundamental bottom line”:

“A country cannot achieve economic development when its environment is degraded; nor can it restore its environment in the absence of economic development.” Shanna L. Halpern (1992)

14.0 Secondly, understanding that the meaning given to sustainable development by climate scientists, legislators and policy-makers will be crucial for climate agreement negotiations.

15.0 Providing “diluted” meanings for sustainable development limits its practical value and applications for environmental decision-making. Also, a very broad definition – where the meaning is open to many interpretations - creates uncertainty for decision-making.

16.0 For climate scientists, legislators and policy-makers to effectively translate sustainable development into the language and practical experiences of everyday life and so facilitate climate change negotiations, the prudent approach would be to identify the “elements” (or “guiding principles”) of sustainable development that apply to climate change.

17.0 An approach adopted by Australia, based on the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, warrants consideration for climate change.

18.0 An innovative, national environmental policy – “*The National Strategy for Ecologically Sustainable Development*” was released in December 1992 – and later incorporated into domestic environmental protection legislation throughout Australia from 1993. Its ‘Guiding Principles’ for achieving sustainable development are:

- i. “Decision making processes should effectively integrate both long and short-term economic, environmental, social and equity considerations
- ii. Where there are threats of serious or irreversible environmental damage, lack of full scientific certainty should not be used as a reason for postponing measures to prevent environmental degradation
- iii. The global dimension of environmental impacts of actions and policies should be recognised and considered
- iv. The need to develop a strong, growing and diversified economy which can enhance the capacity for environmental protection should be recognised
- v. The need to maintain and enhance international competitiveness in an environmentally sound manner should be recognised
- vi. Cost effective and flexible policy instruments should be adopted, such as improved valuation, pricing and incentive mechanisms
- vii. Decisions and actions should provide for broad community involvement on issues which affect them.”

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- The challenge for COP20, Lima 2014 is to lay the foundation for an effective new, universal climate change agreement to be negotiated in Paris in 2015. Ideally, this should involve finding solutions that are - not only positive actions to address climate change - but also, are consistent with sustainable development.
- A positive action at Lima to address climate change in the new climate agreement would be for the Parties to reach agreement and endorse the meaning for sustainable development; as well as framing the multiple

and competing objectives –*cultural, ecological, economic and social* -
for achieving sustainable development.

TAGS: G20; Brisbane; COP 20; Lima; climate agreement; sustainable development;
guiding principles; objectives; UN Secretary-General

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