



World leaders will gather in Rio de Janeiro from 20-22 June this year, at Rio+20 - the UN Conference on Sustainable Development.

Rio+20 will take stock on where the world is now, twenty years after the "Earth Summit" in Rio which gives the 2012 conference its name. However, the organizers emphasize the conference's forward looking character by adding the slogan "The Future We Want."

The official discussions will focus on two main themes: how to build a green economy to achieve sustainable development and lift people out of poverty, and how to improve international coordination for sustainable development.

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon introduced a major contribution to the Rio+20 debate when he launched a report on 30 January 2012 prepared by his High-level Panel on Global Sustainability, co-chaired by Finnish President Tarja Halonen and South African President Jacob Zuma. The group's final report, 'Resilient People, Resilient Planet: A Future Worth Choosing', contains 56 recommendations to put sustainable development into practice and make it a part of mainstream economic policy as soon as possible.

One of the Panel's most interesting ideas is a new approach to calculating growth by taking into account the use of resources and harm done to the environment. Connie Hedegaard, the European Commission's Climate Chief, was a member of the High-level Panel. She told In Focus that the idea of pricing resources and the environment was one of the ideas she wanted to see in the final document of Rio+20.

"Right now we claim that we have growth when we are actually not having real growth because we create growth by depleting resources and by taking away opportunities from future generations", says Commissioner Hedegaard.

"We want a more sustainable way of creating our growth, and we must make that more visible and one way of doing that is by pricing resources, energy and harmful use of the environment." (See the full interview with Hedegaard on video: <http://vimeo.com/36342330>)

Up to 50,000 expected in Rio

It remains to be seen if Rio+ 20 produces "Sustainable Development Goals" and if so how they will relate to the Millennium Development Goals. In any case, the negotiations on the final document still have a long way to go.

The Rio+20 Conference will see not only world leaders, but an expected 40-50,000 participants from the private sector, NGOs and other groups, come together to shape the outcome. The UN has launched a global conversation in the run up to Rio+20 in order to tap into the ideas and concerns of global citizens and make sure their voices are heard. The Drop by Drop competition is a part of this global conversation.

"Rio+20 will be one of the most important global meetings on sustainable development in our time," according to UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon.

But what realistically can be expected with so many countries and people participating?

Negotiations on the Rio+20 communiqué are already well under way and have produced a so called "zero-draft."

At the end of the last round of negotiations in January, Sha Zukang, Secretary-General of the conference, outlined seven priority areas that have been agreed by Member States and stakeholders that will help guide the creation of a framework to advance green economies. They include poverty eradication and green jobs, energy, water, food security, urbanization, disasters, oceans and seas, as well as climate change and biodiversity.

By launching the report of his High-level Panel on Global Sustainability, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has sent a strong message declaring that sustainable development is a top priority for his second term of office which started at the beginning of this year.

"Sustainable development is a social, economic and environmental imperative," he stated. "I call on all sectors of society to join in this effort. We need everyone - government ministers and policy makers, business and civil society leaders, and young people - to work together to create a future worth choosing - a future we want."

Janos Pasztor, who served as the High-level Panel's Executive Secretary is hopeful that the outcome of Rio+20 will not be far from the Panel's blueprint:

"Although the 22 members serve in a personal capacity, at the end of the day they represent a large part of the world geographically and politically speaking, as well as being gender balanced," Mr. Pasztor told In Focus. "What they are saying makes political resonance and political sense, so you can expect that what the 193 countries are discussing, may not be so far from this. That is our expectation."

(See the full interview with Pasztor on video: <http://vimeo.com/36342670> , see also on the Panel's recommendations:

[http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=41077&;Cr=sustainable+development&Cr1=\)](http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=41077&;Cr=sustainable+development&Cr1=))