

PEOPLES' SUSTAINABILITY TREATY ON RADICAL ECOLOGICAL DEMOCRACY

1. PREAMBLE

Humanity is on a collision course with the Earth: this conclusion is overwhelmingly clear from the spate of recent studies on biodiversity loss, climate change, ocean depletion and other aspects, but also from the experiences and observations of people around the planet as they see their life-support systems crumble. This ecological crisis is compounded by, and linked to, the daily crisis of economic survival of over half of humanity, living in destitution, hunger, and deprivation.

We note that the prevalent model of development has not only failed to lift this section of humanity above unacceptable levels of poverty, but has also greatly increased the inequities between the wealthy and the poor, and led directly to the ecological unsustainability we see around us. *It is fundamentally flawed in that it is predatory of both nature and people, ecologically unsustainable, and socio-economically inequitable.* Its current *avatar* of economic globalisation, imposed on so-called 'developing' countries and often welcomed by their own economic and social elite, has only further exacerbated the above effects.

We also note that in most parts of the world the governance of natural resources, and of society's affairs in general, is highly centralized and top-down. Even in what are today called democratic countries, the forms of democracy are not deep or radical enough to enable all citizens to take part in crucial decision-making affecting their lives. Such lack of, or inadequate, democracy also prevails in international governance institutions.

Twenty years back (1992), in Rio de Janeiro, we had the first Earth Summit (UNCED, the UN Conference on Environment and Development), from which the Rio Declaration, the UN Framework Convention on Climate (UNFCCC), the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the Forest Principles and Agenda 21 all emerged. The Precautionary Principle was established. The UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) was "to ensure effective follow-up of Rio *Earth Summit (UNCED)*". At that point we also had the UN Centre on Transnational Corporations (UNCTC), which was developing an international code of conduct for corporations. Rio's vision for 'sustainable development' was reiterated and taken further with the universally agreed Millennium Development Goals in 2000; and further reinforced by the pledges made in the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg. Yet, as is admitted in the draft declaration for the Rio+20 conference and in a number of other United Nations documents, we have failed to achieve these goals. Clearly the strategies adopted in this period, *given that they remain within the context of a fundamentally flawed pathway to development*, have not worked.

Meanwhile, the power of corporations has grown manifold. In 1993 the UNCTC was closed down and instead the notion of corporate social responsibility began to be promoted. In 2012, we have proposals for a Convention on Corporate Social Responsibility and Accountability, which is interpreted by some of its supporters as a Convention on Corporate Sustainability Reporting. No

longer are governments talking about an international instrument that controls the activities of corporations, rather than merely voluntary initiatives controlled by the corporations themselves.

At Rio+20, nations will be discussing a new framework for addressing these issues, broadly termed the 'green economy'. Yet it is clear to us that this new framework, while containing some positive elements, again fails to sufficiently challenge and alter the prevalent pathway of development. There is in any case no agreement on exactly what this green economy means: at one extreme it is another name for the new bioeconomy, where fossil fuels are to be replaced with biomass as a source of fuel, plastics, etc, and at the other, people believe it should mean agroecological farming. A term as vague as this confuses and divides people and is no basis for a framework to unite them. Moreover, it does not address the basic problems in today's centralised models of governance at national and global levels, including the fact that indigenous peoples, local communities, and ordinary 'citizens' in general continue to be left out of crucial decision-making processes.

It is in this context that we propose a radically different vision of human well-being, one that is in tune with nature and respects other species, promotes socio-economic equity amongst all people, enhances the cultural, material, economic, social, and political opportunities of all, and empowers each person and community to take part in decision-making affecting their lives. We call this 'Radical Ecological Democracy', and present below its broad principles.

2. PRINCIPLES

Radical Ecological Democracy is predicated on the following key principles:

Principle #1: Ecological integrity

The functional integrity of the ecological processes (especially the global freshwater cycle), ecosystems, and biological diversity that is the basis of all life on earth.

Principle 2: Equity

Equitable access of all human beings, in current and future generations, to the conditions needed for human well-being (socio-cultural, economic, political, ecological), without endangering any other person's access.

Principle 3: Right to meaningful participation

The right of each citizen and community to meaningfully participate in crucial decisions affecting her/his/its life, and to the conditions that provide the ability for such participation, as part of a radical, participatory democracy.

Principle 4: Responsibility

The responsibility of each citizen and community to ensure meaningful decision-making that is based on the twin principles of ecological sustainability and socio-economic equity.

Principle 5: Diversity

The integrity of the diversity of environments and ecologies, species and genes (wild and domesticated), cultures, ways of living, knowledge systems, values, livelihoods, and polities (including those of indigenous peoples and local communities), in so far as they are in consonance with the principles of sustainability and equity.

Principle 6: Collective commons and solidarity

Collective and co-operative thinking and working founded on the socio-cultural, economic, and ecological commons, respecting both common custodianship and individual freedoms and innovations within such collectivities, with inter-personal and inter-community solidarity as a fulcrum.

Principle 7: Rights of nature

The right of nature and all species (wild and domesticated) to survive and thrive in the conditions in which they have evolved, and respect for the 'community of life' as a whole.

Principle 8: Resilience and adaptability

The ability of communities and humanity as a whole, to respond, adapt and sustain the resilience needed to maintain ecological sustainability and equity in the face of external and internal forces of change, including through respecting the conditions enabling the resilience of nature.

Principle 9: Subsidiarity and ecoregionalism

Local rural and urban communities (small enough for all members to take part in decision-making) as the fundamental unit of governance, linked with each other at bioregional and ecoregional levels into landscape, regional, national and international institutions that are answerable to these basic units.

3. COMMITMENTS

We urge **Governments** to:

- Critically assess (with full and meaningful public participation) the impacts of currently prevalent policies and strategies of 'development', especially from the point of view of whether they are (a) ecologically sustainable, (b) leading to reduction in inequities and promotion of equity amongst various communities and people, and (c) helping to rapidly and sufficiently move people out of conditions of poverty and deprivation; and present these assessments to the public.
- Critically assess (with full and meaningful public participation) also the various market and finance-based or technology-heavy strategies currently being promoted as solutions, including those proposed under climate change negotiations and many aspects of the so-called 'green economy'.
- Promote, based on the above assessments, fundamental changes in development policies and strategies, towards alternative ways of genuine human well-being which are ecologically sustainable and socio-economically equitable; this should include discarding outmoded indicators of development such as GDP and economic growth rates, and their replacement by indicators of well-being that reflect qualitative and quantitative aspects of human happiness, welfare, and security.
- Ensure legal and other forms of recognition of indigenous peoples and local communities, including their territorial and tenurial rights, and their collective self-governance and care of territories, lands, waters, and resources, such as through Indigenous Peoples' and Community Conserved Areas and Territories (ICCAs), Biocultural Territories, Caring for Country, and other such practices.
- Promote the understanding and respect of diverse cultures, ways of living, knowledge systems, values, ecologies, and polities, discarding policies and programmes that impose uniformity in any of these aspects.

- Ensure effective decentralisation of political and economic governance, empowering local rural and urban communities to manage their affairs, and facilitating larger linkages amongst them at sub-national and national levels.
- Ensure full public access to information on environment, development, and other aspects of human well-being, as a fundamental right.
- Effectively play the critical role of the state in empowering and meeting the needs of the most disadvantaged sections of society, including those facing exploitation and deprivation based on gender, class, caste, ethnicity, age, or other aspects.
- Facilitate the exploration of sustainable and equitable paths of well-being by indigenous peoples, local communities, state institutions, and other elements of civil society, in a range of sectors including the following (in all cases, promoting strategies that are decentralised and community-based):
 - Food sovereignty and security, including access to adequate and nutritional food
 - Sustainable agriculture, animal husbandry, and fisheries
 - Dignified and adequate shelter
 - Water security
 - Energy security
 - Biodiversity conservation
 - Protection of ecological processes (including freshwater cycles)
 - Restoration of degraded ecosystems and ecological processes
 - Decent and secure livelihoods
 - Rural and urban sustainability
 - Local self-reliance, with links between communities at regional scales built on and strengthening such localization
 - Fair and equitable economic relations including trade and markets
 - Sustainable production and consumption patterns
 - Deep, radical democratic forms of decision-making and governance
 - Cultural integrity and identity
 - Meaningful, appropriate education and health systems
 - People-centred, participatory technologies
- Encourage and celebrate communities that are already engaged in the above.
- Strictly and actively regulate the activities of the corporate sector, not leaving it to 'voluntary' commitments or corporate social responsibility measures, but *ensuring* it too promotes and stays within the limits of ecological sustainability and socio-economic equity.
- Actively discourage and regulate over-consumption of resources and spaces by certain sections of society.
- Continue its role in supporting and promoting education, research and development in the fields relevant for sustainability and equity, ensuring in this the synergy of the best in 'tradition' and 'modernity'.
- Promote, within all its policies and programmes, an ethical relationship with nature and the earth, which respects their right to survive and flourish.
- Ensure that all its policies, programmes, and agencies are oriented towards the above actions.

We propose that **Civil Society Organizations:**

- Independently assess the fundamental problems with the current models of development and governance, and make their assessments publicly accessible, for use in advocacy and providing guidance to governments.
- Independently also assess the shortcomings of the various finance/market-based and technology-heavy solutions being offered for the ecological crisis.

- Advocate, lobby with, and guide relevant government (and other) agencies the need to radically change these models, including through and with mass people's movements.
- Learn from and promote alternative ways of achieving human well-being that are sustainable and equitable, and create new ones, including in the sectors mentioned above; in particular, rediscover and promote the power and role of 'peoples' and 'local communities', that are self-defined social units, which are related to the local environment that they collectively govern and manage in trust for their future generations.
- Advocate for rights to territories and areas as the most crucial bases for livelihoods and cultures of indigenous peoples and local communities.
- Participate in and facilitate the struggles of the oppressed (and in particular indigenous peoples and local communities, and of women) to gain basic human, environmental, and socio-economic rights, including territorial rights and the right to take part in decisions affecting their lives.
- Vigorously defend the diversity of cultures, ways of living, knowledge systems, values, ecological systems and processes (including species and genes), and polities, resisting the imposition of uniformity.
- Promote the commons and collective processes in a range of areas, including economic, social, intellectual, ecological and cultural.
- Adopt, and promote the adoption of, patterns of consumption and production that are compatible with sustainability and equity.
- Promote a sense of (and actions related to) responsibility towards fellow human beings and towards nature.

4. SIGNATORIES

We, civil society organizations pledge to work towards the establishment of a Radical Ecological Democracy at the sites and countries we work in, and collectively at the global level.

Proposed by Kalpavriksh (India) and by Poloc (Chile);

1. ANPED – Northern Alliance for Sustainability (<http://www.anped.org/>)
2. Asian Regional Exchange for New Alternatives
3. Asociación para la Conservación, Investigación de la Biodiversidad y el Desarrollo Sustentable – SAVIA (Bolivia) (<http://www.saviabolivia.org/>)
4. Cenesta (Iran) (<http://www.cenesta.org/>)
5. CODDEFFAGOLF (Honduras) (<http://www.coddeffagolf.org/>)
6. Cooperativa Autogestionaria para la Solidaridad Social R.L (Costa Rica) (<http://www.coopesolidar.org>)
7. Ecological Society of the Philippines (the Philippines) (<http://esp.org.ph/>)
8. Ecologistas en Acción (Spain) (<http://www.ecologistasenaccion.org/>)
9. EcoNexus (United Kingdom) (<http://www.econexus.info/>)
10. Foundation for Ecological Security (India) (<http://fes.org.in/>)
11. Global Forest Coalition (<http://globalforestcoalition.org/>)
12. ICCA Consortium (<http://www.iccaforum.org/>)
13. Japan Civil Network for the United Nations Decade on Biodiversity (<http://www.jcnundb.org/>)
14. Kalpavriksh (India) (<http://www.kalpavriksh.org/>)
15. Natural Justice (Lawyers for Communities and the Environment)
16. Oasis Earth (USA) (<http://oasis-earth.com/>)
17. ONG Poloc (Chile) (<http://www.poloc.org/>)
18. Tao Foundation (Taiwan)
19. David Barkin, Universidad Autonoma Metropolitana-Xochimilco (Mexico)
20. Stella Joy, Active Remedy Ltd. (www.activeremedy.org.uk)

5. ANNEXURE

1. ACTION PLAN

To move towards the above Principles and Commitments, we commit to undertake the following actions.

Short Term (2012-2015)

- Action #1: Disseminate the final document of the Treaty on Radical Ecological Democracy to relevant networks of indigenous peoples, local community, and civil society; and explore synergies with other similar concepts, through these networks.
- Action #2: Carry further and publicly disseminate critiques of dominant models of development and globalisation, and of 'false solutions' to the ecological and socio-economic crises we face (including the so-called 'green economy').
- Action #3: Examine the report of the High Level Panel on Global Sustainability, set up by the UN Secretary-General, for possibly contradictions and synergies with the concept of Radical Ecological Democracy; put forth a critique and, if necessary, possible linkages to further action.

- Action #4: Further develop the Treaty document, in appropriate forums of discussion at national, regional, and global levels.
- Action #5: Exchange and promote learning from experiences of alternatives in a range of sectors such as those listed above, from various countries.
- Action#6: Examine possibilities of influencing relevant international forums, including the Council for Sustainable Development, and institutions set up at Rio+20, to adopt the principles and strategies of Radical Ecological Democracy.

Medium Term (2016-2025)

- Action #1: Organise regional and global events to discuss, refine, and take further the concept and practice of Radical Ecological Democracy.
- Action #2: Advocate the adoption of the principles and strategies of Radical Ecological Democracy in relevant international forums and treaties, including resolutions in the UN General Assembly.
- Action #3: Advocate the adoption of the principles and strategies of Radical Ecological Democracy in the work of multilateral and bilateral aid and development agencies, and international financial institutions.
- Action #4: Build momentum for adoption of Radical Ecological Democracy as the key framework for declarations, resolutions, and action plans to be decided on at Rio+30 (presuming there will be a UN Conference on this occasion, in/around 2022).

Long Term (post 2026)

- Action #1: Celebrate visible successes in the movement towards Radical Ecological Democracy!