



Rio+20: The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, June 2012

Jane A. Leggett

Specialist in Energy and Environmental Policy

Nicole T. Carter

Specialist in Natural Resources Policy

June 18, 2012

Congressional Research Service

7-5700

www.crs.gov

R42573

CRS Report for Congress

Prepared for Members and Committees of Congress

Summary

The United Nations (U.N.) Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD or “Rio+20”) convenes June 20-22, 2012 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. This conference marks the 20th anniversary of the U.N. Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio in 1992. Governments participating in the 1992 meeting politically endorsed the objective of “sustainable development” as achieving economic, environmental, and social development that “meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”

Rio+20 begins from the premise and findings that the objectives of the 1992 Rio conference have not been achieved. The U.N.’s fifth Global Environmental Outlook, published in June 2012, found significant progress toward only four of 90 internationally-agreed goals associated with sustainable development. It found back-tracking on eight goals. Stakeholders widely agree that changes in policies and institutions are desirable to improve implementation, but do not agree on means. It seems unlikely that Rio+20 will produce any agreements that would require congressional action or be legally binding. Some proceedings, however, may engender congressional interest in concepts proposed for simultaneously achieving economic, social, and environmental objectives. Rio+20 could influence views and actions internationally on development paths and practices, thereby affecting regional and global economies, demand for development aid, transnational environmental issues, and conflict incidence and resolution. Therefore, Congress may take interest in the conference. In addition, proceedings may reference the non-binding, 1992 Agenda 21, produced at UNCED in 1992; media coverage could raise questions from constituents that Members may wish to address.

The Rio+20 organizers indicate that “[g]overnments are expected to adopt clear and focused practical measures for implementing sustainable development, based on the many examples of success we have seen over the last 20 years.” However, with strongly divergent views among the expected 115 Heads of State and up to 50,000 participants, Rio+20 may be more like a trade show than political negotiations. Indeed, some observers suggest that the conference may yield many deals among private participants. It is not expected to produce a treaty or any other binding commitments of national governments. Some observers wonder whether a meaningful communique can be successfully negotiated. High-level participants will be prompted to address issues that include

- the definition of “green economy,” and whether a definition gives adequate emphasis to social aspects (e.g., “fairness”) of sustainable development;
- whether “Sustainable Development Goals” (SDGs) should replace or supplement the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), agreed by the U.N. General Assembly in 2000 and expected to end in 2015, as well as how SDGs might be negotiated, and what priorities might be set among them;
- how to reform international environmental institutions, particularly whether the United Nations Environmental Program should be strengthened;
- what actions, if any, might lead to improved implementation of existing sustainable development goals, given slow progress so far;
- whether governments may commit to greater financial and technological assistance to low-income countries to assist their sustainable development.

Contents

Overview.....	1
Considerations for Congress.....	2
Expectations and Concerns.....	2
Rio+20 Conference Focus and Objectives.....	3
Themes.....	5
The Green Economy.....	5
Institutional Framework for Sustainable Development (IFSD).....	6
Sustainable Development Goals.....	6
Measuring Progress: The U.N.'s Fifth Global Environmental Outlook (GEO-5).....	7
Example: Freshwater—U.S. Interest & Rio+20.....	9
U.S. Views and Submissions to Rio+20.....	10

Appendixes

Appendix A. Timeline of Environment and Development Discussions.....	12
Appendix B. The Millennium Development Goals (2000).....	13

Contacts

Author Contact Information.....	14
---------------------------------	----

Overview

The United Nations (U.N.) Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD or “Rio+20”) will convene June 20-22, 2012 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. This conference marks the 20th anniversary of the U.N. Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio in 1992 and the 10th anniversary of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg, South Africa. As many as 115 Heads of State may attend, with up to 50,000 other participants. Rio+20 organizers seek three objectives:

- securing renewed political commitment to sustainable development,
- assessing the progress and implementation gaps in meeting already agreed commitments, and
- addressing new and emerging challenges.

No legally binding agreements are expected to be made at the meeting. Government delegations may agree to a process to identify new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).¹ In addition, reform of international environmental institutions is on the conference agenda, with a focus on the U.N. Commission on Sustainable Development and the U.N. Environment Program (UNEP).

In 1992, governments attending the “Rio” conference (formally called the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development or UNCED) politically endorsed the objective of “sustainable development”—achieving economic, environmental, and social development that “meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”² High-level government representatives produced a political declaration, Agenda 21,³ and a Statement of Forest Principles—none of which contain legally binding commitments. Agenda 21 led to establishment of the U.N. Commission on Sustainable Development, under the U.N. Economic and Social Council, as well as creation of national commissions on sustainable development in many countries, including the United States. The Rio meeting also opened for signature two treaties: the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the United Nations Framework Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).

This report summarizes the objectives and major issues of Rio+20 and gives a sampling of the wide diversity of views to be discussed by government officials, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), business leaders and trade associations, and representatives of youth, women, land-locked countries, cities, researchers, artisans, farmers, and many, many others who will be present at Rio+20. It also outlines United States policy toward the conference and possible issues for congressional consideration, including possible action on conference outcomes; the role of

¹ Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) would replace the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) for sustainable development agreed in 2000, as the deadlines set in the MDGs were 2015 or earlier. The MDGs are identified in **Appendix B**.

² This is the most common definition of sustainable development, from United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development (the Brundtland Commission). *Our Common Future*. Oxford University Press, 1987. <http://www.un-documents.net/ocf-ov.htm#1.2>.

³ Agenda 21 is a 40-volume, non-binding “program of action” on a wide range of environment- and development-related topics. It is available at <http://www.un.org/esa/dsd/agenda21/>. Also request CRS Congressional Distribution Memorandum “Agenda 21” by Luisa Blanchfield.

Agenda 21, and, more broadly, the possible role of sustainable development in the United States and U.S. foreign policy.

Considerations for Congress

Few Members of Congress or their staffs are expected to attend Rio+20. Many experts anticipate no legally binding or immediately consequential outcomes from the conference and some might question the relevance of the conference to Congress. Nonetheless, it is possible that some elements of any communique may serve U.S. national interests and foreign policy. These may merit examination through briefings or hearings. Members of Congress may find it useful to be apprised of the active discussion occurring mostly outside the United States on sustainable development. Background documents prepared for Rio+20, including the Global Environmental Outlook, may provide data and descriptions of circumstances and policies in other countries that may be useful to congressional decision-making.

There may be additional issues for Congress related to Rio+20 that merit attention or communication with constituents. For example, there may be differences of view between the federal executive and legislative branches of the United States on sustainable development and implementation of its principles.

Also, some segments of the U.S. population have expressed suspicion and opposition to what they perceive sustainable development to be, and particularly about its potential impact on national sovereignty; some may query their Members' offices. Some have offered their concerns about Agenda 21 (see adjoining box), which is likely to be referenced in the 2012 conference.

Agenda 21 Concerns

Agenda 21, a 40-volume "plan of action," was produced in preparation for the 1992 U.N. Conference on Environment and Development in Rio, and has been the subject of a high level of concern and misunderstanding by segments of the U.S. population. For example, some people express concern that Agenda 21 contains binding commitments or actions and infringes on U.S. sovereignty. In fact, Agenda 21 does not.

Agenda 21 will undoubtedly be referenced at Rio+20 and could be raised by constituents concerned, on the one hand, about lack of progress on international goals toward sustainable development or, on the other hand, about proposals to strengthen agencies of the United Nations, or gain commitments to increase financing to low-income countries.

For more information on Agenda 21, request from CRS the congressional distribution memorandum "Agenda 21" by Luisa Blanchfield.

More broadly, there is some debate regarding the role of sustainable development in the United States. For much of the world, the striving for sustainable development is of central economic, social, and environmental importance. In the United States, there is lack of accord on the intersection among economic, social, and environmental policies. Almost any topic containing "sustainable" or "green" may elicit controversy in the United States. Dialogue in Congress on the concepts behind them may provide constructive opportunities for identifying common ground.

Expectations and Concerns

Over the past decade, many stakeholders have grown increasingly impatient, and resistant to, "top-down" decision-making by national governments and international entities. International processes have witnessed a shift toward greater inclusion of and decision-making by civil society, local communities, and the private sector. This movement seems welcomed by a large majority of Rio+20 participants. The broad inclusiveness of the conference may produce outputs that more

resemble a cacophony of messages than an orchestrated plan with broad consensus. Like many international documents on issues that are complex, the output may offer length and ambiguity rather than clarity and consensus.

Rio+20 is premised on analysis showing that the objectives of sustainable development of the 1992 Rio conference have not been achieved. The fifth Global Environmental Outlook (GEO-5, see section below) concluded in early June 2012 that significant progress has been made on only four of 90 assessed, internationally agreed goals associated with sustainable development. Nonetheless, Rio+20 website indicates that “[g]overnments are expected to adopt clear and focused practical measures for implementing sustainable development, based on the many examples of success we have seen over the last 20 years.”⁴

For optimistic observers, “the second Earth summit is a chance to take honest stock of the situation and present ways to break political deadlock and hasten progress on the ground, in the air and in the oceans.”⁵ Others see the process in a stalemate that leaders in Rio are unlikely to resolve, and call for wholesale, perhaps radical, change. Among the jaded, one observer commented that “the United Nations seems to be more concerned about the number of paragraphs agreed upon than about concepts.”⁶

Rio+20 Conference Focus and Objectives

Rio+20 includes three days of public meetings (Sustainable Development Dialogues),⁷ followed by three days of meetings among diplomatic delegations from 193 nations, including many Heads of State.

Governments outlined three overall objectives for the conference:

1. securing a renewed political commitment for sustainable development;
2. assessing progress and remaining gaps in implementation of sustainable development efforts; and
3. addressing new and emerging challenges.

As part of these objectives, governments are expected to assess the implementation of international environmental agreements, such as the Kyoto Protocol under the U.N. Framework Agreement on Climate Change (UNFCCC),⁸ and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), a set of eight internationally agreed-to development goals created in 2000.⁹

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ “Back to Earth.” *Nature* 486, no. 7401 (June 7, 2012): 5–5, at <http://www.nature.com/nature/journal/v486/n7401/full/486005a.html>.

⁶ Reported in Thalif Dean, “Rio+20: A Stalemated U.N. in Do-or-Die Session on Action Plan” Inter Press Service. June 3, 2012. <http://www.globalissues.org/news/2012/06/04/13902>.

⁷ <http://www.uncsd2012.org/index.php?page=view&nr=596&type=13&menu=23>.

⁸ CRS Report R40001, *A U.S.-Centric Chronology of the International Climate Change Negotiations*, by Jane A. Leggett.

⁹ See CRS Report R41410, *The Millennium Development Goals: The September 2010 U.N. High-level Meeting*, by Luisa Blanchfield and Mariano Leonardo Lawson.

Many participants and observers hope that Rio+20 outcomes will address the Rio+20 objectives in a Communique from high level officials, which may contain agreement to a process to produce new Sustainable Development Goals, and affirmation of—and a Framework for Action to implement—internationally agreed goals.

The draft Communique, entitled “The Future We Want,” is eclectic and sweeping, like the background reports and side meetings. As of the beginning of the third and last Preparatory Committee, only one-quarter of the draft text had been agreed and was “unbracketed” (i.e., does not contain proposed alternative language). Tens of pages, however, had been eliminated from earlier drafts. Delegations will likely continue previous differences over proposals to create a new global environment agency, “strengthen” financing,¹⁰ enhance technology transfer, and increase capacity in nations.

In addition, the Rio+20 conference process includes collection of voluntarily submitted commitments to action from all stakeholders. The U.N. established a registry for such commitments.¹¹

Rio+20 Conference Priority Areas and Proposals

Organizers identified seven priority areas: jobs, energy, cities, food, water, oceans, and disaster readiness (described, with fact sheets, at <http://www.uncsd2012.org/rio20/index.php?menu=123>). A sampling of related proposals includes:

Decent Jobs: some advocates seek stronger standards to both reduce adverse environmental impacts and provide decent working and living conditions for all workers and respect for workers’ rights; others call for addressing the needs of rural communities; some propose attention to job opportunities associated with investment in natural capital (natural resources), a low-carbon economy, and sustainable resource management;

Energy: many agree on a general goal of affordable access to energy for all people; some press for goals to increase energy efficiency and the share of renewable energy sources; some seek greater financial and technological sources, and other seek commitments to phase out subsidies to fossil fuels;

Sustainable Cities: increasing urbanization is understood to be an ongoing trend, and the form of cities, especially of megacities, is viewed as a critical element of sustainable development. Cities seek greater recognition of their roles and actions, greater authority, and augmented resources; proposals also call for A 3rd Conference on Housing and Sustainable Development in 2016;

Food Security: proposals call for a right to food and proper nutrition, and needing to eliminate trade barriers and politics that distort production and trade of agricultural products;

Water: some advocates press for a goal of universal access to clean water and adequate sanitation, as well as reform of water and wastewater management; some call for the Secretary General’s Advisory Board on Water and Sanitation to begin consideration of new goals for managing water resources after 2013;

Oceans: the rise in attention to the “blue economy” includes calls for an agreement for conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity, and addressing governance of marine areas beyond national jurisdictions; others propose to end fishing subsidies; some call for another conference in 2014 or 2016 on Small Island Developing States (SIDs); and

Disaster Readiness: proposals call for actions to carry out the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015.

Many other topics will be discussed as well, including health, migration, forests, protection and assistance to the family, gender equality, sustainability accounting and reporting, and others. Despite having initially identified seven priority areas, the expanded list under discussion is reflected in likely disagreement of what priorities should be beyond the Rio+20 conference.

¹⁰ “Strengthening” financing could include proposals to increase the magnitude, reduce the conditions on financing, alter how finances flow, etc.

¹¹ Registry at <http://www.uncsd2012.org/voluntarycommitments.html>.

Themes

The preparatory committees identified two main themes: the *green economy* in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication; and the *institutional framework for sustainable development* (IFSD).

The Green Economy

The first theme of Rio+20 is “The Green Economy.” Government delegations agreed that “[e]ach country will choose its own green economy approach and policy mix, assessing national priorities and adapting measures to national institutions and economic systems.”¹²

A major point of discussion, however, has been lack of agreement on what the green economy is, and what its relationship to sustainable development may be. Some see it as an element of achieving sustainable development, which was described in 1992 as consisting of three “pillars” economic, social, and environment, all of which were critical to supporting the edifice of development. Rio+20 organizers described the green economy as “the intersection between environment and economy;”¹³ others expressed concern that this formulation gave too much emphasis to the economic pillar and not enough to social aspects (e.g., equality of women, engagement of civil society in decision-making, etc.), and risked supplanting the three-pillar concept of sustainable development.

Organizers may wish to see high-level officials agree at Rio+20 on policy options to facilitate the green economy and foster greater international cooperation. Background documents and side meetings identify a host of practices to foster a green economy by community, national, international, and corporate actors. The conference preparations emphasize a diversity across regions and countries of meanings and approaches to sustainable development.

One element of the green economy that seems to enjoy widespread agreement is the importance of the private sector in sustainable development. Some observers have suggested that one outcome from the proceedings may be a large number of private deals on renewable energy, pollution control, water infrastructure, and other commercial and development investments.

Issues of trade also have been examined, including risks of protectionism, subsidization, compatibility of national measures with World Trade Organization (WTO) rules, and the importance of countries’ domestic conditions and institutions (e.g., protection of intellectual property) to enable trade. For example, participants may debate how technologies essential to environmentally compatible development should be developed and disseminated across countries, with disagreements on such topics as “transfer” versus commercial sales.

¹² UN, “Background note for round tables of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development ‘Looking at the way forward in implementing the expected outcomes of the Conference.’” A/CONF.216/4. (May 29, 2012) at <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N12/354/46/PDF/N1235446.pdf?OpenElement>.

¹³ From the Rio+20 webpage on the green economy at <http://www.iisd.ca/uncsd/rio20/enb/>.

Institutional Framework for Sustainable Development (IFSD)

The second theme of Rio+20 is the institutional framework for sustainable development (IFSD). Many stakeholders agree that reform of existing international processes and institutions on environmental matters could benefit the effectiveness and efficiency of environmental protections. There also seems to be general agreement on some types of high level, intergovernmental body on sustainable development.

Many stakeholders would like to strengthen the U.N. Environment Programme (UNEP); among these, some propose to make UNEP a “specialized agency” of the United Nations, with greater authority and standing than the current program. Some European delegations proposed creating a world environmental agency under the United Nations that would have stronger regulatory and compliance authority; such concepts are strongly opposed by the United States and many other countries, for both pragmatic and sovereignty reasons. Other proposals would expand membership in UNEP to all countries, and increase its financial base.

Some delegations have proposed to create a new Council for Sustainable Development in the United Nations, parallel to the Economic and Social Council and the Security Council. Other proposals would strengthen the U.N. regional councils and support national sustainable development councils. Others seek greater engagement of the public (“civil society”) in the United Nations and national decision-making regarding sustainable development.

Sustainable Development Goals

Rio+20 may launch a new process to develop Sustainable Development Goals to succeed and extend the MDGs (**Appendix B**).¹⁴ Some participants propose that SDGs could provide a framework for work toward sustainable development beyond 2015. Many ideas put forward for individual SDGs would expand the scope of the MDGs, and there remains little agreement on specific language. Moreover, views differ on whether the SDGs would be applicable to all countries and applicable uniformly, or whether there would be differentiation among categories of countries. The wealthier countries emphasize the growing importance of rapidly developing economies, and that the choices made in developing countries will have greatest effect on people and the global environment. Lower-income countries point to the greater capacities of the wealthier economies and argue that they must take on greater responsibilities and augment assistance to lower income countries. If there is agreement to create SDGs, there are at least three remaining areas of contention:

- **Integration:** There remain differences of views on how the three “pillars” of sustainable development—social, economic, and environmental—might be integrated in the SDGs. Some participants have expressed concerns that social and economic priorities may be not receive sufficient emphasis in SDGs, and some observers have expressed concern that SDGs risk evolving into a distinct track parallel to a post-MDG path. Others suggest that SDGs and post-2015 MDGs would be complementary.

¹⁴ See CRS Report R41410, *The Millennium Development Goals: The September 2010 U.N. High-level Meeting*, by Luisa Blanchfield and Marian Leonardo Lawson.

- **Process:** The process by which SDGs may be developed remains unresolved as well. G-77 countries¹⁵ prefer that it be “inter-governmental” without oversight by the General Assembly or the Secretary-General, as was done for the MDGs. Others contend that a process would need guidance from some office or agency, with the Secretary General’s office as the most likely contender, under the General Assembly.
- **Priorities:** While delegations appear to generally agree that priorities should be set among emergent SDGs, they diverge on what the priority areas should be. The United States, for example, has opposed inclusion of “equity” and “sustainable production and consumption” in a priority list.

Of all the proposals, only two SDGs were agreed to *ad referendum* by government delegations in the early June preparatory meeting:

SDG 1. We underscore that the MDGs are a useful tool in focusing achievement of specific development gains as part of a broad development vision and framework for the development activities of the United Nations, for national priority setting and for mobilisation of stakeholders and resources towards common goals. We therefore remain firmly committed to their full and timely achievement.

SDG 2. We recognize that the development of goals could also be useful for pursuing focused and coherent action on sustainable development. We further recognize the importance and utility of a set of sustainable development goals, which are based on Agenda 21 and JPOI [Johannesburg Plan of Implementation], fully respect the Rio Principles, in particular common but differentiated responsibilities, build upon commitments already made, respect international law and contribute to the full implementation of the outcomes of all major Summits in economic, social and environmental fields, taking into account that these goals should ensure a holistic coherence with the goals set out in Agenda 21. These goals should address and incorporate in a balanced way all three dimensions of sustainable development and their inter-linkages. These goals should be incorporated and integrated in the United Nations Development Agenda beyond 2015, thus contributing to the achievement of sustainable development and serving as a driver for implementation and mainstreaming of sustainable development in the United Nations system as a whole. The development of these goals should not divert focus or effort from the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

Measuring Progress: The U.N.’s Fifth Global Environmental Outlook (GEO-5)

One of the key background documents for Rio+20 is the fifth Global Environmental Outlook (GEO-5), prepared under UNEP. Its “Summary for Policymakers” was negotiated and endorsed by many governments, including the United States, in January 2012. It concludes that, despite moderate successes in some areas on some environmental problems, neither the scope nor speed of adverse environmental changes worldwide has decreased over the past five years. GEO-5 identified four of 90 internationally agreed goals related to sustainable development on which

¹⁵ The G-77 is a negotiating group, in the United Nations framework, of developing countries. See <http://www.g77.org/doc/>.

significant progress has been made. Some progress has been made on 40 goals, such as reducing rates of deforestation and expanding protected areas. Little progress has occurred for others, such as abating human-induced climate change, preventing desertification, and maintaining fish stocks. The report observed deterioration for eight goals, such as protecting coral reefs.

Environmental Successes Identified by GEO-5

The four successes noted by GEO-5 are:

- **Ozone Protection:** A drastic reduction in both the production and use of ozone-depleting substances (ODS) has been achieved, resulting in a 31 per cent improvement in ODS indicators at mid latitudes since 1994, and the predicted avoidance of 22 million cases of cataracts for people born between 1985 and 2100 in the United States of America alone.
- **Drinking Water:** The world is on track to reach the Millennium Development Goal on access to safe drinking water, but not that of sanitation—2.6 billion people still lack access to basic sanitation—and some progress has been made in meeting water efficiency goals.
- **Lead:** Lead in gasoline has been phased out globally except in six countries; lead blood levels in children have gone down.
- **Marine Pollution:** Efforts in research on marine pollution are being made globally, including in the developing world, in order to protect marine resources—often an important food supply—from pollution.

Source: United Nations Environment Program. *Global Environmental Outlook 5: Summary for Policymakers*, June 2012. (pp. 7, 10, 11.) A matrix of issues, trends, and gaps is available from UNEP at http://www.unep.org/geo/pdfs/geo5/Progress_towards_goals.pdf.

GEO-5 raises many unresolved challenges of degrading “natural capital,”¹⁶ on which the productivity of economies and human well-being depend. GEO-5 reports that statistics show deteriorating air quality and rising concentrations of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere; depleting groundwater reservoirs; eutrophying coastal waters and acidifying ocean waters; losses of vertebrate biodiversity of up to 30% in some areas with thousands more species at risk; declining reporting on hazardous wastes; and other problems. Many of these problems are most acute in rapidly developing but low-income countries that may lack adequate financial, institutional, and technical capacity to address them. Many of these problems also flow across national boundaries.

In addition, GEO-5 urges more reliable and systematic monitoring by nations of their environments and of related economic, social, and environmental processes, in order to inform decision-making. It stresses the importance of improved standardization of methods and access by the public to data.

The report identifies a host of best practices by issue area. Regarding the potentially controversial topic of environmental governance, GEO-5 identifies best practices as,

Multi-level/multi-stakeholder participation; increased introduction of the principle of subsidiarity;¹⁷ governance at local levels; policy synergy and removal of conflict; strategic

¹⁶ “Natural capital” is a term used to describe natural resources that are critical as input to economies, such as water, air, stability of the climate, etc. Often, these resources are available for free or minimal cost (often for extraction but not for their value); if they are consumed or degraded, man-made capital may be required to replace them.

¹⁷ *Subsidiarity* is a political and sometimes management principle that responsibilities should be handled at the least (continued...)

environmental assessment; accounting systems that value natural capital and ecosystem services; improved access to information, public participation and environmental justice; capacity strengthening of all actors; improved goal setting and monitoring systems.¹⁸

Example: Freshwater—U.S. Interest & Rio+20¹⁹

To illustrate how U.S. interests, and therefore congressional interests, relate to the Rio+20 event and negotiations, this section discusses the U.S. interest in sustainable development and security issues related to freshwater in the international context. Water has played a prominent role in the dialogue leading up to Rio+20. While freshwater is not the focus of Rio+20 or other recent international negotiations (e.g., the climate change negotiations in Durban, South Africa in 2011), the natural resource management challenge of water and attention to water's role in achieving poverty, health, and climate objectives is generating water-related discussions at U.N. conferences. Water was selected as a priority issue in all the GEO-5 scoping consultations (see Water in GEO-5 box for assessment of progress on water indicators).

International freshwater issues are receiving rising attention in the United States and elsewhere as a security²⁰ issue. Although the argument that water and other environmental conditions can contribute to either improving or deteriorating community safety and political stability is not a new concept, attention to and analysis of the global water situation, its stressors, and linkages to other sectors is growing rapidly. A February 2012

Water in Geo-5

GEO-5 assessed progress as follows for water indicators:

- Access to improved water: significant progress; modest progress on rural-urban equity
- Water-related diseases: some progress Water scarcity: deteriorating conditions
- Water demand: deteriorating conditions
- Water use efficiency: some progress
- Water security: deteriorating
- Competition and conflict: some progress
- Climate change impacts on human security, some progress on adaptation and mitigation strategies; little or no progress on funding and implementation
- Extreme events: modest progress in some years or regions, deteriorating in others
- Dams and river fragmentation: dam density is increasing, progress on freshwater supply, deteriorating ecosystems
- Groundwater contamination: very little or deteriorating progress
- Pathogenic contamination: some progress
- Nutrient pollution: little or deteriorating progress
- Toxic chemicals: some progress
- Integrated water management: some progress; insufficient data

Source: UNEP, *Global Environment Outlook 5*, June 2012.

(...continued)

centralized level of authority at which they can be successful; that more central authorities should perform tasks only when they cannot be performed effectively by less centralized authorities (including private decision-making). In the United States, this is consistent with many concepts of federalism (a term which has other meanings in other countries).

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 15.

¹⁹ This section was authored by Nicole T. Carter, CRS Specialist in Natural Resources Policy.

²⁰ "Security" is now associated with many social concerns, including food security, health security, and national security. It has different meanings in different uses, which this report does not attempt to explore.

Intelligence Community Assessment of *Global Water Security*²¹ illustrates the rising view of water as critical not only to public or environmental health but also to political stability, food and energy supplies, and climate change mitigation and adaptation. Specifically the report warns that water is anticipated to increasingly contribute to instability in nations important to U.S. national security interests.

Consequently, some U.S. decision makers and stakeholders are evaluating what actions and opportunities are available for influencing the future role of water in fostering improved international security. Rio+20 is seen by some stakeholders as one such opportunity.

In preparation for Rio+20, conference organizers distributed for discussion a “zero draft” of the Communique.²² No legally binding commitments are expected in the version high-level officials may adopt. The portion of the draft specific to water reiterated the right to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation as a human right. This aim would be consistent with the 2010 United Nations Human Rights Declaration by the U.N. General Assembly on access to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation as a human right essential to the full enjoyment of life and all other human rights. The zero draft also supported the “the necessity of setting goals for wastewater management” and proposed renewed commitment to integrated water resources management and water efficiency plans. These would be encouraged through capacity development, exchange of experiences, best practices and lessons learned, as well as sharing appropriate environmentally sound technologies and know-how. In addition to the language in the zero draft, there were proposals for specific water targets and water-related discussion in other background and advocacy documents (e.g., how to meet and manage water use and promote water use efficiency in both agriculture and in energy development, water’s role in natural disasters and resiliency to disasters and climate change, emerging water quality concerns).

As previously noted, Rio+20 could launch a process to develop Sustainable Development Goals by 2015. These may supplement or replace the current MDGs; like the MDGs they would almost certainly be non-binding.²³ Among the eight current MDGs (**Appendix B**), the one to “Ensure Environmental Sustainability” includes the target to “[h]alve, by 2015, the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation.” One proposal in the SDG discussion would elevate water to its own goal—“safe drinking water and sanitation for all,” rather than water as a quantifiable target within a broader goal. Some proposals would give more attention to sanitation given the slow progress on it under the MDGs.

U.S. Views and Submissions to Rio+20

The United States provided a submission of its views on November 1, 2011, entitled Sustainable Development for the Next Twenty Years.²⁴ It identifies three “key messages” that guide the U.S. approach to Rio+20:

²¹ Intelligence Community, *Global Water Security*, Office of the Director of National Intelligence, February 2012, http://www.dni.gov/nic/ICA_Global%20Water%20Security.pdf.

²² United Nations, *The Future We Want*, United Nations, January 10, 2012, http://www.uncsd2012.org/rio20/content/documents/370The%20Future%20We%20Want%2010Jan%20clean%20_no%20brackets.pdf.

²³ Among other challenges, the goals are global in nature, without responsibilities allocated quantitatively to various entities. As such, global goals would not be enforceable if some wanted to try to make them legally binding.

²⁴ U.S. Department of State, “Sustainable Development for the Next Twenty Years: United States Views on Rio+20,” (continued...)

1. *The Built Environment: Clean Energy and Urbanization*, addressing Clean Energy, New Infrastructure, and Access for All; Urbanization and Sustainable Cities; Water Systems; Sustainable Manufacturing and Environmental Goods and Services; and Human Capacity and Green Jobs.

2. *The Natural Environment: Ecosystem Management and Rural Development*, comprised of Food Security and Sustainable Agriculture; Oceans, Coasts, and Fisheries; and Ecosystem Services and Natural Resource Management.

3. *The Institutional Environment: Modernizing Global Competition*: including Making New Connections: Linking Governments, Communities, and Businesses for Action; Transforming Traditional Institutions; Strengthening International Environmental Governance; and Informing Decisions, Catalyzing Action, and Measuring Progress.

No comprehensive statement is available of how this U.S. vision translates into positions on specific elements of the Rio+20 proposals. Still, some views may be distilled from statements.²⁵ As examples, the U.S.:

- agrees with strengthening international environmental institutions, but opposes adding a Council on Sustainable Development to the U.N. architecture or making UNEP a specialized agency of the United Nations;
- views the *transfer* of technology as outside the scope of sustainable development commitments;
- opposes discussion of intellectual property rights;
- opposes a call for a new agreement to protect biodiversity in the marine environment in the high seas (i.e., outside of national jurisdictions);
- opposes proposals for significant new funding for sustainable development;
- encourages actions toward sustainable development by stakeholders, especially women and youth;
- seeks greater emphasis globally on transparency and public awareness of corporate and governmental performance on environmental responsibilities, facilitated by new communication technologies; and
- resists commitments related to climate change or other issues addressed in other fora.

(...continued)

available at <http://www.uncsd2012.org/content/documents/37011-11-01%20US%20Submission%20Rio%2020%20Nov%201%281%29.pdf>.

²⁵ Various statements and reports on positions can be found, among many sources, at <http://www.uncsd2012.org/content/documents/579us.pdf>; <http://www.uncsd2012.org/content/documents/676usa.pdf>; <http://www.iisd.ca/uncsd/rio20/enb/>; <http://www.iisd.ca/uncsd/iinzod3/>; <http://www.twinside.org.sg/title2/sdc2012/sdc2012.120201.htm>; <http://www.twinside.org.sg/title2/sdc2012/sdc2012.120605.htm>. More sources are available on request.

Appendix A. Timeline of Environment and Development Discussions

Date	Milestone	Outcomes or Issues
1972	United Nations Conference on the Human Environment (the “Stockholm Conference”)	Stockholm Declaration; Stockholm Action Plan; and 5 resolutions calling for ban of nuclear weapons, a databank of environmental data, an environmental fund, actions on development and environment, and establishment of the U.N. Environment Programme (UNEP)
1987	Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development (the Brundtland Commission)	<i>Our Common Future</i> : Defines “sustainable development”: meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”
1992	United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil	Rio Declaration; Agenda 21; United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change; United Nations Framework Convention on Biological Diversity; Statement of Forest Principles
1997	19 th Special Session of the U.N. General Assembly	Programme for Further Implementation of Agenda 21
2002	World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg, South Africa	Johannesburg Plan of Implementation; Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development; Marrakesh Process—recognized contribution of “partnerships”
2012	Informal-Informal Negotiations on the Zero-Order Draft Communique	draft Communique of more than 200 pages; two subsequent sessions have reduced it to about 80 paragraphs
June 13-15	Third PrepComm in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil	Agenda, Rules of Procedure, draft Communique, etc.
June 16-19	Sustainable Development Dialogues in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil and on the worldwide web	Recommendations expected from each of Dialogues on 10 topics, to be conveyed to the high level Rio+20 Partnership Forum
June 20-22	High-Level Rio+20 Partnership Forum in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil	Communique expected

Appendix B. The Millennium Development Goals (2000)

On September 8, 2000, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the United Nations Millennium Declaration (A/RES/55/2). Among other aspects of the Declaration, the General Assembly adopted what are commonly called the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs),²⁶ most to be achieved by 2015.

The MDGs are aspirational and not legally binding. The Goals and their respective targets are described below.

Eradicate extreme hunger and poverty

1. Reduce by half the proportion of people living on less than a dollar a day;
2. Achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all, including women and young people;
3. Reduce by half the proportion of people who suffer from hunger.

Achieve universal primary education

1. Ensure that, by the same date, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling and that girls and boys will have equal access to all levels of education.

Promote gender equality and empower women

1. Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005, and at all levels by 2015.

Reduce child mortality

1. Reduce by two-thirds the mortality rate among children under age five.

Improve maternal health

1. Reduce by three quarters the maternal mortality ratio.

²⁶ The United Nations Millennium Declaration may be found at <http://www.un.org/millennium/declaration/ares552e.pdf>. See also CRS Report R41410, *The Millennium Development Goals: The September 2010 U.N. High-level Meeting*, by Luisa Blanchfield and Marian Leonardo Lawson.

Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases

1. Halt and begin to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS;
2. Achieve, by 2010, universal access to treatment for HIV/AIDS for all those who need it;
3. Halt and begin to reverse the incidence of malaria and other major diseases.

Ensure environmental sustainability

1. Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programs; reverse loss of environmental resources;
2. Reduce by half the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation;
3. Achieve significant improvement in lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers, by 2020.

Develop a global partnership for development

1. Develop further an open, rule-based, predictable, non-discriminatory trading and financial system;
2. Address the special needs of landlocked developing countries and small island developing States;
3. Deal comprehensively with the debt problems of developing countries;
4. In cooperation with pharmaceutical companies, provide access to affordable essential drugs in developing countries;
5. In cooperation with the private sector, make available the benefits of new technologies, especially information and communications.

Author Contact Information

Jane A. Leggett
Specialist in Energy and Environmental Policy
jaleggett@crs.loc.gov, 7-9525

Nicole T. Carter
Specialist in Natural Resources Policy
ncarter@crs.loc.gov, 7-0854