

SELECTED DOCUMENTS

UNCSD (Rio+20)

A View inside RioCentro*

PrepCom III*Wednesday, 13 June*

Some ended the first day of Rio+20 suggesting that the future we want may be a long time coming if the pace of negotiations doesn't pick up at the final PrepCom. During a meeting with the conference organizers, NGOs were reported to have been vocal in their expression of concern about slow progress, given the lackluster performance of negotiators at the informal negotiations. With prompts to complete their work by Friday sounding increasingly hollow, some participants have indicated they have already begun to bracket their weekend plans to hit the beaches.

While delegations and NGOs mentioned that, for the most part, they are impressed with the RioCentro facilities, there has been some puzzlement to find that a commitment to make the conference paperless has not been matched by the provision of sufficient numbers of power outlets for laptops and tablets along with reliable internet coverage on the "Rio+20 wifi network".

Thursday, 14 June

One insider highlighted that pressure was beginning to build, as the large number of unresolved paragraphs in the face of a looming deadline had begun to force a more hands-on approach by the host country, evidenced by Brazil's reported involvement in informal consultations on some of the more contentious issues, such as governance and energy.

Meanwhile, in splinter group after splinter group, observers commented on delegates' growing reliance on previously agreed text, from General Assembly Resolutions to the outcomes of the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development and the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women. As one delegate commented, "If all we're going to do here is regurgitate what we've said before in other fora, why are we even here?" With many saying they are still looking for vision and leadership – together with the forward-looking ideas and text – the countdown has started. Some have asked if the "Future We Want" will turn out to be the past we already had.

Friday, 15 June

Speculation about what would happen when the PrepCom concluded Friday night occupied many discussions in the corridors. Participants recalled the PrepCom's three-day mandate, set out in the UNGA resolution calling for Rio+20, and some wondered what the modalities for negotiations would be after the closing

gavel. The closing plenary partially answered the question, however more questions remained, including whether there would continue to be transparency in informal talks and how the delegates might respond to the host country's consolidated text. Some astute UN watchers were quick to note that the PrepCom was only officially opened Friday night, right before it was closed, and commented that they were pleased that a compromise had been reached on the Rules of Procedure, following lengthy discussions, paving the way to making the PrepCom official.

Pre-Conference Informal Consultations led by the host country*Saturday, 16 June*

"Huge expectations rested on the shoulders of the host country's ministerial and diplomatic corps Saturday as they took over the arrangements for the informal consultations. "Leadership" was the word that emerged time and again in the corridors, as participants looked back at the protracted preparatory process and wondered about the fate of their efforts in the next few days.

As delegates looked over the new 50-page draft to find the headline issues they had been hoping for, some speculated that, given the host country's choice to lead with the first informal group discussions on MOI, SDGs, IFSD and oceans, these themes were emerging as candidates to be the key deliverables from the conference.

After a confident opening plenary and an announcement about an imminent electronic release of a consolidated text, groups of delegations were left to speculate about the reasons for a two-hour delay before the electronic text was uploaded. Similarly, after convening four working groups, delegates were called back to plenary for a hastily convened session in which countries had the opportunity to express their concerns with the text – a document which, the Brazilian delegation had already noted, would make "all members a little bit happy and a little bit unhappy too".

Delegations commenting on Brazil's approach to the management of the informal consultations seemed prepared, for the most part, to give the host country the benefit of any doubt. The question now, said one observer, is whether negotiators can adapt their *modus operandi* to the shift away from text-based negotiations, as the host country is requesting over the next two days.

The consensus behind a meaningful outcome seemed to instill a level of pragmatism, noted some observers. One NGO participant who, while trusting that a level of transparency would be upheld, conceded that the practice in the

PrepCom splinter groups of displaying every textual proposal on-screen was no longer appropriate to this stage of the process, where consultation, consolidation and facilitation would be the order of the day. If there was a lingering doubt, it was about timing. "The Brazilian role has appeared a little mysterious at times. Their approach is only emerging today," mused one delegate.

Sunday, 17 June

As negotiators scrambled to finalize text, some delegates indicated challenges with formulating their strategy for the negotiating endgame. They pointed to last Friday night's deadline, when they were warned that anything they had not agreed on might be redrafted by the host coordinators, and the current goal to identify alternatives to unacceptable text by Monday evening, as two points that have hastened some agreements. But in an era when final, all-night sessions have become *de rigor*, many wondered which night this week might feature the "all nighter," especially since some were already referring to "negotiation by exhaustion." The workload's toll has manifested itself in other ways as well, with one delegate commenting that, "We are referring to the right to food in the text but we are so busy working that we even don't have time to eat!"

Negotiators were also struggling to grasp the art of "non-negotiation," as facilitators instructed delegates to "work with a clean text all the time" during group discussions and outside of these sessions to "get together and propose wording to Brazil." Many also commented on the growing number of senior-level negotiators around the tables, especially those from the climate change negotiations, wondering how they might help with the "heavy lifting" – sorting out remaining "red line" to "red wall" issues and further consolidating the text. There was speculation how negotiations would proceed, as one insider questioned whether informal groups would continue to submit proposed text to the host country and when a new consolidated text would be released.

Monday, 18 June

As negotiations on the "pre-conference consultation" text neared the host country's deadline for the creation of a clean text, a familiar flurry of huddles and informal consultations became the order of the day. Delegates and observers rushed from room to room at RioCentro, trying to figure out where and when consultations were taking place because schedules and plans seemed to change frequently, causing some exasperation for the organizers of side events who were forced to switch locations at the last minute. ➔

* Excerpts from IISD Reporting Services' Daily Web Coverage (<http://www.iisd.ca/uncsd/rio20/enb/>). See page 137.

Brazil continued to drive negotiators towards a consensus, placing the onus on interested delegations and, in good humor, warning negotiators that the alternative was to have a Brazilian facilitator bring his long experience of arbitration to bear. As more and more ministers arrived in Rio, the Brazilian facilitators worked hard to keep to their goal of concluding consultations. Brazil also fielded a number of special pleas on issues that continued to trouble some groups, such as SDGs. With plans for a late night plenary to focus minds and suggest that red lines would have to give way to deadlines, participants speculated on the likely outstanding issues that may require high-level tradeoffs in a series of packages. Some expected them to involve issues such as: the SDGs; fossil fuel subsidies; IFSD and UNEP; technology transfer; reproductive rights; and sustainable development financing options.

Tuesday, 19 June

Brazilian Foreign Minister Antonio de Aguiar Patriota opened the mid-day plenary, informing waiting delegates that he believed they were in a position to adopt the text to be formally presented at the UNCS D (Rio+20) for adoption. He observed that, while not ideal, the text represents “the equilibrium” at this point. Delegates agreed to the outcome document *ad referendum*. ...

A palpable sense of relief filled the corridors Tuesday afternoon, as delegates exited the plenary room after agreeing to adopt the 49-page document, *ad referendum*, to be presented to Ministers and Heads of State and Government at the Rio+20 Conference. As the host country facilitators basked in near universal praise for their heroic efforts – resulting in the adoption of a text that, just a few days earlier, had only a minority of its content approved – relief, for many, was tinged with disappointment. While several delegates commented that this outcome document represented the best possible balance of options that could be achieved, on many issues it was felt that Rio+20 was fast becoming a missed opportunity for “The Future We Want”.

As one group of countries noted at a hastily convened press conference after the early morning plenary, “Time never met us. We really think that 50,000 people came together here to do something that would change the world.” “We have postponed the decisions,” said one country delegate. “I don’t think we have really something to be proud of.” Those who saw the outcome as a glass half-full pointed out that the text on MOI, strengthening of UNEP and SDGs were designated as processes to be sorted out in the coming years. Briefings for the press and by Major Groups followed immediately afterward, and reflected confusion in some quarters about the legitimacy and organization of the process. Women, trade unions and others said they were particularly disappointed in the late disappearance of reference to “sexual and reproductive rights” from the text.

Many, however, appreciated the difficulties faced by the host country and their eventual success in rallying delegates around a document containing so many polarizing issues, and recognized that the results could have been “worse.” “We were concerned this document would be Rio ‘92 minus,” said one stakeholder.

“What we have now is containment”, with sustainable development “still at the top of the hierarchy” and green economy as part of this overarching framework. One high-level delegate emphasized: “We have a road map for governance and sustainable development; it is the moment to stress this convergence for the leaders tomorrow”.

The Conference

Wednesday, 20 June

In the afternoon, to commence the ceremonial opening of UNCS D, President Dilma Rousseff highlighted the decisions of the conference, urging governments not to weaken in their commitments. ...

With only high-level statements and a series of bilaterals to attend to, most participants enjoyed participating in what is now largely a spectacle, with cavalcades of power, endless TV crews and interviews, and observers relaxing in front of giant screens in between spotting the heads of state who qualify as celebrities.

On a more substantive note, some noted that a bridge between civil society’s extensive presence in Rio and the Heads of State and Government will see thirty recommendations transmitted to high-level roundtables. Consistent with the host country’s experience with experiments in “participatory democracy” and recognition in the negotiated text that the intergovernmental process is unlikely to move forward without a thriving global movement for sustainable development, the results of a series of four days of thematic discussions engaging civil society ended yesterday. Gilberto Carvalho, Secretary-General, Office of the President, Brazil, described the sessions as a “great success in participatory democracy”. Civil society participants have been speculating about the manner in which the host country will choose to reflect the recommendations in the outcome of the UNCS D.

Thursday, 21 June

On the eve of Rio+20’s closing ceremony, the focus for many in RioCentro turned from the proposals they had hoped for to the implementation efforts that will be required in the coming months and years. And for the first time ever, the daily coordinating meeting for the Major Groups hosted UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon, and each Group had the chance to weigh in on the issues they have been promoting for the past two years.

In the corridors, some expressed frustration at the lack of urgency displayed by negotiators over the past months, and a sense of anti-climax that the text had been closed three days before the end of the conference. Others considered that finalizing the text early provided a stable foundation for the rest of the conference to focus on implementation, allowing heads of state to do what they do best – announce commitments and network for new development partnerships. For example, within 24 hours of the closing of the text, the Governments of Brazil, Denmark, France and South Africa announced a new group,

“Friends of Paragraph 47,” to promote corporate sustainability reporting – the name referring to the relevant commitment in the outcome document.

Not all leaders are at the table, however. Some noted that debates at the G20 summit in Mexico on the Eurozone crisis and other immediate economic issues have somewhat overshadowed the longer-range issues being discussed here. Nevertheless, said one delegate, “the political impetus of the G20 may be useful for speeding up the UN processes.” And a veteran representative of an NGO observed, “It is critical not to equate Rio+20 with a document...Rio+20 is a gathering of people, a catalyst, which can convert to action”.

Friday, 22 June

Amb. Luiz Alberto Figueiredo Machado, Executive Secretary, Brazil National Commission for Rio+20, opened the closing plenary session on Friday evening, 22 June, at 6:47 pm. The rapporteurs of the four roundtables presented their reports on “Looking at the way forward in implementing the expected outcomes of the Conference”. ... Amb. Figueiredo then invited delegates



Protesters outside the Plenary Hall

Courtesy: IISD

to consider the outcome document of the conference (A/CONF.216/L.1), which was adopted without objection at 7:15 pm. He noted that a minor clarification will be made to change “women’s empowerment” to the agreed expression of “empowerment of women” throughout the text. ...

In her closing statement, UNCS D President Rousseff also said that Rio+20 had demonstrated that multilateralism is a legitimate pathway to build solutions for global problems. The negotiations on the outcome text had taken place over the past two years, and as the outcome document had swelled to over 200 pages at points with limited signs of movement towards consensus text, many had expected the full ten days in Rio would be filled with the long nights and brinkmanship that have characterized recent multilateral environmental negotiations. At the end of the meeting, delegates complemented Brazil for its leadership during the Pre-Conference Informal Consultations, during which the organizing country developed a revised draft, facilitated three days of discussions, encouraged delegates to suggest changes to the draft, and facilitated final agreement prior to the opening of Rio+20 itself. Delegates at UNCS D adopted the final report [of the Conference proceedings] for Rio+20 on 22 June 2012.