

Earth Summit: From Rio 1992 via Kyoto and Copenhagen, Back to Rio 2012

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Abstract

In early 1980s, a journal entitled 'Mountain Research and Development' flourished concerning 'sustainable development', in which cooperation at the regional and global levels among countries has launched, promoting it to become a highly significant tool for communicating. As a 'tool for communicating' the journal has attracted and gathered its scientific and political members with many countries 178 nations into the largest conference of the United Nations on Environment and Development (UNCED), also known as the 'Earth Summit', at Rio de Janeiro in 1992. A series of global meetings have been held since, regarding environmental issues, hopefully to reduce greenhouse emissions and protect the environment.

The aim of this paper is to outline the main facts which have been discussed in four main conferences starting from Rio 1992, via Kyoto 1997, Copenhagen 2009, and ending up after 20 years at Rio for the second time. Due to the word limitation, this essay has focused on the climate change and environmental protection, whereas conserving biological diversity along with Agenda 21 has been left for future researches.

Keywords: Earth summit; Environment; CO₂ cut; conference; Rio; Kyoto; Copenhagen

Introduction

In early 1980s, a journal entitled 'Mountain Research and Development' flourished concerning 'sustainable development', in which cooperation at the regional and global levels among countries has launched, promoting it to become a highly significant tool for communicating [1,2]. As a 'tool for communicating' the journal has attracted and gathered its scientific and political members with many countries 178 nations [2] into the largest conference of the United Nations on Environment and Development (UNCED), also known as the 'Earth Summit', at Rio de Janeiro in 1992 [1]. A series of global meetings have been held since, regarding environmental issues, hopefully to reduce greenhouse emissions and protect the environment.

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From Rio, 1992

According to Messerli [1] Rio conference in 1992 was a continuous to earlier conferences, but with new visions. The UNCED main focus was on the association between economics and the global environment, in relation to politics for the reason that a number of scientists claimed that the global warming is inflated and might increase by 1.5-4.5°C by the middle of the 21st century) [3]. In

addition, in 1990 only, the CO₂ emissions have reached to 22.7 billion tonnes in all over the world, a case which required immediate action [2]. The Summit aim was to demolish the dangerous anthropogenic interfering (ibid). All nations presented in the conference accepted and signed on two agreements, one was the 'Convention on Biological Diversity' and the other on the 'Framework Convention on Climate Change' [4]. An agreement has also been reached on 'Agenda 21' (an advanced strategy along the 21st century concerning both the planet sustainability and forest protection) [3]. Although both of the agreements have been signed off, a crucial issue has been introduced regarding money. Both the industrialized and the developing countries are required to pay for it in order to achieve environmental protection. A minimum of ten billion dollars per year has been determined as a start (ibid).

Regarding Climate Change and Global warming, the agreement was to adjust greenhouse gas amounts in the atmosphere, in order to inhibit anthropogenic negative effect on the environment within a specific period of time, and applying cost-effective methods, to produce a smooth curve between ecosystems and Climate change to achieve sustainability in economic development and food production (ensure healthy food for human consumption) [3].

Certain steps have also been viewed, discussing the possible ways that can be implemented serving the conference goals, like providing monetary resources and assisting developing countries towards development, to name just a few (ibid).

When the time has come to take actions, disagreements has been occurred due to the fact that, there was no sufficient time to apply the roles according to the scheduled, nor specific guidelines have been attached that could be directly applied (ibid). At the international level, the United States, for instance, has argued that it is capable of reducing CO₂ emissions up to around 9% to support environmental protection programmes, but that would affect the domestic economy and

therefore would be unrealistic for its people, instead, the US has criticized oil countries for climate change claiming that the main cause for CO₂ emissions is fossil fuel (ibid).

Kyoto 1997

Rio conference in 1992, in turn, has paved the way for Kyoto protocol to be prepared and introduced in 1997 [2]. In Kyoto protocol, members have been legally binding towards the targets: greenhouse emissions targets have been decided for each member countries, along with an emission-trading programme [2,5]. In addition, penalties will be set for any violation regarding the emission-trading programme [2].

Again, in 2001, the US has disagreed, this time with Kyoto protocol, and withdrew the opportunity of approving it. In the time when the developed countries were responsible of 55% of the total emissions, with the US responsible of 36% of it (ibid), majorly from deforestation and fossil fuel combustion [5,6], it positioned the concern of protecting the environment on a 'global level' at risk. A solution has been reached 7 years later when Russia, which has a high share of the greenhouse emissions, agreed to accept the protocol and balanced the percentage of a reduction by 5.2% [2]. The reduction has been achieved by the introduction of new technologies and using control measures [7], additionally, governments started to work on sustainable agriculture, climate adaptation and reducing tropical deforestation [2]. Kyoto has also worked on new methods to provide poor countries with the essential currency and technology (ibid). The end of the protocol reporting period was proposed to be in 2012 [6].

Copenhagen 2009

Africa Research Bulletin [8] states that in December 2009, Copenhagen has witnessed the gathering of a new conference, which has been formed by the United Nations, as continues action to the earlier conferences and protocol. The average temperature target of 2°C has been chosen as the maximum increase in temperature to be committed. An amount of \$30 billion has been drawn to control the emissions by 2012 and \$100 billion by the year 2020 [8,9].

In the 'Copenhagen Summit' sharp conversations have taken place between the US president and the presidents of other countries around the US disapproval upon the previous protocol in Kyoto. As a result of that, the Summit chair compulsorily accepted a deal of an unfamiliar solution in order to withdraw the accusation, and to carry on producing an effective new accord [8].

An "unprecedented breakthrough" was the term used by President Obama to describe the current political Summit [8]. Meanwhile, an increase in the gap between 'developed' and 'developing' countries was taking a place. Therefore, in order for the summit to survive and play an efficient role in means of climate change, the accord has to be held in a full session with all the gathered nations, among them the US, China, Brazil and major Europeans, under the framework of UN Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) (ibid).

Africa Research Bulletin (2010) also states that the major question through the session was whether to maintain Kyoto protocol. Keeping Kyoto protocol serves the interests of developing countries, because it positions them in a different scale in terms of cutting the greenhouse emissions than the developed ones. However, the US and rest of the developed countries asked for a new agreement in which China and the other developing countries have regulations to follow as well (ibid).

Ultimately, and unfortunately, Copenhagen Accord 2009 ended up with neither goals to achieve nor a successful conclusion, but endless negotiations. Despite all above, Copenhagen accord was and still considered an important milestone from a political perspective (ibid).

To Rio 2012 (Rio+20)

Back to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, the United Nations has met again in 2012. Two major themes have been in effect: 'The Green Economy' and 'Environmental Governance' [4]. It has been also concentrating on the political outcomes and creating a valuable political forum with the intention of achieving sustainable development [10]. In addition, many crucial steps have also been centered, for instance, adopting guidelines on 'green economy policies', and launching an international process to provide funding options for 'sustainable development'. Furthermore, strengthening the programme was also a priority, taking actions was the goal beyond the 67th session of the overall assembly (ibid).

It was in this conference where the governments of the gathered nations asked for commissions in terms of statistics in order to provide a work programme that measures the progression of each entity (ibid). Future goals have also been set during this conference, according to the United Nations [10], investigating wider aspects including energy, food security and oceans. Rio+20, which has attracted more than hundreds of the United Nations representatives, has been found to be successful on a broad-scale due to the fact that it resulted in around 8 hundred voluntary commitments, in addition to the beginning of new corporations to advance sustainable development (ibid).

Conclusion

To sum up, Rio 1992 was a beneficial start and a necessary step to let know all the gathered nations the importance of taking action regarding protecting the environment. Although the US had a big disagreement and drew down the goals and aims of the conference at some point, efforts and attempts have been always there trying to raise-up the vital meaning beyond the meeting which is reserving our climate. Kyoto protocol was a change point in which an action has been seen by some of the developed countries. Later on, Copenhagen Accord has tried to solve the crucial issue behind Kyoto protocol's disagreement; difficulties were present and the meeting did not achieved its aim, although, at least progress in terms of politics took a place. Lastly, Rio 2012, with more than 65 sessions, has been able to re-fulfill what the previous meetings were trying to accomplish and succeeded to carry-out several vital stages and apply it on all the gathered nations. Implementations and consequences of Rio+20 will be comprehended in the new conference, which is expected to be held in New York in 2014 according to the United Nations [10].

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