Bringing Back ‘the Social’ to Sustainable Development

*Rio+20: challenges, opportunities, responses*

Sarah Cook  
Director, UNRISD  
GEPP Public Conference  
10 May 2012

[www.unrisd.org/greeneconomy](http://www.unrisd.org/greeneconomy)
Our Common Future

- Brundtland Commission (1987)

*Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.*
A Future Worth Choosing

- The UN High-level Panel on Global Sustainability (2012)
Complexity
Key challenges

- Uncertainty and complexity
- The limits of science and technological solutions
- Differences of scale
- Timeframe
- The working of the market
- Separation from economic decision making
Theme

*Green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication*

UNEP definition

*A Green Economy is one that results in improved human well-being and social equity, while significantly reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities*
Green Economy

- **Ecosystem** (natural capital)
  - Goal: maintain ecological resilience

- **Economy** (manufactured and financial capital)
  - Goal: improve resource efficiency

- **Human well-being** (social and human capital)
  - Goal: enhance social equity and fair burden-sharing

**GREEN ECONOMY**
The social dimensions of transition paths under different models for green economy

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‘Selling nature to save it’

- Carbon sequestration - Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES)
- Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD)
- Commodification of nature
- Social limits of market-based approaches
A double injustice

*Those most harmed are the least responsible and have the least resources to respond, this is the double injustice.*

- Examples
  - Increases in the price of household electricity tend to be socially regressive
  - “Conservationist” regulation versus indigenous rights and stewardship
  - Biofuels vs food security
  - Privatization of the commons
Viewing green economy through a social lens

- Social impacts and distributional consequences
- Knowledge and values
- Social structures, institutions and relations
- Social processes, actors and agency
- Social and solidarity economy ‘alternatives’
- Social policies
Eco-social policies

- Social protection and adaptation
- Co-benefits between economic, social and environmental outcomes
- Social policy
  - Investments and infrastructure
  - Housing
  - Consumption patterns
  - Distribution
- Social “drivers” of change
The transformative potential of social policy

POLICY FOCUS

(a) Social consequences

(b) Social complementarities or co-benefits

(c) Social drivers for structural change

Current emphasis in policy making

Potential for transformation

MOST

LEAST
UNRISD outputs

- Occasional Papers
- Conference News
- Research and Policy Brief
- Special issue of Development, Vol. 55, No. 1
- Online think pieces
- Podcasts
- UNRISD newsletter for Rio+20
- UNRISD inputs and articles for UN publications and reports

www.unrisd.org/greeneconomy
Outputs - videos

- Series of 6 video documentaries based on conference findings and footage

1. Green Economy and Sustainable Development: Bringing Back the Social
2. Putting a Price on Nature: Can Markets be Green and Social?
3. Social Policies for Sustainable Development
4. Coalitions for Change
5. Food for the Future: Agriculture in a Sustainable World
6. Sustainable Futures, Alternative Visions

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