Advocacy position of Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, USA toward Rio+20, November 2011

Twenty years after the Rio Earth Summit, the planet is in a deeper environmental, energy and financial crisis. The period has also seen increasing political and social crisis in many regions. Several leaders have recognized that “business as usual is not an option.” We could not agree more, and we have options.

General Content
Expectations for the outcome of Rio+20: We expect a commitment to poverty eradication, investment in healthy, fair and sustainable food and agricultural systems; commitment to the realization of right to water and realization of right to food; re-affirmation of the principle 15 of agenda 21; commitment to support for measures to curb excessive speculation on commodity markets and reconsideration of ambitious targets for biofuels in the context of sustainable development.

Specific Elements of this submission:
Endorsing the objective of the conference, our submission focuses on the following sectoral priorities: food security, sustainable agriculture, water, biodiversity and climate change. In addition, we address the challenges and potential of the green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication.

With its focus on the green economy, Rio+20 attempts to address one of the negative consequences of the development path we have followed: environmental degradation. As a market based mechanism that helps address issues related to environmental crisis, it is believed that the green economy will help the world achieve sustainability.

This assumption ignores the role of global capital and finance in the continuation of social injustice and creation of the political crisis. A green economy divorced from social, political and financial concerns will not help address the multiple crises the world faces today.

In this brief submission we will look at these issues with a focus on the right to water and the right to food, as well as environmentally sustainable, economically viable, socio-economically just food and agricultural systems, with special attention to rights of women, indigenous groups and rural communities.

Recalling Resolution 64/236 that describes the focus of the Conference: “The focus of the Conference will include the following themes to be discussed and refined during the preparatory process: a green

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1 This document is based on our Submission made on November 1, 2011, to the UNCSD Bureau as input to the Zero Draft Outcome Document for the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20). Comments are welcome and can be directed to svarghese@iatp.org
economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication and the institutional framework for sustainable development.” we suggest the following:

1. Inclusion of agriculture in all its dimensions as a core issue at the UNCSRD in Rio and subsequently in global policy and practice.

Agriculture sits squarely at the center of the challenges we face in the beginning of this century. Over the last 50 years many nation-states have made amazing progress towards achieving food security. Unprecedented levels of agricultural production ensure that globally we produce enough food to feed humanity. Yet, millions of households and close to a billion individuals remain food insecure. A still larger number, more than double, do not have access to water for meeting basic needs such as sanitation, an essential service by modern standards of development. Also, most of the increase in agricultural productivity has been at the cost of water pollution and depletion, land degradation, global warming and biodiversity loss.

It does not have to be this way. The right kind of agricultural and trade policies that support healthier food systems (and accompanying water governance) can not only help us meet challenges in realizing right to water and right to food, but can also ensure biodiversity protection, climate adaptation and emission mitigation.\(^2\)

We request that “Socially just, ecologically sustainable and economically viable agriculture [i.e. agriculture that ensures sustainable development] in the context of poverty eradication and the institutional framework for sustainable development” should be a major focus of this conference. This request accords with submissions made by over a hundred civil society organizations from around the world.\(^3\)

2. Inclusion of international human rights at the center of future global development frameworks and at the center of national plans around the green economy. We will focus on right to water and right to food in this submission, but also will refer to a few other rights.

A. Right to water

The global water crisis has become a powerful symbol of inequality in our world. Diarrhea caused by lack of clean drinking water and sanitation has killed more children than malaria, measles and HIV/AIDS combined.\(^4\) More people die as a result of polluted water than are killed by all forms of violence including wars.\(^5\) Over 80 percent of people with unimproved drinking water and 70 percent of people without improved sanitation live in rural areas.\(^6\) Most of them live in developing countries and emerging economies.

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\(^2\) [Integrated solutions to the water, agriculture and climate crises](https://example.com/)

\(^3\) [Rio plus 20- what are the options- when "Business as usual" is not an option?](https://example.com/)

\(^4\) [Why children are still dying and what can be done](https://example.com/)

\(^5\) [Sick Water? The Central role of Waster Water Management in Sustainable Development](https://example.com/)

\(^6\) [Ibid](https://example.com/)
Emphasizing the centrality of access to drinking water and sanitation, UNSG’s Advisory Board on Water and Sanitation (UNSGAB) calls for the incorporation of water and sanitation in the three pillars of sustainable development: “1) Social: [...] A healthy living environment, one that supports human dignity and is free of disease-transmitting agents and conditions, is impossible if open defecation is widely practiced. Access to safe, clean toilets brings dignity, equity and safety, particularly for women and girls. Toilets and safe water in schools increase attendance, particularly for adolescent girls. Without sanitation and clean water, sustainable development’s social objectives remain unmet. 2) Economic: A growing body of empirical evidence shows that poor sanitation and a lack of clean water curbs economic growth. ….. The economic objectives of sustainable development will be greatly advanced by the expansion of basic sanitation services. 3) Environmental: Clearly, a healthy environment depends on sanitation. […]”. We endorse this call to incorporate right to water in the outcome document.

Recognizing the importance of sanitation to sustainable development, the World Summit on Sustainable Development agreed in 2002 to include sanitation in the list of targets to achieve Millennium Development Goal 7 on environmental sustainability. Later on, in November 2002 the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights adopted General Comment 15 on the right to water, which elaborated on the international obligations in relation to the right to water and sanitation. In 2010 the “right to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation” was recognized by the UN General Assembly as “a human right essential to the full enjoyment of life and all other human rights”.

The creation of any future global development framework must build on this growing international recognition of the right to water and sanitation.

B. Right to food

According to the World Food Summit Plan of Action (1996), which took place four years after the Earth Summit in Rio, “Food Security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life”. This was followed in 1999 by the General Comment 12 on Right to Food, which elaborated on the international obligations in relation to the right to water. In November 2004, 187 Member States of the General Council of the FAO, adopted the Voluntary Guidelines to Support the Progressive Realization of the Right to Adequate Food in the Context of National Food Security.

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2 General Comment 15 on Right to water
3 UN General Assembly Resolution on Right to water and sanitation
4 Voluntary Guidelines to Support the Progressive Realization of the Right to Adequate Food
Realization of the right to food remains a mirage, however. According to the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization, 925 million people in the world suffered from hunger (which is the world’s leading health risk) in 2010. At the same time, as a result of unhealthy foods and diets, 1.5 billion people were overweight and obese (making it the fifth leading risk for global deaths) in 2008. These contradictions are not only a powerful symbol of global inequality, but also indicative of the broken nature of our food and agricultural systems.

While the idea of the green economy seeks to address the question of resource efficiency in agriculture, it has not yet grappled with the challenges and contradictions of our current food and agricultural systems. In this context, the green economy can become more meaningful by emphasizing food sovereignty, which calls for an overall framework for “food and agricultural policies that put the right to sufficient, healthy and culturally appropriate food for all individuals, peoples and communities [...] at the center of food, agriculture, livestock and fisheries policies.” This concept, which has been endorsed by farm organizations around the world, values food providers, localizes food systems, and values the knowledge and skills of small-scale food providers. It works in harmony with nature through using smaller-scale, ecological forms of food provision. Social justice and ecological sensitivity are essential components in this framework.

The creation of any future global framework on agriculture and food systems must build on the international recognition of right to food and food sovereignty.

C. Inclusion of Rights of Women and Rights of Indigenous Peoples

The Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food saw a clear connection between access to water and the right to food. In his preliminary report to the UN General Assembly, in 2001, he pointed out that, “As a component of the right to food, access to safe, clean drinking water and basic irrigation water must be protected under the obligations to respect, protect and fulfill the right to food and through international cooperation.” He elaborated: “everyone must have access to drinking water on equal terms and that irrigation water should also be accessible for poor peasants who depend on their land to feed themselves.”

This focus on water for poor peasants is particularly relevant for farm women’s food security. Women play major roles in food production, processing and preparation, and yet a majority of the food insecure are women. The future of agricultural and food systems has to be built on the firm foundation of women’s empowerment for it to be sustainable and equitable. Also, as women form a large majority of world’s hungry, ensuring the food security of all women requires recognizing women’s rights as central to the green economy. The outcome document and national plans that

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12 World Health Organization (WHO): [Facts on obesity](http://www.who.int/compass/obesity/)
deal with green economy must take cognizance of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), often described as an international bill of rights for women.\textsuperscript{15}

Similarly, the outcome document must place the implementation of UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples at the center of the green economy.\textsuperscript{16} Across the world, indigenous communities and pastoralists are victims of discrimination, oppression and even expulsion from their home lands and alienation from their livelihoods. Rio+20 should recognize that sustainable development is possible only if the right to food and right to water obligations to these communities are met through the realization of Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

3. **Address the means to reduce food price volatility, including support for measures to prevent excessive speculation on commodity markets and reduce ambitious targets for biofuels use.**

Almost 70 percent of the global poor reside in rural areas. In developed countries too, family farmers and rural inhabitants are forced to leave their communities in search of employment. In that context, investments in agriculture and food systems will provide livelihood options for people, allowing them the opportunity to stay in their communities, and meet their food security needs.

Proposals for valuing ecosystem services and incentivizing biodiversity protection offer projects for financial flows to rural areas. However, these opportunities also open up the potential for new forms of commodification of nature. In the past, commodification of nature (be it in the form of food, timber, metals or minerals) has usually resulted in the marginalization of rural communities. Most of the flow of wealth is away from the communities, leaving impoverished communities and devastated natural resources behind. Similar patterns of extractive exploitation have been the norm in international trade too, where countries dependent on exports of primary commodities reap few of the benefits of that production.

This extractive form of wealth accumulation has left the large majority of the world’s people poorer. Deregulation of the financial sector has increased commodity speculation and derivative trading, which has left those involved in primary production at the mercy of the vagaries of markets driven more by financial speculators than market fundamentals of supply and demand. A report issued in June 2011 by a UNCTAD on the growing influence of financial speculators on commodity markets, including agriculture prices, said: “The ‘financialization’ of commodity markets has changed trading behavior and significantly affects the prices of such basic goods as staple foods.”\textsuperscript{17}

Volatility has also been increased by new pressures on food stocks, among them rising demand for biofuels. The recent report on food price volatility by the High Level Panel of Experts explores this issue in detail. That panel, which presented its recommendations at the 17th Session of the Committee on Food

\textsuperscript{15} The UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)

\textsuperscript{16} United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

\textsuperscript{17} UNCTAD *report: Price formation in financialized commodity markets*
Security, concluded that both subsidies and the ambitious targets for biofuel use set by the U.S. and European Union should be reconsidered.

While the environmental benefits of biofuels are questionable, biofuels development can contribute to improvements in rural livelihoods and farm prices, particularly in the U.S. and Europe, where corporate-driven agriculture policies have historically driven overproduction of commodities, resulting in prices for these crops often dropping below the cost of production. At the same time, profit demands by foreign biofuels investors have contributed to land grabs in developing countries. Public funding currently supporting this sector should be directed to production systems that are environmentally and socially sound and benefit small-scale farmers. Mandates and targets must be reduced based upon realistic and sustainable production levels that prioritize local and domestic food security needs.

Volatility could also be ameliorated by new initiatives to advance food reserves. The G20 agriculture and development ministers have endorsed a new initiative to test food reserves in West Africa. This experiment should be expanded, building on recent experiences with food reserves in other countries and regions.

4. Redirect investments towards a green economy that works for the poor: lessons from carbon markets

Every crisis is an opportunity for addressing the root causes: be it food crisis, financial crisis or climate crisis. Yet most often the responses tend to be transactional in nature; rarely transformational, and rarely help us move towards solving the crisis itself. The financial flows involved simply benefit global capital. The crisis in the environment (biodiversity, water quality, water availability) has given rise to plans around the green economy. Unless it is a green economy that works for the poor, some of these initiatives around offsets (such as biodiversity derivatives) could further marginalize them.

Any definition of the green economy should refrain from projects for environmental offsets, both because of questions around the environmental integrity of such credits and because of the well reported market integrity failures of carbon derivatives markets. For example, carbon offsets, often promoted as the preferred solution for climate change mitigation, attempts to compensate for the scientific uncertainties about carbon sequestration with aggressive accounting methodologies especially if one is to go by the example of the new pilot project to develop an offset market for soil carbon sequestration in Kenya. According to a recent study by IATP,

“The World Bank, through its BioCarbon Fund, is showcasing the Kenya Agricultural Carbon Project as an “early action” to demonstrate a “triple win” for mitigation, adaptation and food security for small-scale producers, while delivering carbon finance through the sale of credits in the carbon market. It claims that, “The Kenya Agricultural Carbon Project is not only the first project that sells soil carbon credits in Africa, it is also paving the way for a new approach to carbon accounting methodologies.” While the project will support improvements in agricultural practices that could benefit local farmers, the carbon market approach is a very shaky foundation for climate finance. Nearly half of the monetary benefits from the proposed offset credits would be
absorbed by project developers as “transaction costs,” with miniscule returns to the farmers who would be implementing the project [emphasis added].”

An alternative approach should ensure that the funds for incentivizing ecosystem protection are generated through better regulation, and that financial flows would actually reach the communities in question, rather than being captured by carbon accountants. Investments in infrastructure development (including in transport, education and health, and those in developing viable livelihood options that are qualitatively at par with urban centers, as desired by these communities) are central to sustainable and equitable development, so that rural areas no longer continue to function as a colonies for meeting the resource needs of urban centers or wealth accumulation of middlemen and intermediaries.

The prosperity of the urban areas continues to be often at the cost of rural areas. The poverty of the urban centers is borne by the poor of the rural areas. The emphasis on the green economy, which has emerged in the context of environmental crisis, has the potential to either become yet another route for capital accumulation of the few, or, done right, has the potential to charter a new path towards equitable development which puts rural areas and urban poor at the center of future development efforts.

Rio must commit public finances not only towards incentivizing environmental protection but also towards enhancing rural services delivery. We call on Rio+20 to ensure that the outcome document support a green economy that works for the poor.

In addition to the above,

i. we endorse the calls made by other civil society organizations, in asking Rio+20 to recognize the reformed UN Committee on World Food Security (CFS), as the primary mechanism with mandate for identifying current deficiencies and shortcomings that impede the implementation of existing plans and proposals on sustainable agriculture and food. We recommend that Rio+20 select for implementation policy options approved by more than 50 governments and outlined in the reports of International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD), within the mandate to develop a work plan for implementing the decisions of UNCSD 2012.

ii. We also endorse the call by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), to redirect investments toward the greener and more pro-poor options across key economic sectors. The submission elaborates on a green economy which works for the world´s poor as one that would:

1. maintain growth while reducing greenhouse gas emissions in the economy as a whole, and promote job creation and other economic opportunities in key economic sectors that predominantly employ the poor
2. generate more public revenues to enable investment in environment-friendly quality services, to which the poor would have equitable access;

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18 Elusive Promises of the Kenya Agricultural Project
3. retain biodiversity and ecosystem services, while also maintaining the livelihoods of the poor and creating opportunities for local sustainable enterprises to thrive;
4. promote equitable access to energy and its efficient use;
5. build resilience to economic, social, environmental and other risks;
6. empower the poor and marginalized, including women and indigenous peoples, to play an active role in the investment decisions that have an effect on their well-being;
7. pursue pro-poor environmental fiscal and financial tools, including financing mechanisms that benefit local communities.

iii. We wish to conclude by drawing attention to some principles that we must revisit and inform Rio+20.

Some of the assumptions we made regarding our ability to manage environmental risks related to economic growth have proven to be wrong. But some of the key principles that were adopted during the Earth Summit, such as the Precautionary Principle, must be reaffirmed in Rio+20 as central to future global development framework. Central to the precautionary principle is the element of anticipation; other important elements include – plausible threats of harm, lack of scientific certainty, as well as precautionary actions which take a long-term approach and which might anticipate changes on the basis of current scientific knowledge. An example of this is the civil society call to include, technology assessment based on the precautionary principle with full civil society participation to assess the social and environmental impacts, on the agenda for Rio+20.

Most importantly Rio+20 must recognize that we have an obligation to prevent harm to the commons that we hold in trust for future generations and that governments, in consultation with communities have a key role to play in protecting the commons, and in doing this they should be guided by ethics rather than by profits.

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19 Principle 15. Precautionary principle: “In order to protect the environment, the precautionary approach shall be widely applied by States according to their capabilities. Where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used as a reason for postponing cost-effective measures to prevent environmental degradation.”

Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, 1992