Call for Papers and Conference

Green Economy and Sustainable Development: Bringing Back the Social Dimension

Background and Context
Changes in patterns of investment, technology, production and consumption associated with sustainability—often referred to as “green economy”—have taken centre stage in international development circles. This potentially transformative approach emphasizes the need to shift from high to low carbon systems. Strategies to promote a green economy, and the concept itself, are, however, highly contested. There are widely varying assessments of the opportunities, costs and benefits of green economy transition for different social groups, countries and regions. Opinions also diverge about the implications of different approaches for achieving the social, environmental and economic objectives inherent in the concept of sustainable development. In this context, the 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD 2012) has identified “Green Economy for Sustainable Development and Poverty Eradication” as a core theme.

Many developing country governments, civil society actors and scholars fear that certain approaches to green economy could sideline or even undermine sustainable development. Key concerns include new forms of conditionality and protectionism, threats to food security from biofuels, and the commodification of nature. An underlying issue is whether green economy transition will reinforce particular market-led approaches to development that have increased North-South and inter-group inequalities in recent decades. The need to reject a one-size-fits-all model in favour of different approaches across regions and at different scales has been emphasized, especially by developing countries. Yet there is growing uncertainty about how to move forward in the current context of multiple global crises and natural disasters. Alternative perspectives such as those associated with climate justice, developmentalism and solidarity economy raise further questions about the potential of green economy to place inequality and those who are experiencing vulnerability at the centre of sustainable development. It is far from clear whether green economy transition will centre on technological fixes and “business as usual” or, conversely, be seized as an opportunity to enhance well-being and transform the social structures, institutions and power relations that underpin various forms of vulnerability and inequality.

Such concerns suggest that the relationships between green economy, sustainable development and poverty eradication have not been adequately conceptualized. From this perspective it is important to direct attention to social dimensions of development associated with equity, livelihood security, social protection and empowerment. Social dimensions of green economy are often addressed in terms of green jobs, green consumerism, and the kinds of education/retraining, social safety-nets and social

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1 Sustainable development was defined by the World Commission on Environment and Development as development that “meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. See World Commission on Environment and Development. 1987. Our Common Future. Oxford University Press, Oxford.
dialogue required to facilitate the transition. While poverty eradication is increasingly accepted as a goal of green economy, it is often assumed that it will follow inevitably from low-carbon growth.\(^5\) Unless social dimensions are addressed more centrally and comprehensively, there is a danger that efforts to connect green economy, sustainable development and poverty eradication will fail.

Work in the United Nations system to address such concerns has directed attention beyond the economic and environmental dimensions of green economy. Thus a green economy has been defined by UNEP as “one that results in improved human well-being and social equity, while significantly reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities”\(^6\), based upon a combination of low-carbon growth, resource efficiency and social inclusivity. A report of the United Nations Secretary-General, *Objectives and Themes of the UN Conference on Sustainable Development*, flags the key role of social policies and institutions for both facilitating transition and dealing with adverse impacts. The preparatory process of UNCSD 2012 has identified the need for “further independent research on the potential social impacts of green economy”\(^7\) and, specifically, for information and analysis on the range of policy options, including “social policies to reconcile social goals with existing or proposed green economy policies”\(^8\).

### UNRISD Call for Papers and Conference

The social dimensions of development are central to understanding the connections between green economy, sustainable development and poverty eradication, and to ensuring that efforts to promote a green economy contribute to socially sustainable development. While there is growing recognition that transitioning to a green economy will have both positive and negative social impacts, it is necessary to consider how benefits and costs are distributed; the types of broader changes in social structures and institutions needed to promote equitable outcomes and transform business and consumer behaviour; the role of different social actors in advocacy, negotiation and decision making; and how accountability, compensation and redress can be assured.

By bringing together United Nations representatives and policy makers, academics and representatives of civil society, the UNRISD Call for Papers and Conference will create a forum for dialogue and analysis, aimed at developing a conceptual and policy framework that will position social dimensions at the centre of green economy and sustainable development. Policy reports and other publications will inform the UNCSD 2012 preparatory process and subsequent policy discussions. The UNRISD Call for Papers and Conference will critically examine the following interrelated issues and questions.

1. **Social impacts and distributional consequences of policies and processes associated with green economy.** What are the consequences of the restructuring of production, services, finance and consumption patterns associated with green economy for the employment, livelihood security and cultural identity of different social groups, across geographic locations and scales? Do different patterns of green economy transition constitute win-win outcomes, or are there winners and losers? What role can social policy, in association with economic and environmental policy, play in minimizing costs, maximizing benefits and building resilience, especially for vulnerable groups? How does the green economy agenda connect with other sustainable development objectives, such as food security, health, social protection, human rights, gender equality, decent work, poverty reduction and climate justice?

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2. The potential and limits of structural and institutional change. What do green economy policies, as well as different models of transition, imply for the continuity or transformation of structures, institutions and social relations that reproduce or reinforce inequality and vulnerability? Conversely, how do existing patterns of inequality and vulnerability obstruct or facilitate the potential for different approaches to green economy to contribute to sustainable development and poverty eradication? Are macroeconomic frameworks and conditionalities changing in ways that are conducive to structural reform and sustainable development?

3. Agency and social mobilization for institutional and policy change. How is the notion of green economy itself, and the consideration of social dimensions, being framed by diverse social actors (such as states, business and civil society), and with what effects in terms of influencing policy agendas? What forms of participation, contestation, coalitions, alliances and compromises are emerging—or might need to emerge—to promote green economy approaches that contribute to sustainable development and poverty eradication? Are disadvantaged groups and countries able to gain voice and influence through processes of social dialogue and decision making associated with green economy transition?

Abstracts are invited from interested researchers and other specialists addressing the above themes.

Please submit the following information by 15 May 2011:
- an extended abstract (500-1,000 words), outlining the main issues, hypotheses, arguments and structure of the paper;
- CV and full contact details.

By 15 June, successful candidates will be invited to submit a draft paper (6,000 to 7,000 words), due no later than 1 September.

The conference will be held at the United Nations in Geneva on 10-11 October 2011.

It is anticipated that UNRISD will be able to cover travel and accommodation costs. In the event of financial restrictions, priority will be given to researchers from developing countries. Subject to peer review, selected papers will be published in an edited volume through a commercial publisher or as a special issue of an academic journal. They should, therefore, not be under consideration for publication elsewhere.

To submit abstracts and for further information, contact Kiah Smith via email (smith@unrisd.org).