



Time To Act Together

The heads of states must collectively promote sustainable development to save the earth

José Manuel Barroso

As the Rio+20 summit begins today, it brings to my mind the first Earth summit that took place in Rio 20 years ago. That summit – which I had the privilege to attend – was an attempt by the global community to change the course of human development to a more equitable and sustainable model.

Two decades later, significant progress has been made on the road to sustainability. But more fundamentally, today's world is a different place. The Rio+20 summit takes place against the backdrop of a changing global landscape, an international economic crisis, rising global population levels, increasing global resource use and, despite all the progress, an unacceptable level of poverty. The community of states thus bears an even greater responsibility to move to a new stage in our collective search for inclusiveness and sustainability.

Today's economic crisis is not only a result of irresponsible behaviour of some in the financial sector, coupled by lax regulatory oversight. It is also the result of deep-seated imbalances that need to be corrected if we want to generate more sustainable growth. These are not only global economic imbalances, they are also imbalances in our ecological footprint. During the 20th century, global economic output multiplied 40-fold and standards of living rose enormously. But this came at a price and was based on an unsustainable use of scarce global resources – fuels, metals, minerals, timber, water and eco-

systems. By 2050, the world's population will reach nine billion – so the imperative to act together is undeniable. If we don't meet this challenge, we'll need the equivalent of two planets to sustain us.

At the G20 summit in Mexico we discussed the need for stable economies and increased growth. Rio offers the world the opportunity to steer this growth towards an inclusive and sustainable path. We should not let escape this opportunity.

The European Union is committed to achieving concrete outcomes from Rio. We have suggested goals and targets for key areas that underpin a green economy: water, the oceans, land and

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ecosystems, forests, sustainable energy and resource efficiency. These goals are essential for sustainable growth. They are also inextricably linked to the issues of poverty eradication, social development, food security and nutrition. It is the poorest in our societies who will suffer most if we use our resources unsustainably.

This is why the European Union will continue to make the case for a concrete Rio agenda. This will not be possible without the support, engagement and



Groundwater depletion and droughts force villagers to trudge miles for water

mobilisation of all, both in the public and private sector. It is, therefore, crucial that Rio+20 further strengthens the engagement of the private sector and civil society – the real engines of our economies – in sustainable development. Strong private sector engagement will also help developing economies to leapfrog to more efficient technologies and avoid being locked into unsustainable practices.

The EU remains entirely committed to achieve these objectives through the Millennium Development Goals. Moreover, without diverting efforts from their achievement by 2015, we are also ready to engage in a discussion on Sustainable Development Goals suggested by some G77 countries.

To underpin global sustainability, the European Union will continue to be the leading aid donor. To give one concrete

example: on April 16, 2012, we successfully organised the EU Sustainable Energy for All summit in Brussels, in coordination with the United Nations and in the presence of the United Nations secretary general, Ban Ki-moon. During this summit, I announced a new EU Energising Development initiative, which should help provide access to sustainable energy services to 500 million people by 2030.

The European Commission is currently establishing a technical assistance facility worth €50 million, to provide governments with the necessary expertise to engage in reforms and to develop their own national energy access strategies. We intend to mobilise at least €400 million over the next two years in support of these strategies. But this is not just a single-issue commitment. For 2012-13 alone, EU aid to all three dimensions of sustainable deve-

lopment will amount to almost €8 billion – more than \$10 billion.

But we need to go beyond traditional ways of development assistance. In times of economic crisis we need to be able to generate innovative sources of financing. A global financial transaction tax (FTT) would ensure not only that the financial sector pays a fair contribution to the economy but could also provide valuable resources to fund development. The EU is a pioneer here and the commission has proposed that much of the revenue generated by a European FTT should be put in the future EU budget. That will help ensure that the EU continues to be one of the world's biggest providers of development assistance.

This is a tangible sign of Europe's unwavering commitment to the Rio agenda, and we expect our partners, as global stakeholders, to share in this responsibility. We want to shape a focussed and clear sustainable agenda for the future.

The result of this summit must be more than a statement of good intent. In today's world, either development is sustainable or it is merely statistical growth. Sustainability is not a choice, nor an option; it is a pre-condition for development. Our planet needs a global green growth and jobs agenda. We owe that to the billions of people who currently live in poverty, but who rightly aspire to a better and more inclusive future and we owe it to the generations to come.

The writer, former prime minister of Portugal, is currently president of the European Commission.