

INTRODUCTION

Representatives from world governments, civil society and the private sector will gather in Rio de Janeiro on June 20-22 to address the many environmental challenges facing the global community. The Rio+20 Summit will mark the 20th anniversary of the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, and although many gains have been achieved over the past two decades, the climate change agenda continues to move at a glacial pace while at the same time climate risks are increasing. As the Rio+20 approaches, the challenge will be to reenergize international will for meaningful progress in addressing climate change, achieving sustainable growth and development, and protecting the environment.

The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD), or Rio+20, has identified seven key priority areas for discussion: decent jobs, energy, sustainable cities, food security and sustainable agriculture, water, oceans and disaster readiness. Green growth as a pathway for sustainable development has been proposed as an element to integrate these priorities. Other issues to be discussed include establishing a new development agenda to replace the Millennium Development Goals (set to expire in 2015) with the Sustainable Development Goals, and finding new sources for climate and sustainable development financing.

Joining the debate on the challenges and expectations for the Rio+20 Summit, experts from the Brookings Institution explore the critical issues and offer policy recommendations for leaders to consider in order to promote sustainable growth in both the developed and developing world.

Katherine Sierra outlines why green growth is important and how it can be leveraged by the international community to bolster the global growth, but explains how the outcomes from Rio+20 will be driven by bottom-up initiatives and organizations, often ahead of national governments or international consensus.

Nathan Hultman and Allison Shapiro address how innovations in technology can be used to help least developed countries move onto sustainable development trajectories through regional science foundations, nations business incubators, and dedicated funds to de-risk investment and encourage intellectual property sharing.

Homi Kharas and David Steven argue that the Sustainable Development Goals need several years of negotiation and development in order to avoid “the curse of the sequel” and that Rio+20 should only launch the process and not determine the goals themselves.

Bruce Jones describes how the international framework for implementing Rio+20’s action items must be reformed in order to achieve success through the creation of a new U.N. Council on Sustainable Development or adaptation of the U.N. Economic and Social Council.

Joshua Meltzer calls for more international cooperation to reduce trade barriers described in the WTO Doha round, however, he explains that countries have the right to act unilaterally in achieving emissions reductions if consensus cannot be reached.

Mark Muro and Devashree Saha examine how cities and regions are increasingly the chief locus of labor force matching, technical innovation and adoption, industrial output, and social opportunity, making them the key drivers of green economies and domestic green growth policies.

William Brown explains the importance of natural capital, like ecosystems, oceans and biodiversity, being incorporated into the economic planning of governments and private enterprise, and calls on Rio+20 participant nations to mandate consideration of natural capital in national wealth accounting.