

A Message  
from the Friends  
of Rio+20

The Friends of Rio+20, is a unique, high-level group of international business, scientific and civil society leaders from diverse issue areas, convened and supported by the World Economic Forum.

# Summary

We must overcome urgent and interlinked economic, social and environmental challenges in the coming decades to create a sustainable development path. Over 1.4 billion people have no access to electricity or decent water; 900 million people are still hungry; we will need 600 million jobs within the next 10 years; and research indicates that human societies are placing such pressures on the Earth's environmental systems that we may soon move beyond safe natural boundaries.

On the occasion of Rio+20, we have come together as an extraordinary coalition of business, scientific and civil society leaders to suggest practical actions to meet these pressing sustainable development challenges.

Governments must define the goals, policies and laws needed to move to a sustainable development path. However, given the urgency of the challenge, we encourage governments to also embrace more multistakeholder and multidimensional ways of generating action on sustainable development – not as a substitute for multilateral agreements or national plans, but to facilitate their ultimate impact.

There is now substantial evidence that clearly defined coalitions of willing and able actors from across government, business, science and civil society can mobilize their combined skills, innovation and resources to make clear progress at scale, against specific sustainable development goals. Such practical collaborations cut across traditional boundaries of interest, expertise and nationality. They can be participative, transparent and accountable. They can be designed to meet combined social, economic and environmental objectives, relevant to each particular sustainable development goal. And they can, and do, deliver practical results, fast.

We list over 30 solid examples of such coalitions in an Annex to this letter, some of which we are engaged in. These include collaborations to improve access to food, water, energy and jobs. Such multistakeholder activities are often able to achieve, through collaboration and innovation, a scale and speed of impact that can support and complement government and international efforts on sustainable development.

To this end, we ask government leaders at the Rio+20 Summit to take two specific actions:

- **To commit to designing economies which put us on the path to sustainable development and to developing a clear set of ambitious, universal and equitable global goals for sustainable development fit for the post-2015 development landscape, while also creating the national and regional policies and framework needed to accelerate their delivery.**
- **To enable multi-country and multistakeholder coalitions of willing and able actors (including interested national and sub-national governments) to undertake explicit sets of actions now and in the near term to help achieve these goals.**

Below, we set out our message in more detail. However, our proposition is simple: by harnessing diverse networks, capabilities and insight, multistakeholder coalitions can be mobilized to deliver practical, time-bound actions to help governments achieve key sustainable development goals. We invite government leaders gathered in Rio to engage us, and others of like mind, to help do so. In this way, Rio+20 can be the launch pad for a truly transformative global agenda for collaborative, practical action on sustainable development.

## Full message

1. We are an international group of business, scientific and civil society leaders from diverse issue areas, economic sectors and regions. We have created an informal and extraordinary coalition we call the Friends of Rio+20. We share a common interest in shifting the world onto a trajectory of truly sustainable development so as to address urgent and interrelated economic, social and environmental challenges. Our global society must ensure access to food, energy and water for all, within a world where there are decent job opportunities, where our atmosphere and oceans are healthy and where deforestation is stopped. This is an urgent challenge – research indicates that human societies are placing such pressures on the Earth’s environmental systems that we may soon move beyond safe natural boundaries.
2. To this end, we ask the government leaders assembled for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, to take two specific actions whilst there. First, to commit to developing and implementing a clear set of ambitious, universal and equitable global goals for achieving sustainable development by 2030, which can also help to shape a new development framework after the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) end in 2015. These goals must be designed to eradicate poverty, reduce inequality and realize justice and human rights, while respecting the finite limits of the Earth’s natural resources; thereby accelerating measurable progress on all aspects of sustainable development by 2030. Second, to recognize the potential of multi-country and multistakeholder coalitions to help achieve these goals and to invite coalitions of willing and able actors (including national and sub-national governments) to undertake explicit sets of actions now and in the near term to help do so. By working together to deliver practical outcomes at scale from the ‘bottom up’, through creative and clearly defined collaborations with real deadlines, governments can mobilize the combined skills, innovation and resources of the public, private and civil society sectors to accelerate progress towards new goals, where it is most needed and feasible. Only if we take advantage of *all* the potential dimensions of international cooperation (multilateral, plurilateral, sub-national, multistakeholder and interdisciplinary) will humanity realize the vision of the original Rio Conference.
3. We believe in the necessity of multilateral government efforts to meet the many compelling challenges of sustainable development, such as the setting of goals, the move toward common standards, the seeking of free and fair trade flows, and the mobilization of finance. At regional, national and sub-national levels, governments also have an important responsibility to promote sustainable development, for example by creating clear and cost-effective policies, regulations and market incentives. Business and civil society have an important leadership role to play too. With clear government goals and policies to react to, business can innovate, creating new products and services that deliver sustainable development outcomes. Business leaders can pledge to better embed and report on social and environmental impacts in their corporate balance sheets. NGOs, scientists and academics can suggest new and transparent ways to deliver, monitor and report progress on sustainable development activities, including new (non-monetary) metrics to measure the social and environmental quality of growth beyond GDP and new ways to measure and reduce our human footprint to achieve sustainable development. But governments and the international community must also recognize – and utilize – the potential that large-scale multistakeholder coalitions and initiatives can play in *delivering* practical sustainable development outcomes over specific time periods, especially to support poor communities in developing countries, and within the context of meeting wider goals. At this time of economic uncertainty, the success at scale of such specific multistakeholder collaboration can also help inspire confidence in governments to move forward on their own, or with others, to secure sustainable development outcomes.
4. Rio+20 occurs in a world vastly different from the world of the first “Earth Summit” of 20 years ago. During this period, the world has reduced the number of people living on less than US\$1.25 a day by half, and roughly 500 million more people have joined the global middle classes. Extraordinary progress in communications and technology has enabled societies to become more connected in ways impossible to conceive in 1992. The combined output of the emerging world

now accounts for close to 40% of global GDP, twice its share in 1990. Much of this is testament to the worth of multilateral efforts, innovation from the private sector and pressure from civil society. And all this is evidence of our ability to achieve much more if we work harder, together, in more creative ways.

5. And clearly we must achieve much more, for the complexity, the scope and the scale of the many development challenges we must face have grown since 1992. More than a decade into a new century, many of the social dimensions of the MDGs remain unmet: 900 million people are still hungry, for example. In the wake of a global financial crisis, income inequality is rising alarmingly around the world, for many different reasons. We face the challenge of creating 600 million decent jobs over the next decade – today 200 million people worldwide are unemployed, including 75 million young people. About 910 million workers earn wages less than US\$2 a day and 75% of the world's people have no social protection. There is widespread fear of losing jobs, along with uncertainty about how best to create quality new ones.
6. It has also become abundantly clear that the environmental challenges of sustainable development are interconnected. As up to 3 billion more people join the middle classes over the next 20 years, the issues of energy, water, food, health, trade and climate – and meeting many other material needs – combine together to frame our future, and so they must be considered together. Governments need new multilateral approaches that recognize and respond to these interconnections. Moreover, we also need new *multidimensional* approaches to achieve specific goals for sustainable development, which address this nexus of environmental and natural resource challenges and which innovate in response, for example by ensuring food security via climate-smart agriculture; or by delivering both sustainable energy and decent jobs. There are many opportunities.
7. Fortunately, there is substantive evidence that governments and civil society can come together to jointly meet these challenges. Businesses, NGOs, research and scientific communities, local governments, and many others across many other parts of civil society have increasing experience in collaborating on sustainable development related initiatives. This experience proves beyond question that clearly defined coalitions that cut across the traditional boundaries of interest, expertise and nationality can work. Such multistakeholder efforts can often achieve, through collaboration, what governments working alone cannot, especially for those in developing countries. Such cooperative efforts can be transparent, participative and accountable. They can share costs and risks. They can be economically viable and at the same time they can demonstrate clear social and environmental benefits. They can be based on sound scientific knowledge and produce practical outcomes at scale, in a specific timeframe. And they are doing so now. We attach an Annex with over 30 examples of how such activities are succeeding in addressing the challenges of sustainable development in precisely this way through collaborative efforts all over the world. We also outline some new initiatives that can be mobilized. To replicate and scale up these sorts of coalitions, governments must mainstream their recognition of – and support for – such activities, making them part of their 'official' discussions on sustainable development.
8. To this end, the government leaders assembled for Rio+20 should renew their commitment to achieving goals for sustainable development that are ambitious, universal and fair to all. These goals must serve our social, economic and environmental needs equally. The outcome of the Rio+20 conference should provide a clear sense of direction to reach these goals within the post-MDG framework for development, and should show us all how we expect to get there in ways that will serve the ends of justice and human rights, while respecting the finite limits of the Earth's natural resources. Significant improvements in scientific research since 1992 allow us to better understand and predict how our environment is changing, and must be used to help design these goals. At Rio+20, government leaders should launch an expert-led process to develop fully-funded Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with clear targets, timelines and indicators, integrated with the existing post-MDG review process. These SDGs should integrate the three dimensions of sustainable development, and be universally applicable and equitable. In Rio, governments should also agree on the key thematic areas for the SDGs, including food, water and energy security for all.

9. To help achieve these goals in a practical, cost-effective and time-bound manner and at scale, we ask governmental leaders to engage with us and others of like mind and interest (including interested groups of national and sub-national governments), to mobilize multi-country coalitions of willing and able actors to undertake specific tasks with specific timetables to make clear progress toward specific goals. Each activity should ensure that social, economic and environmental goals are equally considered and are central objectives. In this way, and by working together, creatively, cooperatively and collaboratively, those of us serving outside of government can help governments and the international community to make positive change happen at scale and fast, thereby realizing our common global goals for sustainable development.
10. We have set out some illustrative ideas of all we might achieve through collaborative efforts, based upon substantive evidence to date. No doubt, there are other compelling initiatives that civil society leaders can identify as good examples. There are certainly other champions from outside government who could join our informal group. We would welcome this. Because our proposition is clear: by tapping our combined capabilities, experience and insight, and our worldwide members, customers and value-chains, we can be a valuable informal civil society, business and science network to help government marshal specific multistakeholder action on sustainable development across regions, issues and economic sectors, quickly and at scale. Working together, we can produce practical results to support wider government efforts. We can get things done. We invite government leaders gathered in Rio to engage us, and others of like mind, to help do so. Let's act on this now. There is no time for waiting.

Sincerely,

### ***The Friends of Rio+20***

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