

Rio+20 update

Rich countries concede on green economy; stalemate on finance, technology continue

Ajay K Jha, 17th June, Rio de Janeiro

United Nations Sustainable Development Summit, billed as biggest event on environment and sustainable development in Rio de Janeiro, which was also the venue of historic Earth Summit in 1992 is witnessing stiff resistance from the developed countries. The Summit, which began on 13th June with the aspiration of renewing political commitment to sustainable development is plagued by the differences between developed and developing countries over a number of issues. With only few days remaining before the high level forum from 20th to 22nd June, when more than 150 heads of the state for final declaration on the outcome of the summit, differences remain not only on language of the outcome document titled “the future we want” but also on fundamental and major issues such as reaffirming commitment to Rio principles laid down by the world earth summit in 1992, vision, finance, technology transfer, and sustainable development goals. The differences also plague negotiations on green economy and institutional framework for sustainable development, two themes of the Summit.

Several rounds of negotiations leading to the Summit have failed to bring a convergence, and many feel that it might ultimately prove a damp squib with no real and effective outcome to support sustainable consumption and production leading to sustainable development. United Nations Secretary General, Mr. Ban ki Moon, speaking at the inaugural Plenary termed the Summit as the once in a life time opportunity and urged the delegates to “make the most of time” in coming to an effective outcome. He also said that “launching the sustainable development goals and improving institutional framework on sustainable development” should be two objectives that the countries should work to achieve.

However, the negotiations till now do not show the promise of resolution of conflicts, which have become deeply entrenched on north south lines. While the developing a poor countries many of them entrenched in poverty, and lacking resources and technology to devise green development pathways insist that developed countries should lead the way in providing finance, technology and capacity building on the basis of common but differentiated responsibility, a key principle for international development cooperation as laid down in the Rio Earth Summit. They also insist that developed countries fulfill their previous promise of providing 0.7% of their GNP to developing and poor countries. However, rich countries say that Rio+20 is not a “pledging event” and that world has changed dramatically from 1992 and developing countries should “look forward rather than looking backwards.” Their common refrain is developing countries should take equal responsibility.

Very little has been achieved in the initial three days of negotiations in the third prepCom. A breakthrough of sorts was arrived when developed countries conceded on language of the green economy and agreed to use the “green economy policies” rather than “a green economy.” G77 insists that there cannot be universally applicable definition of “green economy,” which will be subject to circumstances of the particular country, and therefore, they should be allowed to define it according to their needs and priorities. However, major differences still remain on provision of finance and technology transfer, and the sustainable development goals. The US and the Canada, outrightly refuse to respect previous commitments regarding increase in the overseas development assistance (ODA), as they never agreed to it. On new and additional finance, rich countries say that finance has to come from south south collaboration, FDI, and the markets. Financial support from IFIs and UN systems is also not an option for rich countries. G77 insists that “global solutions will have to be supported internationally.” Similarly, technology transfer is also a much hated word for the developed countries, and many of them including the US. The EU, Australia, New Zealand and Canada want to replace technology transfer with “technology development and innovation.” They also insist that language on technology transfer be changed to “technology transfer voluntarily or on mutually agreed terms. They also want to remove any references to IPR, patent rights held by rich countries for green technologies, are major handicap in transfer and effective use of technology in developing and poor countries alleges G77.

The delegates are wondering what will be the form of discussion and negotiation, after the end of the PrepCom. They also wonder whether the same level of transparency will be maintained henceforth towards the final negotiation and outcome. All await the new text that Brazillian govt. chair the Summit has promised. The lull in the negotiations also reflect that uncertainty about the future of the planet and the environments.

End of message

Comments and feedback are welcome at k.ajay.j@gmail.com