

LAND AND WATER RIGHTS

1. Twenty years ago, at Rio, when the international community embraced “sustainable development” and adopted Agenda 21, the vision was for a greener, more equitable world in the 21st century. Today, we face a world crisis – of food, economy and climate. But it is also a crisis of political leadership and an imperative for greater democratisation.
2. As we meet at CSD17, we are challenged to make some fundamental shifts in thinking and practical action towards sustainability on the ground, starting with land and water.
3. We must value nature and functioning ecosystems, as the foundation of sustainable development. This means applying the ecosystem approach as a strategy for the integrated management of land, water and living resources that promotes conservation, and sustainable use, including equitable benefit-sharing. Ecosystems should be managed for their intrinsic values, as well as for the tangible and intangible benefits for human societies. For example, water planning must guarantee minimum environmental flows for ecosystems, recognizing land as a water user on its own right. The human right to water for basic social needs should be prioritised. Trans-boundary water management must uphold the principle of reciprocity, and ensure the equitable sharing of international waters.
4. Both cultural and biological diversity are central components of the ecosystem approach, and indigenous peoples and other local communities living on the land, are important actors, whose rights and interests should be recognized. Secure land and water rights for small holder farmers, pastoralists, indigenous peoples, and women are preconditions, of an enabling environment for healthy ecosystems and healthy peoples. Priority must be given to supporting the revitalization of local and regional food and energy production systems which reduce greenhouse gas emissions, building on indigenous knowledge and technologies. The rights of farmers and indigenous peoples to seeds must be protected. Recognition and rewards must be given to pastoralists, small farmers, forest communities, and indigenous peoples for their protection and care of ecosystems, and their provision of environmental services, including carbon sequestration.
- 5 Failures to respect, protect and fulfil human rights, constitute real barriers to human sustainable development. Conversely, empowered citizens and communities are a renewable spring of creativity and diverse collaborative actions for sustainable development. Building the capacity of civil society for direct engagement in decision-making, through environmental and development education, fosters informed choices about development and technological options, and the obligations of governments under international human rights law, as well as commitments made in international agreements, such as the Convention on Biological Diversity, and recent international instruments like the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The value added of the long list of Conferences and Meetings in the Preamble of the CSD17 negotiating text, is in the commitment of governments to their implementation.

6. The cluster of issues under CSD17 demand strong attention to the social and ecological pillars of sustainability: after all it is nature and society, which set the values and parameters for sustainable development.