

# **Rio +20: Towards the Green Economy and Better Governance**

Irish Civil Society Response

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# 1. Introduction

The first United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development or “Earth Summit”, was held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. The main outcomes of the landmark conference included seminal documents on Agenda 21, the Rio Declaration and the Statement of Forest Principles, as well as two legally binding conventions; the United Nations Convention on Climate Change and the United Nations Convention on Biodiversity. These documents have shaped and guided sustainable development policies and actions at international, regional, national and local levels in the intervening two decades. The Earth Summit highlighted environmental and development issues at an international level, emphasizing the importance of sustainability principles for social well-being and the economic systems they support.

There have been extensive efforts since 1992, at local, national, regional and international levels, to implement sustainable development. The UN Commission on Sustainable Development was set up in 1992 to oversee implementation of the Rio agreements. Agenda 21, the international plan of action for sustainable development, continues to provide long-term focus for balancing sustainability goals with economic and social development. The Aarhus Convention of 1998 also represented an important step for sustainable development within the UNECE in three main ways; public access to information about the environment, public participation in environmental decision-making, and widening the conditions for access to justice. The United Nations Millennium Summit in 2000 agreed on a set of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), setting time-bound targets for addressing extreme poverty in line with the objectives of Agenda 21. Concrete steps to turn words into action were then agreed upon at the Johannesburg Summit, 2002, in the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation.

At EU level the sustainable development process has been advanced through a suite of policies and actions following on from the adoption of the EU Sustainable Development Strategy in 2001 which was subsequently renewed in 2006. Comprehensive framework Directives and other legislative instruments on waste management, air, water and biodiversity have been put in place, which have been transposed into Irish law. We have also seen the introduction of a cap and trade system, the Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS) and the setting of binding targets on greenhouse gas emissions.

Rio +20 presents an opportunity to revisit agreements and commitments made in 1992 and to consider how we will deliver on these, both collectively and individually. In order to inform Ireland’s contribution to the Rio +20 preparatory process a public consultation was carried out in which all interested parties were invited to respond to a stakeholder consultation document (Appendix 1). These responses have been summarised to form this report and are referenced throughout the document (see Appendix 2).

## 2. Progress on sustainable development since the Earth Summit in 1992: Successes and Failures

In an Irish context, significant steps have been taken since the Earth Summit in Rio in 1992. Ireland has made considerable progress in environmental performance, developing environmental policies and adopting measures to promote an innovation-based, low carbon, green economy. The *National Sustainable Development Strategy* published in 1997 provided a comprehensive policy analysis of the issues to be addressed under Rio and outlined a series of ambitious objectives across all sectors. Since then, Ireland experienced a period of rapid economic growth, during which some progress was made towards decoupling environmental pressures from economic demands (OECD, 2009). We have seen a large expansion in Ireland's infrastructure in areas such as roads and public transport, comprehensive legislation in areas such as environmental licensing, waste management and water resource management and establishment of an independent Environmental Protection Agency, with wide responsibilities and strong powers. As a result, Ireland generally has good air and water quality and energy efficiency has improved (OECD, 2009).

Preparation is underway to publish a renewed National Sustainable Development Strategy (rNSDS), which aims to develop a framework that integrates sustainable development into key policy areas. The rNSDS will outline effective mechanisms for implementation and a concrete course of action to advance sustainable development in Ireland. Drawing on the model established by the EU Sustainable Development Strategy, the rNSDS will concentrate on gaps where limited progress has been made and which still present formidable challenges, not least among these being the need to decouple natural resource use and economic growth.

Progress has been made under Local Agenda 21, which facilitates sustainable development at a community level<sup>1,2</sup>. *Sustainable Development: A strategy for Ireland* was published in 1997, encouraged local authorities to drive Local Agenda 21 forward (DECLG, 2001). Some County and City Development Boards (CDBs) have made significant progress in their approach to sustainable development. For example, Waterford CDB has put a range of strategies into place, including a Climate Change Strategy, 2008-2012, an Economic Plan, 2010-2014 and the County Development Plan, 2001-2017<sup>1</sup>. However, many communities remain unaware of Local Agenda 21 so more must be done to ensure that citizens have the knowledge and support they need to implement it in their communities<sup>1,2</sup>.

Ireland has not been successful in making progress in a number of areas, particularly with regard to clean energy<sup>1,2</sup>, green house gas (GHG) emissions<sup>1,2,5</sup> and biodiversity<sup>1,2,5</sup>. Progress in the area of clean energy has been limited and Ireland remains heavily dependent on imported fossil fuels for almost 90% of its energy needs<sup>1,2</sup> (Eurostat, 2011). This leaves the country exposed to international market price fluctuations (SEAI, 2009). Oil prices almost doubled between 2005 and 2010 and the IEA estimated that EU fuel imports increased by €70bn between 2009 and 2010. The Sustainable Energy Authority has been promoting the move away from fossil fuels and towards greater energy efficiency but more must be done to increase domestic energy sources and improve energy resilience in Ireland. Ireland has not only failed to halt increases in carbon emissions, but research demonstrates that greenhouse gas emissions for Ireland were 25% higher in 2007 than the 1990 baseline<sup>1,2,3</sup> (Eurostat, 2011). Current projections indicate that Ireland will only meet its Kyoto obligations as "a direct result of the current economic recession" (OECD, 2009) and is likely to miss annual obligations under the EU's 2020 target after 2015<sup>2</sup> (EPA, 2011).

Ireland also failed to meet the 2010 target to halt biodiversity decline<sup>1,2,5</sup>. A number of native species have already been lost from the island and many more are in need of protection. Eight species of water beetle are regionally extinct and a further 13% are under threat (Foster *et al.*, 2009). Byrne *et al.* (2009) reported that two species of non-marine mollusc are extinct, while 31% of remaining species are under threat. One mammal species has been lost and 4% are threatened (Marnell *et al.*, 2009), one species of butterfly is extinct and 18% are threatened (Regan *et al.*, 2010), 40% of fish and one of Ireland's three amphibian species are threatened (King *et al.*, 2011). 16 species of bird have appeared on the red list of Birds of Conservation Concern, having shown rapid population declines in recent years.

A summary of specific successes and failures highlighted by respondents is outlined in Table 1.

Table 1: Main successes and failures in progressing sustainable development in Ireland since the Earth Summit, 1992.

	Successes	Failures
<b>International</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aarhus Convention, 1998, provided public access to environmental information, public participation in environmental decision making and increased access to justice<sup>2</sup>.</li> <li>• Millennium Development Goals, 2000, set targets for addressing extreme poverty<sup>3</sup>.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• International framework to fight against poverty is fragmented and over 1bn people live in absolute poverty worldwide<sup>3</sup></li> <li>• Global failure to hit target of halting biodiversity loss by 2010<sup>5</sup></li> </ul>
<b>Regional</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EU Strategy for Sustainable Development<sup>4</sup> provides an EU-wide policy framework for delivering sustainable development</li> <li>• EU Emissions Trading System<sup>4</sup> was introduced to help EU meet GHG emissions reduction target under the Kyoto Protocol</li> <li>• Europe 2020 Strategy<sup>4</sup> aims to promote smart, sustainable and inclusive economy.</li> <li>• Roadmap 2050<sup>4</sup> looks to move towards a low-carbon economy, with the long term goal of reducing domestic emissions by 80-95% below 1990 levels by 2050.</li> </ul>	
<b>National</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National Energy Efficiency Plan 2009-2020<sup>1</sup>. Energy efficiency in Ireland improved by 10% compared with a 9% improvement for the EU-15. Energy efficiency improved for industry by 16%, in the residential sector by 15% and in the transport sector by 1.4% between 1995 and 2007 (SEAI, 2009a).</li> <li>• Good progress on water management<sup>4</sup> with Water Framework Directive and River Basin District management<sup>2</sup>. Biological quality of rivers, lakes, inshore and coastal waters is high and rate of compliance with EU Urban Waste Water Directive rose from 25% to 92% between 2000 and 2009 (OECD, 2009).</li> <li>• Afforested land increased by 51.8% between 1990 and 2008<sup>3</sup></li> <li>• National Waste Prevention Programme has successfully increased waste recovery<sup>1,2</sup>. Ireland has met ambitious targets set by Waste Management Law for recovery of paper, cardboard, wood, packing, construction, demolition and municipal waste. There was an increase in recovery of household waste from 19% in 2004 to 29.5% in 2009 and of</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The number of private cars per 1000 population increased from 227 in 1990 to 435 in 2008<sup>3</sup> and private car energy consumption increased 135% between 1990 and 2007. The transport sector was responsible for 47% of Ireland's final energy demand in 2007 and 36% of Ireland's energy-related CO<sub>2</sub> emissions (SEAI, 2009b). There was an 88% increase in transport sector emissions between 1996 and 2006 (Department of Transport, 2009)<sup>2</sup>.</li> <li>• Ireland imports almost 90% of its energy needs resulting in poor resilience to market fluctuations (Eurostat, 2011)<sup>1,2</sup>.</li> <li>• Greenhouse gas emissions for Ireland were 25% higher in 2007 than the 1990 baseline (Eurostat, 2011)<sup>1,2,3</sup></li> <li>• Delayed implementation of Nitrates Directive means that nitrate levels in groundwater and rivers in certain areas is on the rise, as is the trophic status of some rivers. Urban supply systems are inefficient, with high leakage rate as a result of old pipes. 30% of Irish rivers are classed as polluted<sup>3</sup> (EPA, 2009) and Ireland will</li> </ul>

	<p>municipal waste from 33% in 2004 to 39% in 2009 (EPA, 2009).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)<sup>2</sup> ensures integration of environmental considerations into Plans and Programmes in order to provide for a high level of protection of the environment and to promote sustainable development.</li> <li>• Sustainable Energy Ireland Schemes including Warmer Homes Scheme<sup>1</sup>, which improves energy efficiency in low-income homes</li> </ul>	<p>not reach full compliance with the EU Urban Waste Water Directive until 2011, 6 years behind schedule (OECD, 2009).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ireland has failed to decouple waste generation from economic growth<sup>3</sup>. Waste generation per capita is amongst the highest in OECD countries. Despite progress with waste recovery, Ireland is still dependent on landfill and has a long way to go before achieving the 2013 target of diverting 50% household waste from landfill (OECD, 2009).</li> <li>• Targets to halt biodiversity decline by 2010 were not met<sup>1,2,5</sup>: 13% native Irish water beetles (Foster <i>et al.</i>, 2009), 31% non-marine molluscs (Byrne <i>et al.</i>, 2009), 4% mammals (Marnell <i>et al.</i>, 2009), 18% butterflies (Regan <i>et al.</i>, 2010), 40% fish and one of Ireland's three native amphibians (King <i>et al.</i>, 2011) are under threat.</li> <li>• Inadequate designation of special areas of conservation<sup>2</sup>: Many proposed natural heritage areas and marine SACs await designation and Ireland has the lowest percentage of land area given to protected habitats in the EU<sup>5</sup>.</li> <li>• Rapid economic growth led to swift expansion in suburban and urban commuter areas are main towns and cities leading to dispersed land use and greater dependence on cars<sup>1</sup>.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Local</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• South Dublin County Council Climate Change Strategy<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Waterford City Council Environmental Awareness Officer and Sustainable Neighbourhood Unit Development Officers<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Waterford County Council Climate Change Strategy 2008-2012<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Waterford County Council Economic Plan 2010-2014<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Successful collaboration between local authorities, Iarnród Éireann and Logistics companies to transfer bulk freight traffic to rail. An initiative introduced in 2005 has resulted in an annual carbon saving of €2m on journeys between Mayo, the Ports of Dublin and Waterford<sup>1</sup>.</li> </ul>	

## 3. Green Economy

### 3.1. What contributions can the current focus on green economy make to advancing sustainable development?

Against a backdrop of financial crisis, the current focus on the green economy may be an important tool in reaching economic stability and has the potential to significantly enhance sustainable development ambitions. Key drivers for the green economy include rising fossil fuel prices, pressure to hit targets for renewable energy and GHG emissions, green public procurement (GPP) and changing consumer preferences (High-Level Group on Green Enterprise, 2009). The Irish economy has, thus far, relied on the availability of cheap fossil fuels and the abundance of natural resources<sup>1</sup>. Despite the recession of 2008, gas prices almost doubled between 2005 and 2010 and Ireland's dependence on fuel imports have left the country exposed to market price fluctuations<sup>4</sup>. Finances are no longer available to continue importing increasingly expensive fuel<sup>1</sup> and energy price increases could lead to inflation, reduced competitiveness and increased unemployment<sup>4</sup>. Ireland's transition to a green economy requires that harmful concessions on coal, oil and gas be phased out<sup>2,4</sup> and greater investment be made into energy efficiency, renewable energy and transport technologies in order to improve energy security.

Ireland is under pressure to ensure that 16% of all energy comes from renewable sources by 2020 under Directive (2009/28/EC) (SEAI, 2010) and to reduce emissions by 20% of 1990 levels by 2020 (DECLG, 2007). Ireland is well placed to exploit wind and wave energy and a strong enterprise and research base is emerging which could help Ireland meet renewable energy targets (High-Level Group on Green Enterprise, 2009). However, several hurdles have delayed the propagation of renewable energy in Ireland, including delays in planning and licensing approvals, delays in connecting to the grid and in 2010/2011 support was removed for Bioenergy in buildings<sup>1</sup>. Development of the green economy in Ireland must involve overcoming these hurdles and seizing the opportunity to take a lead in production and export of renewable energy<sup>1</sup>. By reducing dependence on carbon producing energy sources, Ireland will be in a better position to hit emissions targets.

Ireland has recognised its commitment to GPP and a National Action Plan on Green Public Procurement is currently in preparation<sup>2</sup>. GPP involves the inclusion of environmental, economic and social criteria in the public procurement process. This could promote sustainable development by encouraging public authorities to meet their needs for goods, services, works and utilities by seeking and choosing outcomes and solutions that have less environmental impact. GPP policy recognises that it is necessary to decouple economic growth from negative environmental impacts and takes account of the wealth of EU environmental policy and legislation put in place to protect biodiversity and ecosystem services (DECLG, 2011). Therefore, GPP has the potential to play an important role in driving the green economy forward<sup>2</sup>.

In recent years there has been a growing understanding of the value of the ecosystem services that nature provides (DECLG, 2008). This may explain increasing consumer demand for environmentally responsible goods and services (High-Level Group on Green Enterprise, 2009). The focus on the green economy has the potential to significantly enhance sustainable development ambitions in the areas of clean technology, resource efficiency, eco-design, secondary resource standards and innovation. Clean technology seeks to use environmentally friendly raw materials and processes for production of goods. Resource efficiency promotes



efficient use of key raw materials, reduction, prevention and reuse of waste in manufacturing processes and service provision. Eco-design aims to make products and services more eco-friendly at the design stage by reducing or eliminating the use of dangerous chemicals, improving energy efficiency, increasing durability or re-use potential. Secondary resource standards would promote the safe use of secondary waste resources, thereby contributing to the conservation of primary resources. Innovation, both private and public is essential to drive the green economy forward<sup>2</sup>. However, there is still a long way to go in breaking the consumption cycle<sup>1</sup>. A coordinated, integrated effort to change consumers' expectations regarding products would give manufacturers the opportunity to make products and provide services that are more sustainable<sup>2</sup>.

The green economy alone does not guarantee sustainable development<sup>1,2,3</sup> and it is important that the focus on green economy does not detract attention from the broader concept of sustainable development<sup>3</sup>. A green economy is one which is low carbon, resource efficient and socially inclusive<sup>2</sup>, criteria not currently supported by our current economic model<sup>1,2,3</sup>. We need an economy that can secure growth and development while improving human well-being, providing jobs, tackling poverty and inequality and preserving the natural capital<sup>1,3,4</sup>. Respecting environmental boundaries is not enough to achieve sustainable development. A commitment must also be made to promote social justice, support inclusion and participation in decision making processes and developing a clear set of principles and mechanisms for accountability<sup>1,2,3,4</sup>. A green economy must also address key social protection systems such as income security, health security, child benefits, unemployment benefits, nutrition, education and housing, in order to reduce social vulnerability and improve resilience<sup>4</sup>.

### **3.2. Can the green economy contribute towards Irish aid efforts in developing countries?**

Ireland has a good track record in championing the eradication of poverty and hunger<sup>3</sup> and has committed to raising development aid to 0.7% of GDP by 2015<sup>3,5</sup>. The core issues affecting developing countries are food security<sup>2</sup>, climate change<sup>4</sup>, access to quality resources and insufficient knowledge on how to manage them sustainably<sup>3</sup>. As a priority action area for Irish Aid, discussions on the green economy must deal with the issue of agriculture and food security<sup>3</sup>. In this regard, Rio +20 must include steps which will prioritise the situation of small-holder farmers and the agroecological approaches they use which, with the right support, can ensure more sustainable farming, rural development and greater national food security<sup>3</sup>. The majority of people living in absolute poverty live on small farms. These small holder farmers are responsible for growing the majority of the world's food. Women play a critical role in food production and efforts to ensure sustainable development should take this into account. Emphasis should be placed on producing the right kind of food sustainably<sup>3</sup>.

The Irish Aid programme also focuses on climate change and the role of the agricultural sector in adaptation and mitigation<sup>3</sup>. The impacts of climate change will be felt disproportionately by developing countries, despite the fact that these countries contribute least to causing it<sup>5</sup>. The negative impacts of climate change have already been felt, reflected in decreasing agricultural production and lower crop yields, contributing to hunger in Africa and Southern Asia<sup>3</sup>. Ireland has a responsibility as a wealthy country to take a leading role in developing a genuinely green economy in order to set an example as a successful, low-carbon, developed country and to minimise Ireland's contribution to climate change<sup>2</sup>.

The green economy promotes reduction of consumption and waste production which may help reduce “ecological debt”. This is the process whereby developed nations consume and produce more waste than our environment can replace and absorb, often leaving developing nations with the repercussions<sup>2</sup>. Developing countries suffer from a lack of quality resources and insufficient knowledge on how to manage them sustainably<sup>3</sup>. Access to energy has been identified as a poverty issue<sup>1</sup>, yet around 1.4bn people globally have no access to electricity<sup>3</sup>. Economic development in many countries is hindered by unreliable power and fuel supplies, despite the fact that these same countries have an abundance of renewable energy and huge potential for improving energy efficiency<sup>3</sup>. Ireland should continue to ensure the dissemination of new technologies<sup>3</sup>, allowing developing countries to “leapfrog” to a low carbon economy<sup>2</sup> and to benefit from Ireland’s experience with renewable energy<sup>1,3</sup>.

## 4. Comments on Existing Proposals/Strategies

### 4.1. Green Economy Roadmap

The European Commission has proposed a Green Economy Roadmap as a framework of action guaranteeing commitment to sustainable development goals beyond Rio +20. The Roadmap will provide a range of specific international, regional and national actions, a timeframe for implementation, a set of indicators and targets. It will also provide mechanisms to monitor progress (EU Commission, 2011). The Green Economy Roadmap highlights Europe's commitment to a green economy and sustainable development and any documents outlining best practice would be welcome in informing and shaping national and local policies and responses to global issues<sup>1</sup>.

### 4.2. What impact can the EU 2020 Strategy and particularly the Resource Efficiency Flagship Initiative have on advancing sustainable development in Ireland?

The EU 2020 Strategy aims to see Europe emerge from economic crisis by promoting development of a smart economy with sustainable and inclusive growth<sup>9</sup>. The Strategy has five headline targets:

- 75% of people aged 20-64 should be in employment
- 3% of EU GDP should go towards research and development
- Targets for renewable energy and emissions must be met
- Share of early school leavers should be under 10% and 40% of younger generation should have a tertiary level education
- 20 million less people should be at risk of poverty

In order to achieve these targets, the Commission proposed seven flagship initiatives, one of which is Resource Efficient Europe (European Commission, 2010). The Resource Efficient Europe Flagship Initiative emphasises that our economy and quality of life depend on natural resources. It provides a long-term framework for actions in a range of policy areas and promotes resource efficiency as a guiding principle for EU policies regarding energy, transport, climate change, industry, commodities, agriculture, fisheries, biodiversity and regional development (European Commission, 2010). The initiative is ambitious and Ireland is at a disadvantage at the outset as a result of the current economic climate and slow uptake on renewable energy<sup>1</sup>. However, energy is a key component of any economy and the Irish government should increase efforts to improve efficiency in energy consumption as a priority<sup>2</sup>.

One of the targets of the Resources Efficiency Flagship Initiative is to reduce energy imports from 16% to 5% by 2050. The initiative presents major economic opportunities to improve productivity, reduce costs and increase competitiveness, particularly with regards to renewable energy, and Ireland should benefit from the opportunities that arise<sup>1</sup>. Renewable energy use could increase energy security in Ireland, reduce emissions and associated financial penalties and give the country greater control over commodity prices<sup>1</sup>. The Resource Efficiency Flagship Initiative could advance sustainable development by continuing to drive forward the agenda and outlining targets for all member states<sup>1</sup>.

## 5. Implementation

### 5.1 Views on Implementation and Closing the Implementation Gap

Despite the ambitious vision laid out by Rio 1992, progress in implementation and the institutional framework for implementation have proved disappointing<sup>3</sup>. Delays in implementation have been due to a combination of factors including an ineffective institutional framework<sup>2</sup>, an economic model that does not prioritise sustainability<sup>1,2,3</sup> and a lack of knowledge dissemination<sup>1,2</sup>.

Political will to fulfil commitments has waned since 1992 and the institutional framework for making real progress on sustainable development is inadequate<sup>2</sup>. This has led to unacceptable delays in transposing EU environmental directives into Irish law<sup>1</sup> and compliance and enforcement procedures are not sufficient<sup>2</sup>. Sustainable development encompasses a broad range of sectors, which leads to challenges with coordination, implementation and assigning responsibility. A reform of the institutional framework for sustainable development is required to close the implementation gap<sup>1</sup>. This framework should have a “bottom up” structure, starting with cooperation between County and City Development Boards and local authorities<sup>1,2,3</sup>. They need to implement action in all areas of sustainable development and fully embrace new initiatives that emerge<sup>1</sup>, coordinating local, national and international decisions<sup>1,2</sup>. At national level, governments must provide direction and resources to ensure that local authorities have the knowledge, ability and funding available to implement sustainable development<sup>1</sup>. Targets agreed at Rio +20 should form the basis of all policy decisions and should be incorporated into all national and regional plans<sup>1</sup>. At a global level, there must be cohesion and cooperation between global initiatives, such as MDGs, Climate Change and Sustainable Development, which often operate in isolation despite sharing common goals<sup>3</sup>. Sustainable development does not always feature strongly in the programmes and work of UN agencies<sup>3</sup>. A UN institution is required that has a powerful, integrated mandate to deal with sustainable development issues<sup>3,4</sup>, which would fall under the *UN Delivering as One* initiative<sup>3</sup>.

Our current economic model is based on the over consumption of finite resources<sup>3</sup>. Steps to change this have often been designed using financial incentives or penalties so the reason behind the changes, decreasing resource depletion, is often lost<sup>1</sup>. It is essential to decouple economic progress from resource exploitation<sup>1,2</sup>. A common misconception is that environmental issues hinder growth<sup>17</sup> and current measures of wellbeing rely on GDP, so social and environmental factors are often overlooked<sup>1,2,3</sup>. The way that we measure growth and success must be reassessed<sup>3</sup> and more must be done to promote awareness of the benefits that a healthy environment contribute towards economic growth<sup>2</sup>. A new economic model should embrace all three pillars of sustainable development<sup>3,4</sup> and progress indicators must be redefined<sup>3</sup>. A possible solution would be the introduction of “satellite” national accounts, which consider factors not measured in the traditional economic model and recognise the value of natural resources<sup>3</sup>.

It is also evident from the current international economic crisis that global financial markets have become increasingly linked by speculative and opportunistic transactions. Speculative transactions account for a high proportion of all financial transactions but they are completely tax free<sup>3</sup>. Financial markets must be regulated to end speculation and taxation reformed to discourage potentially harmful activity in the real economy and financial sector<sup>3,4</sup>. Support is growing for the introduction of a progressive tax targeting those who profit from speculative transactions. The tax

would not only assist monitoring of the financial risks being taken but would also generate revenue which could be used for national and international development. With a potential value of €50-100bn, the annual, global revenue could be enough to eliminate the worst forms of material poverty worldwide. The European Commission has taken the initiative, proposing a Financial Transactions Tax within Europe. This represents an important step towards implementation<sup>3,4</sup>.

There needs to be a stronger commitment to ensuring understanding of sustainability and increased cooperation between communities and local government<sup>1</sup>. The public and the public authorities at all levels still need to be informed and educated about the real issues facing them<sup>2</sup>. Ireland's position as the only EU country yet to ratify the Aarhus Convention represents a significant obstacle to improving public access to information, decision-making and justice regarding the environment in Ireland<sup>2</sup>. Understanding of how sustainable development addresses issues of social justice and the environment empowers people and encourages them to act<sup>1</sup>. Although school programs have improved awareness of sustainability, a gap remains in education provision on environmental sustainability in the wider community<sup>1</sup>. Some local authorities set a positive example by promoting community-based initiatives, such as the All Ireland Pride of Place competition, awareness campaigns and EcoCert, which encourage businesses and citizens to take a more sustainable approach<sup>1</sup>. There are also a number of global movements focused on sustainability. Collaboration between governance and sustainability movements would bring about enormous progress as government directives would be more easily disseminated throughout the community<sup>1</sup>. Greater involvement of non-state actors and marginal groups will also be vital in closing the implementation gap<sup>1,2</sup>.

## 5.2. Mechanisms and Tools for Implementation

- Implementation of sustainable development strategies already in place<sup>1</sup>
- Adoption of policy framework that promotes a low carbon, resource efficient and socially inclusive society<sup>1</sup>
- Appointment of local Sustainability Development Officers with relevant qualifications and experience to educate others on issues related to sustainable development<sup>1</sup>. The role could also include coordination, direction and ensuring adoption of sustainability principles within the community<sup>1</sup>.
- Formation of a national forum involving agencies and bodies involved in environmental protection, a high level Environmental Governance Network involving key stakeholders<sup>2</sup>.
- Appointment of Ombudspersons at UN and National level to ensure that sustainable development concerns are considered in all policy decisions<sup>2,4</sup>.
- Workshops on sustainability run by County/City Development Boards providing training for all board partners, particularly those within the public sector<sup>1</sup>.
- New set of indicators for well being<sup>2,3</sup>
- Resources allocated specifically towards promoting sustainability at local authority level<sup>1</sup>
- More support for non governmental organisations which promote sustainability awareness and understanding amongst their peers<sup>1</sup>.
- Use of incentives to promote action. Presenting the potential economic gains associated with green economy will promote buy in from businesses<sup>1</sup>.
- Legally binding rules prioritising the goals and targets of Rio +20 and ensuring compliance<sup>1,2,3</sup>, accompanied by penalties for failure to comply which are enforceable and respected<sup>1</sup>

## 6. Expectations for Rio +20

### 6.1. Expected outcomes

Rio +20 provides an opportunity to renew focus on sustainable development. Civil Society in Ireland would like to see:

- A reiteration of commitment to the principles of sustainable development contained in the Rio Declaration, 1992<sup>1,2,3</sup>, particularly:
  - A commitment to provide knowledge and support for implementation of Local Agenda 21<sup>1</sup>
  - Reiteration of the importance of poverty eradication in achieving a sustainable society<sup>2,3</sup> and reaffirmation from all states that they will honour pledges to provide 0.7% GDP in Official Development Aid by 2015<sup>2</sup>
  - Renewed commitment to the 'polluter pays' principle<sup>2,3</sup>
  - Reemphasis of the importance of employing the precautionary principle<sup>1,2,3</sup>
- A stronger commitment from all nations to ensure greater understanding of sustainability across all sectors of society, promoting communication and cooperation between communities and the government<sup>1,2,5</sup>
- A shift in focus from the current economic model to one which combines economic, social and environmental criteria as measures of growth and success<sup>1,2,3,4</sup>
- Establishment of institutional structures to facilitate this<sup>2</sup>
- A international commitment on action to halt climate change and mitigate against it's adverse effects<sup>1,3</sup>
- Recognition in UN Law of biodiversity loss as an environmental and financial crisis on par with climate change<sup>2</sup>
- Targets set based on what needs to be achieved<sup>1</sup>
- A commitment from all nations to the implementation of actions rather than just agreement to goals<sup>1</sup>
- An enhanced governance framework to promote and monitor progress<sup>3,4</sup>

### 6.2. Outcome Document

The outcome document should deliver:

- A set of specific goals<sup>1,3,4</sup>
- A clear pathway of implementation<sup>1,4</sup>
- An agreed timeline for achieving targets<sup>1,3</sup>

Rio +20 presents an opportunity to revisit agreements and commitments made in 1992 and to consider how we will deliver on these, both collectively and individually. Governments need to make firm commitments on how to tackle emerging issues, promoting compliance and enforcement procedures. All nations must show the political will to fulfill the commitments made in 1992 in order to achieve sustainable development.

## 7. Stakeholder Seminar

The Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government held a seminar on the 25<sup>th</sup> October 2011 as part of a wider consultation process. The seminar was open to the public and speakers represented environmental, social and local authority interests, from an EU and Irish perspective. The outcome from the stakeholder consultation to date was presented at the seminar and stakeholders were given a further opportunity to respond. Points rose from the following sectors:

### Local Authority

- Attention was drawn to the success of Local Agenda 21 in a number of counties in Ireland. However, a speaker from the environmental sector noted that many County and City Development Boards were not given sufficient terms of reference for implementing Local Agenda 21 and that Government support for inclusion of sustainability into their Terms of Reference is limited.
- The role of local authorities as key players in environmental and pollution control was emphasised.

### Environmental Sector

- Concern was raised over the lack of compliance with environmental law. It was suggested that a combination of low political will, low compliance and lack of enforcement could continue to hinder implementation. It was proposed that civil society be given more power to push compliance at a local level.
- It was suggested that Ireland could learn from other countries that have successfully introduced green public procurement.
- Another suggestion was that social media such as Twitter be used to keep people informed of events and programmes taking place at a local level.

### Social/Development Sector

- Emphasis was placed on the limitations of current economic models and their failure to meet the needs of society. There was a reiteration of the need for growth and success to be measured in terms of social, environmental and economic variables, rather than depending on GDP. A suggested solution was the development of “satellite” accounts, which consider items not traditionally measured and recognise the value of natural resources.
- The importance of the role of women in food production in developing countries was highlighted. The point was raised that women are responsible for 60-80% of food production in developing countries, yet suffer huge inequalities in pay and access to primary and secondary education.

There was also general consensus that a key factor in progressing sustainable development would be the production of a new set of indicators for social well-being.



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# Appendix 1

## Questions posed in consultation document

1. What have been the main successes/failures in progressing sustainable development since the Earth Summit in 1992?
2. What contributions can the current focus on the green economy contribute to advancing sustainable development, particularly from an Irish perspective?
3. Can the green economy contribute towards Ireland's efforts in assisting developing countries and what priorities should we be addressing in this regard?
4. What impact can the EU 2020 strategy and, in particular, the Resource Efficiency Flagship Initiative have on advancing sustainable development in Ireland and what priorities should Ireland establish in implementing the initiative?
5. What are the comments, if any on existing proposals: e.g. a green economy roadmap, framework for action, sustainable development goals, a revitalized global partnership or others?
6. What are the views on implementation and how to close the implementation gap, which relevant actors are envisaged as being involved (Government, specific Major Groups, UN system, IFIs, etc.)
7. What specific cooperation mechanisms, partnership arrangements or other implementation tools are envisaged and what is the relevant time frame for the proposed decisions to be reached and actions to be implemented?
8. What are the expectations for the outcome of Rio +20, and what are the concrete proposals in the regard, including views on a possible structure of the Outcome document?

## Appendix 2

### Stakeholder responses

Table 2: Submissions received in response to circulation of the public consultation document

Sector	Submitted by
County and City Development Boards	Donegal
	Fingal
	Kerry
	Laois
	North Tipperary
	South Dublin
	South Tipperary
	Waterford County
	Waterford City
Environmental	An Taisce
	Environmental Protection Agency
	Environmental Pillar of Social Partnership
	Friends of the Irish Environment
	VOICE
Social/Development	Dóchas
	Goal
	Irish Aid
	Irish Presentation Justice Network
	Social Justice Ireland
	Trócaire
Business	Bord Gáis Éireann
	International Congress of Trade Unions
Independent	Elizabeth Cullen

Table 3: Reference codes for sectoral responses

Sector	Submission Code
County and City Development Boards	1
Environmental	2
Social/Development	3
Business	4
Independent	5