



2nd European Resources Forum, Berlin

Minutes from the European Resources Forum 2014

Minutes by:

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Plenary session: Natural resources – to whom do they belong?

- Shaoyi Li; Head, Integrated Resource Management Unit, United Nations Environment Programme, France
- Silke Helfrich; Author and Expert on the Commons, Co-founder of Commons Strategies Group, Germany
- Dr. Detlef Schreiber; Head, Competence Center Environment, Resource Efficiency, Waste, GIZ – Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit, Germany
- Moderator: Dr. Inge Paulini; Secretary-General, German Advisory Council on Global Change, Germany

Shaoyi Li argued that the question whether we need new forms of cooperative solutions for stewardships of natural resources is a very sensitive question, has been so in the past and will remain so for the future, because on the one hand natural resources are essential to human society and its well-being, but on the other hand the ecosystems we live in are becoming degraded and the goods and services they provide endangered. For instance, Shaoyi Li reported that in China there is no single river that is not polluted at present. In his view, poor people have the unquestionable right to catch up in terms of economic well-being, but what does this mean for global resource use in terms of responsibilities? While hundreds of millions of people are starving, globally 30% of food is wasted, showing a dramatic mismatch between responsibilities. Furthermore, issues of equity and social justice are aggravating – developing countries may have only 1-2 tonnes per capita resource consumption, while in industrialised countries this is as high as 40 tonnes; the top 20% of population own 85% of all income, whereas 40% of the global population have to live on 2 US-\$ a day.

Hence, Shaoyi Li highlighted that natural resources cannot belong to the rich, the powerful, but that there have to be certain factors for fair sharing and access. Security of access to resources is a real concern: increases in population and income will lead to an attempt to triple global resource consumption from today's level; the ecological carrying capacity is already today far exceeded, so how to accommodate this increase? Resource prices are volatile and unpredictable, leading to economic and social concerns and

conflicts – for instance, the Arab spring was found to be also fuelled by resource price increases. Resource governance is weak at local, regional and national level in many countries. Also on the international level, preservation of common resources, such as biodiversity or the oceans is little coordinated and a set of multiple institutions involved frequently is not communicating with each other. What is needed, hence, is sound governance, jointly and in continuous communication addressing the issues of security, equity, sustainability. The International Resource Panel has set the resource nexus, governance of resources and poverty eradication and marine resources as part of the priority areas for 2015-2017.

Dr. Detlev Schreiber presented some of GIZ' experience from international cooperation with a focus on Raw Materials & Extractive Industries. In order for nations and its citizens to have permanent sovereignty over their resources we need supranational coordination. Such international exchange on responsibility is also instrumental to clarify to whom not only the assets and benefits, but also negative externalities and environmental impacts belong. Rising raw material prices in the last few years triggered high growth of extractive industries around the world and many developing countries have several extractive industries on their territories, depending on them for a large share of state income with all problems of resource curse and the Dutch Disease associated. Against this background, GIZ engages in working on good governance in the extractive sector, such as supporting the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative EITI processes, reforms in fiscal administration and public private dialogues.

Based on examples of past projects, Dr. Schreiber outlined the range of challenges met and solutions trialed. For instance, the Yasuni Biosphere Reserve in Ecuador became a renowned international test case to stop oil drilling by raising donor money equaling the foregone oil revenues in order to leave the oil in the ground. Unfortunately, it failed because the Ecuadorian government had neither collected nor itself provided enough money and in late 2013 gave concessions to oil drilling. Among other national governments, the German government did not support this project financially, but offered support through a bilateral program for institutional development and the protection of natural resources. The case of gold mining in the Peruvian Madre de Dios mine shows that also small-scale, artisanal gold mining can have huge social and environmental impacts because tens of thousands people involved in mainly small-scale, often illegal gold extraction use heavy machinery degrading big areas of rain forest with manifold ecologic and social problems, such as corruption and violence. This shows that resource-rich developing countries are facing big risks, but also big opportunities – developing countries need to be accompanied in achieving a socially balanced and environmentally friendly development of their extractive industries, need clear regulations as well as social and environmental standards. Income generation and distribution need to be addressed and externalities need to be internalized – markets should be prepared to pay higher prices.

Silke Helfrich provided a holistic and ethical perspective on the use of the commons. In her view, we need to be challenging ourselves by asking collectively what are the roots of the environmental challenges and phenomena and how could we jointly build a system, a society and an economy where freedom, fairness and sustainability match? She argued that capitalism, whether including regulation or not, fails to deliver on freedom, fairness and sustainability. However, even during disruptive, potential moments of change, such as the fall of the Berlin wall or the 2007/2008 financial crises, the question how to build an alternative system was not addressed and globally we all seem to stay in the same paradigm. But we need a paradigm shift and we need to revise our ways of thinking, our culture and our economies. The movement of Commoners, of which Ms Helfrich is part, senses that this paradigm shift is right underneath the surface and the Commoners work towards supporting such a shift.

Silke Helfrich stressed that common goods, such as water or the atmosphere should not belong to only one person, nor to only one entity and hence should not be traded as a commodity. Creating truly common goods needs (1) a deliberate will to do so, (2) a social process (called “communing”), and (3) bottom-up institutions building up that keep the common goods and the commons. Speaking about commons means to speak about all these things together; the commons aren’t goods, they cannot be objectified – it is a world view and a social process. As regards governance, there is no panacea, no one fits all solution – there have to be different approaches to different resources. If we understand commons as a social process and not as a resource, we can stop reducing complexity and instigate social organization at appropriate scale. The commons are a foundational layer for new forms of governance, they also respond to the limits of top-down hierarchical management of natural resources: Giving the whole responsibility to the state and insisting that the state has the sole sovereignty over the resources is not in line with the Commons as their focus is on extraction, on business – but not on us, on people and on how this should help us humans. We cannot build new governance on old modes of thinking (building on A. Einstein) – the way we deal with each other as human beings will be highly influential on how we address these issues, e.g. addressing climate change will require a cultural change.

In the **plenary discussion**, the issue of how to promote international cooperation was debated. As regards the problem of marine litter, the UN environmental assembly adopted a resolution on marine litter issues, showing high political awareness of the problem on the international level and political will to act. However, as marine litter originates from on-shore, this needs to address land-based activities as to the root causes and to involve those actors. Cooperation on resource use on a finite planet cannot be a zero sum game – the rich might have to lose to benefit the poor countries, but there will also be substantial co-benefits, so countries should work together to avoid crisis and exploit opportunities. The prevailing competition meme means that “I will gain and you will lose”, hence EU’s increased competitiveness will dampen other regions’ and hence impair the fair access to resources. This highlights one of the key challenges of sustainable resource use – while it is relatively easy to know what one is up against, it is complicated to define what other world/paradigm we want to live on. As regards the control of the resources and who takes the decisions on those principles of equity, security, we need to increase shared knowledge and open access to information code and knowledge – however, this will be a threat to top-down production models based on intellectual property rights. So far there is no coherent alternative economic and governance model – this is because most institutions are so involved in defending the existing paradigms. We are the precariat of imagination – it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism.

Furthermore, it was discussed that decisions about access to resources and property ownership should include the youth much more so as to challenge prevailing mental models rooted in traditional paradigms. As the stewards of the future, younger people could help changing the criteria classifying countries as successful away from only economic ones to include or focus on natural capital, quality of air – then smaller countries could look much better on value of their countries. In order to better empower the youth and civil society, we should establish an international multi-NGO funding mechanism for civil society to widen and foster dialogues.
