

Sustainable Development in Brazil Agenda 21

Marina Silva

Environment Minister
Brazil

The concept of sustainable development, disseminated through the report Our Common Future, implies that it is possible to achieve development without destroying the environment. Based on this concept, the document proposes the union of all countries to overcome the increasing degradation of the global environment in its atmosphere, forests, rivers and oceans.

The notion of the need for a common and global effort to correct the path of the economic and social development model is established in the political scenario. However, one cannot say that the current development in the globalized world is sustainable in view of the concentration of economic power and income, financial speculation, increased extraction of natural resources, pollution and environmental impacts on a global scale, which can even cause devastating climatic phenomena. However, just the fact that we are witnessing increasing concern over environmental problems and the need to reach a level of healthy development is an encouraging sign that these issues are gradually permeating the social fabric on a global level and raising the awareness of the population. And that is not all: in the last 10 years there has been huge progress towards generating scientific knowledge related to these issues, which is even causing a revolution in the established paradigms. It seems that we are experiencing the beginning of a major cycle of a new form of organization of knowledge based on a range of interconnected disciplines.

The United Nations Conference on the Environment and Development - Rio 92, adopted the concept of sustainable development and innovated, proposing the Agenda 21, which was signed by 179 countries that attended the event. This document, which was the key outcome of the event, contains the widest range of assumptions and recommendations on how nations should work to change their development vectors into sustainable models and begin their sustainability programs. It is a volume with 40 chapters and 800 pages, describing the action program for introducing the environment into the development framework. It contains treaties on areas that affect the link between the environment and the economy, including the atmosphere, energy, deserts, oceans, fresh water, technology, international trade, poverty and population. The document is divided into four sections: social and economic dimensions related to international policies that can help consolidate sustainable development, the strategies to fight poverty and privation and the introduction of changes in the production and consumption patterns; conservation and management of resources for development, related to the management of natural resources, waste and toxic substances; strengthening of the role of the main social groups, which suggests the necessary actions to promote the participation of civil society; and means of implementation, addressing the financial mechanisms and legal instruments for implementation of projects and programs focusing on sustainable development.

With this context, we can say that Agenda 21 has entered the lives in our society as an organizing factor of the priorities in various places and established the mechanisms to improve the quality of life of the whole population. With the process of implementation of Agenda 21, a great number of new actors and social groups were formed and consolidated, making society co-responsible for the project of sustainable development of its community, its city and even its country. And it is important to highlight that it is not an environmental agenda, but rather an agenda for sustainable development.

In Brazil, the process of construction of the Brazilian Agenda 21 included a broad diagnosis that mobilized all the interested segments around public debates in 26 states and discussion and thinking among at least 40 thousand people, representing several government sectors and civil society. All this movement produced the Brazilian Agenda 21, which is organized into six key themes: Sustainable Agriculture, Sustainable Cities, Infrastructure and Regional Integration, Natural Resources Management, Reduction of Social Inequalities and Science and Technology. The outcome of this work is found in the two volumes of the Brazilian Agenda 21: Result of the National Consultation and Priority Actions, launched in 2002, a short time before the World Summit on Sustainable Development, or Rio + 10.

Johannesburg, in turn, meant for Brazil an opportunity to reaffirm the significance of Rio 92 and to renew an international partnership based on common goals, bringing closer together developed and developing countries to promote sustainable development at the global, regional, national and local levels. Furthermore, it promoted great participation of non-government organizations, social movements and business, academic and scientific sectors, recognizing the importance of engaging all the actors in order to reach the sustainable development targets. However, there is a lot of criticism, particularly from organized civil society, that we had little progress up to or during the Summit. But if Brazil manages to carry out the implementation of the commitments approved at the Summit and renews its commitment towards

cooperation, we can contribute a lot to a future in which conservation, sustainable use of natural resources and the establishment of sustainable patterns of consumption and production will become a reality.

Now is the time to direct the debate towards rendering the actions, commitments and goals agreed in the Johannesburg Implementation Plan feasible, as well as those in the Agenda 21. This requires working and thinking of creative solutions that can lead to concrete outcomes in the path towards sustainability, with very clear implementation goals, taking into account our needs in terms of renewable energy, drinking water supply, access to biodiversity resources, processing of agricultural and agriforestry products, among others. This responsibility is shared among government leaders, NGOs and social movements and the business sector, which, in turn, has shown willingness to think in the long term, with a view to the preservation of natural and human resources.

In fact, Sustainable Development and Agenda 21 are today two concepts that have been in our vocabulary since the last decade, but what are the guiding principles of the actions that lead us to believe that we can implement them? In the first place, the key assumption is defense of life through constant search of quality and balance in the relationships between people and between them and all living forms and manifestations in nature. Based on this principle, we can seek development focusing on social justice and, integrating the right to a healthy environment for all, on environmental justice that, for our government, means that most of the population is not exposed to the negative environmental effects of political and economic actions, and has equitable access to natural resources and to information pertaining to such resources, to information on environmental risks and to democratic decision-making on local policies and programs.

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It is a huge challenge, because although there is clear consensus that it is impossible to achieve environmental solutions dissociated from social, economic, cultural and ethical solutions, the discourse is still fragmented and hard to assimilate. In this sense, it is necessary to join efforts to translate sustainability at the various levels that condition it, without losing its unity. Sustainability is in itself strategic and integrated, and its cross-cutting nature makes it a great tool for the political exercise of Brazilian leaders, since it has a strong foundation in the mature relationships among the different groups and sectors in the sustainability field and there is a huge amount of quality information on the theme, with a focus on government action.

We have no doubt that Agenda 21 meets the complex requirements for putting the engine of sustainability in place and keep it working. According to the principles established by the government of Luis Inácio Lula da Silva, for an environmental policy that is integrated and linked to development, Agenda 21 is one of the main instruments for introducing cross-cutting environmental management into government policies, since its methodology enables social inclusion together with development in its widest sense, income generation and preservation of the environment. But how can this be achieved? History shows that only through debate among all sectors of society is it possible to build a political force that is the voice of the demands of citizens, who experience the social and environmental problems locally. Therefore, Agenda 21 – which has proved to be an efficient guide for processes that unify society, promoting understanding of citizenship concepts and their application, influencing the design of public policies – is one of the key instruments for building participatory democracy and active citizenship in Brazil. It is time to promote its full implementation and dissemination.

In 2003, the strategic importance that Agenda 21 achieved lead the government to consider it a Program in the Multi-Annual Plan- 2004-2007 PPA. The Program Agenda 21 is made up of three essential actions: promote internalization of the principles and strategies of the Brazilian Agenda 21 in the design and implementation of national and local public policies, through strategic, decentralized and participatory planning, in order to establish the priorities to be defined and executed in partnership between government and society, in the context of sustainable development; promote the design and implementation of Local Agendas 21 based on the principles and strategies of the Brazilian Agenda 21 which, in line with the global Agenda, recognizes the importance of the local level in the achievement of sustainable public policies; and articulate a national strategy for continued qualification of regional agents that promote sustainable local development, through dissemination of the principles and strategies of the Brazilian Agenda 21 and induce the processes of design and implementation of the Local Agendas 21.

Regarding the Local Agenda 21, we have today 400 processes in course – almost double the number recorded up to 2002 – and our target is to reach, by the end of the government, 1.500 experiences throughout the Country. In order to implement this process, incentives are provided to the various actors of society to implement them in their localities, and the Program's team and the Ministry of the Environment as a whole have been working to qualify and monitor processes in communities and follow up on the implementation of the Forums of the Local Agenda 21. In 2003, through institutional partnerships and through the National Fund for the Environment, an invitation to bid was published for the construction of 64 new local Agendas 21, the biggest induced demand in the history of the Fund. Other financing institutions, such as the Banco do Nordeste and the Caixa Econômica Federal are also engaged in the promotion of the Local Agendas 21.



Incorporated into the activities as disseminating and educative elements, the National Meeting of Local Agendas 21 and the National Conference on the Environment were also part of the activities of the Agenda 21 this year. The first National Meeting of Local Agendas 21, held in November in Belo Horizonte, was attended by approximately 2.000 people from all regions of Brazil, which confirms the great interest of society for the themes of Agenda 21 and, above all, marked this as a wide and effective process that involves and stimulates participation. Regarding information and education, and in partnership with the Ministry of Education, the Training Program on Agenda 21 was developed and executed, with a focus on training about 10,000 teachers in public schools in the Country, who, through the TV program Leap into the Future, produced by TVE, discussed the importance of implementing Agenda 21 in the communities and schools. In line with the Strategic Planning of the Agenda 21 program, this training program will have continuity and will involve not only teachers, but also the participants of the Local Forums of Agenda 21, representing both civil society and the local governments.

Another action, the internalization of the Brazilian Agenda 21 in the construction of public policies at the different levels of government, is considered vital to improve quality and move forward in the construction of a Sustainable Brazil. Thus, on the 28th of November, president Luis Inácio Lula da Silva signed a decree increasing from 10 to 34 the number of members of the CPDS – Policy Commission for Sustainable Development and National Agenda 21, making it more representative and increasing its capacity to coordinate the process of Agenda 21, and attempting to engage the whole federal government in this process. The institutions that make up this new broadened CPDS are: Ministry of the Environment, which chairs the Commission, Ministry of Planning, Budget and Management, the vice-chair, Civil office of the Presidency, Ministry of Science and Technology, Ministry of Foreign Relations, Ministry of Cities, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Labor and Employment, Ministry of Agrarian Reform, Ministry of Agriculture, Stock Raising and Supply, Ministry of National Integration, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Development, Industry and Foreign Trade, National Association of Municipalities and Environment – ANAMMA, Brazilian Association of Environment Organizations – ABEMA, Brazilian Business Council for Sustainable Development – CEBDS, Forum of Urban Reform; organizations representing youths, human rights, Indian communities, traditional communities, consumer rights, business organizations, scientific community organizations, the Brazilian Forum of NGOs and Social Movements for the Environment and Development - FBOMS and trade union federations. The CPDS works within the Chamber of Natural Resources Policies of the Government Council, and among other competences, it coordinates the implementation of the Brazilian Agenda 21, supports the processes of Local Agendas 21, including proposals for funding mechanisms, and supervises the design and evaluation of the implementation of the PPA.

Finally, in order to add to our list of partners, we have increased dialogue with municipal and state governments and with the parliament, through the mixed Parliamentary Front of Agenda 21. One of the main goals of this front, composed of 107 Federal Representatives and 26 Senators, is to articulate the Brazilian Legislative Branch, at the federal, state and municipal levels, to allow greater fluency in the discussion of environmental themes, dissemination of information related to them and mechanisms for communication with civil society.

Incorporating the principles of sustainability in the national public policies, as well as in the actions with the different social segments, is a process that requires cultural changes and changes of patterns and habits long rooted in our society. The aim is for the government as a whole and the various segments of society to understand that development can be a great opportunity for collective construction of sustainability in the Country. We are all responsible for collaborating in the achievement of a change of paths and attitudes, which implies in developing capacity for mobilization and achievement, in order to turn conflicts into cooperation and establish consensus based on the ethics that emerge from the relationships between men, women and nature, thus generating the preservation and the quality of life that we deserve. ■

