

Green Economy or Green Society?

Contestation and Policies for a Fair Transition

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Acronyms

CDM	Clean Development Mechanism
CJM	Climate Justice Movement
COP 15	Copenhagen Climate Conference
CSO	Civil society organization
CSR	Corporate social responsibility
DDS	Deccan Development Society
GDP	Gross domestic product
GMO	Genetically modified organism
IMF	International Monetary Fund
ISSC	International Social Science Council
MST	Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (Landless Workers Movement)
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NREGA	National Rural Employment Guarantee Act
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PES	Payment for Ecosystem Services
REDD	Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation
Rio+20	United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UN	United Nations
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNRISD	United Nations Research Institute for Social Development
US	United States
WBCSD	World Business Council for Sustainable Development
WTO	World Trade Organization

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Summary

Drawing insights from an UNRISD inquiry into the social dimensions of green economy, this paper examines key challenges facing policy makers and other actors in making social concerns more central to the green economy debates. While there is widespread agreement that the current global environmental challenge requires a major transformation, widely differing interpretations exist about the nature of this transformation, with competing assumptions about the institutions required and the drivers of change. Often, social issues are seen as residual to economic and environmental concerns, market-based green economy solutions tend to dominate policy and discourse, while redistributive or rights-based alternatives remain on the margins. And while social protection and “win-win” policies are beginning to integrate social concerns into market-based green economy mechanisms, it is also apparent that there is still a need for social, economic and environmental policy to connect in ways that are more integrated, complementary and synergistic. Crafting such an approach depends crucially on addressing the politics of governance itself.

Power relations, governance arrangements and participatory processes are central to how green economy—both conceptually and in policy terms—is envisaged and implemented. For example, there is a danger that the dominant forms of governance for a green economy transition are reproducing a conception of participation limited to stakeholder consultation. Organized efforts, collective action and gaining control over resources and institutions by disadvantaged groups often tend to get sidelined, despite the finding that more collaborative governance can facilitate resource mobilization, the pooling of competencies, and ensuring complementarities and synergies that otherwise would not exist.

The paper argues that any transformation must be both green *and* fair, leading to a green society, not just a green economy. To place “the social” more centrally in green economy and sustainable development debates, critical questions concern how, and at what stage, social dimensions are incorporated into problem definition, analysis and solutions; and whether the goals of equity, poverty reduction and inclusivity are in fact compatible with the policies and transition paths currently being adopted or considered. A necessary starting point is a more comprehensive definition and framework for the analysis of social issues—one in which the domains of society, economy and the environment, as well as political processes that underpin change, are explicitly recognized as closely connected and interdependent.

Towards this goal, the paper first identifies a wide range of social problems and other issues associated with green economy. The analysis also considers the social and developmental implications of different transition pathways, each of which implies different state, market and society relations. The remainder of the paper addresses how governments, civil society and other actors are responding—or might respond—to the challenge of promoting a green and fair economy. Specifically, social and other public policies can play a key role in mitigating unfair consequences, influencing behaviour and transforming patterns of inequality. Finally, the ways different actors—particularly social movements and those most disadvantaged—contest ideas and policies, participate in governance (in project design and implementation, public policy making and civil regulation), and organize and mobilize to resist and influence change, are also crucial social concerns.

The “social lens” developed in part 1 of this paper can be summarized as one that considers:

- **knowledge and values:** analysis of whose knowledge, worldviews and values frame agendas, set the discourse and influence policy; what forms of knowledge are excluded, marginalized or devalued;
- **social structures, institutions and relations:** analysis of how social institutions and relations affect patterns of exclusion or inclusion, underpin inequalities and vulnerability, and shape individual and collective behaviours and responses;

- **social impacts and distributional consequences:** analysis of how policy initiatives and strategies impact different social groups and relationships; how can policies be designed and implemented to avoid negative impacts, or adequate compensation mechanisms put in place;
- **social and public policies:** beyond the protection of those affected and human capital formation, analysis of policies associated with redistribution and social reproduction, and the interaction between economic, social and environmental choices and policies, as well as the complex relationships between these domains at micro and macro levels; and
- **social actors and agency:** analysis of forms of social organization, mobilization and participation at local, national and global levels, recognizing competing interests; actors are viewed not as passive recipients of state policies or victims of processes, but as proactive agents from whom innovative discourses, practices and proposals can emerge to challenge and reorient existing development strategies.

This analysis—drawn from empirical research across numerous country contexts—highlights both the centrality of social issues in green economy debates and some of the major challenges confronting policy makers in crafting transition pathways that are both green and fair. Policy responses, discussed in part 2 of the paper, include: (i) social protection and adaptation mechanisms such as forms of targeted assistance or retraining; (ii) policies or programmes that deliver co-benefits or achieve a win-win scenario, such as green jobs or incentives for green consumption; and (iii) transformative social policy that drives structural change. This third level of policy has the potential to move beyond the current focus on compensating losers or protecting the vulnerable, to tackle structural causes of vulnerability and achieve both green and social goals. To do this effectively, policies should:

- integrate sustainable environmental goals into core social policy objectives;
- incorporate uncertainties and complexities associated with climate change into conventional social policy analysis;
- ensure that economic policies are designed to meet core social and environmental, rather than simply growth, objectives;
- compensate losers and support adaptation through a range of social protection measures;
- create employment and facilitate the uptake of green economy jobs among disadvantaged groups;
- facilitate the participation of women as producers and citizens by alleviating the care burden; and
- minimize inequalities and entrenched disadvantage through redistributive and other social policies.

Crafting transition paths with this kind of policy coherence (that is, where macroeconomic and other pro-growth, pro-“efficiency” policies do not crowd out welfare and sustainability objectives, and where environmental goals are balanced with human welfare considerations) requires governance arrangements that facilitate the collaboration of multiple actors (state, market, civil society and community) at multiple scales (international, regional, national, subnational and local), and that address inequalities and power imbalances associated with the market economy. This requires attention to meaningful participation—in particular, the organized efforts of disadvantaged groups and civil society actors to influence and control project planning, public policy making and regulatory institutions. Indeed, the joining-up of policy tools with participatory processes and coalitions of multiple actors often emerges as a determinant of green society initiatives.

As discussed in part 3, unpacking and reconfiguring power relations in decision-making processes, and opening up spaces for contestation and negotiation in the design and implementation of projects and policies, are central to achieving a fair and sustainable transition path. Key issues linking participation to policy making are (i) resource mobilization at the local

or community level; (ii) access and influence in decision-making processes or governance; and (iii) forms of resistance and advocacy on the part of social movements and civil society networks that aim to (re-)frame public policy and debate regarding priority concerns and development pathways.

Achieving the kinds of eco-social policy described above requires governance forms that:

- valorize the knowledge and practices of local communities, by providing proactive state support for traditional livelihood practices that also achieve environmental and social justice;
- actively engage local resource users or intended beneficiaries in project design and implementation to avoid the pitfalls of top-down external interventions;
- strengthen broad-based participation and local ownership over public policy making and civil regulation;
- ensure an enabling financial, legal and market environment in which relationships between state, private and community actors are constantly interrogated to ensure a fairer balance of power;
- address injustices associated with land rights and gender equality, and promote cooperative/collective organization and autonomous development; and
- support local, national and global activism associated with social movements and networks of civil society organizations.

These aspects connect the spheres of policy and action, and are crucial both from the perspective of distributional and procedural justice, and for driving deeper structural transformations that a fairer, greener economy will require. The paper concludes with a call for “joined-up analysis, policy and action” in order to address problems of fragmentation and bias that can result in forms of green economy which contradict the principles and objectives of sustainable development.

This necessitates a broader definition of the social—one that expands the sphere of analysis from social groups, (women, indigenous peoples and so on), problems and outcomes, to emphasize social relations, institutions and processes that are central to efforts to achieve sustainable and equitable improvements in human well-being, at both individual and collective levels. It rejects the widely accepted dualism of the economic and social and reorients the focus from economic indicators and growth to a broader and multidimensional view of well-being. Furthermore, it recognizes that the achievement of development is fundamentally a political process, involving contestation, collective organization, and struggles for the representation and recognition of different groups with competing knowledge and interests.

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Introduction

Twenty years after the concept of sustainable development – with its triple emphasis on social, economic and environmental dimensions of development – was popularized at the first UN Earth Summit in 1992, the world faces major challenges across all these domains. Climate change has radically shifted the focus of environmental concerns, while global financial meltdown and related crises of food and energy have extracted heavy social costs from those least able to bear them (Utting et al. 2012b). The limits and contradictions of current development models have thus been sharply exposed.

In this context, green economy has emerged as a prominent approach to addressing the human causes of global environmental and climate change through the transformation of the economy towards cleaner production and consumption processes. Widely defined as an approach “that results in improved human well-being and social equity, while significantly reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities” (UNEP 2011:2), the vision combines low carbon growth, resource efficiency, conservation, social inclusivity and poverty reduction, apparently offering “win-win opportunities to improve the integration of economic development with environmental sustainability” (UNGA 2012:6, article 29).

As a policy goal, green economy was thrust into the global limelight as one of two central items for discussion by world leaders at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) in June 2012. Attempts to create a global consensus, however, ran up against opposition. The process brought to the fore a high level of contestation around the concept itself and dominant approaches to transition. For some developing country governments, green economy carries the baggage of Northern-driven conditionalities or regulations that might constrain growth and reinforce North-South inequalities; while many civil society and social groups are concerned with, among other issues, the scope for “corporate capture” and the contradictory impacts of proposed policies for livelihoods, natural resource use and management, and the cultural heritage of communities around the world. Different disciplines and academic schools of thought also viewed the potential and limits of green economy in diverse ways.

The common element of many of the major critiques refers ultimately to the general neglect (whether analytically or in policy terms) of the third – social – “pillar” of sustainable development. The economic, technological and institutional changes that underpin green economy strategies often assume that the resulting greener growth will benefit the poor. But less attention has been paid to analysing the unequal or problematic social consequences of these policies, the structural determinants of inequality and unsustainable behaviour, or the social and power relations that shape policies, processes and outcomes. As such, any approach to green economy itself involves a problem definition or framing that is shaped by particular worldviews, knowledge and values – often to the neglect of alternative knowledge and value systems. The views and voices of groups often most directly affected by proposed “solutions” are rarely present or influential in the decision-making processes.

As recognition of the neglect of social issues in green economy debates grew in the build-up to the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) launched a research inquiry into “the social dimensions of green economy and sustainable development”.¹ Drawing to a large extent on papers that formed part of this inquiry,² this paper examines key challenges facing policy makers and other actors in bringing social concerns more centrally into green economy analysis and policy. Part 1 identifies a wide range of social problems and other issues associated with green economy. The analysis also considers the social and developmental implications of different transition pathways, each of which implies different state, market and society

¹ For more information on the UNRISD inquiry see www.unrisd.org/greeneconomy.

² These papers were presented at the UNRISD conference on Green Economy and Sustainable Development: Bringing Back the Social Dimension, held 10-11 October 2011 at the United Nations in Geneva.

relations. The remainder of the paper addresses how governments, civil society and other actors are responding or might respond to the challenge of promoting a green and fair economy. Part 2 highlights the potential role of social and public policies, and part 3 focuses on the importance of social agency and issues of participation, collective action and coalition building. Such arenas of policy and action are crucial both from the perspective of distributional and procedural justice, and for driving deeper structural transformations that a fairer, greener economy will require. A concluding section discusses issues of fragmentation associated with knowledge, institutional arrangements and social agency, and suggests the need for “joined-up analysis, policy and action”.

1. Viewing Green Economy through a Social Lens

There is widespread agreement that the current global environmental challenge requires a major transformation. This will involve fundamental changes in structures of production and consumption, in patterns of resource use and investment, in technologies and their use, and in human behaviour and public policies from the local to the global levels. It must be different from earlier structural transformations in which agrarian societies urbanized and industrialized through a carbon-dependent process with heavy environmental costs; and it must be both green *and* fair, leading to a “green society”, not just a green economy. But widely differing interpretations exist about the nature of the transformation that is necessary or possible, with competing assumptions about the institutions required and the drivers of change. These debates raise fundamental questions concerning how different social groups are affected; how (or even whether) countries that have not yet transformed their economies along the high carbon development path can develop along an alternative, sustainable path; and what this means for the livelihoods and welfare of the majority of the world’s poor who live in such societies.

To view green economy through a social lens, we highlight five sets of issues. First, it is important to recognize that different social actors with varying worldviews, knowledge and values view problems and solutions very differently. The capacity of people, individually and collectively, to respond to challenges and policies, like their conventional behaviour in relation to the environment and other human beings, are shaped by social structures, institutions and relations. These include, for example, hierarchies and identities linked to class, gender and ethnicity (Fraser 1999; Harvey 2010; Phillips 1999); social capital and bonds associated with networks, voluntary associations, trust, solidarity and participatory governance (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992; Woolcock and Narayan 2000); and processes of norm diffusion and attitudinal change associated with social learning and community sanctions and monitoring (Jackson 2009; Peters 2010).

A social lens also reveals the distributional consequences of both environmental change and policy responses in terms of the welfare of different social groups, and winners and losers in processes of change. Social and other public policies, discussed in part 2, can play a key role in mitigating unfair consequences, transforming patterns of inequality and influencing people’s behaviour and capacity to respond to risk and opportunity. And, as discussed in part 3, the ways different actors contest ideas and policies, participate in governance, and organize and mobilize to resist and influence change, are also crucial social concerns. The above elements can be summarized as:

- *knowledge and values*: analysis of whose knowledge and values frame agendas, set the discourse and influence policy; what forms of knowledge are excluded, marginalized or devalued;
- *social structures, institutions and relations*: analysis of how social institutions and relations affect patterns of exclusion or inclusion, underpin inequalities and vulnerability, and shape individual and collective behaviours;
- *social impacts and distributional consequences*: analysis of how policy initiatives and strategies impact different social groups and relationships; how policies can be

designed and implemented to avoid negative impacts, or so that adequate compensation mechanisms are put in place;

- *social and public policies*: beyond the protection of those affected and human capital formation, analysis of policies associated with redistribution and social reproduction, and the interaction between economic, social and environmental choices and policies, as well as the complex relationships between these domains at micro and macro levels; and
- *social actors and agency*: analysis of forms of social organization, mobilization and participation at local, national and global levels, recognizing competing interests; actors are viewed not as passive recipients of state policies or victims of processes, but as proactive agents from which innovative discourses, practices and proposals can emerge to challenge and reorient existing development strategies.

Contested pathways

Any definition or transition path to green economy is inevitably highly contested. At an abstract level, the term is a “floating signifier” (Jessop 2012); that is, one amenable to a broad consensus. In practice, however, interpretations as to what green economy actually means and what transition path should be pursued, vary widely. Indeed, there are deep disagreements among groups with different ideologies, agendas or worldviews. This emerged clearly at the Rio+20 summits. Divisions among developed and developing countries at the official summit, and the opposition to green economy at the People’s Summit³ exposed the limitations of the win-win discourse associated with the term when it was popularized by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) some years earlier.

Different interpretations of green economy reflect not only ideological and (geo)political divides; they also arise from different disciplinary perspectives. The world of policy making related to global environmental change tends to favour inputs from natural sciences and economics. As the International Social Science Council (citing Urry 2011) points out: “often this is at the expense of understanding society and the social” (Hackman and St. Claire 2012). Within the social sciences, only the fields of environmental studies, economics and geography engage significantly with climate/environment issues. Political science, sociology, anthropology, psychology and other disciplines lag behind (Hackman and St. Claire 2012:10). Furthermore, within particular disciplines, major variations in approach are often apparent. This is shown clearly by Pascal van Griethuysen (2011) in relation to economics. Green economy policies are heavily informed by neoclassical economics, under which market efficiency depends on “getting the prices right”. Referring to carbon trading, van Griethuysen argues that policy making could gain important insights from other strands of economics including ecological economics, institutional economics and property economics (van Griethuysen 2011). These different strands of economic thinking lead to different framings of problems; different assumptions about drivers of change and solutions; and different rankings of environmental, efficiency and equity issues.

The contested nature of green economy can be illustrated with reference to different transition pathways currently being debated. Clapp and Dauvergne (2011) have identified four perspectives or worldviews – market-liberal, institutionalist, social green and bioenvironmental – which are useful in this regard. Such “ideal-type” categories mask, of course, significant overlaps and the degrees to which specific elements appear under multiple pathways, but the worldviews presented in table 1 highlight different sets of ideas, actors, policies and institutions, each with its own potentials and limitations.

Perhaps the strongest point of contention between and within these perspectives concerns the relative and legitimate roles of markets, state and community in achieving sustainability. Other lines of variation include whether problems are viewed as technical or political; whether

³ See Final Declaration of the People’s Summit in Rio +20, available at <http://rio20.net/en/propuestas/final-declaration-of-the-people%e2%80%99s-summit-in-rio-20>, and Thematic Social Forum 2012.

solutions can be incremental or require deeper structural transformation; the extent and nature of participation; and whether pre-existing inequalities need to be addressed first in order to achieve a just transition.

Table 1:⁴ Contested transition paths to a green economy

	Green Growth	Strong Sustainability	Social Economy	Limits to Growth
<i>Worldview</i>	<i>Market liberal</i>	<i>Institutionalist</i>	<i>Social green</i>	<i>Bioenvironmental</i>
Social	Green jobs Social protection for vulnerable groups Equality of opportunity Stakeholder consultation Green consumerism	Global cooperation Redistribution (income) Stronger institutions Inter- and intra-generational equity Capacity building Social dialogue	Redistribution (income, wealth and power) Rights-based Social justice Equality of outcomes Empowerment Citizen action	Radical decrease in consumption and population growth Inclusivity Needs
Environment	Eco-efficiency Technology transfer Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD)	Eco-regulation Strengthen global governance regimes REDD+	Environmental justice Agro-ecology Grassroots action	Eco-centric valuing of nature for its own sake Enforced regulation of global commons
Economy	Green growth Voluntary corporate social responsibility (CSR) Carbon markets, Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) Production focused Private governance	North-South trade reform Green finance Green taxes State governance Clean Development Mechanism (CDM)	De-globalization Localization Institutional reform Regional solidarity	No-growth/de-growth Measures beyond GDP
Indicative organizations	World Trade Organization (WTO), International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD)	UNEP, United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Global Environment Facility	World Social Forum Third World Network	World Watch Institute Pachamama

Source: compiled by authors, drawing on Clapp and Dauvergne 2011.

The market liberal pathway, which is highly influential both discursively and in practice, tends to emphasize the dual ecological and economic dimensions of a transition process. Social issues are largely viewed as an outcome: more efficient and environmentally friendly growth will result in improved human well-being. Poverty reduction is assumed to follow from employment and other aspects of well-being associated with low-carbon growth (OECD 2010), assisted by social protection mechanisms or programmes that promote pro-poor adaptation and build resilience to shocks (Mearns and Norton 2010).

Where social costs arise in the transition process, these (it is also assumed) can be addressed through compensatory mechanisms and transfers. Social concerns tend to be defined in relation to specific vulnerable groups—the poor, women or indigenous peoples; those likely to be

⁴ The categories presented in this table are meant as a conceptual tool to organize key ideas and approaches currently informing the green economy debate. In practice, the lines between each category are often blurred, and there is a wide variance in how the social, economic and environmental elements are combined to inform policy and action. For further elaboration see UNRISD 2012b; Cook et al. (2011); and Utting (forthcoming).

affected most directly by climate change (often overlapping with the above); or those likely to be disadvantaged by transitions to green economy (for example, workers in “dirty” industries). This in turn suggests the need for targeted mechanisms that assist such groups in overcoming their disadvantage; responses are framed as protection or compensation for individuals or groups to overcome the adverse impacts of processes or policies, or as adaptation to enable the vulnerable to better respond to or manage environmental or climate-related risks and changes in employment.

As demonstrated throughout this paper, the assumptions about the relationship between dominant policy approaches to green economy and their social outcomes are highly problematic. Instead, we argue, a socially just transition to a low-carbon economy and sustainable development—or green society—will require a conceptual framework, analytic tools and policy instruments that overcome the deeply entrenched separation between the social, economic and environmental domains beneath the umbrella of sustainable development. In particular, it will require acknowledging the centrality of social issues and policies in achieving economic and environmental sustainability, recognizing the interdependence among the three domains, minimizing contradictions and enhancing complementarities.

Reconfiguring the social dimension of sustainable development

To place the social more centrally in green economy and sustainable development debates, critical questions concern how, and at what stage, social dimensions are incorporated into problem definition, analysis and solutions; and whether the goals of equity, poverty reduction and inclusivity are in fact compatible with the policies and transition paths currently being adopted or considered. A necessary starting point is a more comprehensive definition and framework for the analysis of social issues—one in which the domains of society, economy and the environment, as well as political processes which underpin change, are explicitly recognized as closely connected and interdependent.

A broader definition of the “social” expands the sphere of analysis from particular social groups (for example, women, indigenous peoples), problems and outcomes, to emphasize social relations, institutions and processes that are central to achieving sustainable and equitable improvements in human well-being, at both individual and collective levels. It rejects the widely accepted dualism of the economic and social and reorients the focus from economic indicators and growth to a broader and multidimensional view of well-being. Furthermore, it recognizes that the achievement of inclusive and sustainable development is fundamentally a political process, involving contestation, organization, struggles for the representation and recognition of different groups with competing interests, and ultimately requiring the redistribution of power and resources. Finally, it is imperative that environmental sustainability is considered an integral dimension of efforts to achieve social development.

While markets will play a key role in green economy transitions, some of the dominant approaches are based on a limited understanding of, or problematic assumptions about, the nature of markets and how they work (or fail) in many of the contexts where policies are being implemented. Critiques range from a failure to adequately foresee or respond to negative social and distributional consequences, to a more fundamental neglect of how markets are themselves socially constructed and embedded in local institutional arrangements.

In many contexts—particularly in low-income, natural resource-dependent, and often highly unequal settings—social structures and relations are powerful determinants of who has power to control resources, and thus how real markets operate. In such contexts, market imperfections and failures (from environmental externalities of economic behaviour to management of common property resources) are the rule, not the exception. Many market-based green economy solutions associated with commodification often involve processes that have problematic social consequences. For example, assigning value and property rights in order to create markets (for carbon or environmental services) can often reinforce pre-existing

inequalities and power structures. Likewise, the economic valuation of (often non-renewable) natural resources rarely considers the non-economic value of the resource to users (for example, the spiritual value a community might place on a site, or the non-commodified sustainable management and harvesting for own-use of forest products). In cases of environmental “bads” (for example, emissions), setting a “price” can create perverse incentives to overproduce. In other words, in many green economy policies, the conditions for markets to function according to the underlying economic model do not hold. Nor do the governance structures and regulatory mechanisms generally exist at local or national levels for such conditions to be created or to ensure fair distributional outcomes. Instead, these approaches to the commodification of nature risk “selling nature to save it” (McAfee 2012:27).

Key concerns arising from this approach include the following.

- Monetary pricing and market-based allocation of environmental assets tend to redistribute those assets upward, favouring people and places with the greatest purchasing power.
- Payment for ecosystem services (PES) and offsetting schemes can shift the locus of conservation to the global South and may set some green economy (for example, biofuel) or conservation policies in conflict with agricultural production, livelihoods, food security and stewardship.
- Such schemes draw attention away from the need to reduce emissions in the production process, weakening incentives for restructuring production and consumption patterns in the global North, and downplaying the need for public investment and regulation to achieve this.
- Economic valuation assumes a universal commensurability of the value of nature, ignoring how values differ in relation to meaning, identity and use.
- Commodification often elevates corporate interests, in turn constraining the scope for policy and regulatory reform conducive to social and sustainable development.

From the above it becomes clear that certain approaches to green economy risk converting the “double injustice” often associated with climate change into a triple injustice. The double injustice has been noted by Gough (2011a:1): “groups and populations likely to be most harmed by climate change are often the least responsible for causing it and have the least resources to cope with the consequences”. The triple injustice arises when green economy policies themselves further exacerbate negative social and distributional consequences for already disadvantaged groups.

Such consequences can be both an outcome of pre-existing inequalities and of policies themselves. Structural inequalities, along lines of income/wealth, ethnicity and gender, for example, are crucial for determining how groups are affected both by climate or environmental change and by green economy policies. Poverty, gender and ethnicity—key correlates of environmental vulnerability—underpin differential exposure to risk, access to or control over assets, the responsibility for and dependence on environmental resources, as well as the ability to respond to shocks or policy change. These same factors affect the capacity of such groups to take advantage of employment and other potential new opportunities associated with green economy, or to alter consumption patterns where such choices can be costly. Such inequalities may also erode the social solidarity required for collective action or public policy to deal with interrelated challenges of climate change and poverty (Agarwal 2010; UNRISD 2012a).

Even within the mainstream economics literature, the possibility is recognized that assumptions linking green economy policies and poverty reduction are weak. In an analysis of whether green growth is “good for the poor”, Dercon (2012) exposes the limits of simple win-win arguments or assumptions that “ignore important trade-offs: particularly those stemming from a poor understanding of the spatial and sectoral processes behind effective poverty reduction”. By contrasting stylized green-sensitive growth ideas and identifying inevitable trade-offs,

Dercon shows that without explicit policies to address social costs, green growth may not only not be good for the poor; the poor may be asked to pay the price for sustaining growth while greening the planet. Thus policies for a green economy may in fact reinforce processes that are at odds with the win-win assumptions that underpin them.

While many efforts are being made to address the specific needs of disadvantaged or marginalized groups (for example, through the implementation of projects and interventions at the micro or community level) or to compensate likely losers (such as those in carbon-intensive sectors, or in fragile and affected environments), such complementary policies are frequently subject to failure. Even well-intended and well-designed projects can fail at the implementation stage, where competing interests, conflicts over resources, poor governance, lack of participation or accountability and different conceptions of justice are among the many factors that contribute to unintended outcomes. The following studies illustrate the trade-offs between sustainable development policies and livelihoods, the social and distributional costs, and the failure of well-intentioned interventions.

- The displacement of people or food crop production in Brazil, India and Indonesia to make way for biofuels; such schemes often involve trade-offs with smallholder agriculture, biodiversity, livelihoods and food security (Bastos Lima 2012).
- Green energy policies involving higher tariffs for domestic users in the United Kingdom and other advanced industrialized countries are regressive, given that energy comprises a far higher share of spending in low-income households (Gough 2011a).
- Strict conservation of carbon sinks and other areas in Australia constrains the livelihood opportunities of indigenous peoples and ignores cultural systems that, historically, have respected nature. This has the dual effect of diminishing opportunities for economic development while excluding traditional owners from participation in green economy (Winer et al. 2012).
- PES schemes that allocate private property rights over hitherto common property or state-owned resources often benefit the better-off and tend to reinforce unequal power relations between corporations, states and common property users (McAfee 2012).
- New markets for greener production (as seen in the case of Gold Standard⁵ carbon-offset cookstoves in Honduras) may impose burdensome transaction costs for local producers who participate in such schemes while the major beneficiaries tend to remain in the North (Bumpus 2011).
- Efforts to promote sustainable development through the Green Mission in the Indian state of Sikkim are often at odds with the social, environmental and cultural effects of infrastructural development centred on hydroelectric projects (Banerjee and Sood 2012).
- Evidence from tree-planting schemes in Thailand shows that interventions that are perceived as just by those designing them (such as economic compensation or farmer participation in Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation/REDD, PES or Clean Development Mechanism/CDM) do not necessarily result in justice locally, or may be at odds with local conceptions of justice (Srang-iam 2012).
- Attempts to promote household energy efficiency in Metro Manila, via appeals to individual or consumer responsibility, often using moralistic messages, can fail because of general mistrust of the public institutions and the energy sector, as well as the failure to build on existing social networks and notions of citizenship (Sahakian 2012).
- As in Nepal, community-based forest management schemes that are scaled up nationally, run the risk of being captured by the more affluent or by “political groups and parts of the government...keen to extract a share of the profits” (UN EMG 2011:89).

The analysis in this section has highlighted both the centrality of social issues in green economy debates and some of the major challenges confronting policy makers in crafting transition pathways that are both green and fair. The UNRISD inquiry into social dimensions of green

⁵ The Gold Standard is an independent verification scheme that aims to ensure the quality of carbon credits.

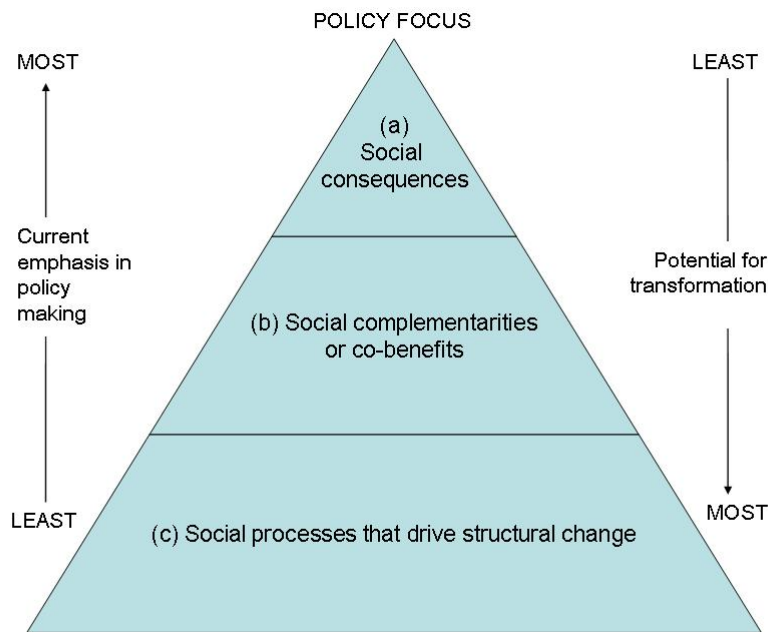
economy explored two key areas of policy, institutional and political change that are crucial to achieve a fairer distribution of costs and benefits. These concern the role of social policy, addressed below in part 2, and the participation of disadvantaged social actors in resource mobilization, governance and contestation (part 3).

2. Social Policy for Structural Transformation

It is increasingly apparent that the challenge of transforming economies to become environmentally sustainable requires deep societal transformation. Given the interconnectedness across the social, economic and environmental domains, any meaningful transformation must encompass policies across these dimensions. Policies will cut across interrelated sectors (such as industry, agriculture, transport, energy, health and education) with inevitable conflicts among them. However, if there is a conflict, social and progressive fiscal or employment policies often tend to be subordinated to growth-oriented macroeconomic and financial policies. Reordering this hierarchy towards a common purpose requires rethinking the social. Social dimensions cannot be limited to the behaviour and well-being of the poor; rather, they are a central driver in the whole project of green economy transformation and sustainable development. Interconnected behaviours—of rich and poor, as individuals or nations, as producers, consumers or citizens—will collectively shape the possibilities for, and determine the outcomes of, a sustainable development agenda.

Given pervasive market failures and the limits of market mechanisms for addressing social issues, the question then is: what kind of policies can support the necessary transformations needed to create a sustainable economy and society? Public actions to address social issues in a green economy transition can be broadly categorized in three overlapping sets of interventions, with varying degrees of transformative potential, summarized in figure 1. The following review of policies currently observed under these types of categories, combined with evidence from countries that have achieved more equitable development transformations, suggests the potential roles of social policy in achieving the kind of structural transformation necessary for a green society.

Figure 1: Transformative potential of policy approaches



Around the globe, particularly in low-income countries, the current social policy agenda tends to be dominated by a particular set of social protection mechanisms aimed at addressing the social consequences of transition (a in the above figure). These principally involve cash transfers or other forms of targeted assistance, and are often conditional on the specific behaviours of beneficiaries. Such interventions aim to assist the poor, and to protect and compensate vulnerable individuals and households against income and consumption shocks, or contingencies such as ill-health. In countries like Brazil and Mexico, conditional cash transfer programmes have grown in scale and increasingly provide a stable source of protection for the poor, while also contributing to more developmental goals. Other large-scale social protection programmes include public works schemes (such as the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act/NREGA in India) which also have an extensive reach and are deeply embedded in policy.

In other cases, however, such programmes have more limited compensatory objectives, often remaining as projects rather than becoming integrated or institutionalized in policy. Thus they are vulnerable to being cut when resources are constrained or politicians change. Participation is generally through income or other forms of targeting, and not by right. In low-income or highly unequal settings, implementation can be impeded by complex local social and power relations, weak or unaccountable bureaucracies, limited administrative and targeting capacities, and limited participation of the affected populations.

Despite such limitations, we are seeing an extraordinary expansion and sophistication of social protection mechanisms. Increasingly, the instruments are also being developed to address shocks related to climate events or other environmental conditions. A range of social protection schemes are emerging which aim specifically to strengthen the coping and adaptive capacities of low-income and other vulnerable groups exposed to environmental risk and vulnerability. These instruments include transfer programmes involving productive inputs such as drought or flood resistant “starter packs”, public works programmes, slum upgrading and weather-related crop insurance or other forms of micro-insurance (Davies et al. 2008; Pierro and Desai 2008).

Another way in which social protection measures are being linked to climate change is in sources of financing: a number of countries (such as Indonesia) have shifted resources from fossil fuel subsidies, compensating the poor through alternative social protection mechanisms

such as cash transfers. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has adapted its recommendations to developing country governments that adopt fiscal reforms which involve a reduction in fossil fuel subsidies. This advice is now coupled with calls to use such savings to expand, inter alia, conditional cash transfer or other social safety net programmes (Lagarde 2012). Equally in countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), energy policies to reduce emissions via the reduction of fossil fuel subsidies and higher energy tariffs are often linked to social policies that subsidize low-income households (Gough 2011a).

Complementarities and co-benefits

A second set of approaches aims to achieve social goals in combination with economic or environmental objectives, through policies or programmes that can deliver so-called co-benefits. Greater attention is paid to the integration of social concerns in economic and environmental policy design and implementation, and to the essential linkages between the three sets of goals inherent in the concept of sustainable development. Specific examples of such win-win policies drawn from the UNRISD research inquiry include:

- linking climate and employment via green (and decent) jobs, such as in the renewable energy or clean waste sectors; job creation and training in “green and decent” work; education, retraining and skills for the transition from “dirty” to green jobs (Hezri and Ghazali 2011; Musyoki 2012);
- incentives/disincentives for green consumption and production, while compensating for negative impacts of such policies; such as green energy rebates and green/carbon taxes incentives for green consumption (for example, via green taxation) (Merritt and Stubbs 2012);
- energy-efficient housing design for state welfare housing; provision of ecological low-cost housing (Gough 2011a, 2011b);
- infrastructure investments (such as public transport) that benefit low-income groups; and
- regulation via voluntary standards and corporate social responsibility (CSR), for example, fair and ethical trade standards.⁶

Other recent initiatives have resulted in high-profile social protection schemes expanding in scope to incorporate environmental concerns, or green economy mechanisms such as PES embracing social dimensions. In India, for example, the national workfare programme NREGA, which provides up to a maximum of 100 days of guaranteed employment per year per rural household, now focuses significantly on natural resource management, environmental rehabilitation and green jobs. Specific programmatic or sectoral areas include food production and agriculture, rural infrastructure, forests and fisheries, alternative energy and energy efficiency, irrigation and watershed development, and rural access (ILO 2010).

Similarly, Brazil has recently expanded the scope of its conditional cash transfer programmes to include payments to families classified as extremely poor and living in forests and other environmentally sensitive areas. The Bolsa Verde programme aims to provide incentives for the sustainable management and conservation of ecosystems, improve living conditions and income levels, and promote education and training related to social, environmental and professional aspects, as well as citizenship.⁷ Bolsa Verde, which forms part of the new priority programme of the Dilma Youssef administration, Brazil Sem Miséria (Brazil without misery), has expanded to the national level the eco-social approach that characterized the Bolsa Floresta programme in Amazonas (Rival 2012a).

⁶ Bumpus 2011; Smith 2012; Utting 2012.

⁷ See www.mds.gov.br/falemds/perguntas-frequentes/bolsa-familia/bolsa-verde/beneficiarios/bolsa-verde, accessed in November 2012.

The broadening of the scope of the UN-led scheme to reduce emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD) is also indicative of the growing attention to co-benefits. REDD+ not only extends the focus of the programme to conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks, but also promotes phased preparedness and implementation strategies in developing countries that focus on capacity building and stakeholder engagement as part of a process based on both learning and linking national REDD+ policy with agriculture, energy and other sectors of economic development.

Despite sharing some of the constraints associated with targeting, interventions such as these are also often institutionalized in policy, requiring broad consensus around investments and financing, creating incentives or opportunities for different behaviours. They are thus less subject to some of the administrative constraints discussed above. While they may not automatically lead to improved opportunities or conditions for poor or marginalized groups, or for women, when they do work well, they are more likely to be empowering.

Transformative social policy

The third level of policy, identified in figure 1, relates to social processes that drive structural change. At this level, policies need to engage with the structural constraints and drivers that can block or promote new patterns of production, consumption and investment, change producer and consumer behaviour while improving well-being and ensuring a fairer distribution of power and resources. They need to address issues of inequality and maximize positive behavioural or institutional change (whether of individuals, communities, businesses/corporations, and other societal, state or market actors) to overcome problems and deliver solutions.

While such policies will incorporate many of the above examples associated with compensation and co-benefits, existing evidence suggests that price and taxation instruments, coupled with social protection measures, will be inadequate, and on balance, possibly even regressive and/or politically infeasible for achieving required transformations (Gough 2011b). Evidence from as far apart as Angola, Brazil, Mozambique, South Africa and the United Kingdom demonstrates that expecting individuals—as citizens or consumers—or enterprises to change their behaviour without a formalized and supportive structure will not translate into reduced emissions (see Gough 2011a; Resnick et al. 2011). In the North, the inability of existing policies to sufficiently reduce the emissions embodied in ongoing growth patterns and the high consumption of its societies means that more radical policies will be required which integrate climate mitigation and social justice goals more directly (Gough 2011a; Jackson 2009).

Social policies are integrally connected with fiscal policies and public finance, employment, labour market and other policy arenas, and have always been a major instrument of the state to influence or change behaviour. Specific policy instruments include mechanisms ranging from direct transfers, asset redistribution and the provision of public services; taxation, pricing or other rationing or subsidy mechanisms; and labour rights and various forms of employment and social regulation. Policies may be motivated by a range of goals that often extend beyond their immediate social objectives: for example, increasing human capital investment to enhance productivity; supporting social cohesion by reducing income, race or gender inequalities through redistributive policies; managing fertility and increasing women's labour force participation by supporting processes of social reproduction; or using a range of social policies to manage processes of economic restructuring. In the current context, it is a logical extension of the functions of social policy to encompass environmental goals—both instrumentally, as proven tools for achieving collective ends; and because social injustice and distributional issues are intrinsic to environmental sustainability.

The multiple roles of social policy

Social policy encompasses a range of public actions designed to manage livelihood risks, protect people against contingencies (such as ill-health and loss of income) and invest in their capacities

to contribute productively to the economy. UNRISD's extensive work on social policy⁸ which draws lessons from the success of countries in northern Europe and East Asia during the second half of the twentieth century, provides some relevant insights for achieving resource-efficient, equitable and sustainable development. In both regions, countries at low levels of income progressed economically and socially through state-led development strategies in which social policies played a critical role. Here and elsewhere, social policies performed multiple tasks related to protection, particularly of the poor or vulnerable from adverse circumstances; production, by supporting economic development through enhanced human capital and productivity; reproduction, of families and society, through collective support for the burden of care particularly of children, the sick and elderly; and redistribution, reducing inequalities and overcoming entrenched disadvantage (Mkandawire 2001; UNRISD 2010). While different governments attached different weights to these tasks, all four aspects of "transformative social policy" (UNRISD 2006) were essential in bringing about the type of structural transformation conducive to both economic and social development.

While earlier structural transformations largely ignored the environmental implications of growth and of changing production and consumption patterns, transformations of a similar scale and intensity will, nevertheless, be needed to address the challenges of climate change and sustainability. And as in the past, transformative social policy should have a key role to play. However, as noted above, social policies that are relevant to a green economy transition—whether involving compensation or co-benefits—often focus on just two of the multiple roles of social policy, namely social protection and production (via human capital). These two roles, to which the market-liberal policy agenda has largely confined social policy, are insufficient to contribute substantially to the kind of developmental agenda needed to address global environmental challenges. Two other essential roles of social policy, namely social reproduction and redistribution, as well as more direct links with environmental concerns, need to receive attention.

The green economy agenda has emphasized the creation of green jobs and recognized the important role of women in economic activities. However, far less attention has been focused on other gender dimensions, including the need to minimize the double burden that women face as both income earners and primary care givers (Stevens 2012; UNDP 2012). Large-scale green economy schemes such as the case, examined by Bimesdoerfer et al. (2011), of rural off-grid electrification (via solar energy) in Bangladesh have facilitated jobs for women but have often neglected issues associated with working conditions and public or community provision of care. Referring to green rural electrification programmes in developing countries more generally, Bimesdoerfer et al. (2011) make the point that their success tends to be evaluated in terms of access to electricity—by measuring indicators such as newly installed capacity—with little attention paid to evaluating the social dimensions, including decent work for women and gender relations and dynamics.

Similarly in India, the uptake of women's employment in certain states, under the rural jobs scheme, NREGA, has been undermined by gender disadvantage, including the lack of child care facilities (Bonner et al. 2012). Such situations often contrast with those where women have taken a lead in crafting green society schemes or where state policy reflects greater concern for gender equality. In the case of the Deccan Development Society (DDS) for example, women's working conditions and child care facilities have been an important focus of attention (Kumbamu 2012; Krishnamurty 2003). In some states a functioning system of child care centres has facilitated the ability of rural women to take advantage of the work opportunities provided through NREGA (for example, in Tamil Nadu) or women's empowerment schemes such as Kudumbashree in Kerala. The recent decision of the government of India to expand the scope of NREGA works to include the construction of child and mother care centres points to a more "transformative" social policy approach. This is further evidenced by the announcement that such centres would be used to host meetings of women's self-help groups (The Statesman 2012).

⁸ See, for example, UNRISD 2010.

The current social policy mechanisms of cash transfers, referred to above, often imply a privatization of the solutions to the care responsibilities that women disproportionately shoulder. This limits their labour force participation—a major cause of their economic disadvantage. Collective solutions through wider public or employment-based provisions of basic care services, or improvements in social infrastructure (including water and sanitation), are largely absent from the social protection agenda but would in many contexts serve as effective instruments in meeting multiple social goals (Kabeer 2011; UNRISD 2010). There are clear synergies between social and environmental objectives in contexts where major challenges for social reproduction are associated with the use and collection of energy, food and water, and with inadequate public transport and services.

The other essential role of social policy relates to redistribution, which aims to promote equality and overcome entrenched disadvantage. The analysis in part 1 of this paper highlighted the ways in which inequality can undermine transitions that are green and fair, and the fact that certain approaches to green economy may exacerbate inequality. Redistributive policies—through agrarian reform, fiscal transfers, progressive taxation or other public spending mechanisms—have a crucial role to play in overcoming initial disadvantages, enhancing people’s capabilities and capacity to adapt and respond to shocks and insecurities, and ensuring the poor can benefit from green economy measures. Income and structural inequalities are increasingly shown to create obstacles to poverty reduction and growth (Berg and Ostry 2011; UNRISD 2010), and there is indisputable evidence that poverty is correlated with vulnerability to climate events and the capacity to respond (even in rich countries, as Hurricane Katrina demonstrated). Redistributive social policies also contribute to social cohesion within communities and societies. By contrast, targeting within poor communities, thereby differentiating between almost equally poor recipients and non-recipients, can be divisive and break down forms of social solidarity on which the poor depend (Ellis 2012; MacAuslan and Riemenschneider 2011).

Eco-social policies

The need for social, economic and environmental policy to connect in ways that are more integrated, complementary and synergistic, points to the importance of the expanding field of eco-social policy. Crafting transition processes that are green and fair requires policies that:

- integrate sustainable environmental goals into core social policy objectives;
- incorporate uncertainties and complexities associated with climate change into conventional social policy analysis;
- utilize social policies to support economic and behavioural change towards sustainable goals; and to ensure that economic policies are designed to meet core social and environmental, rather than simply growth, objectives;
- compensate losers and support adaptation through a range of social protection measures;
- create employment and facilitate the uptake of green economy jobs among disadvantaged groups;
- facilitate the participation of women as producers and citizens by alleviating the care burden; and
- minimize inequalities and entrenched disadvantage through redistributive and other social policies.

An eco-social policy approach can ensure that carbon-intensive sectors with high distributional impacts—such as housing, transport, energy and agricultural production—are addressed in ways that are ecologically beneficial and distributionally just. Eco-social policies or instruments could be important for supporting adaptations or transitions particularly among the most vulnerable. Making eco-social investments, for example in housing, energy and infrastructure that benefit the poor, and integrating incentives for low-carbon consumption or other

behavioural change into a range of social and economic policy areas (such as housing, transport, energy and water use), are key in this regard. New social housing, for example, that conforms to higher environmental standards can generate employment, improve well-being and be more resilient to disasters while also reducing emissions (Gough 2011a). “Triple win” scenarios can also be envisaged with public policies that support forms of social and solidarity economy, such as social enterprises and fair trade producer groups, which involve forms of production and social relations associated with sustainable income generation, social protection, solidarity and environmental sustainability (Reed 2012).

As is increasingly proposed by governments and international financial institutions, financing such policies may in some cases be possible through allocations away from environmentally negative, and often regressive, subsidies such as for fossil fuels (World Bank 2012). But other fiscal reforms, for example, reducing subsidies to corporations, a return to progressive taxation, and new sources of taxation and development financing (including a Tobin tax), may well be necessary. Bringing various aspects together, Gough (2011a) argues for mixing economic incentives and regulation such as broad carbon taxes and cap-and-trade emissions trading systems with personal carbon allowances and trading policies. He also suggests the possibility of a more radical policy shift in the world’s richer countries, which would involve reducing working hours, and thus lower incomes, expenditures, consumption and emissions.

For such social policies to work in support of green structural transformation, sufficient ambition to promote the necessary changes will be required. This would require changes in a number of related areas of politics and participation: in power relations and governance arrangements, notably in the capacity of the disadvantaged to mobilize resources and influence decision making; in the hierarchies of policy making, unseating the primacy of economic growth; among competing interests (especially corporate versus community interests); and in crafting political consensus and coalitions. And as emphasized by the report of the High Level Panel on Global Sustainability, it also requires the realization and institutionalization of human rights (United Nations 2012). It is to these issues we now turn.

3. Participation for Distributional and Procedural Justice

In addition to transformative social policy, crafting transition paths that are green and fair depends crucially on the agency of social actors who are currently disadvantaged by economic and ecological modernization. The concept of participation, as defined by UNRISD in the late 1970s, is key for understanding the ways and means by which such agency occurs. UNRISD defined participation as “the organized efforts of the hitherto excluded to gain control over resources and regulative institutions that affect their lives” (UNRISD 2003:69). In subsequent decades, the term participation has been widely assimilated into mainstream development discourse (Cornwall and Brock 2006). In the process, however, some aspects got lost in translation. Participation is often reduced to consultation with stakeholders, often chosen quite selectively by technocrats or other actors in positions of power. Such consultative processes often marginalize—indeed displace—forms of participation that are key in any transformative process. Furthermore, there is no guarantee that the voice of the disadvantaged will actually be heard or significantly shape decision-making processes.

There is a danger that the current discussion on the governance and politics of green economy transition is reproducing this narrow conception of participation. Key elements in the UNRISD definition, such as “organized efforts” (or collective action) and “to gain control” in relation to both “resource mobilization” and “institutions”, often tend to get sidelined.

Unpacking and reconfiguring power relations in decision-making processes, and opening up spaces for contestation and negotiation in the design and implementation of projects and policies, are central to achieving a fair and sustainable transition path. Participation and empowerment are crucial from the perspective of both procedural justice (to ensure fair

decision making) and distributive justice (to ensure fair outcomes and impacts) (Hezri and Ghazali 2011). They are also important from the perspective of policy coherence. The term is used here not simply in the sense of better coordination of design and implementation in different policy fields. It also means ensuring that macroeconomic and other pro-growth, pro-efficiency policies do not crowd out welfare and sustainability objectives, or that environmental goals are balanced with human welfare considerations.

The UNRISD inquiry highlighted three forms of participation or organized efforts that are particularly relevant. These relate to (i) resource mobilization at the local or community level; (ii) access and influence in decision-making processes or governance; and (iii) forms of resistance and advocacy on the part of social movements and civil society networks that aim to (re-)frame public policy and debate regarding priority concerns and development pathways. Each of these dimensions is considered below.

Local-level resource mobilization

Potentially, there is much that mainstream development policy and practice can assimilate from community-based or local level experiences. Myriad examples of community-based livelihood and natural resource management systems simultaneously address multiple development objectives associated with social protection, economic and political empowerment, cultural identity and environmental integrity. A growing body of literature and advocacy is also highlighting the potential of social and solidarity economy – that is, forms of production guided by social and ecological objectives and involving associative and solidaristic relations among producers.⁹

The traditional knowledges and practices of small farmers, fisherfolk, indigenous peoples and forest dwellers – in terms of both values associated with environmental and social justice, and knowledge of resource management and livelihood systems – are essential for crafting transition paths conducive to sustainable development. Yet all too often, such practices are marginalized in development policy and operate in a disabling rather than an enabling environment. Apart from proactive state support (such as infrastructure, technical assistance, social policy and procurement), basic institutional aspects (such as respect for land rights and relatively simple technological innovations) can make a significant difference. Agarwal's (2010) extensive study of women in rural development in India emphasizes such aspects, particularly when combined with local-level cooperation and collective organization, which she finds are key for the management of common property resources and protection of the commons.

In the case of Araçuaí Sustentável, an agro-ecology and popular education project in the Brazilian state of Minas Gerais, significant gains have been achieved in relation to environmental protection, food security, empowerment and local economic development. Project success relates to valorizing what is already present in a community, not what is lacking – a very different approach from that of conventional aid or state agencies – as well as integrating economic, environmental and social policy at the local level (Rival 2012a).

But this and other cases also point to the dangers of idealizing “community”. Hierarchies and unequal power relations can be as significant at the local level as at other scales. And enabling local green society will likely involve intensifying relations with powerful private and actors and institutions (see Bumpus 2011). As Rival (2012b) points out, such relations can provide much-needed resources and competencies but they constantly need to be contested and interrogated.

The case study of the Deccan Development Society in the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh, analysed by Kumbamu (2012), identifies key features of social and solidarity economy alternatives that bode well for green society. These include collective organization of women

⁹ Corragio 2011; Fonteneau et al. 2010; de Sousa Santos 2006.

producers, democratic decentralized decision making, agro-ecology practices, autonomous development (such as alternative media, seed banks, rejection of genetically modified organisms/GMOs), recovering past practices and local knowledge (for example, millet production and consumption), and workfare to improve poor-quality land and yields. External support, in particular from urban-based professionals and donors, has been important. But as Kumbamu points out, this “raises valid doubts about the sustainability of autonomous institutions that the *sangham* women have created” (Kumbamu 2012:110). He goes on to note that transition associated with such local initiatives ultimately also requires systemic transition in power relations at different scales, but points to a key dilemma: “non-confrontational tactics and non-party politics of the DDS have facilitated easy access to state institutions and national and international funding organizations [but] the DDS never challenged the unequal distribution of land and the politico-economic power vested in landholdings” (Kumbamu 2012:110).

External support for local community-based initiatives or movements—whether from state, business and non-governmental organization (NGO) actors—needs to be assessed critically to guard against situations of co-optation, aid dependence and bureaucratization. Local initiatives often remain isolated and small in scale because they lack an enabling legal, policy and market environment. Indeed, smallholder agricultural production has often been systematically marginalized by policy biases associated with structural adjustment programmes, export-orientation, cheap food imports, subsidies and support services favouring large commercial agriculture.

Whether or not community-based initiatives contribute to social well-being and local economic development depends crucially on whether producers can add value to commodities. Currently, various co-benefit schemes (for example, biofuel projects targeting small farmers, or fair/ethical trade) often lock small producers into the role of suppliers of low value-added commodities and into value chains where other market actors appropriate the bulk of the benefits (see Bastos Lima 2012; Smith 2012). Also, local producers may have greater scope for adding value when producing for the local or domestic market, as for example in the case of national fair trade initiatives in Mexico (Smith and VanderHoff Boersma 2012).

Participation in governance

The organized efforts of disadvantaged groups and civil society actors to influence and control project planning, public policy making and regulatory institutions is a second dimension of participation. Key issues include: stakeholder dialogue or consultation; direct control of regulatory or policy design, implementation and oversight; and issues of collaborative governance or partnership.

Project design and implementation

Over several decades, development research has emphasized the importance of actively engaging local resource users or intended beneficiaries in project design and implementation to avoid the well-known pitfalls of top-down external interventions. Case studies from Brazil, Honduras, Malaysia and South Africa emphasized such aspects.

In Limpopo province, South Africa, green economy is seen as an opportunity to address poverty and employment issues. But, as Musyoki (2012) points out, bringing in new participants in agriculture, especially poor and marginalized women, often proves difficult. This became apparent in the Mapfura Makhura Incubator project where small-scale farmers were to transition to biodiesel producers. While the project aimed to achieve gender balance, only 30 per cent of participants in the pilot phase were women. The main problems included poor information flows and a limited number of women who owned land, which was one of the criteria for selection (Musyoki 2012). A precondition for participation, then, related to the lack of women’s land rights.

In their study of the determinants of success and failure of green economy projects in Malaysia, Hezri and Ghazali (2011:13–14) note:

The importance of understanding local context for policy intervention cannot be overstated...The choice a society makes for any renewable technology often involves decisions that have high stakes and a high degree of uncertainty. Therefore a democratic process that factors in the communities' voice should be put in place.

In the case of the Bakun Hydropower Project, "had a genuine democratic process been put in place, the resentments felt among resettled communities might have been less widespread" (Hezri and Ghazali 2012:14). In the case of a women's waste paper recycling and handicrafts project, despite support from both private and public sectors, project success was undermined by limited participation of the intended beneficiaries. In the case of a System of Rice Intensification project, a bottom-up approach through local community participation was one of several elements of success.

Referring to carbon reduction projects in Honduras, and REDD+ more generally, Bumpus (2011:11) observes that "democratically engaged local social relations would provide a stronger and more sustainable platform for the development of such projects and policies". He notes that this has important implications in the case of broader climate finance mechanisms such as REDD+ that create new global-local links.

Participation in public policy

The organized efforts of groups at the community level to enhance their control over resources can be a precursor to participation in public policy. Rival's (2012a) research, based on two different Brazilian case studies, shows that efforts of social actors who have sought to create innovative sustainability-enhancing institutions in order to achieve environmental and social policy integration. In the case of the Araçuaí Sustentável project, a clear policy lesson relates to the sense of ownership and pride that local grassroots participants have developed through the project. They have been able to move from being recipients of welfare programmes to taking a proactive role in public affairs. They have often coordinated directly and in partnership with government officials, either to improve the quality of imparted social services, to expand redistributive social policies or to challenge covert policy goals.

The tensions between top-down technocratic and bottom-up participatory approaches that affect project planning are also evident at the level of public policy making. In numerous national and international policy arenas, spaces have opened up for civil society organizations (CSOs) and activists to voice concerns and views of disadvantaged groups. As Hiraldo and Tanner (2011:iii) point out, the increased prominence of forestry concerns in global green economy negotiations has opened up new spaces for pro-poor voices to enter the debates:

The emergence of REDD+ has brought new actors to the green economy negotiating arena whose interests are not only linked to the economy and the environment, but also to human rights and social participation issues. Thus, whereas negotiations around green economy had previously been influenced by government institutions, multilateral bodies, private companies, financial institutions and environmental organizations, REDD+ is involving development non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and human rights groups in the negotiations.

But it cannot be assumed that a place at the table means increased influence in decision-making processes. In the case of REDD+, the participation of NGOs means that they inevitably engage in complex power networks and "clusters of interests" in competition (Hiraldo and Tanner 2011). These power relationships are non-linear: different combinations of civil, government and business alliances emerge depending on their views, for example, around whether REDD should or should not be linked with livelihoods, biodiversity, and water protection (as in

REDD+); whether it should be governed privately (by business) or by governments; and whether the institutional framework should be linked to property or human rights.

Broad-based participation has also been important in reforming biofuel policy in Brazil. As in many countries, biofuel programmes have proven to be highly problematic from both a social and an environmental point of view (concerns include the expansion of monocultures, trade-offs with food security, the use of crops unfamiliar to smallholders and inappropriate for local—soil and other—conditions, and high transaction costs of having to provide technical assistance and otherwise deal with individual farmers). Research by Bastos Lima (2012) reveals the mix of policies and actors that have resulted in a more inclusive approach:

- policy advocacy by social movements;
- involvement of a local social movement in the process of agreeing and signing contracts, which has enhanced smallholder bargaining power;
- the entrance of a subsidiary of the state-owned oil company, Petrobras, as a new industry actor establishing contracts with smallholders;
- improved technical assistance and promotion of smallholder cooperatives to build organizational capacity;
- purchase of feedstock at above market prices;
- promotion of both food-and-feedstock cultivation; and
- possibilities for smallholders to ascend the biofuel value chain through, for example, locally-owned seed-oil extraction.

Also referring to Brazil, however, Sano (2012) notes that despite significant discursive and procedural shifts associated with participation in policy making, participation in practice can sometimes fail to create meaningful channels for debate and influence, and instead serves to legitimize government decisions. This can result from the complexity of environmental issues, combined with specific constraints facing many civil society actors—including under-representation on government bodies, lack of technical support and limited spaces for effective participation. Developing “plural environmental governance” thus remains a major challenge in Brazil, as elsewhere (Sano 2012). Referring to India, Banerjee and Sood observe that trends associated with participatory governance often result in forms of public-private partnerships that fundamentally benefit private actors who incur few risks while the state incurs hidden costs and long-term liabilities (Banerjee and Sood 2012).

Translating a space at the table into effective voice, influence and decision-making power is a complex process. It often involves changes in governance structures, capacity building, incentives for “active citizenship” and bottom-up pressure. Research on the UK Transition Towns movement illustrates how positive environmental, economic and social gains can be achieved when transparency and equitable decision-making mechanisms created by government are combined with a decentralized framework for community participation, strong incentives for both citizen engagement and green consumption, and policies promoting localism that respond to citizens’ movements for local environmental and economic change (Merritt and Stubbs 2012). This has led to success in both gaining consensus and generating financial resources for locally relevant climate change policies.

Participatory relationships must therefore create an environment that addresses structural constraints to the non-participation of some actors or groups, such as the lack of assets or inability to mobilize (Merritt and Stubbs 2012). And where local government is largely dependent upon national government resources, investing in local government capacity to partner with communities on climate change projects (by providing infrastructure, legislation and regulation, for example) is crucial for successful multistakeholder coalitions (Merritt and Stubbs 2012).

Civil regulation

An important development in the field of participatory governance associated with green economy relates to the increasing role of civil society organizations, not only in consultative processes associated with public policy and project design and implementation, but actually assuming direct responsibility or regulatory authority for designing and overseeing the implementation of standards associated with sustainability.¹⁰ In the field of green economy, such initiatives include the Gold Standard; Fairtrade International; the Ethical Trading Initiative; the Forest Stewardship Council, the Marine Stewardship Council and several other commodity Roundtables (for example, Palm Oil, Soy, Cocoa). These forms of civil regulation (Bendell and Murphy 2002) potentially address important limitations of regulatory governance associated with, inter alia, weak state capacity, the restrictions imposed on state regulation because of international (World Trade Organization/WTO) trade rules (McGlennon 2011), and the challenge of designing effective regulatory regimes in contexts of increasing complexity and risk that arise with economic globalization (Beck 2005) and global value chains. But they face a variety of challenges and dilemmas.

The balance of stakeholder interests in the governance structures of multistakeholder initiatives is a crucial determinant of how meaningful such initiatives are from the perspective of inclusiveness and sustainability. Initiatives such as the Forest Stewardship Council and Fairtrade International, which have promoted more equitable stakeholder participation and representation of workers and small producers from developing countries, have done more for subaltern groups in developing countries than schemes like the Marine Stewardship Council which have been more Northern-centred.¹¹

But schemes with more inclusive governance arrangements face a dilemma: when they raise the bar in terms of standards and procedures, companies may turn to other less demanding schemes. Or particular schemes may fragment due to internal differences in approach. The split within the fairtrade movement in 2011, when the US labeling organization Transfair USA left the international fairtrade federation, Fairtrade International, is a case in point. The fact that the split occurred relates directly to the issue of participatory governance. The balance of interests within the governance structures of both organizations had changed through time. Organizations representing small producers in developing countries had gained both voice and vote within Fairtrade International. This had not occurred within Transfair USA. Such interests pushed for adjustments in price and social premium and reasserted principles associated with small producer empowerment and agro-ecology. Interests within Transfair USA, on the other hand, leaned towards expanding market share by working with larger commercial producers and promoting conventional forms of corporate social responsibility (Reed 2012; Utting 2012).

Social movements, contestation and advocacy

Local, national and global activism associated with social movements and networks of civil society organizations has a crucial role to play in framing public opinion and policy options, and in determining which issues are prioritized by policy makers or at least put on the agenda. Collective mobilization is also necessary for challenging existing institutional forces, norms and values that reproduce many unsustainable practices. Indeed, anthropological analysis of forest protection and agro-ecology projects in Brazil suggests that ongoing contestation and bargaining between the different actors engaged in a project are not only features of the relationship but a key for success. Such tensions or “conflicts of interest” can ensure that assets and competencies, or different types of capital—natural, economic, social and human—come together in complementary ways (Rival 2012a, 2012b).

Social movements activism related to green economy is evident on multiple fronts: pressuring governments to take climate change seriously and take action; contesting dominant approaches

¹⁰ Reed et al 2012; UNCTAD 2011; Vogel 2005; WWF 2012.

¹¹ See chapters by Auld, Cashore and Reed in Reed et al. 2012.

to green economy centred on the commodification of nature and “green grabbing” (Fairhead et al. 2012), and attempting to reframe the debate in terms of environmental and social justice; and proactively promoting alternatives (Bullard and Müller 2012).

The challenges facing social movements in this field, as in many others, are immense. Not only do they have to build popular mass and broad-based coalitions within civil society, they also have to build coalitions with other public and private actors and institutions. Furthermore, they have to not only contest and make clear what they dislike, but also propose feasible real world alternatives.

Movements defending and advocating for land rights or food sovereignty—for example, the Landless Workers Movement (MST) in Brazil, Ekta Parishad in India and Via Campesina internationally—as well as other movements for social and environmental justice issues such as fairtrade, rainforest protection and climate justice more generally, are not only active but are also coalescing in networks that facilitate learning, contestation and bargaining. Such activism was instrumental in broadening the green economy agenda in the run-up to the 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, as was seen in the inclusion of global CSO priorities for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which tend to go beyond the sectoral focus of governments and many UN entities.¹²

Research also shows, however, the pitfalls of romanticizing movements. They are prone to fragmentation, co-optation and “NGOization”, and their influence may pale in comparison to that of more powerful interests (Utting et al. 2012a). For Bullard and Müller (2012), the openness of the terminology of both green economy and climate justice poses a major challenge for social movements searching for alternatives. They argue that civil society actors mobilizing around climate justice represent a weak form of coalition, and attribute this to the “staying power of business” and global neoliberalism, the lack of elite consensus around the climate problem and solutions (and therefore the diffuse character of an identifiable “enemy”, internal conflicts within the climate justice movement itself, and a lack of clarity around the levers of change).

While efforts to forge a climate justice movement (CJM) at the global level have proven difficult, research indicates that there is considerable potential in doing so from the bottom up via movements that are rooted in the struggles of local communities and that connect their struggles both analytically and organizationally with broader issues and constituencies. There is a strong capacity for rooted social movements and coalitions from the global South to engage in political action at multiple levels, but the main challenge is to broaden their struggle beyond their current base and to create their own “globality”.

As Bullard and Müller (2012:60) observe, despite the activist retreat from global-level organizing following the Copenhagen Climate Conference (COP 15) in December 2009, this:

does not mean the absence of movement: there are strong and dynamic CJMs in the Global South, whose main challenge is to broaden their struggle beyond their current base, and to globalize it. There are also dynamic, if much weaker, CJMs in the Global North, whose main challenge lies in moving beyond their own, extremely narrow activist base—and in turn linking up with much more powerful movements in the South.

Conclusion: Towards Joined-Up Thinking, Policy and Action

Based largely on research that contributed to the UNRISD inquiry into the social dimensions of green economy, this paper has attempted to show why such dimensions need to be factored

¹² Suggestions for SDGs from CSOs included goals and indicators for: combating poverty, changing consumption patterns, public participation, sustainable livelihoods, access to redress and remedy, environmental justice, access to information, and subsidies and investment (see UN-DESA 2012).

into debates and policy dialogues to ensure that transition paths are both green *and* fair. The social dimensions highlighted above include: knowledge, belief systems and values of different groups; social structures, institutions and relations; and the distributional consequences of change processes of policies for different social or interest groups. Incorporating these issues into our analyses tells us much about human behaviour and the capacity to adapt and respond to change; possible sources of resistance to transition; as well as who might win or lose, and what to do about it, in change processes. Viewing green economy from a social development perspective points to a range of issues and questions that are often neglected by researchers, activists and policy makers, which, in turn, can lead to major imbalances in the orientation of green economy policies. Our analysis of social policy and participation in the context of green economy highlights two arenas of public and civil intervention that are crucial for achieving economic, social, environmental and emancipatory objectives associated with sustainable and rights-based development.

Building a knowledge base that overcomes problems of disciplinary bias and fragmentation is crucial for recognizing the centrality of social dimensions of green economy and sustainable development. The approach developed in the paper suggests that numerous social science disciplines and subdisciplines have much to contribute to debates and dialogues on green economy transition. As noted in part 1, however, analysis of global environmental change tends to be dominated by a small number of academic fields. As the International Social Science Council (ISSC) has emphasized, not only do multiple disciplines have much to contribute, but knowledge needs to cohere.¹³ Incorporating multiple disciplines and knowledge will require “defragmenting research efforts”, and promoting interdisciplinarity (with inputs from and collaboration among diverse scholarly fields) and transdisciplinarity, (collaboration across the natural and social sciences and between researchers and other societal actors) (Hackman and St. Claire 2012:8-9).

Problems of bias, blind spots and fragmentation characterize not only knowledge but also policy and action. Policy choices for a green and fair economy need to be informed by more diverse forms of knowledge and recognize also the multiplicity of social institutions (such as norms, regulation, rights, trust and cooperation) and social relations (such as class, gender and ethnicity) that underpin people’s capacities to adapt to change. Furthermore, evaluation of the impacts of technological, economic and ecological change on different social and economic groups is essential to inform policy choices.

We have seen that where social issues are addressed, the focus is often, first, on issues of protection and compensation of those negatively affected by certain processes of change, and second, on attaining co-benefits (for example, green jobs or community forestry) associated with the different economic, social, environmental spheres of sustainable development. A third set of policy interventions and governance arrangements related to social reproduction, redistribution, rights and effective participation, which is key for structural transformation compatible with sustainable development, tends to receive less attention.

Social policies can move beyond the current narrow focus; they can assist in tackling structural causes of vulnerability to environmental change; in changing behaviours, whether related to management and use of natural resources or towards green consumption; and in ensuring the distributional outcomes of any transition process are just. Green goals can, and indeed must, increasingly be incorporated into existing social policy priorities and instruments. To do this effectively, social and eco-social policies can, for example, address the distributional consequences of energy prices and green taxes on different income groups; mitigate the social costs of industrial restructuring, through the creation of green jobs and related training programmes; set standards of decent work associated with green jobs; and protect and promote the livelihoods and rights of rural populations and communities in the context of market-based

¹³ In 2011 and 2012, the ISSC undertook an extensive enquiry into how to raise the profile of social science research in knowledge and policy on climate change and global environmental change (ISSC 2012).

conservation mechanisms (PES, REDD+), green growth policies (export-led agriculture, large-scale water infrastructure development), green technologies (biofuels, renewable energy) and other green economy schemes.

The analysis in this paper suggests that the scope for meaningful change is much greater when policy, institutions, participation and innovation come together in ways that are complementary and synergistic. Several such complementarities have been noted: cooperation and technological innovation in rural India (Agarwal 2010); decentralization, incentives and active citizenship in UK transition towns (Merritt and Stubbs 2012); cooperative organization, government training and fair pricing in Malaysia (Herzi and Ghazali 2012); and public-private partnerships and collective or community organizing in Brazil (Bastos Lima 2012; Rival 2012a).

The joining-up of policy tools with participatory processes and coalitions of multiple actors often emerges as a determinant of initiatives that are conducive to fair and sustainable development. Collaborative governance can facilitate resource mobilization, the pooling of competencies, and ensuring complementarities and synergies that otherwise would not exist. And we have seen how governance arrangements can facilitate collaboration not only of multiple actors (state, market, civil society and community) but also at multiple scales (international, regional, national, subnational and local). Ongoing contestation within governance is also important to ensure that voice translates into influence, and that consultative processes serve to democratize—rather than simply legitimize—policy making. This points to the importance of the empowerment and organization of traditionally disadvantaged social actors.

A green society depends crucially on the capacity of such groups to organize collectively, engage in advocacy and bargaining, and be part of broader coalitions for change. We have also seen that activism and advocacy at different scales need to connect with local struggles both in terms of the analysis of problems and solutions and mobilization strategy. The scope for such connectivity currently appears to be increasing in contexts where (i) regional and global forums, such as the World Social Forum, exist, (ii) a culture of networking is taking root, (iii) technological opportunities associated with the Internet and social media facilitate communication, and (iv) situations of crisis energize the quest for alternative models of development. In this regard, developments at the People's Summit in Rio+20 appear significant. The process of intra-civil society dialogue, networking and coalition-building, which has been a feature of the World Social Forums, was taken a step forward. The findings of several thematic discussion groups cohered in a platform for change that attempted to provide a blueprint for "Another Future is Possible" (Thematic Social Forum 2012). This marked the latest phase in a process of social movements activism that has attempted to go beyond criticizing by proposing alternatives.

Ultimately, public policies need to be rooted in a strong social contract between a state and its citizens, creating solidarity and a consensus for change across social and economic groups. Addressing global environmental challenges in a globalized world will require a new environmental-social contract that extends from local and national levels to the global arena; it will need to be associated with stronger mechanisms of global social and environmental governance over the management and provision of global public goods (WBGU 2011). Such a contract will need to be grounded in rights of citizenship or entitlements linked to employment or residence; as well as in principles of universalism, solidarity and intergenerational equity. This in turn calls for a focus not just on policies and outcomes, but on the institutional arrangements and processes for achieving them. Key in this regard is a focus on the agency, empowerment and accountability of social actors—states, business, civil society, communities and individuals—in bringing about the structural and institutional changes necessary for a transformation to sustainable development.

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This UNRISD Occasional Paper series, produced in collaboration with the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) for Rio+20, aims to stimulate debate around the social dimensions of green economy and sustainable development. While the Rio+20 process explicitly links the goals of promoting green economy, sustainable development and poverty eradication, the social dimensions have received relatively little attention compared to economic and environmental concerns.

Poverty reduction and equitable development are often assumed to be outcomes of low-carbon growth, which in turn is achieved principally through market mechanisms. Targeted social protection interventions are designed in tandem to compensate or protect marginalized or disadvantaged groups. Yet the papers in this series show that deeper transformation of the social structures, institutions and power relations underpinning vulnerability and inequality is required to ensure that development processes are greener and fairer for all. Social policy, broadly conceived, has a key role to play in both achieving this transformation, and supporting changes in the structures of production and consumption necessary for a green economy.

In October 2011, UNRISD convened a conference to explore these themes, bringing together academics, students, government officials, United Nations policy makers and civil society representatives. The papers in the series are drawn from that conference, and reflect the important role that social science research plays in the global search for solutions towards sustainable development.