

# Sustainable Development between International Law and International Relations

## Abstract

Sustainable development (SD) gained real momentum with the UN Conference on SD in 1992 when it entered the international stage. Today, almost no document at the UN level does not acknowledge the potential of sustainable development (SD); its importance is also reiterated in (international) documents at the regional and local level.

One major issues since its inception in 1992 has been the equal regard of its three dimensions, economic, social and environmental. In the literature the concept is mainly mentioned concerning the environment and economics, while the social component seems to be neglected for various reasons. In real politics however, it is not the economic but mainly the environmental ministries leading the process on SD. The first part of this paper will explore the gap between the integrational three-dimensional claim of sustainable development as put forward by the UNCSO in 1992 and 2002 and its enactment focusing on background information of UN stakeholders closely involved in the process, acquired through interviews in NYC in March 2012.

The second part of the paper will focus on the law dimension of sustainable development. With the end of the Rio conference in 1992, the issue became more prominent in international law as well, leading the International Law Association to study the implications of the concept in international law more closely, leading to an important declaration on the principles of SD in international law in 2002. Interestingly, the evolvement of SD in international relations happens in complete disregard of the legal development of the concept. This communicative gap and its impact on the concept will be addressed in the second part of the paper. The paper brings together the challenges sustainable development faces in international law and international relations on aspects that have been disregarding in the reserach thus far.

*Paper prepared for the 2012 Berlin Conference on the Human Dimensions of Global  
Environmental Change: Evidence for Sustainable Development  
Berlin, October 6<sup>th</sup>, 2012*

***Please do not cite or circulate without permission by the author.  
Comments are very welcome.***

*To receive the full paper, please get in touch with me:  
Julia Frohneberg M.A., Researcher, University of Hamburg, Germany  
[Julia.frohneberg@wiso.uni-hamburg.de](mailto:Julia.frohneberg@wiso.uni-hamburg.de)*