



REPORT

CYMRU

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Sustainability | Conservation | Climate Change

# What can an Earth Summit do for Wales?

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# REPORT STRUCTURE

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## FOREWORD BY ANNE MEIKLE HEAD OF WWF CYMRU

At the 1992 Earth Summit, a powerful idea came to global prominence for the first time.



Anne Meikle  
Head of WWF Cymru

*“let’s use Rio+20 to rekindle the enthusiasm and commitment that existed in 1992 to create a better world”*

That idea was Sustainable Development (SD) and 178 governments were joined by civil society, businesses, local authorities and trade unions, who all agreed that **everyone** needed to take action so that we lived within the environmental limits of the planet and we ensured a world with less poverty and injustice – where benefits were more equally shared.

The 1992 Summit was a radical departure point, which led to global agreements that are still in force today. This report reveals a ‘golden thread’ of sustainable development in Wales running from that 1992 Summit, through the creation of the National Assembly (with its duty to promote SD) and the Welsh Government’s ‘One Wales: One Planet’ scheme (which recognised limits to resource use), to the Sustainable Development Bill, due in 2013.

Yet sadly, this report also shows that over time, we have lost some of the enthusiasm around sustainable development and for many it has slipped down the list of priorities.

Meanwhile, the world is still facing crisis. We are using the earth’s resources more quickly than they can be replenished. This is driving up our fuel and food prices here in Wales, while around the globe, people struggle to access essentials such as clean drinking water. Meanwhile plant and animal species continue to decline and the world is failing to tackle climate change effectively.

So this year, let’s use Rio+20 to rekindle the enthusiasm and commitment that existed in 1992 to create a better world. To do this, politicians must take a lead from the key themes of this year’s Summit:

**1. Fair access to resources.** Let’s stop talking about social justice as if it were separate from sustainable development.

**2. Building a green economy.** It is too easy to use the recession to excuse behaviour and lifestyles that are leading to injustice, poverty and damage to the environment. Our future prosperity in Wales depends on resources found outside our borders. With key resources becoming scarcer and more expensive, our economy will suffer unless we become much more resource efficient. Achieving our own prosperity at the expense of people and wildlife elsewhere is clearly unsustainable.

In 1992, it was clear that making the changes we need would take a lifetime. However twenty years on, we are in danger of losing the energy we had back then to deliver sustainable development in Wales.

Let’s make 2012 the year we rediscover our enthusiasm to **delivering** a sustainable Wales, with a world-leading SD Bill which strengthens our current duty and defines clearly what our sustainable future is.

To deliver prosperity for current and future generations, let’s make sure we continue that ‘golden thread’, to make Wales a global leader on sustainable development.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

Over the last twenty years, outcomes from the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, and the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002, have provided a framework for the international community, national, regional and local governments to pursue sustainable development in the constituencies and communities that they serve.



## REALITY CHECK AROUND RIO +20 AND THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT BILLS

What has their legacy been in Wales, in terms of the country's governance, development, institutions, communities and citizens? What can we learn from Wales' journey over this period to inform future approaches to sustainable development in Wales, through Rio+20 in 2012 and beyond, as Welsh Government pursues a legislative approach through the Sustainable Development Bill?

WWF Cymru commissioned this work to understand how the Rio and Johannesburg summits have impacted on politics, policy, government, governance, institutions and individuals of Wales. Documentary evidence, media archives and interviews have helped to build a retrospective picture of their influence and to consider what we can learn from the 'sustainable development journey' in Wales to inform the next 20 years.

**This report serves as a reminder and prompt.**

**A reminder of what has been achieved in Wales since 1992, and how much is still to be done since the ambitious agenda of the first Rio Summit**

**A prompt, by capturing what key actors perceive to be the priorities for the future.**

**Both should serve as a reality check on our progress so far, and inform debate around Rio+20 and the Sustainable Development Bill.**

Throughout the text we have provided a series of questions in italics to provoke further debate on the issues that we raise.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The research team are very grateful to the individuals who have agreed to take part in this analysis, individuals who represent all aspects of Wales society, government and institutions. The views reported here are from the research team.



## 2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This research has unearthed a rich picture of the influence of Rio and Johannesburg Summits on Wales, an influence that has lasted over two decades.

There are a number of key findings which provide a salient lesson for Wales as it moves forward to legislate for sustainable development and plan into the future, these are set out below.

1. Memories from Rio 1992 were difficult to capture, but they gave a sense of the hope in Wales that the Earth Summit would make a real difference. Civil society, young people and a few innovative local authorities were engaged, interpreting the Summit for Wales and local people.
2. Despite local government re-organisation, 1992 - 2002 saw a blossoming of Local Agenda 21 initiatives with local visioning, community involvement and resource efficiency making the language (and often the practice) of sustainability commonplace in local government.
3. A long lasting and tangible outcome, 20 years on from Rio, is the resilience of the sustainable development agenda in local government policy and process. Since Rio in 1992 we have seen the rise and fall of Agenda 21; and a shift in focus on mainstreaming SD and resource efficiency in local government rather than community engagement under the SD banner.
4. Evidence from Johannesburg 2002 was easier to come by, and, 10 years on from Rio, it painted a picture of widespread engagement in the sustainable development debate, from local government, civil society and Welsh Assembly Government (WAG), both in Wales and in Africa.
5. Retrospective analysis over 20 years has shown from Rio to Rio+20
  - a growing maturity of policy and institutional frameworks in Wales addressing the Summit themes
  - maturing national debate leading up to the 2002 Summit
  - a watershed post 2002 of diminishing local government Local Agenda 21 work and national debate around Summit themes
  - WAG's influence on the SD agenda growing through Section 121.
  - enhanced political representation from WAG at an international level
  - enhanced civil society engagement in projects which exemplify SD
6. International sustainable development issues have been embraced by Welsh Assembly Government as it has developed, with SD helping WAG find its voice on an international stage via Johannesburg, Network of Regional Governments for Sustainable Development (NRG4SD) and subsequent climate summits.
7. Civil society and NGOs have been active from Rio onwards with long lasting and well established support networks, innovative projects and community engagement on SD over a 20 year period. There is a clear relationship between civil society and SD developed through Cynnal Cymru and others.
8. Wales has developed a 'suite' of partnership projects which exemplify the international element of SD and Summit themes - showing world leadership around Fairtrade, ecological footprinting, Wales for Africa, Size of Wales and others.

*“Wales has developed a ‘suite’ of partnership projects which exemplify the international element of SD and Summit themes”*

9. The Summits have in many instances created the conditions for pursuing SD in Wales. In the complex world of policy development and policy delivery, it is too simplistic to expect to be able to observe direct relationships between the Summits and domestic actions. Rather, there is a subtler and more indirect process at work where individuals have actively used Rio and Johannesburg to legitimise their agendas at events, in institutional settings, and policy formulation.
10. This research suggests that there is a direct effect of the Summits in creating the political space, discourse and policy frameworks which have, ultimately led Welsh Government to pursue an SD Bill.
11. Key individuals and groups of individuals have been ‘catalysed’ by the Summits and these politicians, civil servants, development officers and campaigners have innovated, collaborated and achieved tangible progress and change.
12. Commitment and drive from Assembly politicians like Sue Essex, Ron Davies, Rhodri Morgan and Jane Davidson enabled space for civil servants, local authorities and NGOs to work together on initiatives, interpreting Summit proposals, and developing responses.
13. The international sustainable development agenda has been lost for many, due to a focus on local delivery and austerity, making ‘mutual dependency’ and ‘global to local’ a hard sell in hard times.
14. We have not seen the transformational change that Rio promised on the ground in Wales, but, we have seen transformational change over 20 years in the policy framework or ‘kit’ to deal with SD - this is however not cohesive, nor does it give an overall sense of direction on SD.
15. Aspirations for the next 20 years are tempered by the fact that there is no agreed common ground on the future agenda for SD in Wales.
16. However, there is hope from key commentators that transformational change is achievable in a short period, but there is a clear sense of urgency that time is short to plan well for SD.
17. Three ‘aspirational’ models have emerged through the research which can be used as a lens when considering the next 20 years. These are ‘Sustainability as survival’ ‘Sustainability as a new development path’ and ‘Sustainability as service delivery’. These models are interconnected but can be used to reflect on which development path the SD Bill is most likely to send us down.
18. Similar messages have emerged from two groups of people - existing policy makers/practitioners and the ‘next generation’ - future decision makers who have grown up in the 20 years since 1992. They perceive the same current and future problems and the same levels of incoherence in values, policy and priorities that the Rio Summit sought to rectify.
19. An implementation gap remains - between the mature policy frameworks that seek to address the challenges of sustainable development in Wales (those developed as a result of the Summits) and SD being exemplified in the way we make different decisions and deliver on the ground.
20. A challenge for the SD Bill and its proponents will be to make explicit the values that underlie their vision of sustainable development. Dominant values at present are seen to be resource efficiency and efficient public services in SD discourse. The challenge is for Wales to ensure that fairness, global equity and living within environmental limits, are not lost.

*“The challenge is for Wales to ensure that fairness, global equity and living within environmental limits, are not lost”*

### 3. THE KEY MESSAGES AND DRIVERS EMERGING FROM RIO & JOHANNESBURG

It is worth reminding ourselves, 20 and 10 years on, exactly what was achieved at both Summits, and what legislative and policy drivers emerged from their discourse.

This helps us to understand and track their influence on UK, Welsh and local responses.



RIO DECLARATION

**The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) 1992** took place in Rio de Janeiro from 3 to 14 June 1992. The Rio Earth Summit as it became known marked a significant milestone in international debates on sustainable development. First, 172 governments participated in the Summit. Second, there were nearly 2,500 representatives of NGOs and 17,000 people at the parallel Global Forum. This created a feeling of dynamism at a global event. Third, a range of issues were discussed, including patterns of production, energy supply, and water. Fourth, there were significant outcomes. These included two agreements being opened for signature,

- **Framework Convention on Climate Change a binding agreement targeting industrial emissions**
- **Convention of Biological Diversity a binding agreement to preserve the diversity of life.**

and three key documents:

- **the Rio Declaration in which 178 governments acknowledge 27 principles needed to work towards SD, living within environmental limits and, at the same time, pursuing social justice and equality.**
- **the Statement of Forest Principles on forest conservation and SD**
- **Agenda 21: an action plan for national and local governments, public and private organisations and the voluntary sector to promote sustainable development**

Rio 1992 also led to the establishment of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development.



JOHANNESBURG DECLARATION

**The World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) 2002** (also known as Rio +10) took place in Johannesburg from 26 August to 4 September 2002. The Summit was partially undermined because the United States government refused to participate. It was left to the European Union to play a more strategic role, with a clear intergovernmental rather than community focused agenda. The main outcome of the Summit was the Johannesburg Declaration. The Declaration is a commitment by governments to focus on a wide range of development, social and environmental issues that comprise sustainable development. In contrast to the Rio Declaration, discourse from Johannesburg is more general and commits national governments to little action.

The Johannesburg Plan on Implementation set out principles for the international community, and national and regional governments to pursue, with no binding agreements. These covered: poverty, resource consumption; health; biodiversity; water; small nations; Africa; regions; institutions.

These are the raw outcomes. Greater detail and critical analysis is provided at length in a wealth of web based material including the following recommended sites.

Earth Summit, United Nations Conference on Environment and Development 1992,  
<http://www.un.org/geninfo/bp/enviro.html>

Johannesburg Summit 2002  
[http://www.un.org/jsummit/html/basic\\_info/basicinfo.html](http://www.un.org/jsummit/html/basic_info/basicinfo.html)

### 4. WELSH ACTIVITY IN AND AROUND THE SUMMITS

One interviewee described this period as still being in “the age of paper” and remembered postcards with pledges being sent to the Summit directly to the UN from a local authority.

The absence of the internet and limited archives from 1992 presented the research team with few examples of activity leading up to the Rio Summit.

Ann Clwyd MP the then Shadow Development Secretary attended the Earth Summit representing the Labour party and the Cynon Valley. Ann states in an article in the Western Mail on June 6 1992 that

*“what is needed is a comprehensive and binding agreement of far reaching environmental and development measures from both the south and north”*

Interviewees remembered a pre-Summit event at the Temple of Peace called the Junior Earth Summit in Cardiff in June 1992, also reported in the Western Mail, with schoolchildren representing the whole of Wales, who were invited to place pledges on a tree. This event was convened on behalf of WWF by a current AM, Alun Davies who suggested when interviewed that the event was,

*“a first example of local to global” “a sense of beginning, an innocence”*

One interviewee who was a sixth former at the time, and is now a key player in SD in Wales recalled how individuals had been recruited for the Temple of Peace event to represent individual countries who would be attending Rio - she happened to be Pakistan. Debates, civil society and youth involvement seemed to be high on the agenda.

The research has revealed no evidence of a lead from the Welsh Office on Rio to local authorities. Local government at that time seems to have had a ‘watching brief’. Indeed, a Western Mail article from June 15 1992 outlined how Cardiff City councillors discussed the consequences of the Earth Summit as it closed, stating

*“The questions of subsidiarity – decision making at the lowest appropriate level – and community involvement are very relevant to the city. It is clear that to work towards achieving the objectives which will be set by the event, a great deal of work at a very local level will be needed”*

For the Johannesburg Summit in 2002 through electronic and media archives and interviews a different picture emerged - one where Wales was keyed into debate at a national, local and community level, where Wales and its good practice was discussed at home and in Africa. Summit related activities in Wales included:

**Wales & the World** was a Pre-Johannesburg Summit Conference organised by Oxfam Cymru and WWF Cymru, supported by WAG, held in April at City Hall in Cardiff. Some 400 delegates attend, and the seminars and workshops provide a starting point for the message First Minister Rhodri Morgan is taking to Johannesburg. Co-chaired by Eluned Morgan, the conference was addressed by Professor Sir John Houghton, Chair Of The International Panel On Climate Change, Derek Osborn of the United Nations Environment and Development UK Committee (Uned-UK) and Antonio Hill of Oxfam. Rhodri Morgan launched the Wales Ecological Footprint stating:

*“Uniquely, we have adopted the ecological footprint as one of the indicators of resource use within Wales.”* (WWF Ecological Footprint - The Story So Far 2006)



*“Uniquely, we have adopted the ecological footprint as one of the indicators of resource use within Wales”*

(WWF Ecological Footprint - The Story So Far 2006)

**Women's Institute** ran a campaign across the UK called “What Women Want” inviting members to say what they wanted world leaders to do on equality for women at Rio +10. This was fed into their wider work on the Millennium Development Goals and into the Association of Countrywomen of the World.

**Monmouthshire Council's** “Reach for the Summit” Programme of events in 2002 included a youth event called ‘Our Planet’ in November 2002, Fairtrade events and in-house themed days on resource efficiency.

**Carmarthenshire's** “Eye on the World” Youth Conference in November 2002 “Global to Local - from Johannesburg to Ferryside” featured workshops on energy, ecological footprinting, international development, fairtrade, biodiversity and poverty.

**Awel Aman Tawe** a community wind farm project that was selected by Departmental for International Development as a case study for Johannesburg. This case study write up explicitly links back to Agenda 21.

<http://www.petus.eu.com/left.php?sct=1&sbst=1&pageid=5&pagesect=1&pagelang=en>

The “**Debate, Decisions, Directions**” Conference in December 2002 which brought over 300 stakeholders together in Swansea to discuss outcomes of Johannesburg, launch Cynnal Cymru and understand key constraints for progress.

**Welsh Local Government Association's** Declaration on Sustainable Development developed to feed into Johannesburg, signed by all 22 authorities and National Parks with case studies to exemplify sustainable actions. Carmarthenshire Council and others endorsed this in August 2002.

<http://online.carmarthenshire.gov.uk/agendas/eng/EXBD20020902/REPO4.htm>

**Local Government International Bureau** representative Cllr Alan Lloyd from Swansea Council delivered the Local Government Declaration to Johannesburg on behalf of local government worldwide.

<http://new.lga.gov.uk/lga/aio/22024>

**Welsh Assembly Government** was represented at the Johannesburg Summit by the First Minister, Rhodri Morgan who signed the Gauteng Declaration and joined the regional government Network of Regional Governments for Sustainable Development.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/wales/2231089.stm>

Clearly, by 2002 Johannesburg had a high profile in the Welsh ‘firmament’.

A decade on from Rio, sustainable development seems to have been de rigueur, engaging the public sector, civil society and academia.

This activity predominantly sought to understand the implications of the Summit within a Welsh context and to engage young people, thereby increasing their awareness of the issues.

These examples provide snapshots of activity in 1992 and 2002. How do they fit into the past 20 years of governance, policy and development in Wales?

*“This activity predominantly sought to understand the implications of the Summit within a Welsh context and to engage young people, thereby increasing their awareness of the issues”*

## 5. TIMELINE - MAPPING THE LEGACY OF THE SUMMITS IN WALES

In order to place the Summits into context over a 20 year period, a timeline was developed from 1992 through to 2012 showing:

- a set of development milestones from a policy and governance perspective around the Summits
- and some implementation milestones - activities which exemplify a local or community response to the themes explored in the Summits.

This timeline has been populated through documentary evidence, interviews and a media review (newspaper and web archives). It served as a prompt to the memories of interviewees and helped in the critical analysis of the Summits' legacy. Importantly, it provides perspective on SD activity. The timeline is not comprehensive, but enables readers to place their own key examples into a 20 year period. What are the other key milestones, policy interventions and junctures not mentioned here?



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The slogan of the WSSD at the Ubuntu Village. World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg.

# RIO CONFERENCE EARTH SUMMIT 1992

## SOME POLICY AND GOVERNANCE MILESTONES 1992- 2002

1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	
<p>Ann Clwyd MP the then Shadow Development Secretary attended the Earth Summit representing the Labour party and the Cynon Valley</p> <p>Agenda 21 for local authorities: strategy for SD; increase household awareness; modified policy and governance</p>		<p>First UK SD Strategy.</p> <p>Biodiversity UK Action Plan</p>	<p>Welsh Local Government re-organisation</p>	<p>Target for local authorities to produce an LA21 strategy by 2000</p>		<p>UK CO2 emissions reduction target 20% from a 1990 base level by 2010</p> <p>Kyoto Emissions Protocol (ratified 2005)</p>	<p>Section 121 of Government of Wales Act</p>	<p>First National Assembly Election</p>	<p>First SD Scheme published by NAW 'Learning to live differently'</p> <p>Welsh National Parks Sustainable Development Fund established</p>	<p>First Ecological Footprint of Wales measured by WAG, WWF, SEI and others</p>	<p>Welsh Local Government Declaration on SD</p>

## SOME IMPLEMENTATION MILESTONES IN WALES 1992 - 2002

1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
<p>Pre -Earth Summit Conference the Junior Earth Summit at Cardiff Temple of Peace</p> <p>Environment Wales established</p> <p>Women's Institute Agenda 21 resolution</p> <p>Gwent Council Agenda 21 Consultation</p> <p>Cardiff City Council partner in Eurocities SD indicators project</p>	<p>Association of Commonwealth Universities 'People and Environment Conference' in Swansea followed up on Rio themes from FHE perspective</p>					<p>Ymlaen Ceredigion Partnership established</p>	<p>Cardiff Council launches Local Agenda 21: Framework for Action</p>	<p>Carmarthen-shire Council launches LA21 Strategy at National Eisteddfodd</p>	<p>ESRC funded BRASS Research Institute established at Cardiff University</p>	<p>Wales and the World pre-summit Conference in Cardiff - 400 delegates</p> <p>New Future for Wales Project (CAT)</p> <p>WWF Our World School Challenge</p> <p>Monmouthshire Council: Reach for the Summit Event for Young People</p>

# JOHANNESBURG CONFERENCE EARTH SUMMIT 2002

## SOME POLICY AND GOVERNANCE MILESTONES 2002 - 2012

2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
<p>Rhodri Morgan, the then First Minister, attends Summit and Wales becomes a signatory of Gauteng declaration as part of network of regional governments</p> <p>Wales founding member of NRG4SD Network For Regional Governments on Sustainable Development</p> <p>Welsh Government and WLGA compact on SD</p> <p>WLGA Climate Change Declaration and guidance</p> <p>Estyn publishes curriculum guidance on education for sustainable development and global citizenship</p> <p>Biodiversity Action Target to halt decline by 2010</p>		<p>Revised Wales SD Scheme 'Starting to live differently'</p>	<p>'One Future Different Paths' UK SD Strategy</p>	<p>WAG Environment Strategy</p>	<p>Biodiversity Action Framework for Wales</p>	<p>WLGA Sustainable Development Framework launched for local government</p> <p>Wales signs UNDP climate change action programme for Africa</p> <p>AM Jane Davidson, attends UN climate talks in Poznan to help regional and sub-national governments role</p>	<p>One Wales: One Planet Revised SD Scheme</p> <p>Wales Climate Change Commission established</p> <p>Code for Sustainable Homes</p>	<p>Zero Waste Strategy launched</p> <p>Wales co-chairs global network nrg4SD</p> <p>Wales is UK's only representative at Quebec climate talks</p> <p>Wales Climate Change Strategy launched</p>	<p>Wales implements carrier bag levy</p> <p>Wales Sustainable Development Commissioner Post established</p> <p>WG start consultation on an SD Bill</p>	<p>WG White Paper on SD Bill</p>

## SOME IMPLEMENTATION MILESTONES IN WALES 2002 - 2012

2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	
<p>Young people attend Johannesburg from WWF, CAT and Techniquet</p> <p>Swansea Cllr. Alan Lloyd delivers World Association of Cities and local Authorities 'Local Government Declaration'</p> <p>Cynnal Cymru - Sustainable Development Forum for Wales established</p> <p>Post Johannesburg Wales Conference University of Swansea</p> <p>Newport Rugby team (via Newport Council) become world first Carbon neutral rugby team</p> <p>Local Biodiversity Action Plans launched e.g. Powys, Denbighshire and so on</p>		<p>Cardiff hosts nRG4SD conference with 34 regional governments from across the world</p> <p>Wales, Cardiff and Gwynedd Ecological Footprints published</p>		<p>Greenprint programme at Hay Festival</p> <p>Bangor University Sustainability Hub established</p>	<p>Cardiff University hosts first International Ecological Footprint Conference</p> <p>Wales for Africa Initiative launched</p> <p>National Eisteddfodd commits to Sustainability Appraisal</p>	<p>Cardiff University hosts first International Ecological Footprint Conference</p> <p>Wales for Africa Initiative launched</p> <p>National Eisteddfodd commits to Sustainability Appraisal</p>	<p>Wales becomes first ever Fairtrade Nation</p>	<p>Countdown to Copenhagen climate change event in Swansea for 300 young people</p> <p>Llamas project named as one of 10 UK low carbon communities</p>	<p>Wales SD Charter launched at Hay on Earth</p> <p>Green Valleys project receives major funding</p> <p>Size of Wales project launched to sustain tropical rainforest</p>	<p>Millennium Stadium, Cardiff becomes the UK's first certifiably-sustainable event stadium</p> <p>Sustainable Places Research Institute launched at Cardiff University</p> <p>Sustainable Development Commission for Wales closed</p> <p>Llangattock village commits to be carbon neutral by 2015</p>	<p>INSPIRE Institute for Sustainable Practice launched at Trinity St David's College, Carmarthen</p> <p>IWA Conference on Rio+20</p>



What does this timeline tell us?

There are a number of patterns which emerge.

- **the increasing pace of Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) policy development around the themes from the Summits**
- **political representation from WAG at an international level**
- **the emphasis of local government on Local Agenda 21 up to 2002 which then declined**
- **national events to interpret the aims of international conferences for Welsh audiences which then diminished**
- **sustainably focused research centres being established in Welsh Universities**
- **institutional development around the themes from the Summits**
- **project development around the themes from the Summits**

As our interviewees commented,

*“Johannesburg gave meaning to the SD Scheme. Without Johannesburg the Scheme could have fallen by the wayside. It gave meaning to what we want to do in Wales”*

*“Rhodri going to Johannesburg was the single most significant thing Wales has done internationally”*

*“Mr Morgan’s presence in Johannesburg will raise the profile of Wales on the world stage...and will enable Wales to punch above its weight”*

Arguably, from this evidence, Wales now has a mature policy setting, intellectual capacity and an institutional framework to deal with the challenges set out in 1992. Couple this with the hundreds of community based projects across Wales, supported by Environment Wales, Groundwork Wales, Cynnal Cymru, WCVA, Welsh National Parks Sustainable Development Fund and others, which aren’t represented here, then a rosy picture could be painted of a maturing sustainable nation.

Is this a true picture?

Can these developments be directly attributed to the influence of the Summits?

Would they have happened anyway?

These questions are explored in later sections.

*“Wales now has a mature policy setting, intellectual capacity and an institutional framework to deal with the challenges set out in 1992”*

## 6. WHAT ACTIVITIES IN WALES EXEMPLIFY RIO & JOHANNESBURG?

A number of activities have emerged which interviewees identify as outcomes linked to the Summits which might not have happened without their influence.

These are shown below, with hyperlinks, where available, for further information.

Why have these examples been chosen by interviewees? There seems to be a direct link between them and the ‘interpretation’ of the Summits in the way that they:

- **exemplify the community angle of Local Agenda 21 from the Rio Summit i.e. engaging the community and community groups in developing activity to pursue sustainability**
- **exemplify the international and global equity agendas of the Summits i.e. international projects or those that sought fairshare on resource consumption**
- **provide ways of raising awareness and engagement on sustainability to key audiences**
- **demonstrate institutional change to pursue sustainable development**

**Ymlaen Ceredigion** partnership between Ceredigion Council, Princes Trust and Ceredigion LA21 established in 1998 to pursue Local Agenda 21 in Ceredigion. A unique approach.

<http://www.ceredigion.gov.uk/index.cfm?articleid=189>

**Women’s Institute** Pathways Project, 90@90 project on consumer behaviour and Women on Climate Change and climate change campaigns.

<http://www.thewi.org.uk/wi-in-wales/current-campaigns>

<http://www.thewi.org.uk/about-the-wi/history-of-the-wi/2000s>

**NRG4SD** The Network of Regional Governments for Sustainable Development, nrg4SD is an international organisation representing 50 sub national governments from 30 countries. Established in Johannesburg, Wales has played a leading role.

<http://www.nrg4sd.org/members/wales-united-kingdom>

**Cardiff** became the **World’s First Fairtrade Capital City in 2004**, working through Fairtrade Cardiff partnership and the Council.

[http://www.cardiff.gov.uk/content.asp?nav=2870,3148,6218,6226&parent\\_directory\\_id=2865](http://www.cardiff.gov.uk/content.asp?nav=2870,3148,6218,6226&parent_directory_id=2865)

**Wales Ecological Footprint** is now established as core indicator for Welsh Government after first being measured in 2004. A measure of global fair share it is now used at a local authority and community level.

<http://www.footprintwales.org/>

**Welsh Local Government Association** SD Framework established in 2007 provides guidance and practical advice on delivering SD incorporate, service and community contexts.

<http://www.wlga.gov.uk/english/sustainable-development-framework>

**Cynnal Cymru** was established in 2002 as a membership organisation that promotes sustainable development and raises awareness of good practice within Wales. It now provides support to the Wales Sustainable Development Commissioner.

<http://www.cynnalcymru.com/>



**Caerphilly's** cross party **Sustainability Panel** is an example of a long standing advice and decision making group (10 year) which influences sustainable development in Caerphilly.

<http://your.caerphilly.gov.uk/sustainable/content/welcome>

**Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship** being established as part of the Welsh National Curriculum from 2006.

**Wales for Africa** initiative launched in 2006 exemplifies Welsh efforts to help deliver the UN Millennium Development Goals to halve global poverty by 2015 - based on public sector, volunteering, Fairtrade and NGO support.

<http://www.walesafrica.org/index.html>

**Size of Wales Project** to help sustain an area of tropical forest the size of Wales through communities, businesses, organisations and schools to help protect 2 million hectares of rainforest and forge lasting links with some of the world's poorest people.

<http://www.sizeofwales.org.uk/>

Clearly there may be many more examples of similar activity from other organisations which have similar aims. The purpose of this research was not to provide a definitive list but provide an indication of what outcomes key actors 'perceive' to be the legacy of the Summits.

*What other activities in Wales were influenced by Rio and Johannesburg?*

## 7. THEMES EMERGING FROM THE RESEARCH

A number of broad themes have emerged from the interviews and documentary evidence, regarding their legacies, which provide some lessons for our approach to sustainable development in the future.

### 7.1 RIO TO JOHANNESBURG - 'THE DECADE OF LOCAL AGENDA 21'

Post-Rio, in some Welsh local authorities, there seems to have been a flurry of activity: 'visioning' for the future, practical community based projects and 'corporate' greening around resource efficiency.

A strong message through this research is that prior to local government re-organisation in 1996 Rio had a 'galvanising' effect as

*"a place and starting point for the conversation (on SD)"*

*"international issues became legitimate to work on"*

*"having a positive effect on galvanising community activity"*

Authorities in Gwent, Cardiff and Wrexham were described as early movers on LA21 amongst others. Gwent had developed a calendar of activities leading up to the conference including pledges to send to the conference. Environmental co-ordinator posts were established in many local councils, and influenced by UK guidance from the Local Government Management Board, sustainable development through LA21 became established as a 'brand' to work through for local authorities, internally and externally. This brand did not work for everybody, with some interviewees describing LA21 as woolly, unworkable, and never quite fitting into the aims of local authorities. This contrast and mixed picture has been picked up in previous studies by Joseph Rowntree Foundation (Thomas & Williams in 2004) and by the BRASS Research Centre (Flynn & Netherwood 2004).

<http://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/files/jrf/1859352162.pdf> <http://www.brass.cf.ac.uk/uploads/wpcommsqualityoflifeAFANo604.pdf>

Local Agenda 21 activity continued, despite local government re-organisation through 1995 and 1996, with a small group of Environmental Co-ordinators lobbying the Welsh Office to include LA21 as part of the 'make up' of new Councils. In Caerphilly CBC's case, this ensured clear responsibility, resources and staffing to pick up on the agenda developed in Gwent. In Cardiff's case innovative work such as the European SD Indicators project was dropped, as the City Council morphed into a new unitary authority. Far from stalling activity, in many Councils the mandate of Agenda 21 was continued through re-organisation and became an established way of working.



*“we would have no WLGA Sustainable Development Framework without Rio and Johannesburg”*

*“I still believe LA21 is crucial to SD because it roots SD in people and their communities helping them to come up with solutions, it brings to life Think Global Act Local.”*

The research suggests a resilience around LA21 and the themes picked up on in Rio up until 2002. The role of organisations such as the LGMB, Local Government International Bureau and ICLEI have had a clear role in this, providing guidance, conferences and case studies to support activity. LA21 was given further impetus by a UK Government requirement of local authorities to have a Local Agenda 21 in place by 2000.

Johannesburg represented for some local authorities a

*“rekindling of the international agenda”*

with many such as Monmouthshire Council and Carmarthenshire Council engaging with young people and the community around global equity issues including fairtrade.

*“In Wales the reality was that Agenda 21 stuck ...20 years on we still have SD/ Agenda 21 officers in Wales –a real achievement and often forgotten.”*

*“What LAs are doing on LA21 I cannot think of how this could have happened in such a co-ordinated way [without Rio]”*

From a high point of activity on LA21 at the turn of the new century a rapid shift in fortunes occurred. Local Agenda 21 strategies continued to be published by local authorities into 2002 but this seems to be more of a legacy activity than a driver of change. Instead, there was a re-branding of Agenda 21 around this time in Wales. Local Agenda 21 was gradually replaced by a new approach to ‘long term’ planning advocated by WAG, through Community Planning Guidance, encouraging community level planning over a 5 year period and the use of quality of life indicators to engage communities in local ‘visions’. Perhaps more importantly, though, Agenda 21 seems to have gone out of ‘vogue’. Sustainable development discourse in local government soon started to focus on ‘deliverables’, resource efficiency and institutional change rather than visioning and community involvement. Some of the reasons for this are suggested in the next section.

**Nevertheless, Agenda 21 survived a decade in a fast changing and evolving sector (Welsh local government) laying the foundations for sustainable development work throughout the public sector. This is a significant legacy of Rio and is testament to those involved.**

As local government interviewees suggested, in views that would be shared by many,

*“it (Rio) meant sustainable development became part of the psyche of Welsh local authorities”*

*“we would have no WLGA Sustainable Development Framework without Rio and Johannesburg”*

## 7.2 POST JOHANNESBURG - RISE OF WAG'S INFLUENCE ON THE LOCAL SD AGENDA

From 1997-99 and the Government of Wales Act through to the first National Assembly elections, there was also tremendous upheaval as Wales entered devolution, moving from the Welsh Office through to the National Assembly of Wales and Welsh Assembly Government.

*“This Summit was a critical part of the way politicians and civil servants were building the ‘business case’ for SD”*

Was the SD duty, Section 121 of Government of Wales Act in 1998 influenced by Rio in 1992? The answer is most certainly yes. Why else would the ‘Glamorgan Group’ who supported Welsh Government leading up to the Act be discussing the need to place sustainable development in the ‘legislation’? If there had been no international context, Agenda 21, UK Sustainable Development Strategy etc. why would there have been this movement to include SD at that juncture? (See Bishop, Flynn, Netherwood Multi-level Governance for SD in Wales 2003). <http://www.iccr-international.org/regionet/docs/ws2-flynn.pdf>

A new organisation provided new ways of working - with subsequent SD Schemes, consultations, effectiveness reviews, indicators, committees to develop the Government response. It is clear from WAGs engagement in Johannesburg 2002 that this Summit was a critical part of the way politicians and civil servants were building the ‘business case’ for SD.

Part of the way the new government made its mark was to develop, with local government, a new WAG Community Planning ‘brand’ which replaced Local Agenda 21. This was more locally focused, still espousing SD, but losing the link to the Summits and the wider international context. Ironically, this seems to have dampened the community focus of SD activity, being replaced in local authorities by a focus on corporate systems, mainstreaming and strategy, predominantly around resource efficiency. Local authority interviewees were very clear on the influence of WAGs Community Planning initiative on Agenda 21 describing it as its “death knell” and the “nail in the coffin”. Is this a fair representation? Certainly the research suggests that post 2002,

- approaches to SD in local authorities became more insular, locally or internally focused without the international link being made (beyond Fairtrade)
- the focus on ‘mainstreaming SD’ and ‘resource efficiency’ won out over global equity or inter-generational issues - with priority given to the here and now and local communities. As one interviewee remarked: “Mainstreaming is about making something ineffective.”
- local authorities became more reactive to WG guidance and at the same time less ambitious in their own approaches

There are a number of other important issues to consider here.

Firstly, post-Johannesburg, as the timeline suggests, WAG began to develop a wide ranging and sophisticated regional policy landscape to respond to the issues discussed at Rio and Johannesburg - issuing guidance to local government, and placing them among their delivery partners. *Could it be argued that this has encouraged a more passive approach to SD policy development, and especially the international agenda at a local level?*

*“WAG began to develop a wide ranging and sophisticated regional policy landscape to respond to the issues discussed at Rio and Johannesburg”*

*“Ecological Footprinting, Fairtrade, Wales for Africa”*

*“WAG took a lead role in framing the national debate around SD and global issues”*

*“we are still dealing with the same issues”*

Secondly, and perhaps more controversially, WAG began to ‘own’ the international SD Brand, more than local authorities, through the iterations of the SD Scheme, attendance at Johannesburg, through involvement in NRG4SD and support for partnership work around for example Ecological Footprinting, Fairtrade, Wales for Africa.

Thirdly and related to this, WAG took a lead role in framing the national debate around SD and global issues, while local authorities became increasingly focused on local outcomes. Does the international element of SD sit most comfortably at a Welsh Government level?

Finally, much of the discourse in the 2002 Summit did indeed focus on resources and processes - understandable, measurable and tangible ‘things’ for local authorities to work with rather than the ‘woolly’ community focused Agenda 21. Performance management and improvement were in vogue at this time in local government, so perhaps it is unsurprising that it was these SD themes that were worked on post-Johannesburg in Councils. The downside of this focus of resource efficiency is that SD still struggles to get out of the environmental ‘ghetto’ it is so often placed in.

Twenty years on, some interviewees suggest that little progress has been made at a local authority level, despite WAGs interventions,

*“we are still dealing with the same issues”*

*“In the early days I was a huge fan of LA21 and in its true form still am....[today] it is more of a problem than an asset. Demonstration projects allowed the leadership of local government to point to those but carry on with business-as-usual. Twelve years on [after Section 121] we cannot trace the impact of SD on big decisions”*

Others were far more positive, seeing the WLGA SD Framework and discussion through the Bill of making SD a central organising principle in the public sector as a broad indicator of getting our systems right to deal with SD in Wales.

Would local authorities in Wales, without WAGs influence over the past 10 years, have made more progress towards the aims of Agenda 21? Would more sensitive guidance from WAG post-2002 have enabled local SD initiatives to flourish? Were Agenda 21s floundering anyway? Or have WAGs schemes and projects let local government settle into a ‘comfort zone’ of SD as resource efficiency? The answers to these questions are difficult and will differ across Wales in different localities. However it is clear from the current discourse around the SD Bill that local authorities are central to the future governance response.

## 7.3 THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY

Over the last 20 years, community level activity has continued demonstrating sustainable development locally, often without the direct engagement of the local authority, but often with the help of Welsh Office and then WAG support.

Would these activities have happened without the impetus of Rio and then Johannesburg? Although not documented the oral history around the 1992 pre Rio conference in Cardiff infers that civil society was heavily engaged in the event.

*“Rio had a galvanising effect on civil society”*

*“Rio had a galvanising effect on civil society”*

*“it made us think we needed to do something that was practical and collaborative”*

Did the Summits create the conditions for the following examples of civil society activity identified by interviewees? Were they used to legitimise or contextualise their value? This is likely in some cases, but less clear in others. Rio may have influenced the Welsh Office to support Environment Wales in 1992 - but the relationship is unclear without further research. The extent to which the summits have influenced the volunteering activity of thousands in the 300+ registered projects over the last 20 years is also unknown.

The relationship is clearer in the Women’s Institute Pathways Project, which has direct lineage from a post-Rio declaration from the WI in 1992 to support over 700 projects through 800 WIs in Wales between 1998 and 2003. This project was taken as an example by WAG to Johannesburg in 2002. With an international focus WI has been involved in international sustainability issues since pollution resolutions in 1927, with direct representation at international conferences through their campaigns on consumption, climate change and carbon.

Cynnal Cymru - Sustain Wales was launched by Rod Aspinwall at the post Summit Swansea conference in 2002 with direct reference to Rio and Johannesburg and the need to represent civil society on sustainable development. This is a central tenet of Agenda 21. Can we claim 10 years on that the networks, projects and awareness raising supported by Cynnal Cymru are as a result of Rio and Johannesburg?

Ymlaen Ceredigion provides a unique approach to governance around sustainability. An alliance of the local Council, a community LA21 group, Princes Trust and an NGO was established in 1998. It has influenced approaches to rural issues, Welsh language, regeneration and supported community project work for over 14 years. Can it be argued that this demonstrates the community aspect of Agenda 21 far more effectively than the organisationally focused approaches of other authorities?

As one practitioner noted,

*“A lot of what I have done would not have happened without Rio”*

*“A lot of what I have done would not have happened without Rio, it gave substance to Brundtland ....it gave a sense of action and purpose”*

Is it too far to stretch the Summits’ influence to the Transition Town movement? Are the climate change ‘story’ and policy impetus coming from Rio through Johannesburg to Bali, Cancun and Copenhagen and the associated media coverage also key drivers for people to engage on climate resilience?

This leads us to one of the central questions of the research. How much activity is attributable to the influence of the Summits? What were the views of key actors on the relationship between what is happening now and what happened 10 and 20 years ago?

## 7.4 WHAT CAN WE DIRECTLY ATTRIBUTE TO RIO AND JOHANNESBURG?

A strong case has been made by some interviewees of the direct relationship between the Summits and creating the conditions, the impetus, the buy in and, in some cases, the legislation to develop policy and activity to pursue sustainable development.

*“We wouldn’t have been talking about SD as a central organising principle without Rio”*

Some expressed the direct causal link,

*“SD would not be part of Welsh Government, there would be no Bill, no Charter, no central organising principle without Rio and Johannesburg”*

*“Rio and Johannesburg gave legitimacy to the SD duty”*

Others were more circumspect,

*“Johannesburg did not have a direct effect on our approach to working with communities, but the thinking stimulated our profession and ‘infiltrated’ our approaches”*

However the majority of interviewees showed remarkable consensus over the role of the Summits in giving credence to SD and associated activity - providing part of the business case for engagement and change as they

- **gave direct legitimacy to SD activity, as these issues were being discussed by governments at an international level, giving local activity both national and international context.**
- **provided impetus at an EU level (through Directives) or UK level, through targets for Wales to act on SD. The research has identified biodiversity, waste and climate change as areas where there seems to be a direct translation from Summit aims to EU, UK, regional and national policy in Wales. However, it is important to note that in most cases, discourse from the Summits have been perceived by interviewees to directly influence the policy landscape in Wales.**
- **‘created the conditions’ for SD to happen in Wales and without them, the profile of SD is unlikely have engaged policy makers, politicians and practitioners on this SD journey - and resulted in the outcomes listed above.**

There were also some alternative views expressed from interviewees, that the Summits had had little influence on Wales, other than the way Johannesburg had been used to build up Wales’ reputation as a leading regional government in this field, and that the Summits had had relatively little influence directly or indirectly on the way that Wales has developed over the last 20 years. If this view is taken in the context of sustainable ‘outcomes’ then there may be some justification for it. Reviews of the SD Scheme and work by Wales Audit Office have shown that there are few examples of changed approaches as a result of the SD Duty in Wales.

*“Where we have failed - communicating the scale of issues and the local to global angle has been lost”*

However the predominant view is one of direct influence and positivity,

*“We wouldn’t have been talking about SD as a central organising principle without Rio”*

*“Johannesburg gave legitimacy to the SD duty, it paved the way for the Climate Change Commission, and Wales for Africa”*

*“Without Rio we would have no scheme, no plastic bags levy and the Senedd wouldn’t have been built sustainably”*

## 7.5 THE POWER OF INDIVIDUALS NEW ALLIANCES AND INNOVATION

There are examples where clusters of individuals went over and above normal business approaches to work together around the themes of Rio and Johannesburg.

**Caerphilly Council**, by using the Agenda 21 experience in Gwent helped to shape the role of a new Council in 1996, building the business case for a cross party Sustainability Panel in 2002, which is celebrating its 10th anniversary in 2012.

This Panel has provided the Council Executive with guidance over a long period, which has included political change, with individual councillors from different parties exchanging the Chair’s role while being mutually supportive of SD.

**The ‘Glamorgan Group’**, a mixture on NGOs, civil servants, councillors and academics, brought the right thinking at the right juncture to influence the Assembly and the Government of Wales Act resulting in Section 121 in 1997.

**The Ecological Footprint Project** between 2003 and 2005 convened by WWF Cymru, involving Stockholm Environment Institute, WAG, Cardiff and Gwynedd Councils and Cardiff and Bangor Universities, helped to establish the Footprint as one of the key indicators of Welsh Government.

**Swansea Council, Cynnal Cymru and SDC** working on the post Johannesburg conference ‘Debate, Decisions, Directions’ involving over 300 delegates, funded by multiple partners to interpret the messages of Johannesburg, launch Cynnal Cymru and understand key constraints for progress.

**The development of Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship** in the national curriculum in Wales was driven by the *“unlikely bedfellows”* of RSPB, ESD and Oxfam Cymru working together to influence Estyn and the then Education minister Jane Davidson.

Indeed, ESD and GC is seen as a genuine success story - taking the thinking from Rio into communities. This has led, according to one Assembly Member to,

*“a profound generational and social change in the school yard”*

**The commitment and drive of Assembly politicians like Sue Essex, Ron Davies, Rhodri Morgan and Jane Davidson were flagged up constantly in both interviews and documents.**

*“Sue Essex was a key driver throughout the whole process, and had been an advocate for Agenda 21 in her Cardiff City Council role and translated this into her role as minister for local government in WAG”*

*“Rhodri Morgan (First Minister) and Jane Davidson (AM) were undoubtedly influenced by Rio and Johannesburg and were committed to implement something in Wales”*

*“With Rhodri’s involvement the pace went up a notch”*

*“Visiting a township had a major effect upon him. He realised that SD was not simply a middle class obsession in Wales. Visiting Africa changed Rhodri’s ideas”*

*“Rio and Johannesburg helped to bolster Ron Davies’s views of sustainability and SD - a legacy that he does not get enough credit for”*

*“Rhodri Morgan (First Minister) and Jane Davidson (AM) were undoubtedly influenced by Rio and Johannesburg and were committed to implement something in Wales”*

Interviews suggest that Assembly and later Welsh Government leadership on SD enabled space for civil servants, local authorities and NGOs to work together on initiatives, interpreting Summit proposals, and developing responses.

It is clear that collaborative working has happened around the Summits, with the Summit often the focus. But there do seem to be some significant events that have shaped commitment in Wales including: Rhodri Morgan's visit to Johannesburg; and Jane Davidson's involvement with the ESD&GC agenda pre and post Johannesburg as well as her attendance at the Poznan and Copenhagen climate talks. This involvement has provided strong messages to those involved - that international Summits and what comes from them can have importance.

*"For the past decade the Welsh Government has tackled the SD agenda when others did not"*

These politicians have had a personal commitment. Good things have happened as a consequence. Post - Johannesburg, it is difficult to point to similar leadership at a local authority level on the international sustainable development agenda which is on the one hand, as previously discussed, unsurprising given WAG guidance and other drivers for local government, but on the other hand, surprising given the amount of engagement up to and including the post Johannesburg Debate, Decisions and Direction conference.

What happened in 2002? Had the impetus from Rio simply run its course, or is there something about the way Summits are interpreted which makes local government engage, or in this case not engage. Interviews suggest that the 'noise around the Johannesburg Summit fuelled by UK debate from LGMB, by WLGA, SDC and others contrasts sharply with the debate around Rio+20. UK Government and ministerial involvement in the Rio +20 agenda appears to be minimal. WG and WLGA discourse around Rio+20 seems minimal too.

Interviewees suggest a number of possible explanations for lack of political engagement at a local level on the 'international' SD agenda now:

- **a greater focus on business processes and local outcomes in local government**
- **a change in the 'social conscience' of individuals - no votes are seen in global equity**
- **an expectant public who see local authorities as providers of services rather than community leaders**
- **a new localism focused on service provision**
- **global issues are seen as a luxury, optional and irrelevant to Welsh communities**

These issues are important to consider in the way sustainable development is framed and progressed in Wales.

*Are we appealing to people's values to progress sustainable development in Wales, or aiming for incremental sustainable service provision?*

*Where is the leadership for transformative change going to come from at a local level?*

<http://www.linktovideointerviewsRhodriandAlun>

## 7.6 THE INTERNATIONAL AGENDA AND LOCAL AUSTERITY

In September 2002, the Western Mail identified the World Summit in Johannesburg as a milestone in the evolution of government in Wales - it was the first time Wales had been represented on a global stage by an elected politician.

They suggested that this approach added a **"new found international dimension to the constitution"**. (Western Mail Sep 11 2002). Alun Davies AM suggests as part of this research that Johannesburg,

*"put Wales on the international map - with WAG speaking on behalf of Wales and up for Wales"*

Involvement in NRG4SD and climate talks has enabled Wales to develop an international presence and reputation for innovative thinking on SD.

Twenty years on the themes of Rio +20 are clearly of relevance to Wales, but in comparison to previous summits, Rio +20 has not been interpreted to Welsh audiences or made relevant to professions and communities.

<http://www.uncsd2012.org/rio20/index.html>

*"The international co-operation agenda is being marginalised, rather the debate is about competing with developing countries"*

The research suggests that in comparison, Johannesburg occurred in a time of plenty, particularly for the Welsh public sector, when arguably it was comfortable for politicians, civil servants, councillors and council officers to be seen to be working on an international conference agenda and bringing it into a local context. This is not the case in 2012.

The research suggests some additional reasons for the lack of profile and engagement 20 years on from Rio:

- **Wales response is now mature compared to 1992 and 2002 and inwardly focused on tackling these issues from a distinctly Welsh perspective. This undermines the relevance of an international SD Summit.**
- **there is enough 'noise' on SD being made through the SD Bill - the international agenda is less important than 'getting our own house in order'.**
- **there is no political advantage from being associated with international issues particularly in local government - do the local electorate care about international sustainable development?**
- **investing time in 'nice to do' activity for the public sector is difficult when the focus is on front line services**
- **the focus from local government is on Europe - 'Europe 2020: Strategic Sustainable Growth' and not wider contexts**
- **Rio +20 has a low profile in the media which means it is not entering the consciousness of key actors in the same way as Johannesburg**
- **Groups who would potentially collaborate are becoming more insular, are less willing to connect on SD due to the effects of austerity**
- **SD is becoming institutionalised (central organising principle) at the potential expense of a broader view informed by international contexts - focusing on the how and not the why.**

*“our mutual dependency on the planet”*

This shift in the profile of international meetings begs the question of how we might make the international agenda relevant again as we discuss the SD Bill. Is it simply a question of more discussion, events and conferences, a ministerial delegation, involvement of young people, highlighting what we do well in Wales? Will the messages from Rio +20 add value and legitimise the debate around the SD Bill, reminding us of a wider context and global responsibilities espoused by Brundtland in 1987 and Rio in 1992. Have we forgotten the roots of SD as we have developed our response in Wales? Will the outcomes of Rio+20 be seen as challenges on which the public sector must deliver through the duties they are given in the SD Bill?

Rhodri Morgan in his interview with WWF Cymru flagged up the relevance of the international dimension when he was recalling his visits to South African townships and the twinning occurring through Wales for Africa,

*“our mutual dependency on the planet”*

*How relevant is this maxim to Wales in the future?*

The research suggests that without intervention, there is a danger of losing the international elements of global equity and ecological limits from Rio as legislation is developed. *Will focusing on the sustainability of public services through the SD Bill mean that in the future - the essence of Rio's values will be lost?*

*“There is a clear sense of urgency that, given the right political and leadership drive that transformational change is achievable in Wales”*

## 8. ASPIRATIONS FOR THE NEXT 20 YEARS

It is clear from the research that much of the vision, excitement, inspiration and enlightenment from Rio has been lost over the last 20 years.

For our interviewees, the ‘mainstreaming’ SD agenda seems to have localised and divorced it from a wider perspective. Are we in our complacent ‘middle age’ on the SD journey in Wales? Will the SD Bill rejuvenate sustainability in Wales?

The research has sought out the views of both current leaders and practitioners and also post-graduate students on some of these issues. The former represent the present who over the last 20 years since Rio have been working to progress sustainable development in their different fields, the latter the future the next generation of policy makers and practitioners, who will work through their careers to do the same.

### 8.1 ASPIRATIONS OF THOSE INVOLVED NOW

The interviewees who have contributed to the report are leaders, innovators, policy and practitioners engaged with SD over the last 20 years.

They have a longstanding engagement with SD issues in Wales and are ideally placed to comment on what they believe to be the key priorities for the future. Their views are important as many of them will be shaping the SD agenda in Wales over the next decade and beyond.

In order to elicit their views the conversation was focused around a number of themes or options that would prioritise future action. Interviewees were asked to identify what they saw as the key issues that needed to be tackled over the next 10 - 20 years. They were then asked to prioritise them and add any additional priorities and thoughts.

Interpretation of the material provided by our interviewees suggest the priorities are: the central organising principle; resilience of natural systems; the community element; economy and public finance. Many respondents suggested that all of these were important, but that some were reliant on others, and so had concentrated on the ‘higher order’ or systemic priorities - hoping that the others would follow. This line of thinking is important for the way in which the SD Bill will be interpreted. Will the Bill, the resulting strategy, plan or scheme (if there is to be one) help to find the common ground, and deliver transformational change in the next ten years to deal with present and future challenges in health, economy, poverty, resource scarcity and a climate impacted Wales?

The responses of our interviewees reveal three clear issues that will need to be taken into account when taking forward SD in Wales:

- there was no overwhelming support for any one priority or even set of priorities. This suggests that even though the Welsh Government and its predecessors has had a responsibility for two decades for promoting SD there is, surprisingly, little common ground on its future agenda.
- respondents thought that delivering on these themes was achievable within the next 10 years given the right political and leadership drive - i.e. transformational change is achievable in Wales in a short time period.
- there is a clear sense of urgency; a strong belief that significant actions must be taken over the course of the next decade if Wales is to be a more sustainable country.

A number of our interviewees expressed concern that what they believe to be the core meaning of SD is in danger of being lost,

*“The narrative around SD is not about step change or difficult issues, or the scale of change but adapting ...SD is being reframed around competitiveness”*

*“wellbeing is about social and economic issues, it is reframing SD to marginalise the environment .....colour[ing] the conversation”*

## 8.2 THE NEXT GENERATION OF DECISION MAKERS

As well as examining the views of the current generation of leaders and practitioners of SD in Wales, the research has also tried to capture the views of some of our future leaders about their hopes and aspirations for a more sustainable Wales.

A small number of postgraduate students specialising in sustainability were asked for their views on: the meaning of sustainable development, the approach to SD in Wales, the role of partnerships in tackling key SD challenges for Wales, and the future of the SD agenda. Many of these students were toddlers in 1992, they were the new generation that the Earth Summit sought to serve.

The following quotes reflect the discussions about meaning.

*“SD is about getting the three elements (social, economic and environmental) in balance”*

*“SD means stability, balance, common sense, care, long-term thinking, responsibility, paying attention to the environment in every day decision making”*

*“the three parts of SD are never balanced - it's always nature losing out”*

Opinions were sharply divided as to whether Wales has a distinctive approach to SD. All recognised the SD duty and its potential significance for promoting a more sustainable country. On the positive side, there were favourable comments on recycling and local food initiatives. On the negative side, there was a belief that SD,

*“would not really be pushed’ if it ran up against economic interests”*

More powerfully still, one student argued that

*“the Welsh Government treats the environment as a resource, a competitive asset in economic development. There is no serious commitment to the environment beyond that dictated by economic benefits”*

In terms of awareness and profile the following comment suggests that we have some way to go to engage and encourage change,

*“The average person on the street has no idea what SD is. In my opinion Wales has no distinctive approach to SD”*

Partnership working was seen by the students as a priority at many different levels

*“Partnerships are essential. In order to achieve SD goals government, NGOs, businesses, the community, individuals all have to be involved”*

*“collaboration is important to bring together both lay and professional knowledge”*

*“The Welsh Government treats the environment as a resource, a competitive asset in economic development”*

*“Through the eyes of the young and informed, the delivery of a sustainable nation seems as far away as ever”*

There were, though, dissenting voices who felt that it is too easy to emphasise the virtues of partnership working and paying insufficient attention to

*“getting the balance right between protecting the environment, developing the economy and relieving social problems”*

As for what they imagine a more sustainable Wales might look like it is not one that is radically different from that of today but it is one that is much more ecologically informed.

It would for example, have

*“a more educated populous who can make more informed decisions about their consumption practices; contain ‘self-sufficient communities’; we would ‘be heading towards 100% renewable energy’ and zero waste; we would live and work in energy efficient buildings; and ‘better public transport, cycle routes and walking to reduce car use”*

Have we really moved on in our approaches in the last 20 years? This view from a new generation would not have looked out of place in 1992. While we may have a more mature framework to evidence that our approach to SD has changed - through the eyes of the young and informed, the delivery of a sustainable nation seems as far away as ever.

WWF Cymru has gathered stories from young people across Wales who attended the Earth Summit in Johannesburg and these are captured in a short film [www.wwf.org.uk/wales](http://www.wwf.org.uk/wales)



© Chris Marais / WWF-Canon

WWF present UN Secretary- General Kofi ANNAN with the SOS Planet globe at the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg.





© Ian Homer Photography / WWF-Cymru.

*“One Wales One Planet is the first time we got to grips with the issues - acknowledging that we’ve got some problems”*

## 8.3 FUTURE NARRATIVES FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Our interviewees hold complex and sophisticated beliefs on SD. By analysing their responses we have been able to draw together a small number of dominant narratives.

It is important to recognise that these narratives are an inevitable simplification, so do not represent any one individual’s views, but they do help make clear emergent policy priorities. These narratives are ways of presenting aspirations for the future and how we meet the challenges of sustainable development in Wales.

It is possible to distinguish three ‘aspirational’ models for SD: **‘Sustainability as survival’**, **‘Sustainability as a new development path’** and **‘Sustainability as service delivery’**. The narratives are not mutually exclusive, there is common ground between them, but they each bring to the fore a distinctive perspective on SD. They are valuable in that they can be used specifically to reflect on which development path the SD Bill is most likely to send us down and more generally about the past, present and future agenda for SD in Wales.

### **Sustainability as survival**

This narrative places emphasis on ecological limits to development and economic growth focusing on planetary boundaries; earth’s carrying capacity; resource consumption; ecological footprinting; food, water, energy, soils, biodiversity and their effects on equity and poverty. These are systems that we rely on which are often unaccounted for in our development path, but would have profound consequences on humanity if they failed. Here, there is a recognition that the SD agenda is centrally concerned with resource limits and the maintenance of ecosystems. Interviewees expressed their thoughts as follows:

*“we need to nail the fundamentals”*

*“One Wales One Planet is the first time we got to grips with the issues - acknowledging that we’ve got some problems”*

*“we need economic and social growth within environmental confines”*

In this narrative, whilst the future is seen as threatening this does not become interwoven with a politics of pessimism. Interviewees believe problems of resource conservation are solvable with positive effects on humanity.

**Our group of young people embrace a narrative of sustainability as survival and show only minimal interest in other narratives.**

### **Sustainability as a new development path**

This narrative focuses on the way we approach physical development, finance, resource efficiency, economy, infrastructure, landscape, regeneration and community involvement in SD. From the ‘softer’ community empowerment espoused by Local Agenda 21 to the harder nosed approach of finance and whole life costing for physical developments. The focus is on outcomes for all three pillars of sustainability: environmental, social, and economic. The hope here is that by making SD a central organising principle, sustainable development in all of the senses described above will naturally follow. **There was a strong sense from the interviews that this approach needed to effectively challenge existing paradigms and traditional approaches to development.** Interviewees commented:

*“Sustainable consumption is the big lever, the one to concentrate on. Pointless to spend billions on unsustainable activities”*

*“every job needs to help with greener growth. People need to be paid to do something pro-active or to stop unsustainable practices”*

*“Rhetoric coming from Wales has been strong but has lacked levers over the economy”*



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*“Wales achieves sustainable outcomes by having sustainable services”*

In this narrative, *“Communities do things and do not have things done to them.”*

There is also a sense that while the above is achievable, the systems that we are compelled to work within in Wales are still, 20 years on from Rio, sending us down unsustainable paths of development.

Many practitioners see their own version of this narrative as achievable given effective leadership and coherence between key agencies.

#### **Sustainability as service delivery**

In this narrative, Wales achieves sustainable outcomes by having sustainable services. The central organising principle and SD Bill provide the framework to deliver more sustainable services to people and the environment which they rely on. There is a domino effect on decision making, finance, supply chains, procurement, regeneration all of which improve people’s well-being. Welsh and local government and the public sector evolve over time to become more sustainable in the way that they deliver on the ground. Collaborative working cuts through traditional long defended silos in Welsh public policy and delivery. In this narrative, behaviour change at a community level remains difficult to influence, however, there is greater accountability from the public sector on how they help or hinder sustainable development in what they do.

However, the extent to which the Bill would drive this service delivery model and integrated outcomes was questioned by both practitioners and the young,

*“there is a recognition that the first 10 years fell short, the Bill is a recognition of weakness”*

*“Bills won’t achieve behavioural change”*

*“even post-Bill, SD will need constant translation and engagement at a more practical level- it needs interpretation for local audiences and the international agenda as well”*

*“the future challenge is still to get out of silos - there are example of silos still getting in the way in the way - like the disconnected Bill development in the programme of government”*

#### **Which narrative fits?**

These narratives represent three distinct yet connected ‘visions’ of a sustainable development path for Wales and are credible and plausible. They offer choices, in terms of ambition, scale, influence and direction.

Whilst there are clearly complementary elements of overlap between the narratives the extent to which they provide choices also suggests an element of exclusivity. This is significant because these narratives will help to shape interpretations of the SD Bill. The role of the SD Bill is crucial in setting the SD path for the next 20 years and beyond, so key questions are:

Which of these narratives does the Bill reflect?

How might the themes in the Bill shape and influence these narratives?

What aspect of these narratives will not be influenced by the Bill?

What might need to change in the current approach to the Bill to meet our aspirations?

Implicit within the above narratives of SD are a keen sense of moral values. Indeed, at its heart SD is asserting a moral case of access and equity over narrower economic based values such as efficiency. Access brings to the fore concerns about who has the opportunity to benefit from social, economic and environmental resources, how they gain access to them (e.g. via the market or through public provision), and when (the current generation or future generations). Equity is concerned with our fair consumption of economic, social and environmental assets.

A challenge for the SD Bill and its proponents will be to make explicit the values that underlie their vision of sustainable development. A realistic view might be that the current core value in debating SD legislation is one of efficiency and effective service delivery, closely aligned to the economic agenda. This version of SD does not draw on the heritage of Rio and the values of fairness, global equity and living within environmental limits which have been discussed in subsequent summits - values which were so strongly held by many interviewees.

*Equity is concerned with our fair consumption of economic, social and environmental assets.*

## 9. WHAT CAN AN EARTH SUMMIT DO FOR WALES?

This research has unearthed a rich picture of the influence of the Rio and Johannesburg Summits on Wales, an influence that has lasted over two decades.

There are a number of key findings which provide a salient lesson for Wales as it moves forward to legislate for sustainable development and plan into the future, these are set out in the Executive Summary.

This piece of research has made a 20 year period, and the achievements, failures and legacy of Rio more tangible. What about 20 years into the future in 2032? Population, economic, geopolitical and climate projections suggest a very different world that we and our descendants will be living in. What will Wales’ place be in this future, where global externalities will inevitably impact on Wales, on its communities and on individual well-being?

Will future researchers berate Wales for looking inwardly in its approach to sustainable development, not taking the international picture into account?

Will the period up to 2032 be seen as a lost opportunity, when a transformative agenda was not delivered, despite having the opportunity to develop groundbreaking legislation? Or will Wales be congratulated on its outward focus, with global as well as local values at the heart of its governance, showing the world how a society can live more sustainably? Time will tell.

## APPENDIX - THE RESEARCH TEAM

The authors of this report are: **Dr. Alan Netherwood and Dr. Andrew Flynn**

**Dr. Alan Netherwood** has worked for Cardiff Council, Environment Agency Wales, Cardiff University and voluntary bodies in the fields of sustainable development and climate change. He now runs his own company Netherwood Sustainable Futures, working with a range of clients on sustainability and climate change initiatives. [alan.netherwood@gmail.com](mailto:alan.netherwood@gmail.com)

**Dr. Andrew Flynn** is a Reader and researcher at the School of City and Regional Planning in Cardiff University. He has been engaged in the study of the implementation of Section 121 of the Government of Wales Act since its inception, with the permission of First Ministers and published work on behalf of the Sustainable Development Commission and WWF Cymru. [FlynnAC@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:FlynnAC@cardiff.ac.uk)

Research was also carried out by: **Fay Blair and Nichola James**

**Fay Blair** is a sustainability practitioner with 20+ years’ experience. As International Sustainable Development Policy Co-ordinator with LGIB (2001-2002), she acted on behalf of English and Welsh Local Government UN World Summit ‘PrepComs’ and concluding Summit hosted in Johannesburg. Fay provided an international insight into the Summits.

**Nichola James** has worked for WWF UK building sustainability strategies with companies such as Vodafone, Vodacom, Canon and MBNA. For WWF Cymru she acted as the main point of contact with civil servants in the Welsh Assembly, its agencies and partners. Nichola now works freelance and provided research on media stories around the Summits.

# WWF CYMRU EVENTS IN YEARS

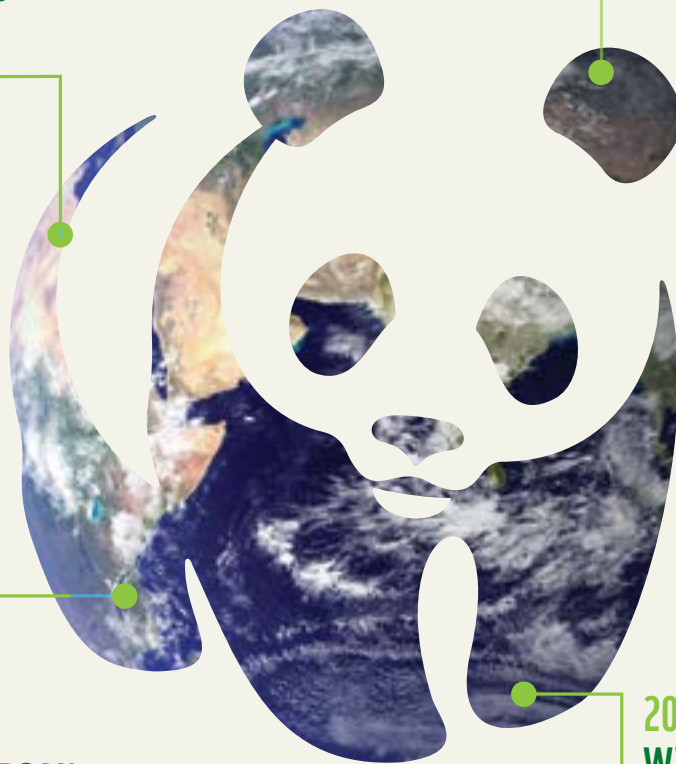
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WWF® WHAT CAN AN EARTH SUMMIT DO FOR WALES?

1992 RIO EARTH SUMMIT:  
AGENDA 21 AND SUSTAINABLE  
DEVELOPMENT LAUNCHED INTO  
THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF WALES

2000  
WWF CYMRU IS  
ESTABLISHED AND  
STARTS WORKING  
IN WALES



2002  
RHODRI MORGAN,  
FIRST MINISTER OF  
WALES ATTENDS THE  
EARTH SUMMIT

2002  
WWF'S 'EARTH CHAMPION'  
RHYS DAVIES, YSGOL  
GYFUN LLANHARI  
REPRESENTS WALES  
AT THE EARTH SUMMIT



**Why we are here**

To stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature.

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