

In Rio de Janeiro the weather forecast for today promises rain – which may bring relief for the thousands of hot and tired delegates at the Rio+20 sustainability summit.



Fortunately there was no rain yesterday as indigenous peoples from the Amazon region gathered on the beach to proclaim their message of the importance of rivers in sustaining their economy, their way of life, their human rights and the future of our climate.

The 'Rivers of Life' event may not seem to be much about our central digital theme but the entire point of networking technologies is to enable voices to be heard and ideas to be shared around the world. The [NextGen video](#) of the event captures some of the energy felt by all involved in what must have been a huge logistical challenge.

Aung San Suu Kyi made much the same point about global communication yesterday when her European tour fetched up at the BBC's World Service. She recounted how, during her years of house arrest in Burma, it was programmes like 'Jolly Good Show' from 'hairy cornflake' Dave Lee Travis that not only kept her in touch with the world but made her realize the extent of global support for the people of her country.

That sense of empowerment that flows from connectivity has also been recognized in the draft Rio+20 text that world leaders will now be asked to affirm during the rest of this week. Critics may say that the text has been watered down too much and the word '*encourage*' is used 50 times but '*mus*

t only gets three mentions. But as Nick Clegg says '*you should not underestimate the challenges of getting 170 countries to all be heading in roughly the same direction*'.

By all accounts we must thank the delegation from Denmark – currently holding the EU Presidency – for pushing through many of the provisions of the final draft text.

Rio+20: digital agenda and real engagement

Written by David Brunnen & Marit Hendriks

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Paragraph 65 (out of 283) may be lost in this outpouring of good intentions, and it loses something by being taken out of context, but is worth noting here because this is the first time that world leaders have been explicitly asked to sign up to a digital future.

We recognize the power of communications technologies, including connection technologies and innovative applications to promote knowledge exchange, technical cooperation and capacity building for sustainable development. □ These technologies and applications can build capacity and enable the sharing of experiences and knowledge in the different areas of sustainable development in an open and transparent manner.

Niall Dunne (BT's Chief Sustainability Officer) would certainly agree with these sentiments. '*Global systems change needs to be enabled by ICT and this has been seriously underplayed*' he says, but he also feels that the intense focus of these world gatherings on the production of an agreed text is something of a distraction. Politicians and big businesses need to catch up with people everywhere who are not waiting around to be told how to run their lives – they are increasingly digitally empowered and have discovered '*the problem solving capabilities of networks*'.

Global organisations, he says, may take years to build but can be zapped overnight if they lose the confidence of their customers. Niall voiced the need for big businesses to adopt radical ideas to bolster growth – ideas like Ellen MacArthur's '[Circular Economy](#)' – and leverage their covenant for the greater good. We hope to bring NextGen TV's interview with Niall, '*What was your second question?*', in tomorrow's report.

And here at home, away from the atmospheric pressures of a rainy Rio, that topic of engagement in social media yesterday held a further twist in the [Oliver Twisteria](#) saga of last week.

Far way from council offices of Argyll and Bute and at the opposite end of the social media spectrum, [Brighton and Hove](#) council explained in a detailed paper how engagement with their

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citizens through all manner of online media was making a massive contribution to community development. Maybe they should send a complimentary copy to the Highlands by post?

Compiled with additional reporting from Marit Hendriks in Rio de Janeiro.

Readers of this editorial may also have visited yesterday's report: ['Rio+20: Reality breaking through](#)