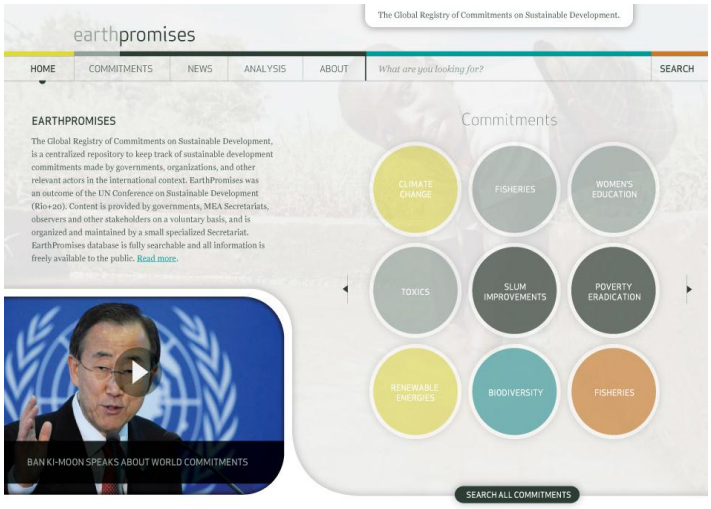
EarthPromises

A Proposed Global Registry of Commitments on Sustainable Development

- *Addressing the lack of international accountability*
- *Demonstrating action and progress on new and existing goals*
- *Engaging all the actors – government, business, and civil society*

Why EarthPromises?

For four decades, the international community has negotiated scores of treaties and plans of action to address global sustainability challenges. National, state, and local governments, corporations, and other entities have also made repeated commitments to sustainable development. Yet to date, there is no universal mechanism for recording these pledges and tracking progress towards these goals.



Rio+20: the opportunity

RIO+20
United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development

In June 2012, the Government of Brazil expects some 150 presidents and prime ministers will join some 50,000 leaders and citizens in Rio de Janeiro for the Rio+20 Earth Summit. It is anticipated that countries, corporations and communities will make promises there to take action on energy, green jobs, oceans, cities and other key areas. The "zero draft" of the Rio+20 outcome document now being negotiated calls for the creation by the UN Secretary General of an registry/compendium of such commitments as a framework for accountability.

Our hope is that the registry would utilize state-of-the-art information technologies to enable citizens around the world to view pledges, the progress being made, as well as areas where greater action is needed. A web-based solution unleashing the power of connectivity is the ideal platform for enabling the current international system more relevant, efficient, and effective in an increasingly globalized world. The proposed global registry would also nurture a new culture of action and accountability. The registry would also enable governments to fulfill their commitment made at the first Earth Summit in 1992 under Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration to increase public access to information.

What's on the cloud of commitments?

The registry could include a range of commitments made by various actors to meet globally-negotiated sustainable development goals and other objectives. It would incorporate streamlined reporting and trend analysis tools to encourage and inspire further commitments worldwide. The registry would feature a flexible and robust classification framework with a set of attributes and metrics. **Figure 1** illustrates examples of attributes, metrics, data and information for an emissions reduction commitment.

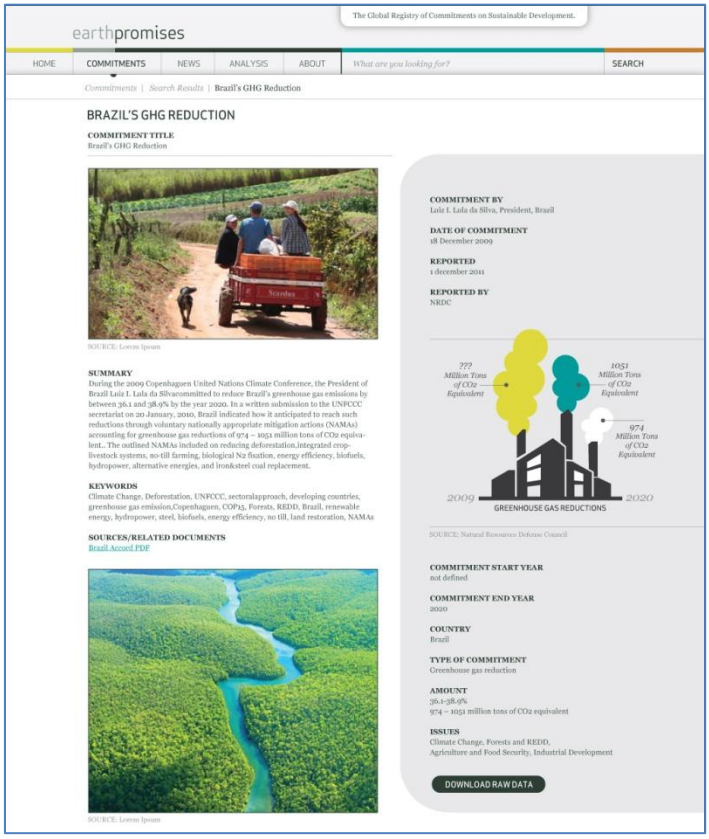


Figure 1 - A reported commitment

EarthPromises will build on existing registries and standards for sustainability reporting and integrated reporting. Of the many examples are the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), the International Integrated Reporting Committee (IIRC), the Sustainability Accounting Standard Board (SASB), and the proposed registry for Nationally Appropriate Mitigation Actions (NAMAs) under the climate convention.

The scalability, compatibility, and interoperability benefits of cloud computing will be leveraged to streamline reporting and track performance of commitments easily and inexpensively.[1] Visitors can search commitments by location, category, issue, stakeholder, and through a *map-based interface* (**Figure 2**).

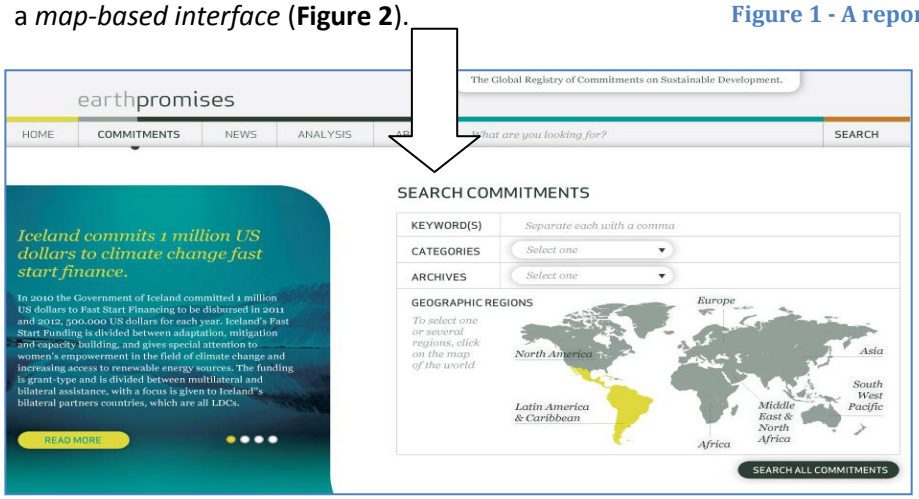


Figure 2 - A search by location and issue

[1] Armbrester, K. and Eccles, R.G. (2012). Creating a Sustainable Society through Integrated Reporting Delivered via Cloud Computing. The European Business Review

Using the power of connectivity

Prompting user engagement and seamlessly integrating social media are critical to the mission of the registry. Visitors can be invited to comment on commitments and interact with the commitment-makers. The database and pledge tracking is also migratable to location-based services on mobile platforms which can tailor searches to more relevant sustainability projects.

Ultimately, the registry can reduce costs, improve flexibility and accelerate adaptation to changing circumstances and adoption of standards/frameworks. EarthPromises can integrate new reporting data, metrics, frameworks and standards over time as they are collected, developed or published. The platform is also efficient and cost-effective for users to share hypotheses, analysis, and best practices through accessing a rich aggregate database of commitments and performance results.

On the road to Rio

In December 2011, NRDC and Boston University's Pardee Center first presented EarthPromises at the Rio+20 preparatory meeting at the United Nations in New York. Since then we have shared our registry website mockup with dozens of government and international officials and with other civil society organizations and experts. The proposal has been extraordinarily well-received; and we are now seeking more collaborators to further develop the concept and advocate for its adoption at Rio+20.

Our hope is that Rio+20 will be the first summit ever where a web-based platform will be the major output. Obviously the content of the proposed registry is critical. Presidents, prime ministers, CEOs and other leaders must demonstrate through their commitments a new determination to speed up the transition to a sustainable economy and to be held accountable. Yet the creation of the registry alone would be an important and encouraging signal that our leaders are willing to embrace new technologies and approaches to tackle the huge and growing challenges we face.

EarthPromises is a concept being developed by the Natural Resources Defense Council and (NRDC) and independent experts and contributors. To learn more, please contact our team:

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