Informal consultations in preparation for the 11th session of the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD-11) were held from 24-26 March 2003, at UN headquarters in New York. The purpose of these consultations was to provide an opportunity for an informal exchange of views prior to CSD-11, which is taking place from 28 April – 9 May 2003. At CSD-11, delegates will consider the CSD’s role in supporting follow-up to the World Summit of Sustainable Development (WSSD) and implementation of the Johannesburg *Plan of Implementation* and other internationally-agreed goals for achieving sustainable development.

Delegates attending the informal consultations discussed the CSD’s future work programme and the future organization and methods of its work, including the proposal for a two-year cycle involving “review” and “policy” years. Participants also considered the organization of work for CSD-11, methods to enhance stakeholder participation in the CSD, and the CSD’s role as a focal point for partnerships. Much of the discussion focused on suggestions contained in the UN Secretary-General’s report, *Follow-up to Johannesburg and the Future Role of the CSD - The Implementation Track* (E/CN.17/2003/3).

**OPENING OF THE MEETING**

CSD Bureau Vice-Chair Amb. Bruno Stagno Ugarte (Costa Rica) opened the meeting on Monday afternoon, 24 March. He conveyed the regrets of Valli Moosa, CSD-11 Chair and South Africa’s Minister of Environment and Tourism, that he was unable to attend. Amb. Ugarte then invited general comments on the Secretary-General’s report (E/CN.17/2003/3). Many speakers welcomed the report and emphasized the CSD’s role in supporting implementation of the *Plan of Implementation*, Agenda 21, the Millennium Development Goals, and the Monterrey Consensus on financing for development. Delegates also stressed the need for the CSD to “add value” and focus on implementation issues, and said there should be a limited number of themes considered at all future sessions of the CSD, so as to ensure focused and productive discussions.
FUTURE PROGRAMME OF WORK

Following the opening statements, delegates commented on the CSD’s future programme of work, focusing on the relevant sections of the Secretary-General’s report (paragraphs 23-39 and Annex I). A number of delegates stressed that the CSD’s work programme should be based on the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation. Morocco, on behalf of the G-77/China, highlighted the CSD’s role in advancing progress on cross-sectoral issues. Norway said more work was needed to identify the precise nature of the CSD’s new role, and suggested that further consideration be given on the relationship between the CSD and other UN bodies. She supported strengthening the stakeholder dialogues. She also noted that, in terms of implementation, the primary responsibility rests with governments. The US said the CSD should focus on key issues and not take an “overly broad” approach. He stressed the CSD’s information gathering and dissemination role. Egypt said it was important to identify how outcomes from the WSSD are going to be implemented, who will implement what, and who will finance it. South Africa said the aim of the current process was to create a new CSD that supports implementation of Agenda 21 and WSSD outcomes. He said the CSD should focus on practical goals and targets and move away from the normative discussions of previous sessions. While the CSD will inevitably take up issues covered elsewhere, he said it should “carve its own niche” and avoid duplication by bringing an integrative aspect to work on key issues.

On issues that could be addressed during the first two-year cycle, Greece, on behalf of the EU, said priority should be given to areas not addressed by other international forums, and should be determined by ministers at CSD-11. In selecting issues for consideration during upcoming CSD sessions, Switzerland highlighted the CSD’s important role in integrating the three pillars of sustainable development. He cautioned that the CSD should not duplicate work in other bodies, and said it was important to consider whether a competent “home” for a particular issue already exists. Samoa said the CSD should consider its role in the review of the Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States.

The Russian Federation and Switzerland said the matrix in the Secretary-General’s report outlining relationships and interlinkages between issues should help inform decisions on the CSD’s future focus. Mexico said that while the matrix was useful, he did not support the themes proposed in the report. The EU said the matrix provided a “good start” but did not comprehensively reflect the issues addressed in the Plan of Implementation.

Delegates also discussed at some length references in the Secretary-General’s report to the WEHAB initiative, which focuses on the key areas of water and sanitation, energy, health, agricultural productivity, and biodiversity and ecosystem managements. India observed that WEHAB had been integrated effectively into the WSSD’s outcomes and, with Saudi Arabia, said the frequent references to WEHAB could create a two-track approach that diverted attention away from the Plan of Implementation. The G-77/China noted that WEHAB was not an outcome of the WSSD but rather a contribution to the preparatory process. The EU said WEHAB themes could be used as priority issues for the CSD, but that this did not exclude other issues. Responding to questions about the
WEHAB references, JoAnne DiSano, Director of the Division for Sustainable Development, UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, said the WEHAB approach supported the approach taken in the Plan of Implementation. She indicated that there was no intention to weaken the focus on the Plan of Implementation.

A number of delegates also commented on text in the Secretary-General’s report on coordination among other UN bodies and agencies. In response to questions on this issue, JoAnne DiSano explained that the report sought to clarify and consolidate work by the CSD, ECOSOC, and other bodies, and to avoid duplication. She indicated that the paragraph also related to the Bretton Woods institutions.

FUTURE ORGANIZATION AND METHODS OF WORK

On Tuesday morning, 25 March, delegates met to consider the parts of the Secretary-General’s report (E/CN.17/2003/3) on future organization and methods of work of the CSD (paragraphs 40-59). This included sections on the new organization of work, regional inputs, the high-level segment, and the selection of issues for future CSD sessions. The session was chaired by Bureau Vice-Chair Hossein Moeini Meybodi (Iran).

NEW ORGANIZATION OF WORK: On the new organization of the CSD’s work, many delegates supported the proposal in the Secretary-General’s report to organize the future work programme as a series of two-year cycles, which would include a “review year” and a “policy year.” The G-77/China said the first year of the cycle should review progress on implementation of commitments, targets and goals, while the second year should be devoted to the adoption of measures to overcome constraints to implementation and to addressing new and emerging issues.

Japan proposed that the CSD meet mainly on WEHAB areas every two years, with an “Implementation/Expert Forum” taking place every alternate year. Switzerland said the CSD should review progress both on the Plan of Implementation and on voluntary partnership initiatives (“Type II” outcomes). India cautioned against further normative debates on new issues, noting that the focus should be on implementation of Agenda 21 and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation. The US said the organization of work should ensure that the work cycles are forward looking and focused on implementation, and that they do not allow for slippage that would prolong the cycle beyond two years. Responding to questions on a suggestion in the Secretary-General’s report that UN sub-commissions or task forces be considered, JoAnne DiSano said the report was simply raising an option that delegates might wish to consider. In response to questions about the number of meetings scheduled, she noted that the scenario outlined in the report involved an overall reduction in meetings.

REGIONAL INPUTS: On the proposal in the Secretary-General’s report for Regional Implementation Forums, several delegates requested clarification on their meeting schedule and role. Expressing concern over a possible increased number of meetings, the US questioned the need for separate Regional Implementation Forum meetings, and suggested that it would be more efficient to take-up regional issues during break-out
sessions of the proposed Global Implementation Forum meetings in New York. Switzerland and Australia supported further consideration of the US proposal. While expressing concern about any proliferation of meetings, Croatia highlighted the potential usefulness of the Regional Implementation Forums. South Africa noted the importance of regional input and involvement, and Indonesia supported efforts to strengthen such involvement.

Replying to questions about regional inputs, JoAnne DiSano said the Secretary-General’s suggestions sought to reflect the experience and momentum generated by the regional preparations for the WSSD. She indicated that the aim of the suggestions was set out a process that would bring together views and analysis from the national and regional level and feed this into the UN system. However, she noted that regional inputs could be reflected in various ways in the organization of the CSD’s work.

HIGH-LEVEL SEGMENT: Commenting on ministerial involvement in the CSD, Japan said the high-level segment should not be held as frequently as suggested in the Secretary-General’s report, as frequent usage could diminish its effectiveness. He recommended holding the first high-level segment in 2007. The G-77/China said the high-level segment was intended to ensure ministerial engagement in the CSD process, and said the segment should involve a focused, action-oriented and interactive dialogue. The Republic of Korea noted that, while high-level engagement is important, not all work requires ministerial involvement. He supported a high-level segment only during the “policy” year (that is, every second year), and cautioned that over-emphasis on the interactive dialogue sessions would disadvantage ministers who are not fluent in the UN official languages. Highlighting ministers’ role in supporting implementation, South Africa urged the continued and regular high-level engagement of ministers. Indonesia stressed the importance of ongoing involvement of all relevant ministers, rather than just environment ministers. The EU said the CSD should remain a high-level policy forum where ministerial involvement is important, and agreed that participation of all relevant ministers should be encouraged. He said the ministerial segment could take place either at the beginning or end of the CSD session.

SELECTION OF ISSUES FOR FUTURE CSD SESSIONS: On the selection of issues for future CSD sessions, delegates discussed three options in the Secretary-Genera’s report for narrowing the focus within the future CSD work cycles. Several delegates, including Canada and Croatia, preferred Option Three, which proposes selecting at CSD-11 one or two broad areas for each of the next four or five two-year cycles. The EU noted its support for adopting a longer-term Work Programme looking 8-12 years ahead, and supported Option Three’s focus on flexibility and predictability. The G-77/China said all three options have advantages and disadvantages, and suggested that further discussion would be needed. He favored a flexible approach. Norway proposed that, rather than looking forward as much as ten years, themes should be determined for just the next three cycles (six years). The US supported Norway’s “fourth option,” and said he preferred setting themes for only the next two or possibly three cycles. Saudi Arabia said a fifth option was to proceed through the Plan of Implementation section-by-section in selecting issues.
Summarizing these discussions, Vice-Chair Moeini Meybodi took note of speakers’ comments on the need to limit the number of themes addressed. He highlighted participants’ general agreement on the two-year cycle, while noting the need for further discussion on review and monitoring, indicators and peer review, emerging issues, and on other intersessional initiatives and consultative processes.

ORGANIZATION OF WORK DURING CSD-11

On Tuesday morning, Vice-Chair Moeini Meybodi noted that a revised draft programme of work for CSD-11 had been produced following an exchange of views on the subject during informal consultations held in February. Commenting on the revised draft, the US proposed that the ministerial roundtables could include a discussion on how such roundtables should work in future, including lessons learned from the WSSD and elsewhere on the most useful process and approaches for such discussions. He also supported extending the time allocated for the multi-stakeholder dialogue. He proposed that the decision document emerging from CSD-11 should be short and straightforward, and could include, *inter alia*, the themes for the next two cycles, as well as a basic structure for upcoming meetings.

Switzerland said CSD-11’s agenda must allow for the ministers to give clear guidance to the CSD on its future work. In order to focus discussions, he said ministers should take up the same issues in their high-level statements as in the subsequent roundtables. He proposed roundtable discussions on follow-up to the WSSD in the CSD, the role of partnerships in supporting WSSD implementation, and the future work programme. He said the multi-stakeholder dialogue should include a discussion on how stakeholders perceive their role and how they can best contribute to the CSD’s work.

The G-77/China repeated a suggestion made at the earlier informal consultation that the means of implementation should be one of the topics discussed by the ministerial roundtables.

ENHANCING CONTRIBUTIONS FROM IMPLEMENTATION ACTORS

On Tuesday afternoon, Bureau Vice-Chair Irena Zubčević (Croatia) chaired this session and invited comments on sections of the Secretary-General’s report on enhancing contributions from the various actors involved in implementation. The report refers to a number of different actors, including UN programmes, agencies and organizations, regional institutions, major groups, scientists, and educators (paragraphs 60-85).

UN SYSTEM AND OTHER INSTITUTIONS: On the contribution of the UN system and other international agencies and financial institutions, the G-77/China requested clarification of text referring to a review of the Task Manager System established under the Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development (IACSD). JoAnne DiSano responded that, while the Task Manager System had been very useful, there was a view
that it was time for successor arrangements to revitalize this area and reflect the increased emphasis on implementation.

Replying to a query about text in the section on the UN system that referred to “greater involvement on non-UN partners and actors,” DiSano said it sought to reflect the reality that all UN agencies have many non-UN connections and constituencies.

Replying to questions about a paragraph proposing the use of “apex Collaborative Groups,” DiSano clarified that these could provide a network for examining issues such as water and energy that are not comprehensively addressed by any one institution within the UN system. She added that this reference to issues that lacked a clear institutional home, such as water and energy, was not intended to pre-empt discussion on what the priority issues on the CSD’s agenda should be. Saudi Arabia highlighted poverty eradication as a key issue.

MAJOR GROUPS: On the contribution of major groups to the CSD’s future work, the G-77/China raised the issue of accountability to ensure the effective contribution of the major groups to the process of implementation. He said this contribution should be enhanced and monitored. China said major groups should now be focusing on implementation issues. South Africa described major group participation as a dynamic process that might evolve and develop further over time.

In response to a question from China about a reference in the text to “fast-track accreditation by ECOSOC” of NGOs and other organizations, JoAnne DiSano stressed that no new modalities or arrangements were being suggested, and that the proposal was simply designed to ensure that the 700 new organizations accredited to the WSSD could contribute to the follow-up process in the CSD.

Indonesia stressed the need for a balance between organizations from North and South. A representative of the Pan African Movement and Southern Caucus of NGOs for Sustainable Development supported language calling for the involvement of NGOs and major group representatives selected fairly and democratically from developing countries. Switzerland supported a more interactive role for major groups, including their involvement in monitoring and reviewing progress on implementation.

On strengthening scientific expertise, JoAnne DiSano highlighted the value of awareness about scientific activities and future plans. While supporting effective scientific input, the G-77/China said this did not require the creation of new scientific bodies.

Summarizing these discussions, Vice-Chair Zubčević noted support for greater coordination and coherence using existing institutions in an effective way. She also highlighted participants’ comments that consideration of many of these issues was also taking place in the Open ended Ad Hoc Working Group on the Integrated and Coordinated Implementation of and Follow-up to the Outcomes of Major UN Conferences and Summits, and said it was important that the CSD continue to monitor this parallel process.
Vice-Chair Zubčevič noted comments that major groups should be more closely integrated within the overall CSD process. She drew attention to some delegates’ concerns about references to WEHAB, and confirmed that Agenda 21 and the Plan of Implementation provide the framework for the CSD’s work.

CSD AS A FOCAL POINT FOR PARTNERSHIPS

Late Tuesday afternoon, Vice-Chair Zubčevič highlighted the CSD’s role as a focal point for partnership initiatives (“Type II” outcomes). She invited delegates’ to comment on this, particularly on the relevant section of the Secretary-General’s report (paragraphs 86-92).

The G-77/China said partnerships should complement the intergovernmental commitment made in Agenda 21 and at the WSSD, but should in no way be used as a substitute for this commitment. He emphasized that partnerships should be balanced, effective, relevant, and focused on concrete results. In terms of accountability, he suggested that a review of progress should be transparent and include an assessment of the achievements of the different actors involved. He stated that the involvement of UN agencies in partnerships should conform with their mandates and agreed priorities, and said the CSD should elaborate further guidelines for partnerships. The EU supported a review process, and Switzerland said the CSD should provide a platform for reporting on and assessing partnerships, and for exchanging practical information and experiences. He supported the establishment of clear guidelines and criteria for reporting, as well as further discussion on the existing guiding principles on partnerships (the “Bali Guidelines”) that were developed through an informal process during WSSD preparatory sessions.

The US endorsed the CSD’s role in providing a forum for reporting on partnerships. While supporting the Bali Guidelines, he argued that it was too soon to elaborate additional principles or guidelines. Canada expressed concerns that guidelines or principles should not be overly prescriptive or onerous, as this would present a barrier to the development of future partnerships, and would discourage potential partners. Pakistan said the CSD should be involved in ensuring that partnerships are more regionally and sectorally balanced. He noted that the partnerships that already operate are heavily skewed towards biodiversity-related work, while health and agriculture-related initiatives are significantly under-represented. The Czech Republic asked whether the CSD might delegates some reviewing and monitoring of partnerships to the regional level.

Responding to a question about the development of a partnership database, JoAnne DiSano highlighted the various uses for such a database, while noting that other organizations are also working in this area. On a question about the planned Partnership Fair to be held at CSD-11, DiSano said it would provide a platform for existing partnerships to report on their work and hold meetings. It could also facilitate the expansion of current partnerships or the establishment of new ones.
Summarizing the discussions on partnerships, Vice-Chair Zubčević noted delegates’ comments on the need for accountability and transparency, and on the CSD’s role in supporting a genuine exchange of information and experiences. She noted that, although some would like to see further development of the Bali Guidelines, others had concerns that this might make the guidelines too strict.

CLOSING SESSION

CHAIR’S SUMMARY: On Wednesday morning, 26 March, Bureau Vice-Chair Nadine Gouzée (Belgium) presented an oral summary of discussions, comments and suggestions raised during these informal consultations. She stressed that this oral summary was simply intended as an unofficial “aide memoire” that reflected the impressions of the Bureau Vice-Chairs.

Future Programme of Work: On the CSD’s future programme of work, she drew attention to statements by many delegates that Agenda 21 and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation provided the framework for the CSD’s work. She also noted discussions and some concerns expressed about references to WEHAB. She highlighted the widely-held view that CSD should add value and avoid duplication, that commitments made at Johannesburg should not be reopened, and that the CSD should focus on issues that integrate the three pillars of sustainable development. She noted interventions highlighting the need for all relevant government ministers – and not just environment ministers – to be involved in the CSD process. She also drew attention to comments on the need to ensure consistency between the work of the CSD and the Open ended Ad Hoc Working Group on the Integrated and Coordinated Implementation of and Follow-up to the Outcomes of Major UN Conferences and Summits.

Future Organization and Methods of Work: On the future organization and methods of work of the CSD, she highlighted delegates’ statements supporting a two-year cycle, and noted the suggestion that it include a “review” and “policy” year. However, she also noted a widely-held concern that the organization of work should not lead to a proliferation of meetings. She drew attention to statements emphasizing regional and sub-regional inputs, and supporting high-level engagement in the CSD process. She noted comments that a reporting system to the CSD should focus on progress and problems in implementation, and said it was clear that the themes for upcoming CSD sessions would have to be examined further.

On activities that would take place during each two-year cycle, Vice-Chair Gouzée said further discussion was required on the role and modalities of regional implementation and the expert forum, on the question of how often a ministerial segment should take place, on the need for sub-commissions and a thematic task force, and on the frequency and timing of meetings. She also noted participants’ statements on the issue of peer reviews and the question of how to address emerging issues.

Enhancing Contributions: On enhancing contributions from various implementation actors, she highlighted comments on the need to promote synergies among actors and to
avoid duplication, as well as on the need to monitor implementation by all actors and enhance the involvement of major groups. Accountability issues and the need to integrate major groups more effectively had also been raised. She reported delegates’ interventions on the need for a better geographic distribution among major groups and suggested that further discussions on inter-agency coordination might prove useful. She also noted comments on the importance of scientific contributions, and reluctance among some speakers to establish any new scientific bodies.

**Partnerships:** On the role of the CSD as a focal point for partnerships, Vice-Chair Gouzée noted delegates’ view that partnerships should complement internationally-agreed commitments, but should no way be used as a substitute for such commitments. She highlighted statements supporting a transparent, credible reporting mechanism. She also reported that, while some speakers had suggested further developing the guidelines on partnerships, others supported using the existing Bali Guidelines, as they preferred gaining more experience with partnerships before starting additional work on the guidelines.

**CLOSING STATEMENTS:** In their closing statements, a number of Parties thanked the Bureau and Secretariat for their hard work and indicated that this had been a useful meeting. Norway said it hoped for the revitalization of CSD as a policy forum with an operative focus, and repeated her suggestion that the CSD should look ahead only as far as the next three two-year cycles – or six years – in setting future issues for discussion. Commenting on Vice-Chair Gouzée’s summary of the consultations, Saudi Arabia stressed that WEHAB is not part of the Johannesburg outcomes, and should not be the focus for work on implementation. He also noted that, although there had been discussions on whether the two-year cycle was most appropriate, it was not his impression that it had been universally endorsed. Japan noted that the suggestion of a “review” and a “policy” year had not been approved by all participants.

The G-77/China said the focus on implementation means that there must be consideration of who is responsible for different tasks. Noting the failure of the international community to meet existing internationally-agreed commitments, he supported a measurable, definable approach to implementation.

The EU supported an implementation-oriented approach, and suggested a work programme based on the broader themes of the *Plan of Implementation* chapters. He said the selection of priority issues to be addressed should be the subject of ministerial discussions at CSD-11. He supported a simple, focused and efficient programme of work, and called for greater involvement of other UN agencies in the CSD process.

The US noted consensus that the CSD’s main task is to promote actions that support implementation of the *Plan of Implementation* and Agenda 21. Suggesting that “we have entered into an experimental phase with the CSD,” he said the CSD could promote implementation of sustainable development by, *inter alia*, helping mobilize resources, enhancing donor coordination, providing policy guidance, and enhancing partnerships. He commended the initiative for a learning center and a partnership fair at CSD-11, and
noted that, while he was ready to accept the Bali Guidelines, he was not prepared to renegotiate them. He argued that each future work cycle should focus on one main theme, and suggested that, as water and energy are so fundamentally linked to both poverty eradication and sustainable development, they should be considered as possible themes for the first two cycles. Supporting a streamlined, clear process for CSD’s work, he expressed hope that CSD-11 would mark the start of a new and revitalized CSD.

The Russian Federation said the criteria for selection of issues for the CSD’s future work programme should be based on whether the subject has already been discussed under the CSD, and on its overall relevance to sustainable development.

Responding to requests for a written “aide memoire” summarizing these informal consultations, Vice-Chair Gouzée said the Bureau would discuss the matter, and indicated that country positions could be appended to such a report. (Editor’s Note: The Bureau subsequently decided that it would distribute a written report, which was distributed late Wednesday afternoon, 26 March.) She thanked participants for their valuable contributions to discussions during the past two days, and closed the meeting at 11:50 am.