CSD-8 HIGHLIGHTS:
TUESDAY, 25 APRIL 2000

On the second day of the eighth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development, delegations and representatives of major groups participated in the third and fourth Multi-stakeholder Dialogues on Sustainable Agriculture, on knowledge, globalization and trade.

MULTI-STAKEHOLDER DIALOGUE: KNOWLEDGE FOR A SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEM

Chair Mayr introduced the third Multi-stakeholder Dialogue on Sustainable Agriculture, focusing on knowledge for a sustainable food system and identifying and providing for education, training, knowledge-sharing and information needs.

OPENING STATEMENTS: Outlining some of its research and training activities undertaken in partnership with stakeholders, the INTERNATIONAL AGRI-FOOD NETWORK, on behalf of industry, underlined the role of the public sector in undertaking research and development, and in the provision of extension, education and information activities and independent advisory services. On behalf of farmers, the ZAMBIA NATIONAL FARMERS UNION argued that new technologies should not be imposed on farmers, and tabled recommendations on, inter alia: recognition of the role of farmer organizations in spreading knowledge; the need for more research handbooks in indigenous languages; the role of government in undertaking farmer-driven research; and on the need for government to increase support to agricultural extension and development. Challenging the CSD to ensure better use of workers’ knowledge, the INTERNATIONAL UNION OF FOOD, AGRICULTURAL, HOTEL RESTAURANT, CATERING, TOBACCO AND ALLIED WORKERS’ ASSOCIATIONS recommended that trade unions develop and implement awareness and training programmes on sustainable agriculture and promote acceptance of core ILO labour standards. The ECOLOGICAL CENTRE OF BRAZIL, speaking for NGOs, recommended that governments develop policies to raise awareness among consumers and other non-farmers, recognize the scientific knowledge of small-scale farmers, and sponsor conferences to identify the impact of current food systems.

GOVERNMENT RESPONSES: NIGERIA, on behalf of the G-77/CHINA, acknowledged the importance of: increased stakeholder support and government funding for agricultural training, research and capacity-building; technology generation, adaptation and dissemination; and the participatory approach, supported by government and the private sector, in research and extension programmes. GERMANY identified four issues related to sustainable agriculture: consumer education and knowledge; the inclusion of farmers in research activities and the incorporation of traditional knowledge into extension services; the risk of denying small-scale farmers access to research results due to the current intellectual property rights (IPR) regime; and workers’ rights to a living wage and safe working conditions.

OPEN DIALOGUE: Representatives from the farming community identified biopiracy as a major problem, and encouraged public sector research and increased farmer involvement in decision-making. NGOs highlighted: patenting as an ethical issue; the loss of local knowledge; and the role of women as custodians of traditional knowledge. Industry noted the importance of IPRs for small businesses, and observed that patenting is not ownership but is the right to use knowledge. Representatives from trade unions highlighted the origin of knowledge and innovation from workers, and fair trade.

STAKEHOLDER RECOMMENDATIONS: Representatives of INDIGENOUS PEOPLE recommended: acknowledgement of the scientific and technical knowledge of indigenous people as a contribution to sustainable agriculture; provision of financial resources to develop knowledge through indigenous peoples’ institutions; the continuation of stakeholder dialogue at CSD sessions; participation of indigenous people in decision-making at the national level, including a sustainable development clearing-house mechanism managed by indigenous people; CSD promotion of the legal recognition of indigenous land and territories; and adoption by the CSD of the principle of prior informed consent and the right of indigenous people to refuse access to their knowledge. TRADE UNION representatives recommended that: multinational companies and governments fund education and communication programmes; workers enjoy the right to refuse dangerous work, to have access to information and training on pesticide use, and to collective bargaining; and highlighted the role of the artistic community in supporting education for sustainable development. FARMERS’ groups called for: recognition that local and traditional knowledge is a fundamental basis of scientific research; partnerships; the popular dissemination of knowledge; farmer-to-farmer processes to encourage innovation; a global system to make information freely available; and support for negotiations on free access to genetic resources. INDUSTRY representatives called for: improved budgets for agricultural research; and recognition of the role...
of the internet in information dissemination, and that of agricultural cooperatives in knowledge and technology sharing. NGO representatives called for: professional training in indigenous science and agroecology; stronger indigenous farmers’ networks; recognition that the maintenance of knowledge and biodiversity in the public domain are key to SARD objectives; attention to issues surrounding the ownership of knowledge; a shift in the use of resources to support sustainable food systems; and full access to product information for consumers.

MULTI-STAKEHOLDER DIALOGUE: GLOBALIZATION, TRADE LIBERALIZATION AND INVESTMENT PATTERNS

Chair Mayr introduced the fourth Multi-stakeholder Dialogue on Sustainable Agriculture, focusing on globalization, trade liberalization and investment patterns, economic incentives and framework conditions to promote sustainable agriculture.

OPENING STATEMENTS: On behalf of industry, the GROCERY MANUFACTURERS OF AMERICA expressed the support of the agri-food businesses for sustainable agriculture development through market-oriented approaches that promote social and environmental responsibility. She called for the progressive elimination of trade barriers and new channels for partnership, noting progress made through voluntary initiatives and codes of conduct. The INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF AGRICULTURAL PRODUCERS, speaking for farmers, identified six elements that comprise the necessary framework conditions for sustainable agriculture: a stable policy environment; essential rural infrastructure; an appropriate regulatory framework; effective stakeholder participation; increased resources for agricultural development; and effective technology transfer.

Speaking for trade unions, the UNITED FOOD AND COMMERCIAL WORKERS emphasized the importance of employment policies that alleviate poverty and address social aspects of sustainable development. She called for new approaches to target-setting and monitoring, and endorsement of the new ILO health and safety convention.

The THIRD WORLD NETWORK, on behalf of NGOs, highlighted the shift of economic control to transnational corporations (TNCs), the dependence of farmers on chemicals supplied by TNCs, and the rapid concentration of wealth and power. She underscored the need to reassess globalization.

GOVERNMENT RESPONSES: Emphasizing the protectionist implications of multifunctionality, SOUTH AFRICA called on developed countries to remove trade distorting agricultural policies. AUSTRALIA emphasized the need for targeted policies, such as community-based partnerships. The EU called for careful consideration of the purpose of subsidies. GERMANY said the future trade agenda should address IPR, special treatment of developing countries within the WTO, and the role of the WTO’s rules in enhancing social conditions in developing countries. The UNITED STATES described the role of government in enabling farmers to thrive in a consumer-driven economy. The EU, with SWEDEN’s support, highlighted a commitment to duty- and quota-free access for essentially all exports from less developed countries.

OPEN DIALOGUE: INDUSTRY representatives identified the need to progressively reduce price supports, noting that farmers would need time to adjust to the new framework conditions. Representatives of NGOs and FARMERS’ groups highlighted the high level of agricultural protection and subsidies in developed countries, and called for special and differential treatment for developing countries. INDIGENOUS PEOPLE’s representatives noted the inability of many indigenous peoples to compete in the current market because of historical patterns of oppression, and called for amendment of the WTO rules. TRADE UNION delegates called for removal of trade distorting subsidies, reform of trade rules to provide for sustainable development and worker rights, and inclusion of reference to “waged agricultural workers” in documents on SARD and the Multifunctional Character of Agriculture and Land (MFCAL).

STAKEHOLDER RECOMMENDATIONS (1): INDUSTRY representatives supported: the reduction of subsidies and the end of protectionism; a more cohesive international framework for trade and sustainable development; and a clear dispute system regarding issues arising at the WTO and in multilateral environmental agreements. TRADE UNION representatives supported: differentiated subsidies; a review of trade and investment rules to protect the rights of workers, small-scale farmers and consumers; a determination by delegations at CSD-8 to incorporate sustainable development practices, including core labour standards, into trade agreements and guidelines at the IMF and the World Bank; and an open process for public debate during trade negotiations to ensure participation before agreements are imposed unjustly on workers, consumers and farmers. FARMERS’ representatives underlined the need to distinguish between trade distorting and non-trade distorting subsidies, and outlined the need for different levels of government involvement in policies to address the impacts of trade on agriculture, ecology and society. The representatives of NGOs called for an in-depth evaluation of the impact of trade liberalization and a moratorium on WTO negotiations in the interim.

STAKEHOLDER RECOMMENDATIONS (2): Chair Mayr invited participants to address the question of how to direct investment to developing countries in support of sustainable agriculture. A representative of FARMERS underlined the need for investment in agro-processing facilities to add value to local produce and reduce local demand for primary products. INDIGENOUS PEOPLE representatives called for the democratization of national institutions to ensure that investments reach people on the ground, and for the worldwide democratization of land holdings. NGOs called for: the targeting of investment to support local economic development; the defeat of attempts at the WTO to restrict governments’ ability to privilege local investment; and the cancellation of debt. INDUSTRY representatives called for the promotion of relative freedom of investment and free trade, nationally and internationally. TRADE UNION representatives called for transition programmes, compensation, retraining and employment measures for the rural sector.

CONCLUSION OF STAKEHOLDER DIALOGUES: Chair Mayr thanked all the participants and described the four meetings as a confidence building process. He explained that the outcomes would be presented to Ministers attending CSD-8.

IN THE CORRIDORS

Three candidates to host the ten-year review of UNCED have emerged. The Republic of Korea reportedly announced its readiness to host the event in 2002 at a private meeting on Tuesday. They will join the other contenders, Brazil and South Africa. There is also speculation about Indonesian interest in hosting the event. NGOs are pressing for the ten-year review to be held outside New York to help ensure that there is no repeat of the UNGASS meltdown.

THINGS TO LOOK FOR TODAY

High-Level Segment: The first High-Level Segment, with a thematic focus on land and agriculture, will commence in Conference Room 2 at 9:50 am. An FAO video screening will precede the deliberations. The High-Level Segment will continue at 3:00 p.m. with a thematic focus on Preparations for the 2002 Review of progress since UNCED.

SIDE EVENT: UNED-UK will convene a side event on the ‘Earth Summit 2002 - A new deal’, in Conference Room 2 at 1:15 p.m.