

CSD-16 HIGHLIGHTS: MONDAY, 5 MAY 2008

On Monday morning, CSD-16 began its consideration of the thematic cluster for the 2008/09 implementation cycle – agriculture, rural development, land, drought, desertification and Africa. After electing officers and adopting the agenda and organization of work, delegates heard reports on intersessional activities, made general statements, and began their consideration of agriculture and regional perspectives.

OPENING PLENARY

CSD-16 Chair Francis Nhema, Minister of Environment and Tourism (Zimbabwe), urged delegates to address the thematic issues on CSD-16's agenda in an integrated matter. Delegates formally approved Vice-Chair-designates Tri Tharyat (Indonesia), Sasa Ojdic (Serbia) and Melanie Santizo-Sandoval (Guatemala), the other Bureau members having been elected in 2007. Delegates also approved the CSD-16 provisional agenda and organization of work. Grenada, on behalf of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), supported by Antigua and Barbuda for the G-77/CHINA, stressed that the parallel scheduling of SIDS day and the review of CSD-13's decisions on water and sanitation should not be seen as a precedent.

Sha Zukang, Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, stressed that the world food crisis threatens to unravel gains by exacerbating poverty. He said CSD-16's discussions would contribute to efforts to address the food crisis, including the 20 May special session of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and the June summit convened by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

INTERSESSIONAL EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES

Delegates then heard reports on intersessional events and activities. ISRAEL highlighted the outcomes of two conferences that met in Israel in 2007: the International Conference on Water Technologies and Water Control and the International Capacity Building Workshop on Combating Desertification in Drylands. AUSTRIA reported the outcome of the Seventh Global Forum on Sustainable Energy held in Vienna in November 2007. CHINA reported the outcome of the Beijing International Conference on Combating Desertification held in January 2008. NORWAY presented the outcome of the Oslo Policy Forum on "Changing the Way We Develop: Dealing with Disasters and Climate Change," held in February 2008 in Oslo. ICELAND reported on the outcome of the High-Level Round Table on International Cooperation for Sustainable Development in Caribbean SIDS held in March 2008 in Barbados.

OVERVIEW OF PROGRESS AND GENERAL STATEMENTS

Kathleen Abdalla (Officer in Charge, Division for Sustainable Development) presented the Secretary-General's overview of progress towards sustainable development (E/CN.17/2008/2). Christopher Flavin (Worldwatch Institute) discussed the 2008 State of the World report, which focused on innovation for sustainable economies. He said over 800 million people remain malnourished, and that the global food crisis is a political and an economic threat.

The G-77/CHINA said the international community is in danger of meeting only one of the MDGs, stressed that progress on implementation is lagging, and suggested renewed and urgent efforts to enhance the implementation of Agenda 21 and the JPOI. Slovenia, on behalf of the EU, said the CSD adds value by reviewing and analyzing aspects of sustainable development, encouraged delegates to devote time to action-orientated discussion, and highlighted the Africa-EU Strategic Partnership focused on sector partnerships and dialogue.

Iraq, on behalf of the ARAB GROUP, called for new and additional financial resources and removal of restrictions on technology transfer to developing countries. Tonga, on behalf of the Pacific SIDS (PSIDS), said agriculture and fisheries are the main sources of employment and export of this region, and urged development partners to implement commitments in the Monterrey Consensus. Grenada, on behalf of AOSIS, said decreasing ODA levels are affecting SIDS and highlighted the need to recognize their economic and environmental vulnerabilities, even in middle income SIDS.

The US emphasized scientific research and education, mechanisms to exchange information between scientists and decision makers, and an enabling environment that establishes the tools and incentives to develop markets sustainably. CHINA highlighted developing country challenges in agriculture, and emphasized its efforts to address drought and desertification. SOUTH AFRICA highlighted Africa's constraints to benefiting from various international commitments, and said the CSD is the global platform to review and measure progress. INDIA highlighted the India-Africa Summit held in Delhi in April 2008 and called on the CSD to support efforts for just and fair trade in the conservation of global and public goods.

CANADA noted the unique opportunity CSD-16 provides for the practical exchange of information. MALAYSIA emphasized the need to address issues such as non-tariff barriers to trade. INDONESIA underscored the need for a holistic, comprehensive approach to tackle the global food crisis. The RUSSIAN FEDERATION said CSD-16 provides an opportunity to explore the obstacles to implementation. NEW ZEALAND looked forward to translating commitments into action.

ARGENTINA highlighted the need to address subsidies and commercial practices. ZIMBABWE urged developed countries to provide technology and capacity building to developing countries. BANGLADESH stressed that the food crisis provides an opportunity to reform the global agriculture sector.

SWITZERLAND emphasized the need to enhance the weight of the CSD within the UN institutional framework, and to consolidate its interactions with ECOSOC. ISRAEL looked forward to a productive and professional CSD session. PALESTINE said the CSD should ensure its population is not excluded from assistance.

WORKERS AND TRADE UNIONS and WOMEN voiced concern about agricultural workers. CHILDREN AND YOUTH said the CSD's inclusion of Major Groups is a model for addressing intergenerational concerns. INDIGENOUS PEOPLES highlighted the resilience of indigenous knowledge and innovation for food security. NGOs called for long-, rather than short-term, solutions. Highlighting urbanization trends, LOCAL AUTHORITIES drew attention to their strategic implementation role in relation to urban development. Noting the current food crisis, BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY stressed increased agricultural productivity and efficiency, innovative agricultural technologies and good management. The SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNOLOGICAL COMMUNITY highlighted the increased importance of the multiple functions of agriculture in servicing biofuels, livelihoods, and ecosystems. FARMERS suggested a farmer-centered agricultural model.

THEMATIC DISCUSSIONS

AGRICULTURE: CSD-16 Vice-Chair Suntizo-Sandoval chaired this discussion. Panel discussions followed the introduction of the document (E/CN.17/2008/3) by the Secretariat. Per Pinstrup-Anderson (Cornell University) highlighted the importance of agriculture in achieving poverty alleviation and sustainable development, and the need to invest in rural infrastructure. He opposed producing fuels using food commodities. Gregory Ruark (USDA National Agroforestry Center) noted the role of agro-forestry in achieving sustainable agricultural development.

Tianzhi Ren (Chinese Academy of Sciences) outlined the challenges of limited land and water, such as increasing demand due to a rising population, increasing urbanization and escalating production costs in China. Underscoring that agriculture is fundamental to poverty reduction, Eric Fernandes (World Bank) said increased agriculture productivity benefits the income of the poor, at least twice as much as GDP growth.

The G-77/CHINA expressed concern over the stalled Doha Development Round. The EU stressed it was actively supporting policies to give developing countries better access to markets. Djibouti, on behalf of the AFRICAN GROUP, drew attention to the commitment of African leaders to allocate 20% of development budgets to agricultural development.

The G-77/CHINA and PSIDS stressed the importance of capacity building, appropriate technologies, and partnerships in sustainable agriculture. PSIDS and CANADA called for adoption of adaptation and mitigation measures in addressing climate change. The NETHERLANDS suggested more investment in agriculture and said it is willing to participate in the debate on biofuels. Recognizing the rapid rise of food prices, the US said it is taking urgent measures. ISRAEL highlighted the importance of improved and appropriate use of irrigation systems.

EGYPT supported using treated water in producing biofuels. IRAN called for providing special assistance to farmers, and said genetically modified (GM) seeds can be harmful.

JAPAN called for assistance for agriculture, especially for African countries, and addressing rising food prices. AUSTRALIA announced its contribution of an additional US\$30 million to the World Food Programme Emergency Appeal. FRANCE said it is doubling its aid budget. INDONESIA stressed the need to stabilize the price of food globally. MEXICO

emphasized addressing income distribution. ARGENTINA highlighted the challenge of addressing market distortions. The RUSSIAN FEDERATION highlighted the negative impact that some biofuels have on food security.

REGIONAL DISCUSSIONS

AFRICA: Chair Nhema chaired this session. Ousman Laye, Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), presented the report on Africa's Regional Implementation Meeting (E/CN.17/2008/12/Add.1). Luc Gnacadja, Executive Secretary, UNCCD, called for more attention to people living in Africa's drylands and proposed increased investment to improve dryland productivity. Alioune Badiane, UN-HABITAT, explained the relationship between sustainable development and sustainable urbanization in Africa. To address the challenges of sustainable agriculture, Sally Bunning, FAO, emphasized action in data provision, experience sharing and a scaling up of effective local initiatives.

MOROCCO highlighted its capacity-building initiatives in sub-Saharan Africa. SOUTH AFRICA referred to the Pan-African Land Policy Initiative to enhance agrarian reforms. SYRIA noted the cost-effectiveness of dryland rehabilitation. ALGERIA urged designating 2010-2020 as the international decade to fight desertification. The SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNOLOGICAL COMMUNITY urged African governments to dedicate to agricultural research 1% of GDP now assigned to agriculture.

SENEGAL called for an integrated approach in addressing the underlying causes of poverty and food insecurity in Africa. ZIMBABWE underlined the interlinkages between the thematic areas of CSD-16. EGYPT emphasized the rising food prices, and suggested increased assistance to Africa. WORKERS AND TRADE UNIONS focused on the plight of rural workers. FARMERS called for investment in agricultural infrastructure.

WESTERN ASIA: Chaired by Vice-Chair Tharyat, this session heard: the report from the regional implementation meeting of Western Asia (E/CN.17/2008/12/Add.4) presented by Djamel Echirk, Algeria; an in-depth perspective on drought and desertification in the Arab states presented by Khaled Al-Sharaa, Syria; and a presentation by Carol Cherfane, Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, on ongoing initiatives such as employment creation and improved marketing standards for small producers.

SAUDI ARABIA referred to recent initiatives, such as the Riyadh Declaration on an emergency Arab program for food security. CHILDREN AND YOUTH emphasized the low level of child education. PALESTINE referred to barriers provoked by security situations, and to desalination. LEBANON proposed more attention to desertification. ISRAEL noted reduced costs in water desalination for domestic use, and its potential in agriculture. SYRIA noted occupation effects on its food production.

IN THE CORRIDORS

Observers noted that the turnout for the first day of CSD-16 was impressive, with delegates scrambling for seats in Conference Room 4 as the visitors' gallery filled up. Several participants were overheard saying that this session, with its agenda, could not have been better timed to respond to the world food crisis. However, a pointed question is being posed by some: why, for all the hype over the food crisis, does CSD-16 seem to be missing media attention? Some were concerned that it is being sidelined by other high-profile fora, such as the ECOSOC special session, FAO Summit in June and the Secretary-General's task force on food security. A delegate noted similarities with the preceding CSD-14/15 implementation cycle, when the energy crisis was expected to propel the CSD to the forefront as a forum, but never really did. Still, some were encouraged that statements on Monday indicated that delegates were ready to discuss practical measures and advance the debate over the next two weeks.