



A Reporting Service for Environment and Development Negotiations

CSD Intersessionals online at <http://www.iisd.ca/csd/csdint9/>

Vol. 5 No. 170

Published by the International Institute for Sustainable Development

Thursday, 15 March 2001

## CSD INTERSESSIONAL WORKING GROUP HIGHLIGHTS: WEDNESDAY, 14 MARCH 2001

Delegates attending the Intersessional *Ad Hoc* Working Group met in a morning session to consider the Co-Chairs' summary of discussions and the elements for a draft decision on information for decision making and participation. In the afternoon session, the Director of the Statistics Division responded to questions from delegates regarding an ECOSOC resolution on the Division's collaboration with the CSD on work related to indicators. The session adjourned at 4:15 pm for informal consultations on indicators.

### MORNING SESSION

**CO-CHAIRS' SUMMARY OF DISCUSSIONS ON INFORMATION FOR DECISION MAKING AND PARTICIPATION:** Co-Chair Alison Drayton (Guyana) invited delegates to comment on the summary's reflection of delegates' views, noting that the text was not for negotiation. No comments were raised.

**ELEMENTS FOR A DRAFT DECISION ON INFORMATION FOR DECISION MAKING AND PARTICIPATION:** During the general discussion on the paper, the EU noted the need to reflect Principle 10 of Agenda 21 and the media's role. The G-77/CHINA expressed concern with the structure, methodology and substance of the draft, adding that the content should reflect Rio+5 language on the measurements for implementation, the role of information in development and an acknowledgement of the necessity of combining socio-economic aspects in the analysis of data produced through new technology.

SAUDI ARABIA said the text "seems to be agenda-driven" and noted that although delegates had not raised the issue of providing assistance, it was in the text. NIGERIA said the document emphasizes indicators, instead of dealing with information for decision making, and recalled that concerns had been raised on the UN Economic and Social Council's (ECOSOC) decision on the participation of all countries in the development of indicators and the Statistical Commission's work in this area.

**General Considerations:** This section highlights the progress made to improve the quality, coherence and cost effectiveness of data and information gathering, as well as the infrastructural, technological, human capacity and financial resource gaps in developing countries. The EU introduced language to: incorporate Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration and references to public participation and environmental justice; and emphasize developing country needs for adequate financial resources and investment in training and capacity building.

The G-77/CHINA said the section should focus on information for decision making and participation. He suggested deleting references to international standards and to greater partnership between developed and developing countries, and adding references that emphasize technology transfer and infrastructural needs in developing countries. JAPAN introduced language on investing in human capacity. NIGERIA, with SAUDI ARABIA, opposed language referring to "environmental justice," as it would raise issues of social and economic justice. AUSTRALIA, with the US, suggested including language to address the question of national sovereignty by strongly indicating that the use of indicators is voluntary and would not put conditions on development aid.

**Guidance to the Multilateral System:** This section recommends that the international community take actions in the areas of: improvements in functioning, coherence and coordination; training and capacity building; and indicators of sustainable development. Regarding the chapeau, the EU introduced a reference to enhancing information for decision making. The US said the two ideas expressed in the text – recognizing international cooperation and seeking provision of assistance – should be separated.

Regarding the section on improvements in functioning, coherence and coordination, the G-77/CHINA proposed new text on coherence in reporting requirements in order to encourage international organizations to rationalize their requests for information with respect to voluntary national reports and to avoid duplication and unnecessary burdens, particularly on developing countries. He supported deleting text encouraging governments to consider access to information, public participation and access to justice. He offered alternative wording on strengthening access of developing countries to information on sustainable development and ensuring that the commercialization of information does not become a barrier to developing countries. On the need for high quality environmental data, he supported a reference to assisting countries, particularly developing countries, in efforts to improve information collection and ground-based observation.

On access to information, public participation and access to justice, the EU added text to incorporate the feasibility and modalities of the development of legal instruments in this area or the addition to existing legal instruments such as the Århus Convention, taking into account specific national socio-economic and cultural conditions. She also supported referring to the assessment and evaluation of international instruments to reflect Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration.

AUSTRALIA said the accessibility guidelines for internet information could take into account people with special needs. JAPAN added text on promoting the development of innovative technologies, such as global mapping, geographic information systems and video

This issue of the *Earth Negotiations Bulletin* © <enb@iisd.org> is written and edited by Wendy Jackson <wendy@iisd.org>, Violette LaRoche <violette@iisd.org> and Wagaki Mwangi <wagaki@iisd.org>. The Digital Editor is Leila Mead <leila@iisd.org>. The Editor is Pamela S. Chasek, Ph.D. <pam@iisd.org> and the Director of IISD Reporting Services is Langston James "Kimo" Goree VI <kimo@iisd.org>. The Sustaining Donors of the *Bulletin* are the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Government of Canada (through CIDA), the United States (through USAID), the Swiss Agency for Environment, Forests and Landscape (SAEFL), the United Kingdom Department for International Development (DFID) and the European Commission (DG-ENV). General Support for the *Bulletin* during 2001 is provided by the German Federal Ministry of Environment (BMU) and the German Federal Ministry of Development Cooperation (BMZ), the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Environment and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Austria, the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Environment of Norway, the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Environment of Finland, the Government of Australia, the Ministry of Environment and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Sweden, the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Japan Ministry of Environment (through the Institute for Global Environmental Strategies – IGES.) The *Bulletin* can be contacted by e-mail at <enb@iisd.org> and at tel: +1-212-644-0204; fax: +1-212-644-0206. IISD can be contacted by e-mail at <info@iisd.ca> and at 161 Portage Avenue East, 6th Floor, Winnipeg, Manitoba R3B 0Y4, Canada. The opinions expressed in the *Earth Negotiations Bulletin* are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of IISD and other funders. Excerpts from the *Earth Negotiations Bulletin* may be used in non-commercial publications only and only with appropriate academic citation. For permission to use this material in commercial publications, contact the Director of IISD Reporting Services. Electronic versions of the *Bulletin* are sent to e-mail distribution lists and can be found on the Linkages WWW server at <http://www.iisd.ca>. The satellite image was taken above New York ©2001 The Living Earth, Inc. For information on the *Earth Negotiations Bulletin*, send e-mail to <enb@iisd.org>.



transmission technologies. CANADA proposed condensed text on encouraging international organizations to harmonize, rationalize and streamline their reporting requirements. The US introduced a reference to gender-disaggregated data. CHINA said countries should decide on provision of information to populations and noted information systems cannot be imposed on countries, as they may not be compatible with national priorities. The UN ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE said the document downplays the issue of public access and public right to access. He said the work of UNEP and decisions adopted by the UNEP Governing Council should be cross-referenced to avoid working on different tracks. SAUDI ARABIA supported deleting the text on access to information, public participation and access to justice. NIGERIA said capacity building is a prerequisite to provision of access to information and public participation.

Regarding the section on training and capacity building, the EU proposed deleting a reference to promoting the wide use of satellite data, and suggested wording on the Ministerial Declaration of the ECOSOC High-level Segment regarding information and communication technologies. The G-77/CHINA suggested, and the US opposed, a new chapeau specifying that developed countries are encouraged to take action on training and capacity building. He also proposed a reference to development of statistics for sustainable development and to assisting developing countries to develop the needed technological infrastructure for sustainable development.

CANADA proposed deleting references to the development of environmental statistics to be linked to economic, social and environmental indicators and, with the EU, to facilitating an increase in the number of computers supplied to developing countries. Regarding text on the development of environmental statistics, AUSTRALIA proposed strengthening the capacity of relevant national agencies.

Regarding the section on indicators of sustainable development, the G-77/CHINA suggested replacing paragraphs on the CSD Work Programme, national-level indicators and a continuing dialogue on indicators with text from the ECOSOC and Statistical Commission on full participation of countries and on the Statistical Commission as the focal point for the review of indicators. He proposed text on the voluntary nature of indicators and on the importance of preceding the review by seeking the viewpoints of all countries. The EU, with CANADA, proposed text on inviting the Secretariat to advance further work on indicators of sustainable development based on the experiences and results of the testing phase, and giving particular attention to, *inter alia*, methodologies, interlinkages, and integration of gender aspects. The US suggested that the CSD should attempt to resolve issues related to indicators before handing the topic to other agencies.

**Recommendations for Activities at the National Level:** This section elaborates actions on access to data and information and to indicators of sustainable development, which governments can encourage at the national level.

The G-77/CHINA suggested deleting proposals on, *inter alia*: the appointment of a relevant institution or group of institutions to integrate and harmonize data; further work on indicators; cooperation with international organizations in capacity-building and technology development programmes; and gender-disaggregated data. He also suggested rephrasing text on efforts to promote access to information technology, and on incorporating, in relevant decision making, performance information produced by major groups. The EU introduced text on: Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration; public access to information; the development and application of pollution inventories and registers; an open, interactive information policy and an operational environment for an independent, objective media; private sector use of performance information in relevant decision making and planning; and the voluntary development and use of sustainable development indicators.

AUSTRALIA proposed text to cover: traditional and indigenous knowledge; private, as well as commercialized, information; and references to women and aged people. The US stressed the need for gender-disaggregated data, preferred the more inclusive reference to “disadvantaged” rather than “minority” groups, and proposed additional language on the need for product and service information to assist consumers in making more informed choices. CANADA proposed language: emphasizing free and open access to information, while

observing confidentiality of sensitive data; distinguishing between specialized information that can be privatized and information available to the public; providing for partnerships with NGOs and private sector organizations in developing strategies on data collection methods; and encouraging the appreciation of traditional and community knowledge. Summing up the discussion, Co-Chair Drayton noted that the main divergences were on indicators and proposed informal negotiations to narrow them.

### AFTERNOON SESSION

Hermann Habermann, Director of the Statistics Division, UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, was invited to the session to provide information and clarification regarding ECOSOC Resolution 2000/27 on basic indicators for the integrated and coordinated implementation of follow-up to major UN conferences and summits, and the Division’s collaboration with the CSD in the development of the indicators.

The G-77/CHINA asked why the Statistics Division had developed indicators on the basis of socio-economic factors and had disassociated itself from the environmental aspects of indicators. He asked if the Statistical Commission would still serve as the intergovernmental focal point for the review of indicators. SAUDI ARABIA queried the role of the Division regarding decision making, INDIA asked what coordination had taken place between the CSD and the Division, and NIGERIA inquired about harmonization of indicators across the UN.

Habermann replied that: the Statistics Division had not disassociated itself from environmental aspects, but rather is acting on the basis of instructions from ECOSOC, to which it would also provide its own recommendations; the Statistical Commission will remain the intergovernmental focal point; the Division is working with other commissions on indicators; the Division is a technical and not a policy body, and that its function is to look at aspects of indicators such as, *inter alia*, the extent to which they can be used in certain countries; and the Division examines indicators at the request of the CSD, and will go back to the CSD with its results.

JoAnne DiSano, Director of the UN Division for Sustainable Development, explained that the CSD was mandated with promoting the accessibility of indicators of sustainable development to decision makers at the national level, and reminded delegates that there is no requirement for any country to use indicators.

### IN THE CORRIDORS I

The reluctance shown by some delegations to even “note” the work carried out on indicators by the CSD generated frenzied informal consultations between and within regional groups throughout the day. Although the work on indicators dates back to CSD-3 and many consider there to be sufficient ground for a consensus, the dilemma for many developing countries is how to endorse work undertaken using an approach that failed to conform to the ECOSOC resolution, specifically, to involve “all” countries in the process.

### IN THE CORRIDORS II

The elements for a draft decision on an enabling environment circulated for Thursday afternoon’s discussion was described as a “Pandora’s box” by one delegate, due to the references to debt relief and trade issues. Several participants said these are not new issues – as some had been discussed at CSD-8 – and the challenge was to find the addition of value to the process. Some, however, noted that the concept of an “enabling environment” is too vague and could present problems, while others expressed disappointment at the lack of a linkage between this subject and information for decision making and participation.

### THINGS TO LOOK FOR TODAY

**PLENARY:** The Working Group will reconvene at 3:00 pm in the ECOSOC Chamber to discuss the Co-Chairs’ summary of the discussion on international cooperation for an enabling environment for sustainable development, and elements for a draft decision on the same issue. Revised elements for a draft decision on information for decision making and participation will likely be circulated.