

SEVENTEENTH SESSION OF THE COMMISSION ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: 4-15 MAY 2009

Delegates to the 17th session of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD 17), which opens today and continues through 15 May 2009, at UN headquarters in New York, will focus on the thematic cluster of agriculture, rural development, land, drought, desertification and Africa. The CSD meets annually in two-year "Implementation Cycles," with each cycle focusing on one thematic cluster alongside cross-sectoral issues. This approach was outlined in a multi-year programme of work (2004-2017) adopted at CSD 11 in 2003. Each cycle is comprised of a Review Year and a Policy Year. CSD 16, in May 2008, conducted a review of barriers and constraints in implementation, as well as lessons learned and best practices, in relation to the thematic cluster. CSD 17 will negotiate policy recommendations based on CSD 16's review of the issues.

In addition to negotiating policy options related to the thematic cluster of issues, CSD 17 delegates will participate in several additional discussions, including dialogues with major groups and a High-level Segment. On 12 May, there will be a dialogue of ministers with major groups and the UN system on implementing sustainable development in the morning, and a dialogue of ministers with the policy research community and the UN system in the afternoon.

Ministers and high-level government officials have been invited to attend the High-level Segment, which will begin on 13 May, and to participate interactively in roundtable discussion groups. The CSD Chair also has encouraged them to avoid reading formal written statements. The Ministerial Roundtables will focus on: responding to the food crisis through sustainable development; realizing a sustainable green revolution in Africa; and integrated management of land and water resources for sustainable agriculture and rural development. The results from the Ministerial Roundtables will be collated in a Ministerial Vision Statement.

The CSD 17 Organization of Work also includes, for the first time, a tripartite dialogue between heads of UN agencies, chairs of Executive Boards/Governing Councils of UN agencies, and ministers. These closed and informal discussions will take place prior to the morning sessions of the first two days of the High-level Segment. A Partnerships Fair, Learning Centre and

side events will take place in parallel with CSD 17. The official output of CSD 17 will include: a negotiated text identifying negotiated policy decisions on practical measures and options to expedite implementation on issues related to the thematic cluster of issues; a vision statement based on the Ministerial Roundtables; and a summary of the outcomes of the Partnerships Fair, the Learning Centre, the Side Events, and voluntary commitments to mobilize further action by implementation actors, to be posted on the CSD website.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE CSD

The Commission on Sustainable Development emerged from Agenda 21, the programme of action for sustainable development adopted in June 1992 by the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), also known as the "Rio Earth Summit." Agenda 21 called for the creation of the CSD to ensure effective follow-up of UNCED, enhance international cooperation, and examine progress in the implementation of Agenda 21 at the local, national, regional and international levels. In 1992, the 47th session of the UN General Assembly adopted resolution 47/191, which established the CSD's terms of reference and composition, organization of work, relationship with other UN bodies, Secretariat arrangements, and guidelines for the participation of Major Groups. The CSD is a functional commission of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), and its decisions are forwarded to ECOSOC. The CSD has 53 member states, although all UN member states are invited to participate in its sessions. The Division for Sustainable Development (DSD), within the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), serves as the CSD's Secretariat.

The CSD held its first substantive session in June 1993 and has convened annually since then at UN headquarters in New York. During its first five years, the CSD systematically reviewed the implementation of all chapters of Agenda 21. In June 1997, five years after UNCED, the 19th Special Session of the UN General Assembly (UNGASS-19), also known as "Rio+5," was held to review the implementation of Agenda 21. Negotiations produced a Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21. Among the decisions adopted at UNGASS-19 was a five-year CSD work programme organized around sectoral, cross-sectoral and economic thematic issues.

CSD 8: The eighth session of the CSD met from 24 April to 5 May 2000. Participants addressed: integrated planning and management of land resources; financial resources, trade and investment and economic growth; and sustainable agriculture

and land management. The decision on land resources addressed the importance of a holistic approach to sustainable development, including integrated watershed management and the application of an ecosystem-based approach that takes into account the necessary balance between environmental conservation and rural livelihoods. The decision on agriculture recognized the important place of agriculture in society for food and fiber production, food security and social and economic development.

WSSD: The World Summit on Sustainable Development met from 26 August-4 September 2002, in Johannesburg, South Africa, and adopted two main documents: the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (JPOI) and the Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development. In their consideration of desertification, delegates agreed to call on the Global Environment Facility (GEF) Assembly to designate land degradation as a focal area of GEF and to consider the GEF as a financial mechanism for the UN Convention to Combat Desertification. The JPOI chapter on the Sustainable Development of Africa affirms the international community's commitment to support sustainable development in Africa, through addressing the special challenges by taking concrete actions to implement Agenda 21 in Africa, within the framework of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). A section on means of implementation calls for, among others, the fulfillment of World Trade Organization (WTO) members' commitments, notably on market access, and the fulfillment of a commitment to comprehensive WTO negotiations initiated under the Agreement on Agriculture, aiming, *inter alia*, to phase out all forms of export subsidies.

CSD 16: CSD 16 convened at UN headquarters in New York from 5-16 May 2008, to review the thematic cluster of agriculture, rural development, land, drought, desertification and Africa. Delegates "reviewed" constraints and obstacles to implementation, as well as lessons learned and best practices, in relation to the thematic cluster, and highlighted the connections with the global food crisis and climate change. CSD 16's review of the issues highlighted the drivers of food prices, including land degradation, high energy costs, climate change, poor harvests, speculation in agricultural commodities, inequitable terms of trade, decline of investments in agricultural development, and increased production of biofuels from food crops. Speakers also tied their discussions to upcoming meetings, such as: the June 2008 Food and Agriculture Organization's High-level Conference on Food Security and the Challenges of Climate Change and Bioenergy; and ongoing processes, particularly the Doha Round of negotiations in the World Trade Organization and its treatment of agricultural subsidies; and NEPAD.

INTERSESSIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOP ON IMPROVING AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTIVITY, WATER USE EFFICIENCY AND STRENGTHENING RURAL LIVELIHOODS: The Capacity Development Workshop on Improving Agricultural Productivity, Water Use Efficiency and Strengthening Rural Livelihoods, convened from 28-30 January 2009, in Bangkok, Thailand. The event was organized by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA/DSD) in collaboration with the UN-Water Decade Programme on Capacity Development (UNW-DPC) and the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), and brought together representatives from governments, local authorities, UN agencies, and academia

to share lessons learned and best practices in combating rural poverty. Specifically, the workshop provided an assessment of the effectiveness of existing national policies and strategies on rural development, irrigation water management and agriculture development in reducing rural poverty, and identified the necessary interventions and adjustments in the existing policies and strategies to promote sustainable agriculture, including irrigation water management and rural development. The outcomes of the workshop served as inputs to the Intergovernmental Preparatory Meeting (IPM).

AFRICAN AGRICULTURE IN THE 21ST CENTURY: The High-Level Meeting on African Agriculture in the 21st Century, which took place in Windhoek, Namibia, from 9-10 February 2009, was a ministerial-level meeting convened in preparation for CSD 17. The objective of the event in Windhoek was to consider how African governments and other stakeholders can meet the challenges related to the CSD 17 thematic cluster of issues. At the close of the meeting, delegates adopted the Windhoek High-Level Ministerial Declaration on African Agriculture in the 21st Century, which notes a number of recommendations for consideration by CSD 17, including an increase in financial support for agriculture on the continent; the empowerment of women farmers; the availability of credit and other financial services to farmers; and increased North-South and South-South cooperation. In the Declaration, the Ministers and government representatives reaffirmed their commitment to sustainable development in Africa, and recognized the critical role that agriculture plays in achieving sustainable growth in Africa. They supported the call for an African green revolution to help boost agricultural productivity, food production and national food security. They noted that an African green revolution depends not only on improved seed and fertilizer, but can also be built on a range of complementary investments in rural development, including roads, electricity, health and education. They further noted that the support of the state is necessary, especially in small-scale agriculture. They also highlighted the critical need for effective institutions to ensure greater price stability and an enabling policy environment that provides incentives for innovation and risk-taking by farmers.

INTERGOVERNMENTAL PREPARATORY MEETING: The IPM for CSD 17 took place from 23-27 February 2009, at UN headquarters in New York. The IPM's role was to provide a forum to discuss policy options and possible actions to enable the implementation of measures and policies concerning agriculture, rural development, land, drought, desertification and Africa. Building on the CSD 16 review of these issues, the IPM discussed each thematic area and delegates proposed policy options and actions for adoption at CSD 17. Delegates also considered inter-linkages, cross-cutting issues and means of implementation, as well as small island developing states (SIDS). The IPM's deliberations were reflected in a Chair's Negotiating Text distributed on the final afternoon of the meeting. The document was developed with the expectation that it could form the basis for further discussions and negotiations during CSD 17. The Chair's Negotiating Text contains sections under the following headings: Preamble; Agriculture; Rural Development; Land; Drought; Desertification; Africa; and Inter-Linkages, Cross-Cutting Issues and Means of Implementation.

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