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CSD HIGHLIGHTS THURSDAY, 13 MAY 1995

GENERAL DISCUSSION IN THE PROGRESS OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF AGENDA 21

Joke Waller-Hunter, Director, Division for Sustainable Development, introduced the documents for the Commission's consideration. E/CN.17/1995/22 (Progress in the implementation of the decisions of the CSD at its second session) addresses action taken at the international level to follow-up the CSD's consideration of health, human settlements, freshwater, toxic chemicals, hazardous wastes and radioactive wastes. E/CN.17/1995/19 (Integrating environment and development in decision making) reflects attempts to develop methodologies for sustainable development strategies, reviews the work on integrated environmental and economic accounting, and examines the link between international agreements and national law. E/CN.17/1995/18 (Information for decision making and Earthwatch) sets forth four proposals: a UN system-wide Earth Watch; Development Watch; a system of access to UN system-wide databases; and a programme of indicators for sustainable development.

The representative from the UN Statistical Division reported on the outcome of a recent meeting of the UN Statistical Commission, which welcomed the collaboration between the DPCSD and the Statistical Commission in the development of indicators for sustainable development (ISDs).

The Secretariat introduced document E/CN.17/1995/9 (Role and contribution of major groups). He said that the major groups are women, children, NGOs, workers and trade unions, representatives from business and industry, as well as farmers, who provide the motor force for implementing Agenda 21. They provide an important channel between the CSD and the local level. He noted the important work of major groups worldwide in implementing Agenda 21 and highlighted Local Authorities Day on 18 April. He said that only 20 countries had provided information related to the role and participation of major groups.

The Secretariat then introduced document E/CN.17/1995/24 (National Information) and noted that governments' positive responses to the new guidelines have been reflected in improved national reporting. The Secretariat felt that the matrix form best captured the basic trends reflected by the information submitted. He said that the 1997 report could contain a combination of both indicators and matrices and urged those governments who have not already done so, to submit their reports.

The Chair opened the floor for general discussion. **Canada** described its computerized Sustainability Information Management System, which is designed to monitor the federal government's transition to sustainable development.

Belgium presented a report from a recent workshop held in Ghent on sustainable development indicators. She said that indicators are needed to alert decision-makers to priorities, promote national activity and facilitate communication, stressing environmental, economic, social and institutional dimensions and their interrelationship. The CSD should make available core indicators that countries can adapt to local conditions.

Costa Rica said that decision-makers must carefully define their actions if indicators are to succeed. She also called for greater linkages between the different dimensions of sustainability.

Sweden said that the Working Group on the Advancement of Environmental Statistics has agreed on a first list of environmental indicators, which are already available in many countries and can thus be compiled in a short period of time. She recommended that in order to coordinate the activities in the development of sustainability indicators, it is important that the CSD work closely with the UN Statistical Division in its compilation of this first set of indicators.

The World Bank called for more attention to the information systems that countries will need as national and local initiatives proliferate.

The US described the Coral Reef Initiative as a unique attempt to mobilize efforts to create a network for sharing strategies for sustainable management. He also referred to the initiative to phase out lead and requested the CSD to recommend that governments develop action plans to phase out lead in gas and other products.

Iran underlined Principle 12 of the Rio Declaration on economic cooperation. He cautioned against unilateral trade actions and said that the cost of environmental compliance is much higher in developing countries. He called for improved market access, capacity-building and special provisions for small firms. He said that countries must be able to exercise their sovereign rights to exploit their own resources in accordance with national needs.

India called for further study of the impacts of trade liberalization on natural resource use. He said that the effectiveness of any set of indicators has to be tested against the objectives to be promoted. He added that in the criteria for selection of indicators, the highest priority should be given to those that are primarily national in scale and scope. He called for additional efforts to ensure adequate participation by NGOs from the South in the work of the CSD.

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Malaysia called for the participation of NGOs in the work of the CSD and funding to enhance the contribution of major groups. The development of ISDs will require a transparent and participatory process.

China said that many developing countries face problems related to debt, poverty and protectionism. The CSD must promote the implementation of the UNCED commitments on funding and technology transfer.

Ecuador called for discussion of a global instrument on forests within the context of the Biodiversity Convention. He said that national sovereignty over resources must be protected.

Australia advocated an inclusive and consultative approach to the development of indicators that reflect national conditions. The discussion on integration of environment and development in decision-making should address implementation and monitoring, including ISDs to take account of social, economic and environmental factors and interlinkages.

The **EU** expressed frustration at the simultaneous discussion of many subjects at different levels and called for better formats for the CSD reports. National implementation must be supported by inclusive dialogue, involving NGOs and major groups on national delegations to the CSD. The EU endorses the role of the CSD in developing a core set of ISDs for governments.

Belarus noted the importance of regional and sub-regional implementation. Countries with economies in transition are experiencing an economic slow-down, which undermines the transition to sustainable development. A special European regional conference on sustainable development in the first part of 1997 is proposed.

The Inter-Parliamentary Union said that the Commission should recognize the important role parliamentarians play to guarantee effective follow-up to the Rio Conference.

The Republic of Korea said that major groups must be invited into the decision-making process. He supported the need for common criteria and guidelines in the preparation and evaluation of national reports.

The Philippines commented on the role of major groups, with particular emphasis on: gender responsive development; environmental education for youth; strengthening the roles of farmers; ensuring that local authorities can respond to the need for local governance; protection of the rights of indigenous people; and extension of all basic human rights to migrants.

Japan described its environmental policy plan. The participation of major groups is one of the key components. He supported the compilation of sustainable development indicators.

Israel noted the interrelationships between biodiversity, climate change, forests and desertification and submitted four proposals for the CSD's consideration. These include convening workshops to: address cross-sectoral linkages between these issues; examine organisms in climate transition zones; study dryland forestry; and examine expanding the food base in the drylands through an intercontinental crop exchange.

Mexico reported that various actions have been adopted at the national level to increase the participation of major groups, especially indigenous people. He proposed increased financing for NGOs from developed countries. The CSD should support lead-free gasoline initiatives. He said that the most effective way to solve environmental problems is through international cooperation.

Bulgaria supported a stronger role for UNEP in the implementation of the polluter pays principle and suggested that UNEP should work with WTO to raise awareness about the links between trade and the environment. The CSD should direct efforts towards changing existing models of unsustainable patterns of consumption.

Morocco described its national commission for sustainable development and expressed disappointment with the inadequate amount of attention directed to desertification at the CSD. He highlighted the problems of desertification, water, human health and soil erosion in Morocco and called for assistance in combating these problems.

Canada noted the importance of national commissions for sustainable development, participatory strategies and enhanced economic methodological work. He offered Canada as a testing location for ISDs. He underlined the importance of the participation of women, indigenous people and major groups in CSD sessions.

The **US** welcomed government commitment to a participatory approach to the implementation of Agenda 21. He noted the importance of voluntary support for major groups and NGOs, and the centrality of the intergovernmental process at the CSD. More attention should be given to world information systems.

The **International NGO Steering Committee for the CSD** urged governments to support the regularization of NGO participation, which is under review by ECOSOC. He noted the difference between governments' approaches to national work on sustainability and their international reporting at the CSD.

Iceland stressed the responsibility of governments to provide public access to information related to sustainable development and described its efforts with Denmark to integrate indigenous knowledge into Arctic environmental protection.

Uruguay suggested that the CSD recommend adoption of legislation and tools for environmental impact assessment and expressed concern about protectionist practices, noting their environmental and human impacts. The CSD should request resources for NGOs.

Algeria described its national experience with the implementation of Agenda 21 and the conventions. Algeria has established a national fund for the environment, a national ozone commission, and a national commission for the environment and sustainable development. Climate stations have also been established to monitor climatic disturbances on ecosystems. A pilot programme has also been implemented to promote the use of natural gas.

Venezuela called for broad participation in all phases of the development of sustainability indicators.

IN THE CORRIDORS

With several days to go before formal negotiations, government delegates are already discussing the mandate for the intergovernmental panel on forests. Several governments have even produced informal position papers. Some of the emerging questions deal not only with the mandate, but with the practical modalities of establishing such a Panel. These include the role that the DPCSD will play, as well as the frequency, location and cost of meetings of the panel. Look for corridor discussion to intensify in preparation for Thursday's negotiations.

THINGS TO LOOK FOR TODAY

PLENARY: Today's topic will be Agenda Item 5, "Education, science, transfer of technology, cooperation and capacity building," with a focus on Chapters 35, 34 and 16 of Agenda 21. There will also be a presentation by the Republic of Korea on the results of the workshop on the promotion of access to and dissemination of information on environmentally sound technologies.

FORUM ON SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE: Third World Network will host this forum today at 1:00 pm.

CANADIAN PRESENTATION: Canada will demonstrate its computerized Sustainability Information Management System today. Check the daily Journal for the place and time.