



13 May, 2008 Meeting Report – UN CSD Major Group Consultation

This report: http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpO_8Ad5.EN.pdf

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National Sustainable Development Strategy (NSDS)

A. History and Background:

In January 2008 CSD Major Group (MG) representatives¹ met on the occasion of the 3rd ECE Regional Implementation Meeting on Sustainable Development, held in Geneva 28-29 January, 2008 and agreed to support the evolution of National Sustainable Development Strategies (NSDS). See Appendix for background information on NSDS.

After further consultation with members of the CSD Major Group facilitating group the Trade Unions (TU) Major Group agreed to convene this 13 May meeting during the 2nd week of the CSD for the purpose of discussing how MG and governments might jointly support the NSDS and improve its monitoring and implementation.

Trade Unions also agreed to orient the production of their yearly country-by-country profiling and the delivery of corresponding information kits to governments this year toward the promotion of NSDS at CSD². This delivery coincided with the timing of a formal thematic discussion on inter-linkages held during the first week of CSD when NSDS-related issues were raised.

The results of these exercises prefaced the production of the CSD Chair's first summary report, which was released at the same time as our MG consultation (Tuesday afternoon of the 2nd week of CSD). This Chair's summary recognized that countries have conducted NSDS reviews³. It argued for the establishment of indicators⁴ and regular evaluations for improvements⁵. It also agreed that NSDS can cut across all levels, sectors and involve

¹ All Major Groups were represented, except the Indigenous Peoples.

² This kit was circulated to all governments during the 1st week of the CSD. An example of the letter contained in the kit, along with the copy of the country profiles for each country are available at: http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpO_8Ab3.EN.pdf.

³ **In June, 2008 96 countries** had reported to the CSD or its Secretariat that they are implementing or developing an NSDS. See Appendix or world map at http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/natlinfo/nsds/nsds_map2008.pdf

⁴ Actually, Indicators of Sustainable Development have been developed under a mandate from the CSD to assist countries in developing national indicator sets, see <http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/natlinfo/indicators/isd.htm> for further background and the revised set of indicators.. Countries are invited to report on national indicators to the CSD, but the response rate is relatively low. The indicators are also available at; http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpA_3a.EN.pdf

⁵ Currently, there is no such regular evaluation at the international level of the NSDS, itself, or of the reports voluntarily generated by countries within the NSDS process. At the CSD governments are encouraged to submit annual or 2-year-cycle reports related to the themes under discussion but these cannot be considered NSDS reports as they are limited to a limited range of issues. The national reporting, however, includes questions on the status of NSDS in countries. These questionnaires are one major source for tracking progress towards the WSSD target on NSDS. As of June 2008 **only 38 of 76** NSDS countries actually produced these CSD 2008 for the

multiple actors to facilitate exchange of learning experiences and capacity building. The Chair's summary, however, did not link NSDS to cross-cutting issues, capacity building or 'best practice' or emphasise the use of NSDS as a tool to improve national implementation of Sustainable Development, generally, or to the CSD decisions, specifically.

On the day following this MG consultation the National Information, Monitoring and Outreach Branch (DESA/DSD) hosted a formal side-event (14 May) on the progress and prospects of NSDS. Various country case studies were presented and background information was provided about NSDS, as well as on indicators of sustainable development. NGO and Trade Union Major Group representatives attended the meeting and observed that the country presentations lacked a connection to indicators and evaluations. There were several direct references to business involvement, numerous oblique references to other stakeholders (naming but a few) and none to Major Groups. They also observed that much of the content of the presentation did not seem to have much to do with the spirit or intent of NSDS, i.e. implementation of the three pillars of sustainable development.

B. Summary of the meeting:

The meeting was chaired by Lucien Royer who welcomed about 50 participants that came from Major Groups, governments, as well as the CSD and UN Secretariat. He applauded those involved in the historical evolution of NSDS and said the process contained much potential for implementing sustainable development and involving MGs. He expressed the importance for all parties to work together in the further development NSDS .

Ms. Nadine Gouzée of The Task Force on Sustainable Development, Federal Planning Bureau of Belgium and *Mr Pieter Decruynaere* of the secretariat of the Belgian Federal Council for Sustainable development provided background on the participatory process in Belgium within the country's framework for sustainable development. They made a distinction between a Strategy (typified by an agreed approach) and that of a Plan (as expressed in a document).

The representatives of Belgium outlined the national political and administrative structures in their country at the federal level and the respective involvement of MG and stakeholders in the federal Council, which advises the government inter alia on the objectives and implementation of its Federal Plan for Sustainable Development. Belgium does not yet have a national strategy, the result of its complex federal structure. Further information is available at: www.frdo-cfdd.be, www.icdo.be, www.plan.be, www.plan2009.be .

Ms. Anne Kari H. Ovind of the Section for the Environment and Sustainable Development, Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Norway explained how Norway's Strategy for Sustainable Development is linked to the National Budget. It is the Minister of Finance who is responsible for coordinating the government's work on sustainable development. The new strategy has been published as part of the 2008 National Budget and is the result of extensive stakeholder dialogue and a broad hearing process including Swedish authorities' contribution to a peer review of our policies.

2year-cycle (which means that CSD annual reports are almost exclusively filed by NSDS countries, with exceptions being Croatia, and the United States, which are not subscribed to NSDS).

She said sustainable development involves all sectors of society and that it was imperative to make good use of the knowledge and expertise from NGOs, within the broad based consultative process. Her contribution to the meeting is available at: http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpO_8Ad7.EN.pdf. For Norway's approach to sustainable development, see: <http://www.sweden.gov.se/sb/d/2164/a/79153>. The Norwegian NSDS strategy is available at: <http://www.regjeringen.no/en/dep/fin/Search.html?id=86895&quicksearch=Norway's+strategy+of+sustainable+development>.

Mr. Matthias Bruckner of the National Information, Monitoring and Outreach Branch, Division for Sustainable Development (DSD), UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) provided information on the main elements of NSDS and their interlinkages: Country ownership and commitment; integration across economic, social and environmental pillars of sustainable development; incorporating both intra- and intergenerational equity; linking sustainable development priorities with budgetary processes; broad based participation; and building capacity.

He noted that most countries for which DSD has information involve stakeholders outside the government in their NSDS processes, but that the degree of involvement varies greatly across countries and across stages of the NSDS process. Major group involvement is most frequent in the formulation and consultation stage, and to some lower extent in monitoring and evaluation. However, participation of major groups in NSDS implementation remains scant. He expressed strong appreciation for MG involvement in supporting the uses of NSDS. For more information, see <http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/natinfo/nsds/nsds.htm>

Mr. Jan-Gustav Strandenaes Northern Alliance for Sustainable Development (ANPED) from the NGOs provided a history of the ANPED's work on NSDS and questioned the seriousness of some governments were approaching the programme. He outlined the results of a preliminary survey conducted in 15 of the West European countries, among the European Environment and Sustainable Development Advisory Councils (EECA)⁶ countries and Central Asian countries, a total of some 170 NGOs. The survey identified serious knowledge gaps and barriers to the participation for stakeholders in NSDS.

He argued that NSDS in many countries was mainly shepherded by bureaucrats and that local governance was lacking almost everywhere. He highlighted the need for CSD national reporting to be connected to NSDS and to a stakeholder meeting process prior to CSD meetings and argued for the need of the return of the CSD task managers at the intergovernmental level to give some oversight to the process⁷. A copy of his slide tape contribution to the meeting is available at: http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpO_8Ad6.EN.pdf. More information is available on the ANPED Website: <http://www.anped.org/>

Ms. Alejandra Garcia Ramirez of the Trade Union Advisory Committee to the OECD (TUAC) reported that trade unions had created a special Sustainable Development Unit (SDUnit)⁸ and developed a wide range of indicators that govern their approach to sustainable

⁶ See appendix #4 for information on EECA

⁷ The trade unions conducted an analysis of the CSD 2008 national reports: http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpO_8Ad1.EN.pdf. Their analysis shows that most of these mention the involvement of stakeholders and civil society with respect to issues like capacity building, knowledge transfer and the like but almost none clearly define the nature or extent of this involvement and not one made reference to Major Groups or their involvement on any issue.

⁸ See <http://www.tradeunionsdunit.org/profiles>

development implementation⁹. She described how country-by-country profiles were developed by trade unions for this CSD16¹⁰ and how the TU Major Group had analysed the countries that have subscribed to NSDS¹¹ and those that submitted a report to the CSD for the current thematic cycle.¹²

She emphasized that although many country reports loosely referred to the participation of “stakeholders”, “civil society” or some like term, only one country –Nauru- actually made reference to “Major Groups”. In almost all cases where references to such groups occurred, almost none actually provided the evidence for such involvement, with most of them using only quite vague references to describe such participation. The trade union analysis also pointed to the relatively poor level of reporting from many countries, with little or no reference to NSDS or the UN indicators. There is also a lack of coherency from one country’s reporting to the next, making it impossible to assess progress relative to international goals.

She also released a summary table arguing for the possibility of strong synergies for NSDS by linking them to the activities of other programmes to which many countries are also subscribed, such as the ILO Decent Work Country Programmes (DWCP) and the World Bank-related Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP)¹³. Such linkages could be made to complement and strengthen the integration of social issues. They could also render reporting and implementation more coherent, as well as eliminate duplication. A summary of DWCP and PRSP are provided in the Appendix. A copy of her contribution to the meeting is available at: http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpO_8Ad3.EN.pdf

C. General Discussion:

A delegate from Croatia questioned how a NSDS could be mainstreamed, so that the sustainable development would actually become a country’s development strategy. A delegate from the Scientific and Technology Major Group asked how involvement from the science/technology community becomes part of a National Strategy.

A representative of ICLEI from the Local Authorities Major Group indicated her support for the NSDS process but contended that reports must do much more to portray the dominant role that local authorities play in sustainable development. It was noted that Agenda 21 called on local authorities in each country to undertake a consultative process with their populations by 1996 and achieve a consensus on "a local Agenda 21" for their community and that this mandate later evolved into the development of NSDS.

A representative of the Children & Youth Major Group argued that NSDS’s must involve an ethical imperative, as the process must be people-centred. Another talked about the need to provide NSDS reports in language that is more broadly accessible. There was also a concern that the quality of the NSDS process can be easily corrupted by politics. In addition a delegate from Serbia attested to the positive role NSDS can play in the development of a country and of the advantages of making links to it with other institutional programmes like those of the ILO and UNEP.

⁹ See http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpS_1.EN.pdf

¹⁰ See http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpO_8Ab.EN.pdf

¹¹ For copy of this analysis, see: http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpO_8Ad3.EN.pdf

¹² For copy of a table review of CSD16 national reports, see: http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpO_8Ad1.EN.pdf

¹³ For a copy of this table see: http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpO_8Ad2.EN.pdf .

A delegate from Belgium confirmed that her organization found the process to be positive. The Belgian tradition of multisectoral consultation goes back to WWII but unions and other stakeholders now participate in a National Council positive momentum towards NSDS, with a willingness by civil society to promote them. She said that ownership by broadest possible cross-section of society was crucial and that trade unions would continue to welcome input from other major groups to enhance and improve the product, and to coordinate efforts.

A general discussion with a question and answer period followed with many participants emphasising the need to for Major Group involvement in NSDS. In the full room of Major Group representatives not one person (besides those sitting on the panel) was in a position to indicate any direct involvement with NSDS at either the international or country level.

A representative from the International Partners for Sustainable Agriculture (IPSA) observed that the government participation at CSD this year did not seem to be guided much by agriculture indicators or those related to Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development (SARD). After the meeting a representative of the International Federation of Agricultural Producers (IFAP) further reflected that national reports to the CSD are mainly devoid of reference to such indicators, emphasising that despite their quality they don't seem to get the proper attention by governments for implementing and reporting purposes.

Several suggestions were made for improving or expanding the trade union list of indicators.

D. Wrap up and Conclusions

The Chair summed by providing a number of recommendations that Major Groups might consider taking forward, in time for 2009, as follows:

Major Group involvement in NSDS: The CSD should

1. Request governments to more clearly involve MGs in their NSDS planning and implementation. Clear references to each MG should be incorporated within NSDS and CSD reporting and such reporting should seek to assess the overall involvement of MGs, identifying the barriers to such involvement.
2. Support the work by Major Groups to review NSDS progress on a continuing basis. Major Groups should be encouraged to submit input into their national reports, with the expectation that such input be reflected in submissions to the CSD.
3. Involve Major Groups within the NSDS process at the international level and within countries. National reports must show evidence of involvement or input from Major Groups and of visible linkages to UN indicators. Discussions should take place with Major Group representatives to determine how best to achieve this goal, e.g through partnerships, via separate reporting or through some involvement in oversight processes.
4. Acknowledge the special roles of Local Authorities as a natural bridge between the citizenry and national governments in designing and implementing NSDS. Local governments are responsible for managing the populated areas of the country (cities, towns, villages) and are important for many NSDS indicators relating to urban transport, freshwater, sewage, waste and land use.

5. Develop a Major Group NSDS awareness raising campaign that could serve three purposes: a) advocacy to encourage countries to subscribe to NSDS, if they have not already done so, b) encourage all country NSDS to be guided by the indicators of sustainable development and c) provide a toolkit for national-level Major Groups to become involved in NSDS.

Quality improvement of NSDS instruments: The CSD should:

6. Consider a process to review the progress of NSDS and the country adherence to the indicators for sustainable for its implementation and reporting. Place such a review within the context of the upcoming UN SCP review and of the WSSD objective that all countries be subscribed to NSDS by 2005,
7. Promote better CSD oversight of NSDS to ensure that quality follow up to reports take place, such as through the use of task managers and develop a reporting process that links these to national-level evaluation and implementation,
8. Strengthen the commitment to the UN indicators and support more awareness raising about them. Ensure that national CSD or NSDS reports show clear evidence of linkages to the UN indicators. As a pilot study, review CSD national reports produced for this thematic cycle and assess the quality of linkages to the UN indicators that relate to relevant CSD themes, especially agriculture, rural development and cross-cutting and social issues. At CSD 2009 include the lack of agriculture indicator linkages (including socio-economic indicators related to agriculture) to country implementation and reporting as a subject within thematic panel discussions.
9. Improve national reporting, both in content and in format and make it more coherent and meaningful in terms of implementing sustainable development,

Development of better inter-institutional linkages: The CSD should:

10. Promote better CSD oversight of NSDS and develop institutional linkages to ensure that follow-up to reporting actually takes place, through transparent and accountable evaluation processes,
11. At the country level, support formal linkages of NSDS to Ministerial or administrative structures of governments that establish accountability and effective influence over policy and implementation. Formulation of national strategies should not be fossilised for all time but be subject to on-going transformation with a clear vision about goals, outcomes and the means for implementation,
12. Help create direct linkages to other UN programmes that can strengthen the coordination and implementation of NSDS, e.g. ILO Decent Work Country Programmes (DWCP) and to Poverty Reduction Strategy Reports (PRSP).
13. Connect the relevance of NSDS to the current ongoing debates relative to the International Environmental Governance (IEGs), such as the ongoing UN environment reform initiatives, MEAs etc.
14. Share this report with other Major Group entities within the UN system, e.g. UNEP.

The meeting was adjourned with thanks to Federica Pietracci and her team for helping to facilitate it with Major Groups.

Appendix *Background*:

1. UN CSD National Sustainable Development Strategies (NSDS):

At the Rio Summit 1992, the National Sustainable Development Strategies (NSDS) were first established in Chapter 8 of Agenda 21. The Chapter calls for countries to adopt NSDS and build their own sectoral economic, social and environmental policies. In 2002, the World Summit for Sustainable Development (WSSD) urged Nation States to formulate and implement their NSDS by 2005. Countries that report on the progress of their NSDS to the CSD or the UN Division for Sustainable Development (DSD) are indicated on a world map: <http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/natlinfo/nsds/nsdsMap.htm>.

Chapter 40 of Agenda 21 calls on countries and the international community to develop indicators of sustainable development so as to increase the focus on sustainable development and assist decision-makers at all levels to adopt sound policies. As of 2008, the UN CSD indicator set contains 96 indicators, of which 50 are core indicators. A summary table of the indicators is available at: http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpA_3a.EN.pdf. The DSD has also produced guidelines on indicators and detailed methodology sheets for all indicators, with an additional concept note: <http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/natlinfo/indicators/isd.htm>.

2. ILO Decent Work Country Programmes (DWCP).

The ILO Decent Work programmes aims to reduce poverty, meet social and equality goals and create jobs with adequate pay, social security and safe and healthy work. The use of DWCPs are designed to help ILO identify its Decent Work at the country level. The establishment of priorities and their listing of Integrated Resource Information System (IRIS) is designed to provide a common frame of reference for the ILO headquarters and office field activity in the countries. DWCPs are prepared under a range of different contexts and related levels of expertise. <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/bureau/program/dwcp/about/index.htm#1>

3. Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP).

PRSP describes a country's macroeconomic, structural and social policies and programs to promote growth and reduce poverty, as well as associated external financing needs. PRSPs are prepared by governments through a participatory process involving civil society and development partners, including the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) <http://www.imf.org/external/np/prsp/prsp.asp>

4. European Environment and Sustainable Development Advisory Councils (EEAC):

EEAC is a collaboration between the councils set up by European governments to provide independent and scientifically based advice on the environment and sustainable development. The network is a tool for sharing information and experience across Europe. Co-operation between advisory councils under the EEAC network started in 1993. More than 30 councils from 16 European countries with around 400 key senior actors from academia, civil society/NGOs, stakeholder organisations and the private sector now participate in the network: <http://www.eeac-net.org/>. Within this context The European Sustainable Development Network (ESDN) is an informal network of public administrators and other experts dealing with sustainable development (SD) strategies in Europe; <http://www.sd-network.eu/>