



UNITED NATIONS NON-GOVERNMENTAL LIAISON SERVICE/NGLS

NGO Dialogue Sessions at the Fifth Session of the CSD

The fifth session of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD-5) was held in New York from 11-18 April 1997. The session, which functioned as a preparatory meeting for the upcoming 19th Special Session of the UN General Assembly to review and appraise the implementation of Agenda 21 (UNGASS), included as a part of its official programme a series of dialogue sessions between governments and representatives of the nine major groups identified by Agenda 21.

The sessions were organized to increase direct interaction between the CSD and major groups, so that the five-year review benefits fully from the perspectives, experiences, challenges and priorities of those involved in implementing the measures called for by the UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), held in 1992 in Rio de Janeiro (Brazil). Four main questions were addressed in the discussions: What are the lessons learned by the major group during the first phase of Agenda 21 implementation? What are the priorities of the major group for the next phase? What challenges does the major group wish to make to other major group sectors, UN bodies and governments regarding future sustainable development efforts? and Which issues, in the view of the major group, should be priority issues for the CSD to focus on in the next phase?

The results of the sessions are included in the official CSD-5 report submission to the special session of the UN General Assembly.

CHILDREN AND YOUTH

The dialogue session on youth, held 11 April, was chaired by CSD vice-chair Ambassador John Ashe (Antigua and Barbuda) and facilitated by Danijela Zunec of Rescue Mission Croatia and Peter Wilson of Global Kids Jamaica/USA. Speakers included representatives from Rescue Mission-Planet Earth; Canadian Environmental Network-Youth Caucus; Latin American Youth Network (REJULADS); Q2000; Playfair! Europe; International Youth and Student Movement for the United Nations; Action for Solidarity, Equality, Environment and Development (ASEED)-Europe; ASEED-Japan; ASEED-Australia; Students Partnership Worldwide; and Global Kids, Jamaica/USA.

Speakers described youth efforts to raise awareness, strengthen bilateral partnerships, improve the environment and address social problems. Activities cited included educational seminars, local fundraising drives, scientific research projects, the development of youth networks and the preparation of reports on sustainability indicators, such as *Mission Made Possible*, *Future Watch*, and *The Children's Version of Agenda 21*. Priority issues highlighted by participants included peer education, participation in decision making, gender balance, human rights, poverty, poor working conditions for youth, homelessness and marginalization (particularly of indigenous youth).

Obstacles to the implementation of Agenda 21 cited by youth participants included limited access to information and decision making, political corruption, gender inequities and consumerism. Speakers questioned the low government attendance at the dialogue session itself, and noted that it reflected some of the problems youth face in getting governments to listen to them.

In the ensuing discussion with governments, the Belgian delegate responded that low attendance reflected the simultaneous scheduling of meetings rather than a lack of interest, while the representative from Hungary noted that since some of the young panellists might become government representatives themselves, they should remember the empty seats to ensure sure they are not empty in the future. Tanzania called on panellists to be more demanding of governments and urged them to secure media coverage for their presentations. The United Kingdom advised panellists to encourage youth to demonstrate sustainable lifestyles. The Philippines noted that children and youth are the target of those who want to promote unsustainable consumption patterns. Uganda raised the importance of micro-financing with regard to financial and economic issues. The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) noted the serious problem of child labour in some countries and asked the youth representatives to take up this issue. Panellists agreed with the importance of micro-financing and highlighted various forms of effective education. They emphasized the need for activities at the grassroots level, and increased access to information. They called on governments to allocate funds in such a way as to reflect the size of the youth constituency, which is 50% of the world's population.

Youth Challenges and Recommendations to the CSD

- n Recognize that young people have much to offer and allow them to exercise their skills for sustainable development efforts with the United Nations.
- n Encourage governments to supply funding for youth activities.
- n Establish a CSD youth consultancy programme (a pilot effort in this area in 1996 has enabled young people to participate directly in commission activities and enhance their global network).
- n Include youth in international fora and promote attention to youth concerns and contributions.
- n Encourage countries to include youth representatives in national delegations to the CSD.
- n Work to allow young people access to information.
- n Promote innovative forms of education and creative ways to involve youth in decision-making processes.

Ambassador John Ashe also chaired the scientific and technological communities session held on 11 April. It was facilitated by Julia Marton-Lefevre, Executive Director of the International Council of Scientific Unions (ICSU). Speakers included representatives of Partner Programmes on Environmental Science; Third World Academy of Sciences; Committee on Science and Technology in Developing Countries; World Federation of Engineering Organizations; Global Change System for Analysis, Research and Training; Committee for the International Human Dimensions of Global Environmental Change Programme; and International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources.

The post-Rio activities described by speakers included the World Climate Research Programme, which aims at improving prediction of the physical climate; the International Geosphere Biosphere Programme, which investigates the effects of global change on ecosystems; the Diversitas Programme, which coordinates research into biodiversity issues; and the International Human Dimensions of Global Change Programme to enhance understanding of the social and economic driving forces behind global change, as well as the impacts of and responses to that change. Panellists noted that many scientific organizations are focusing on capacity building because of the need for local solutions and the engagement of local expertise in addressing sustainability challenges. The organizations have also been developing advisory support roundtables and partnerships with other major groups, such as business and industry, to cultivate relationships.

Obstacles to implementation of Agenda 21 cited by speakers mainly addressed the lack of funding for research in areas of sustainable development, an unwillingness or difficulty in working together or sharing knowledge, a shortage of scientists in developing countries, and difficulties of gaining access to decision-making processes.

In the ensuing discussion, the United States and Indonesia agreed on the importance of improving public understanding of sustainable development and the scientific knowledge needed for it. The Czech Republic observed a lack of information in the media, and Ghana noted the difficulty in understanding some of the information that is disseminated.

Japan highlighted the importance of links between the scientific community and government, and the Philippines drew attention to the importance of links between the scientific community and private sector research and development. The United Kingdom asked about best and worst practice issues, and Malaysia raised questions about the efficiency of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

Science and Technology Challenges and Recommendations to the CSD

- n Encourage support for basic science education and research for environment and development issues.
- n Assist developing countries in national scientific capacity building.
- n Support coordination within the scientific community.
- n Raise public awareness of scientific and technological issues related to sustainable development.
- n Package scientific information so that it is understandable and accessible by ordinary citizens as well as policy makers.
- n Facilitate dialogue between scientists and decision makers.
- n Compile and disseminate information on lessons learned in science and technology.
- n Improve relationships between the scientific community and the media.
- n Give greater attention to research and development activities in the private sector.
- n Create direct dialogue opportunities between the CSD and representatives of the scientific community on specific topical areas of sustainable development.

CSD vice-chair Ambassador Monika Linn-Locher (Switzerland) chaired the women's dialogue session on 14 April, which was facilitated by Bella Abzug, President of the Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO). Speakers included representatives from the Central and Eastern European Network for Sustainable Consumption and Production, Poland; Country Women's Association of Nigeria; Movement for Nuclear Safety, Russia; NGO Campaign for the Earth International, Canada; Perzent Center of Karakalpakstan; the *Rede de Defesa da Especie Humana* (REDEH), Brazil; Red Thread, Guyana; and Women, Food and Agriculture Working Group, *Via Campesina*, United States.

Speakers in the dialogue session noted that women cannot be considered merely a major group, since they are represented in and reflect all of the nine major groups defined in Agenda 21, and have served as catalysts for environmental and democratic activism across class, race ethnicity and coalition lines. Speakers said that thanks to women's efforts, there is a principle on women in the Rio declaration, a chapter on women and over 170 references to women mainstreamed throughout Agenda 21, and they have also ensured a gender analysis in the process and documents of other international conferences, particularly the Beijing platform for action. However, speakers said five years after Rio and two years after Beijing, women still comprise the majority of the poor, the landless and the underfed.

Speakers described a number of relevant initiatives by and for women at the international level, including the

Women's Caucus of NGOs, which enabled women to participate in intergovernmental negotiations on an on-going basis; the Beijing conference, where women drew attention to poverty and its effects on the lives of women in particular; and the Microcredit Summit held in Washington DC in 1997, which highlighted the importance of providing credit to poor women. (Summit participants committed to providing US\$21.7 billion in microcredit to poor people by the year 2005.) Panellists also highlighted the importance of local Agenda 21 efforts in strengthening mechanisms by which women are integrated in decision-making processes and are helping to alter unsustainable production and consumption patterns.

Obstacles to implementing Agenda 21 cited by speakers included the inequities and prejudices that confront women, such as lack of representation, inadequate access to credit, poverty, and the negative impacts of trade and debt-related issues. For example, they noted that although women make up over 50% of the world's population, they constitute far less than the same ratio in government posts throughout the world; barriers to land ownership by women not only stifle their prospects for financial independence but create disincentives for following sustainable practices; trade imbalances and debt crises contribute to poverty-related problems; and the growing emphasis on food as a commodity and on agro-business has negative effects regarding sustainable agriculture and world food security, which has important implications for women farmers as well as for the well-being of women and children in general.

In the ensuing discussion, Peru identified poverty as the main obstacle to achieving the goals outlined in Beijing and urged countries to promote capacity building for women and provide special attention to women in indigenous communities. The Philippines described efforts to mainstream women's concerns into its policy decisions; and Australia, Bangladesh, the Netherlands and Switzerland all noted progress in micro-financing programmes for women. Sweden stressed the issue of women in agricultural production, and the Netherlands addressed women and trade in export-driven, monoculture economies along with Cuba, which also described hostile food policies and their relation to food insecurity. Australia noted the linkages between transboundary movements of hazardous material and women's health problems. Norway and Sweden stressed the importance of addressing the role of both women and men when formulating gender policy, and Finland suggested that the conclusions reached during the recent Commission on the Status of Women should be incorporated into the CSD-5 decisions.

Women's Challenges and Recommendations for the CSD

- n Ensure full and equal participation in decision making at every level in all social, political and economic areas.
- n Commit the necessary resources and establish time-bound targets for integrating women fully into the development of policies, institutions, mechanisms, implementation and evaluation of all future plans for sustainable development.
- n Ensure that women's reproductive and productive contributions are measured, valued and integrated into national accounts and in the calculation of national wealth.
- n Disaggregate by gender all data collected at the national and international levels.

- n Develop and integrate gender indicators in the systems of monitoring sustainable development.
- n Enforce compliance with International Labour Organization (ILO) agreements to prevent gender-based economic exploitation by transnational corporations (TNCs).
- n Make major debt cancellation announcements at UNGASS, as it is a critical centerpiece of the Rio formula, and explain to the public the relationship of debt cancellation to stemming environmental degradation and ending the cycle of poverty.
- n Identify industrial hotspots and prepare a plan to clean these areas.
- n Regulate commercial advertising and identify instruments to combat its negative effects.
- n Ensure that on-going negotiations on the multilateral agreement on investment will equally address the rights and responsibilities of corporations in sustainable development processes.
- n Establish a mechanism within the commission to monitor and guide the actions of the World Trade Organization.
- n Earmark 1% of all funding dispersed via the World Bank, regional development banks and other international financial institutions to support rural women, who make up the main share of the world's 1.3 billion poor.
- n Support appropriate and gender-fair education, health, recreation, childcare and other infrastructural systems designed by and for rural communities.
- n Promote "sustainable agriculture" rather than "agricultural sustainability."
- n Affirm and pledge to reach the Microcredit Summit goal of raising US\$21.7 billion to ensure that 100 million of the world's poorest women and their families receive credit for self-employment by the year 2005.
- n Remove legislative, policy, administrative and customary barriers to women's equal rights to natural resources, including access to and control over land (and other forms of property), credit, inheritance, information and new technology.
- n Strengthen the reporting requirements by governments to the commission and improve links with other relevant bodies of the Economic and Social Council, such as the Commission on the Status of Women.
- n Review and address the impact on women of public and private sector genetic research, bioprospecting, biotrade, and biotechnology policies and programmes.
- n Strengthen the role of women in efforts to implement Agenda 21. In doing this, the commission should examine examples where efforts to increase participation have been successful and disseminate this information widely.



CSD vice-chair Ambassador Bagher Asadi (Iran) chaired the trade unions dialogue session held on 14 April. The session was facilitated by Clayola Brown, Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees (UNITE), the United States. Speakers included representatives from UNITE; *Central Unica dos Trabalhadores*, Brazil; Graphical Workers' Union, Sweden; Canadian Labor Congress; Mine, Geological and Oil Workers, Czech Republic; Laborers' International Union, US; Zimbabwe Council of Trade Unions; Indian National Trade Union Congress; Worker Education and Environment, ACTRAV/ILO Project; the

Swedish Confederation of Professional Employees; Trades Union Congress; and the Bangladesh Independent Garment Workers Union.

The concept of "collective engagement" was the focus of trade union presentations, as well as their response to the trends of hunger, ill-health, illiteracy, unemployment, industrial accidents and social tensions, which have increased since the Rio conference. Collective engagement is the process through which workers learn and grow by working together to recognize problems and fashion solutions in a cooperative, collaborative and mutually self-directing way. It aims to harness the energies of workers and other members of society in transforming ideas about sustainable development into action.

Speakers described projects directed at poverty alleviation, holistic approaches to adopting ecologically-friendly practices, progressive standards of chemical labelling, ecological consciousness-raising, monitoring, enforcement of codes of conduct, information dissemination, recommendations for sustainable development indicators, and preparation of training materials explaining ILO conventions and labour standards. They argued that workplaces and workers are key to changing not only patterns of production, but also unsustainable forms of consumption. Speakers said this is constantly illustrated by situations where involvement of unions proved to be the crucial ingredient to achieving tangible progress, not just in the workplace but nationally, regionally and in the community.

Foremost among the obstacles to implementing Agenda 21 described by speakers is the lack of workers' rights, particularly the freedom to associate. The Agenda 21 provisions for capacity building and the harmonization of classification and labelling of chemicals were also cited by speakers as areas that have not been effectively implemented. They urged governments to overcome what they described as the deficit of years of unsustainable patterns, with emphasis on arresting such crises as global warming and climate change.

In the ensuing discussion, several governments asked about the applicability of the EcoManagement and Auditing Scheme (EMAS) in developing countries, and the relationship between EMAS and ISO 14,000, which is the International Standards Office list of basic, voluntary industrial standards from an environmental perspective. The Netherlands warned against reliance on market forces, and the US welcomed the concept of collective engagement. Ecuador called for national systems of regulation to ensure health and environmental protection, particularly in view of the growing importance of informal economies and the absence of mechanisms to deal with sustainability.

Workers and Trade Union Challenges and Recommendations to the CSD

- n Put the workplace at the top of the sustainable development agenda, especially for changes to production and consumption patterns.
- n Recognize the role that trade unions can play in furthering sustainable development.
- n Encourage cooperation among employers, workers and governments.
- n Support ILO initiatives and work to integrate ILO programmes and sustainable development activities.
- n Encourage governments to develop workplace linkages to national reporting and monitoring systems.

- n Encourage governments to include trade union representatives in decision making regarding sustainable development.
- n Support making eco-management and audit practices compulsory, open to the public and independently validated.
- n Urge governments to support NGOs and trade unions in eco-labelling programmes.
- n Encourage environmental education at all levels in the school system.
- n Ensure adherence to safety, health, environment and child labour laws in producer countries and promote the use of codes of conduct in implementing sustainable development initiatives.



CSD vice-chair Dr. Czeslaw Wieckowski (Poland) chaired the Indigenous Peoples' dialogue session held on 15 April. The session was facilitated by Raja Devashish Roy of the Chakma Peoples, Bangladesh Indigenous and Hill Peoples Association for Advancement. Speakers included representatives from the Quechua People, Ecuador; Kuna People, Panama (International Alliance of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples of the Tropical Forests); Nuuk People, Greenland (Inuit Circumpolar Conference); Maori People, New Zealand (Maori Congress); Ogoni People, Nigeria (National Youth Council of Ogoni People); Kankanaey People, the Philippines (Asian Indigenous Women's Network); and Quechua People, US (International Indian Treaty Council).

Speakers said that the co-chairs' text failed to reflect the lack of progress on critical issues of concern to Indigenous Peoples. They stressed, among other things, the need for political empowerment, self-determination, and control over natural resources; the problems of poverty, homelessness and unemployment; recognition of indigenous political institutions, ancestral lands and intellectual property rights; and mechanisms for participation in decision making beyond what they described as tokenism.

Among the described activities undertaken by Indigenous Peoples groups since the Rio conference are the application of sustainable practices in everyday life; contributions to the Draft UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples; legal actions against unsustainable mining practices and against patenting of human genes; and support of the forest, biodiversity and intellectual and cultural property rights forums. Speakers stated that Agenda 21 itself fails to adequately address the needs of Indigenous Peoples. For example, they said the concept of territories does not appear in the Forestry Principles; there is little reference to Indigenous Peoples in the Arctic region or to the negative impact of mining or damming activities on indigenous communities; and Agenda 21 generally portrays Indigenous Peoples and their traditional practices as objects of research for commercialization.

The ensuing discussion illustrated the difference of experience and perspective among some governments and Indigenous Peoples, with governments for the most part defending their own national policies *vis-à-vis* indigenous complaints. For example, Canada and the US both expressed support for Indigenous Peoples, but disagreed with concerns raised by speakers and NGOs in the audience regarding unsustainable mining and damming practices affecting indigenous communities. Peru cited the

numerous problems its Indigenous Peoples face and highlighted drug trafficking, civil strife, environmental degradation and migration, although indigenous groups said the government had neglected to address the root causes of such problems. Nigeria, responding to a description of the situation of the Ogoni people, said that the Ogoni are considered an ethnic group rather than an Indigenous People.

Indigenous Peoples' Challenges and Recommendations to the CSD

- n The international community should recognize Indigenous Peoples as Peoples and not as NGOs.
- n The UN should establish a permanent forum for Indigenous Peoples.
- n Forest policy fora at all levels must establish mechanisms to ensure equal and full participation of Indigenous Peoples and other forest-dependent people in decision making.
- n The scope of the UN Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Peoples should be expanded so as to enable greater participation by Indigenous Peoples representatives in the full range of UN activities.
- n The UN should improve dissemination of information to Indigenous Peoples.
- n The international community should address issues concerning biological diversity, such as biotechnology, bioprospecting, and the Human Genome Diversity Project. Institutions and conventions dealing with these issues must allow for participation of Indigenous Peoples. A Biosafety Protocol under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) should be speedily accepted.

Indigenous Peoples requested the CSD to:

- n Promote the immediate adoption of the Draft UN Declaration on the Rights of the Indigenous Peoples in its current form.
- n Examine impacts of globalization, the WTO and regional agreements on intellectual property rights, such as the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) on indigenous communities.
- n Review activities of transnational corporations, especially extractive industries such as mining and timber, and examine the effects of these businesses on Indigenous Peoples. Methods of conflict resolution should be among the issues considered.
- n Promote dialogue between indigenous, non-indigenous groups and governments at international, national and local levels.
- n Participate in the workshop regarding a UN Permanent Forum for Indigenous Peoples, to be held in Chile in June 1997.

Dr. Wieckowski also chaired the NGO dialogue session held on 15 April. The session was facilitated by Roberto Bissio of *Instituto del Tercer Mundo*. Speakers included representatives from the Environmental Liaison Center International (ELCI); Association of Small Farmers of the Pacific Coast, Costa Rica; Country Women's Association of Nigeria; Friends of the Earth International; Environmental Justice Networking Forum, South Africa; Third World Network, Malaysia; the Latin American Network on Forests; and Consumers International.

Speakers noted the increasingly important role NGOs have played in efforts to advance sustainable development in the five years since Rio, and they highlighted efforts and discussed Agenda 21 implementation at the local, national and regional levels. They also made recommendations for the CSD to undertake in the next five years.

Obstacles cited included ingrained production and consumption patterns, lack of access to decision making, trade liberalization, low political will to address sustainable development issues, and lack of resources. ELCI presented its report on *Grassroots Reflections on Agenda 21*, which concludes that government performance in implementing Agenda 21 and the Rio agreements was low and focused on symptoms of environmental problems, instead of underlying causes.

In the ensuing discussion, a number of governments gave accounts of their efforts to consult with NGOs and take their perspectives into account in advance preparation of their positions. Ways and means mentioned to enhance the participation of civil society and NGOs included pre-consultations, debriefing sessions, Local Agenda 21s, and the establishment of national committees on sustainable development. Japan highlighted the importance of local municipalities in monitoring, inspecting and enforcing to adhere to environmental standards. Australia proposed granting official status to NGO reports to the CSD, and requiring governments to respond to these reports (such a mechanism is already in place under the Commission on Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child). Bolivia and the Philippines stressed the collaborative ways in which their national reports have been produced with the active participation of major group organizations. The US noted that it placed "the highest priority on consulting with civil society" in the formulation of its national report.

The Rio +5 Forum, held in Rio de Janeiro from 13-19 March 1997, was the culmination of a one-year process designed to assess progress (or lack of progress) since the Rio Summit. The forum's recommendations, which are posted on the Earth Council's web site (see below), focused on strengthening local, national, regional and global initiatives. The Earth Council has developed a number of new programmes to follow up the outcomes of Rio+5. The council will work to strengthen national Councils for Sustainable Development (NCSDs), especially through helping to improve the institutional frameworks for these bodies, their participatory processes and networking capacities with other NCSDs around the world. The council also plans to establish a Knowledge Resource Facility, which will support sustainable development initiatives by highlighting and sharing practical experience with implementation. An Earth Charter Benchmark Draft will be the subject of widespread consultation and will be promoted with NCSDs, integrated into curriculum design, incorporated into the teachings of religious and spiritual groups, and used as a basis for the design and development of an alternative dispute resolution mechanism.

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NGO Challenges and

Recommendations to the CSD

- n Encourage dialogue at local and national levels as well as the international level.
- n Incorporate trade and environment, trade and development and the intersection of trade, environment and development into Agenda 21 initiatives and into the future work of the CSD.
- n Establish a sub-commission or panel on trade and sustainable development.
- n Initiate dialogue with the WTO and its Committee on Trade and Environment.
- n Initiate a new round of commodity agreements.
- n Facilitate a sustainable development and equity review of WTO agreements.
- n Initiate a review of the WTO Agriculture Agreement.
- n Take up the issue of intellectual property rights and sustainable development.
- n Investigate the impacts of liberalization on sustainable development.
- n Urge the special session to adopt a resolution urging states and organizations to implement proposed activities drafted during the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests.
- n Establish a sub-commission on corporate accountability.

Ambassador Bagher Asadi chaired the dialogue session on local authorities, held on 16 April. The session was facilitated by Jean-Pierre Elong Mbassi, World Assembly of Cities and Local Authorities Coordination (WACLAC), and Jeb Brugman of the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI).

Speakers included representatives from the World Assembly of Cities and Local Authorities Coordination; Dubai Municipality; Policy Committee, Corporation of London in the UK; City of Marrakesh, Morocco; Barcelona, Spain; Cajamarca Municipality/Association of Peruvian Municipalities; Leicester City Council, UK; and ICLEI.

More than 1800 local authorities from 64 countries have established Local Agenda 21 processes and are working to reorganize themselves and change mindsets and practices in order to become more effective agents for sustainable development. Speakers described "green space" programmes, increased public transport, air quality improvements, privatization of water and sanitation departments, and housing programmes. They also highlighted partnerships between local authorities internationally, decentralization and local governance, and the progress of the Local Agenda 21 movement. They proposed that the CSD focus on the human settlements sector and the Habitat Agenda; application of Agenda 21 principles by TNCs; capacity building; harmonization of policies between different levels of government; initiatives to improve coordination of agencies; and developing local authority networks.

Obstacles to implementing Agenda 21 include insufficient resources and policies that promote unsustainable practices, such as absence of integrated transportation policies and unsustainable energy policies, lack of tax raising powers, and poor enforcement of environmental laws. Panellists called for enhanced local-national partnerships, capacity building, attention to Agenda 21 and Habitat II objectives, and information networks. One panellist called

for the need to coordinate programmes such as the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and Capacity 21 with Local Agenda 21 initiatives.

In the ensuing discussion, NGOs in the audience pointed out that many grassroots and local community groups are not fully recognized by local authorities as instrumental in promoting and working for Local Agenda 21. The Netherlands said that the challenge for sustainability lies in the world's cities, and France said that local authorities should aim to assist the UN rather than asking for assistance from it. The US suggested that local authority proposals do not pay adequate attention to public participation in local Agenda 21 implementation, and it stressed the importance of engaging the private sector. Several delegates described sustainable development pilot projects in their own countries. Australia noted that, as part of its contribution to UNGASS, it would be hosting a conference on Pathways to Sustainability from 1-5 June, which will showcase local initiatives.

Local Authorities' Challenges and Recommendations to the CSD

- n Local Agenda 21 programmes should be actively encouraged in each country, particularly through establishment of Local Agenda 21 national campaigns in partnership with local authority associations.
- n The CSD should establish global targets to encourage Local Agenda 21 campaigns, and to review and address obstacles to Local Agenda 21 initiatives.
- n The international community should provide an enabling environment that encourages subnational and local authorities (with investments from public and private sources) to extend and increase efficiency of water supply and sanitation services, especially in fast-growing urban areas and poor rural communities.
- n Trends toward decentralization of government to local levels should be recognized, and support should be given to local authorities to assist in implementation of their new governance and service provision responsibilities.
- n Other proposals requested the CSD to commission a study that examines barriers to local Agenda 21 implementation, especially those erected and maintained by national governments. Barriers may concern transportation, energy, tax policies, subsidies and poor enforcement of regulations.

Ambassador Monika Linn-Locher chaired the farmers dialogue session held on 16 April. The session, one of the most dynamic, was facilitated by Linda Elswick of the World Sustainable Agriculture Association (WSAA) of the United States. Speakers included representatives from the Federation of Swedish Farmers; Danish Farmers' Union; National Farmers' Union of Canada; Zambian Women in Agriculture; *Union Nacional de Agricultores y Ganaderos* of Nicaragua; New Brunswick Federation of Agriculture of Canada; Center for Citizens Initiative, Moscow (Russian Federation); and the Karnataka State Farmers Association of India.

Speakers noted that issues concerning food and agriculture uniquely transform the abstract concept of sustainable development into something tangible and meaningful to all people. They cited their own awareness of environmental responsibilities to society, and how they are increasingly addressing the environmental impacts of their practices as

well as identifying and carrying out solutions.

Activities toward implementation of Agenda 21 that have been undertaken since the Rio conference include land tenure reforms; agricultural cooperatives; rural banks and rural women's services to create a supportive economic and social framework for sustainable agriculture; and the initiation of eco-audits and codes of good farm practices, including the establishment of standards for pesticide and fertilizer use, animal manure, water quality, energy consumption and research.

Obstacles emphasized by panellists included lack of land tenure, trade policies and attitudes towards biodiversity. Low net farm income was also highlighted as an obstacle, since it forces farmers to consider short-term profits over long-term effects of their activities on the environment. Poor prospects have also driven young people away from farming, resulting in an ageing farming population in developed countries and the feminization of agriculture in developing countries. The WTO was criticized for what speakers described as its watershed of adverse effects on farmers. They pointed out that the global market is determining what is produced, who is producing it, and who has control over what is produced. Speakers said this usurps the place of instruments for ensuring food security and moves decision making outside of public institutions.

Panellists also highlighted the fact that there is no legally binding international agreement protecting farmers' rights in the face of biodiversity erosion resulting from agricultural monoculture. They called on the CSD to harmonize its policy with the Convention on Biodiversity, where farmers' rights are recognized, and to modify those agreements that do not support farmers' rights. They also called for the removal of agriculture from the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and the WTO, the elimination of Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPs), and the rejection of the biotrade initiative proposed by the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD).

There was lively discussion among speakers, governments, and farmers from the audience. Topics of interventions included balancing the need to feed people with reducing the impacts of agriculture on the environment, the value of organic farming as a strategy for achieving sustainable development, the impacts of technology development on farmers, and trade-related issues. NGOs in the audience noted references in the Beijing platform to organic farming, and how these references stress linkages between health and agriculture. Others said the CSD failed to mention the 1996 Leipzig International Technical Conference on Plant Genetic Resources, as well as efforts of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and initiatives under the Convention on Biological Diversity relevant to agriculture. Germany asked how farmers, especially in developing countries, reconciled their roles as business people and "guardians of the earth."

Farmers' Challenges and Recommendations to the CSD

- n The international community should take a more comprehensive approach to food security by involving representatives from all sectors of society.
- n Farmers' organizations should be included in national delegations attending meetings that discuss issues related to the agricultural sector.
- n Increased interaction between the UN and WTO is needed.
- n The CSD should facilitate approval of the Global Plan

of Action and the International Undertaking on Plant Genetic Resources as a protocol to the Convention on Biodiversity. This requires immediate finalization of the revision to the international undertaking as a protocol to the Convention on Biodiversity.

- n There is a need to review, assess and if necessary modify existing national legislation and international agreements concerning intellectual property rights, land tenure and seed legislation (also post-WTO legislation) to ensure that they support and do not run counter to farmers' rights and the overarching objectives of the CBD.
- n The WTO review process in 1999-2000 should lead to removal of agriculture from the Uruguay Round Agreement and to the elimination of TRIPs in agriculture.
- n There should be a moratorium on bioprospecting activities as well as on the release of genetically-modified plant varieties and organisms.
- n Developed countries and agribusinesses should provide compensation for the developing country knowledge and resources they have used for many years.
- n The CSD should promote the establishment of a permanent working group on farmers' rights, biodiversity and sustainable agriculture.
- n An international convention to address farmers' rights and sustainable agriculture issues would help to build accountability within the structure of international law.
- n The CSD should arrange for consultative status for farmers as a major group by the time of the special session of the General Assembly.
- n Farmers' organizations, especially those from the developing countries and in countries in transition, should be supported and strengthened to become effective partners in policy design and implementation.
- n Public research on sustainable farming practices, improved cropping methods and extension services should be increased at all levels.



Ambassador John Ashe chaired the dialogue session on business and industry held on 18 April. The session was facilitated by Maria Cattai of the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) and Bjorn Stigson of the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD). Speakers included representatives from the Xerox Corporation; EnviroServ; Scudder, Stevens and Clark; Tokyo Electric Power Company; British Petroleum Company; Aracruz Cellulose; WBCSD; Dow Chemical; and *Grupo IMSA*.

Speakers noted that the business community has made some progress toward sustainable development since the Rio conference, and they cited examples from the reports *Signals of Change* by WBCSD and *Implementation of the ICC Business Charter for Sustainable Development* by ICC. The business charter was launched shortly before the Rio Summit and adopted by 2500 companies worldwide. Speakers emphasized a change of direction from the 1970s and 1980s, when efforts focused on pollution cleanup and end-of-pipe measures, to a systems approach to environmental management, developing partnerships with government and stakeholders, and corporate responsibility throughout the product life-cycle. However, they acknowledged that business and industry are still in the early stage of their "green revolution" and still need to engage small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), especially those in

developing countries.

Obstacles to implementation of Agenda 21 cited by panelists include difficulties in engaging SMEs and polices, and taxes and subsidies that promote unsustainable practices. Speakers suggested that unnecessary regulations can hinder the efforts of businesses to promote sustainable development, and economic, social and legal frameworks often work against sustainability. They strongly recommended that governments provide incentives for sustainability and remove disincentives.

During the ensuing dialogue session, Belgium addressed the difficulty in reconciling industry's preference for voluntary initiatives with the need to have consistency in government policies and environmental standards. A panellist suggested that big businesses should assist small businesses in adhering to internationally-harmonized standards, rather than negotiating lower standards for developing countries. The US called attention to local participation, and Peru emphasized consumer awareness. China said SME practices are often harmful to the environment, and panellists responded that big businesses need to support SME efforts to promote sustainable development. Governments from the Pacific region asked about the efforts of companies to forestall action on climate change, and suggested that in acting to protect their short-term profits they are challenging scientific findings regarding global warming. France acknowledged the trend toward business-to-business technology transfers, as well as the role that governments play in providing incentives for such activities.

NGOs who witnessed the shelving of the long-anticipated Code of Conduct for TNCs in 1992 have been eager to see the "report card" on the promises of increasingly responsible self-regulation and adherence to voluntary codes. They questioned panellists about companies that act responsibly in some places, especially where it is legally required, and irresponsibly in others. They asked what tools are available to the public to determine whether a company's claims to responsible behaviour are valid or not just "greenwash" or eco-propaganda; how to judge whether or not the 2500 companies signing the business charter have complied with their own agreements if companies are not required to validate their compliance; what is needed beyond continued persuasion and education to deal with companies that refuse to act responsibly, or whose economic survival is dependent upon unsustainable practices or products; and clarification about the role and responsibility of governments to ensure that such companies are accountable to society and the communities where they operate. Many NGOs felt this is especially important in light of the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI), being negotiated by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), which increases corporate rights and influence.

Business and Industry Challenges and Recommendations to the CSD

- n Capitalize on the ability of governments to change and adapt quickly.
- n Minimize regulations by developing a minimal parallel

regulatory system based on performance.

- n Help to motivate and introduce voluntary systems that encourage responsibility for products throughout their life cycles.
- n Examine whether taxes and subsidies promote unsustainable behaviour, and change policies accordingly.
- n Move from income- to consumption-based taxes over a sufficiently long period of time.
- n Get prices right so that products reflect their full environmental costs.
- n Re-examine the measure of gross domestic product (GDP) and consider supplementing it with a net-GDP measure.
- n Promote stakeholder outreach and involvement regarding the role of business in promoting sustainable development.

Ambassador Bagher Asadi chaired the final synthesis session held on 18 April. The session provided a summary of views expressed during the week, and it made further recommendations for future CSD sessions. Speakers included representatives from each major group: Global Kids of the United States for youth; ICSU for the scientific and technological communities; REDEH and WEDO for women; ICFTU for workers and trade unions; for Indigenous Peoples, the Maori Congress; *Instituto del Tercer Mundo* for NGOs; ICLEI for local authorities; IFAP for farmers; and ICC and WBCSD for business and industry.

Speakers said that the sessions were a useful first step toward further sharing of views on problems and solutions, as well as building greater consensus around Agenda 21 objectives. Several speakers expressed disappointment with the low attendance of governments in the sessions. Government statements generally expressed appreciation for the dialogue sessions, particularly in showing the progress made through major group activities in the first five years of Agenda 21 implementation.

Questions and proposals for future dialogue sessions included: focus dialogue sessions on specific thematic issues; encourage a more interactive format; schedule dialogue sessions outside negotiating hours to ensure higher participation of government delegations; involve other sectors of society, such as artists, writers and religious communities; ensure more participation from developing countries; enable dialogue between the major groups in a systematic way in order to find balanced approaches to the costs, benefits and risks involved in sustainable development; and encourage use of the dialogue sessions model in other bodies of the UN system.

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