



Roundup



United Nations Non-Governmental Liaison Service (NGLS)
Serving the UN system and NGO community since 1975

Twelfth Session of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD-12)

OVERVIEW

The twelfth session of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD-12) was held at UN Headquarters in New York from 14-30 April 2004. Most of the session was devoted to a review of the progress in implementation of Agenda 21, the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21 and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (JPOI) adopted at the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD, see *NGLS Roundup* 96). A high-level segment attended by some 100 government ministers was held from 28-30 April. CSD-12 also dedicated three days to the final preparatory meeting for the International Meeting on the Ten-Year Review of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States (SIDS+10), rescheduled to be held in January 2005.

In its first “non-negotiating” session ever, CSD-12 proved to be a very open forum for the exchange of knowledge, practices, and experiences related to the focus themes of water, sanitation and human settlements.

As the first “review” session under its new 14-year post-WSSD work programme, CSD-12 was organized in a manner that encouraged interactive discussions among all participants—governments, civil society groups, and UN agencies. The purpose of the session, as agreed by CSD-11 (see *NGLS Roundup* 102), was to explore successes and failures; identify best practices as well as obstacles and constraints; and discuss where and how efforts could be strengthened to meet development objectives.

Going into the Commission, it was unclear how governments, the UN system, Major Groups and other stakeholders would respond to the mandate of the meeting and its organization of work to “review progress” with no built in negotiations to produce an agreed outcome text as a measure of achievement. However, on the whole, participants expressed satisfaction with the interactive working methods of

CSD-12 and the Commission’s principal outcome, the Chair’s Summary. Participants recognized the Summary for having reflected the breadth of views and experiences exchanged during this session, its reaffirmation of political commitment to achieving the internationally agreed goals and targets, and its identification of the actions needed to increase the pace of delivery. Many remained cautiously optimistic about its impact on next year’s CSD-13 “policy” session that will also focus on water, sanitation and human settlements.

THEMATIC AND INTERACTIVE DISCUSSIONS

The Secretary-General’s reports on water (E/CN.17/2004/4), sanitation (E/CN.17/2004/5) and human settlements (E/CN.17/2004/6) served as the basis for thematic discussions, while interactive discussions on the same topics were held among Major Groups representatives, experts and government officials.

Priorities outlined included: rural sanitation, hygiene, wastewater treatment, water quality, and Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM). Introducing the Secretary-General’s reports, Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs José Antonio Ocampo stressed that the continuing lack of political commitment at the international and national levels would need to be overturned in order for the development objectives in these areas to be met.

Water

The thematic discussion on water focused on meeting the global targets for two main areas: access to safe drinking water, and water management standards. Reporting on the current global state of safe water, Alvaro Umana, of the UN Development Programme’s (UNDP) Environmentally Sustainable Development Group, noted that one-half of all developing country populations were exposed to unsafe drinking water and

lacked adequate sanitation. Mr. Umana argued that access to safe water was a necessary stepping stone to achieving the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) targets, especially the reduction in child and infant mortality.

Other speakers focused on the need to analyze the impact of water quality and availability on health and poverty. The Netherlands underscored IWRM as the key to solving the problems described by Mr. Umana, noting that such systems would ensure the involvement of all stakeholders and also ensure an effective, balanced path towards sustainable development for all. Roberto Lenton, Co-Chair of the MDG Task Force on Water and Sanitation, suggested that the MDGs should be used as the focus of integrated water management plans in order to fast-track their implementation at national levels.

African delegations called for international support towards implementing the UN Integrated Resource Management Strategy, and sought suggestions from experts as to how countries in the region could meet the MDGs in the face of deepening poverty, persistent natural disasters and declining official development assistance (ODA).

Several delegations, including the United States (US), highlighted the importance of increasing private sector investment in water management, which they noted currently stood at less than 10%.

Highlighting the water needs of the Small Island Developing States (SIDS), Tonga noted that as rainwater collection was a main source of freshwater, the ability of SIDS governments to monitor climate variability and to identify trends was critical. Tonga also called for international assistance in technology development and equipment maintenance to ensure the building of water desalination and waste disposal facilities.

Representatives of Major Groups (including Women; Children and Youth; Indigenous People; NGOs; Local Authorities; Workers and Trade Unions; Business and Industry; Scientific and Technological Communities; and Farmers) expressed concerns about the increasing scarcity and lack of access to water; the need for increased funding; the need to raise the level of education about water issues; and the importance of viewing water from a social perspective rather than as a commodity. Interactive discussions focussed on: balancing water usage for people, the environment and agriculture; water demand management and water conservation; meeting the financing challenges for water; and empowering stakeholders to ensure participation, especially of women, in decision making.

Frank Rijsberman, Director General of the International Water Management Institute (Sri Lanka), highlighted the need to balance water for agriculture and for the environment, and generate "more crop per drop." Switzerland underscored the role of ecosystems, particularly forests, in water management and flood mitigation. The UK drew attention to challenges in water management caused by rapid urbanization.

Regarding water demand management and conservation, Canada outlined its soon-to-be-finalized water quality index, which will categorize water sources as excellent, good, fair, marginal or poor. The country has also produced several "ecosystems initiatives," which recognize the interrelationships between water, air and land use and human activities. Presenting an example of regional cooperation in the Southern African Development Community (SADC), South Africa described the establishment of functional river basin organizations characterized by equitable information sharing and the consideration of down and upstream users.

Challenges were also identified in the management of water supplies. Apichart Anukularmchai, Professor at the Asian Institute of Technology of Thailand, noted the slow shift from water supply to demand management in Southeast Asia, highlighting the challenge of ensuring water for poor farmers and the role of economic instruments in increasing efficiency.

On the subject of financial challenges, many participants stressed that financing should focus on aspects other than infrastructure, particularly policy reform and capacity building of local authorities and communities. Major Groups noted that the rural poor are not adequately served by the private sector. South Africa called for increased grant funding and, with the Netherlands, urged developed countries to meet ODA commitments.

Positive examples of women's empowerment with respect to water issues were also outlined. The Women's Water Network in the South Asia region elaborated on its success in increasing representation of women at all decision-making levels in water resources planning and management by 50%. Another example illustrated how the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) had been used to link elimination of discrimination with expansion of constitutional guarantees on equal access to land and other natural resources.

Despite these successful practices, however, the majority of speakers felt that not enough was being done regarding the empowerment of women on the issue of water. Indigenous Peoples advocated for a rights-based approach to water development in order to empower indigenous women. Youth and Women's groups underscored the lack of water-related and gender-specific indicators and data. Women's groups also called for acknowledgement as full and equal partners in decision-making processes tied to water management.

Sanitation

Opening the thematic discussions on improving sanitation, Toru Shimizu, the Vice-Chair of CSD-12, recalled the MDG of cutting in half the number of people without access to basic sanitation by 2015. Jamie Batram, Coordinator for Water, Sanitation and Health of the World Health Organization (WHO), cautioned that the international community might have underestimated the number of people without

access to water and basic sanitation when setting the Goal, and said that as it was, even meeting the target would leave some 2.4 billion individuals still waiting.

Gourisankar Ghosh, Executive Director of the Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council (WSSCC), said that while the MDGs that related to water and sanitation could not be addressed separately, sanitation and hygiene issues tended to be neglected during planning, policy making, budgeting and implementation activities. To rectify the situation, he said it was necessary to develop, as a matter of priority, national action plans and strategies for sanitation and hygiene.

In discussions on sanitation targets, participants also described projects which had achieved accelerated development not only through legislation and political commitment, but also through such measures as decentralization and privatization of water and sanitation infrastructure, as well as small-scale and private sector initiatives, and a demand-driven approach.

Costa Rica presented its experience in developing a sanitation strategy that included integrating public health issues into the country's education system. Measuring the impact of a sanitation strategy would involve evaluating a population's health after an investment in sanitation facilities.

Peter Kolsky, Senior Water and Sanitation Specialist at the World Bank, argued that governments with scarce resources could not afford to promote sanitation through the large-scale supply or purchase of facilities that people did not want, and proposed that they instead use their funds as a lever to stimulate household demand and create conditions for local industries to meet that demand.

Ireland, on behalf of the European Union (EU), stated that there was a need to complement current and expensive technologies with cheaper and environmentally safer approaches. Water-borne sanitation was extremely expensive and dependent on adequate water supply, and more cost-effective approaches were needed in urban areas if the MDGs were to be met. In rural areas, the representative stressed, the potential existed for low-tech, low-cost sanitation solutions such as basic and improved pit latrines.

Interactive discussions focused on: financing sanitation, and various approaches to mobilizing community and market-based resources; reaching the poor through small entrepreneurs and generating employment; developing sanitation at the household and community levels; and marketing sanitation.

Sanitation at the household and community levels generated much discussion. Several delegations presented information on their national experiences, highlighting the need for establishing educational programmes; providing sanitation facilities at schools; creating sanitation demand; scaling up initiatives; applying a gender approach to sanitation service delivery; facilitating decentralized management of

services; increasing rainwater harvesting; and disseminating information to health practitioners. Youth groups felt that the health of children could be used as an indicator of community and environmental health. NGOs identified the lack of coordination among local and central governments, the international community, civil society organizations and communities as an obstacle to meeting sanitation targets.

With regard to new technologies and the marketing of sanitation, Edward Quiroga, of the WSSCC in Colombia, stressed the usefulness of "eco-sanitation" technologies. In order for new technologies to be taken seriously, he said, awareness campaigns would need to be launched to overcome the belief that traditional waste disposal technologies were better than adopting new and more efficient technologies. The Scientific and Technological Community encouraged governments to invest, develop and apply more cost-effective technologies. Women's groups underscored the role of women as agents of change in promoting sanitation technologies.

Human Settlements

Thematic discussions on human settlements centred on three important challenges: prerequisites for housing the poor, financing, and urban governance.

Miloon Kothari, the Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing for the UN Commission on Human Rights, said that the major problem poor people faced was that their human rights were being ignored. The rights to water, housing, sanitation, and to be free from being dispossessed of their homes and property went unrecognized in many countries. He noted that in the countries he had visited some 15% to 20% of the most destitute people were not meeting their housing needs.

Ireland, speaking on behalf of the EU, acknowledged that three million homeless were scattered throughout the Union's 15 countries, but emphasized that a rights-based approach to housing was unlikely to be meaningful unless it was supported by financial investment in infrastructure and basic services, and regularization of land housing tenure. Conversely, the US delegate warned participants that certain rights were not unanimously agreed to, especially housing rights.

Speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China (G-77/China), Qatar's representative underscored its concerns regarding the failure of developed countries to provide additional financial resources to developing countries; in fact, ODA has decreased from previously established commitments. The delegate noted that this trend was particularly alarming, especially in light of the stagnate state of partnerships which are failing to attract either government or private funding.

Special consideration was also given to the plight of women and girls residing in poor settlements. Sweden warned that unless the international community took urgent action to promote the human rights of women and girls in such situations, it would lose the battle

against poverty. Sweden called for governments to involve women in efforts to improve slums, to promote their education and empowerment, and to support their efforts to raise community awareness about the need for clean water and sanitation.

On financing human settlements, countries recognized that there were extensive gaps between supply and demand. One of the expert panelists, Dinesh Metha, Coordinator of the Urban Management Programme for UN-HABITAT, stated that even if ODA for financing human settlements—now at about US\$5 billion per year and declining—were doubled, it would still fall short of the set targets for slum dwellers. Mark Hildebrand, Executive Director of Cities Alliance (US), agreed that increased assistance would not prevent new slums from emerging and urged development partners and urban centres to move beyond pilot projects and to develop long-term financing strategies. Some governments that had committed themselves to cities without slums, including Tunisia and Chile, he said, were close to achieving that goal.

Underlying the issue of financing settlements was the promotion of local partnerships, Mr. Hildebrand stressed, including city government, the private sector and the organized urban poor. The informal sector had to be recognized, he emphasized, noting that the vast majority of new housing was being produced by the urban poor themselves. Also necessary for sustainable financing strategies, he said, was the promotion of responsible deficit-financing for infrastructures at the sub-national level.

Joel Bolnick, Coordinator of the Urban Resources Centre in Cape Town (South Africa) and speaking on behalf of Shack Dwellers International, encouraged community groups to start creating networks of community-based organizations to facilitate borrowing privileges. Citing examples from South Africa, he noted that certain community networks were able to generate “urban poor funds”—ranging from a capital base of US\$20,000 to US\$3 million—which effectively changed the relationship between communities and formal institutions because the financial risks were shared equally among actors.

Anna Tibaijuka, Executive Director of UN-HABITAT, also emphasized the need for appropriate low cost technologies and grass-roots strategies to meet the “slum challenge.” She urged CSD-12 participants to empower the poor as the most realistic solution to enable them to break out of the slums.

In terms of urban governance, discussion focused on developing sustainable city planning and development. Pietro Garau, Co-Chair of the MDG Task Force on Slum Dwellers, emphasized that sustainable cities depended on the restoration and maintenance of the health of urban municipalities and finding the right balance among environment considerations, economics and equity through effective citizen participation.

Interactive discussions focused on slums and urban poverty, and changing patterns of human settlements; women and human settlements development; financing human settlements; and urban governance.

Speakers stressed that interventions to change patterns of human settlements would need to focus on pro-poor policies, and that participation in urban development programmes must include players at all levels of society. The importance of stimulating local economic activity in slums and of recognizing the informal service sector as an asset, not a liability, was also emphasized. Youth groups cautioned against exporting unsustainable settlement and consumption patterns to developing countries.

Regarding the challenges faced by women in human settlements, Women's groups emphasized the need to support their role in responding to HIV/AIDS and natural disasters. Grace Wanyonyi, of the Ministry of Roads and Public Works in Kenya, provided an overview of the housing situation in her country and highlighted the constraints facing women in slum areas, including lack of access to land tenure, skills and credit, especially micro-credit, which she said could be extremely beneficial for the support of home-based businesses.

With respect to urban governance, Indigenous Peoples' groups added a sense of urgency by recounting the systemic problems they had suffered as a result of forced relocation from traditional lands. Trade Unions recommended that the International Labour Organization (ILO) play a more central role in developing national housing strategies.

HIGH-LEVEL SEGMENT

More than 100 government ministers, with portfolios ranging from environment, water, housing, development, finance and agriculture, attended the high-level segment. Combining high-level interactive discussions with informal meetings, the ministers, along with heads of UN agencies and experts, further discussed targets, successes, challenges, and timelines for development objectives for water, sanitation and human settlements.

Addressing the high-level segment, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan noted that while “high-level political attention has been diverted from sustainable development by the recent focus on terrorism, weapons of mass destruction and the war in Iraq,” action must be undertaken both at the national and local levels to address water, sanitation and human settlements issues. Efforts must incorporate effective public administration, inclusive governance and a real commitment to equity, he said, stressing the need for the US and Russia's active participation in achieving sustainable development goals, especially with respect to climate change.

CSD-12 Chair Børge Brende also urged the Commission to become the “global springboard for local action.” He went on to argue that the crisis in basic sanitation is “as shocking as the AIDS epidemic, and as solvable as polio.”

In discussing targets, goals and timetables, many ministers asserted that objectives were achievable, but only if the necessary political commitment and mobilization of resources could be generated. It was repeatedly stressed that this commitment would need to be global in nature, and would require both international and national support. Ireland, on behalf of the EU, emphasized the importance of the implementation of National Strategies for Sustainable Development (NSSDs), and proposed that all countries have them in place by 2005. Qatar, on behalf of the G-77/China, reminded developed countries of their commitments, especially regarding ODA assistance, better market access for developing countries, and technology transfer—all areas in which substantive progress has been slow or non-existent.

Ministers also recognized that creating an enabling international environment would require the participation of civil society groups and the business sector in the formation of policies, good governance mechanisms and finance. UNDP Administrator Mark Malloch Brown cited some successes in the HIV/AIDS campaign with regard to private sector involvement and the participation of civil society groups, and further suggested that lessons from this campaign could be applied to water. He acknowledged, however, that there were divisions among civil society groups and the private sector as to whether water was a human right or a commodity. In order to bridge these differences, Mr. Malloch Brown recommended that a middle ground approach be undertaken through public-private partnerships.

MAJOR GROUPS

The nine Major Groups played a very active role with nearly 700 individuals and 200 organizations

participating in CSD-12, which introduced new modalities of participation and saw effective caucus organizing.

As CSD-12 was a review rather than a policy oriented session, the Commission worked to more fully integrate the participation of Major Groups into the different areas of its programme. As such, they were in a position to sit on expert panels, assist and contribute to the High-Level Segment meetings, and actively participate in the thematic discussions. This permitted the Major Groups to offer insight regarding best practices, lessons learned, and obstacles and constraints on the three themes. Major Group representatives indicated that they were encouraged by the openness of CSD-12, and recommended that its format be replicated across the UN system.

Building on their enhanced participation, the Major Groups held caucus meetings in which they discussed issues and prepared collective statements. To ensure that the agreements reached in the sessions were going to be realized, a “youth contract” was developed for National Delegations planning to attend CSD-13. Among the five items of this contract is the commitment to include a youth delegate on the official delegations for CSD-13.

Under the slogan of Common Caring Capacity, the Women’s caucus focused on “genderizing” the issue of water. Reminding delegates that the CSD-11 recognized gender as a key cross-cutting issue, they heavily criticized the Secretary-General’s Reports on Freshwater Management, Sanitation and Human Settlements, which failed to properly integrate a gender perspective. Moreover, the Women’s group stressed that in the CSD’s 12-year existence, a woman has never been selected as Chair and that at CSD-12, only 15% of the invited panel experts were women.

As water became the central issue of CSD-12, the Freshwater caucus participated in many of the discussions and delivered a statement outlining concerns that there is an absence of national and international leadership on public/private partnership models that have mixed to negative outcomes and are still under careful debate in the water sector. The caucus also delivered a statement of concern, undersigned by more

Partnerships

CSD-12 hosted a Partnerships Fair which involved interactive discussions for all stakeholders, enabling participants to more closely examine private/public dynamics in partnership building, while identifying areas where partnerships could be improved. Partnering was seen by some as a new business model, representing a departure from the traditional relationships between donor/implementer or donor/vendor.

Some participants called for an overarching structure for partnerships, stressing the need for codes of conduct, while others observed that partnerships functioned best as loose affiliations with only minimal formal interaction among partners. Clarity and transparency in decision making were seen as essential to effective and equitable partnerships, and it was suggested that all partners could be considered “donors,” as each organization commits time and resources by participating in such initiatives. In that regard, redefining the role of private sector partners beyond corporate philanthropy was seen as crucial to fostering further private sector involvement in partnerships.

More than 200 partnerships were launched during the World Summit on Sustainable Development (2002, see *NGLS Roundup 96*) and as of 31 January 2004, a total of 266 partnership initiatives have been registered with the CSD secretariat.

The Human Dimensions of Environmental Security

While not an explicit theme of CSD-12, the connection between the scarcity of resources, particularly clean water, and security was made numerous times during the commission. Several side events specifically explored the interrelationship with related issues such as redefining aggression and security, environmental degradation, controversies regarding trans-boundary waters, resource extraction and the role of governance in either aggravating or containing conflict.

With the establishment of the High Level Panel on "Threats, Challenges and Change" (see *Go Between 101*), UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan has made it very clear that the international community needs "clear and practical measures for ensuring effective collective action, based upon a rigorous analysis of future threats to peace and security." He has said many times that this exercise must examine human security issues like the environment, poverty, hunger and disease in addition to the more conventional understanding of threats and conflict. The report of the Panel is expected to be completed by the end of the year.

than 70 organizations, regarding the Secretary-General's advisory board on Water and Sanitation. The statement criticized the membership of the advisory board, which does not include any NGO or civil society representatives, and which many claimed was unbalanced due to an overwhelming presence of individuals in favor of privatization. Those concerned with the membership of the advisory board stated that this misrepresentation of interests contradicts the leadership role of the UN in protecting the human right to water for the world's poor, the majority of whom are women and children. The lack of a clearly defined mandate and duration of this board was also a source of much skepticism.

During the closing session, the Major Groups delivered a joint statement in which they collaboratively and unanimously addressed the Chair of the Commission. Representatives took turns reading the statement in which they emphasized the need for the Commission to eschew inconsistencies in the planning of meetings from year to year. They recommended that from this point on the Commission should maintain the level of open participation afforded to the CSD-12 process.

They also stressed that while governments and UN agencies expected Major Groups contributions to be constructive, little was mentioned of their input in the Chair's Summary. As a result, it was suggested that in the future the Chair's Summary should include a section devoted exclusively to the work of organizations from the Major Groups.

SIDS +10 PREPARATORY MEETING

Progress made in preparing for the SIDS+10 included the drafting of a provisional agenda, accreditation of NGOs, and agreement on some areas of the draft

negotiating text. Talks bogged down, however, according to the Chair of the Preparatory Meeting Anwarul K. Chowdhury, over issues such as trade relations, market access, renewable energy sources and proposals for new financing mechanisms. Informal negotiations on the Plan for the Further Implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action and a political declaration which broadly outlines the basis for international cooperation for the development of SIDS will continue as necessary.

The Mauritius meeting, to be held from 10-14 January 2005, will examine, among other things, why there have been serious shortfalls in the Barbados Programme of Action's implementation over the past decade, and why efforts to help the SIDS confront key challenges—including their fragile ecosystems, isolation and economic dependency on a few export commodities—have not advanced since the General Assembly's five-year review (SIDS+5) in 1999.

Contacts

CSD

Federica Pietracci, Major Groups Focal Point, Division for Sustainable Development, United Nations, 2 UN Plaza, Room DC2-2220, New York NY 10017, USA, telephone +1-212/963 8497, fax +1-212/963 0443, e-mail <pietracci@un.org>, website (www.un.org/esa/sustdev/csd/csd12/csd12.htm).

SIDS +10

Division for Sustainable Development, Small Islands and Developing Countries (SIDS) Unit, UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2 UN Plaza, Room DC2-2020, New York NY 10017, USA, telephone +1-212/963 4135, fax +1-212/367 3391, e-mail <mauritius2004@sidsnet.org>, website (www.sidsnet.org).

This edition of NGLS Roundup was prepared by the United Nations Non-Governmental Liaison Service (NGLS). The NGLS Roundup is produced for NGOs and others interested in the institutions, policies and activities of the UN system and is not an official record. For more information or additional copies write to: NGLS, Palais des Nations, CH-1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland, fax +41-22/917 0432, e-mail <nghs@unctad.org> or NGLS, Room DC1-1106, United Nations, New York NY 10017, USA, fax +1-212/963 8712, e-mail <nghs@un.org>. The text of this NGLS Roundup and other NGLS publications are also available online (website: www.un-nghs.org).

Printed on recycled paper