



Taking Issue

*The Sustainable
Development Issues
Network*

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A daily publication of the Sustainable Development Issues Network (SDIN) at the Eleventh Session of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development

Interesting Draft Decision treads on dangerous "renegotiation" ground.

Pieter van der Gaag (ANPED, the Northern Alliance for Sustainability) and Saradha Iyer (Third World Network)

At 4:00 PM today, Chairman Minister Moosa tabled the "Draft Decisions" that will form the basis of negotiations next week. In-depth discussion amongst representatives of major groups shows that the Chairman's text sets out an interesting programme of work for the next 10 years. If adopted, it will strengthen the CSD, and thus support moving forward in implementation.

The chairman rightfully sets the focus of the CSD for the next ten years. The CSD shall continue to mainstream sustainable development, using the global system and based on the principles and plans as set out in Rio and in Johannesburg. The inclusion and participation of major groups remains high on the agenda.

As with everything else, there are good and bad, as well as unclear things in the text.

THREE overarching themes

The Johannesburg Plan of Implementation made it absolutely clear that sustainable development is best served if THREE overarching themes are being considered together. Poverty eradication, changing unsustainable production and consumption Patterns, and protecting the natural resource base of economic and social development are those overarching themes. Singling out one- Poverty Eradication undermines the essence of Rio.

The WTO

The absence of any consideration to the CSDs role in integrating Trade is a major omission that will come to haunt its implementation programme and jeopardize its chances for success. In excluding economic decision-making and the WTO specifically from its purview, the CSD is undermining its own mandate. The WTO is today the most powerful multilateral organization and its legally binding rules have tremendous impact on sustainable development. If sustainable development dimensions are not injected into trade policy, and the CSD is in the best place to help do so, our goal of sustainability will forever remain and elusive goal.

In need of clarification

The role of major groups remains unclear. During the Multi-stakeholder Dialogue

(Continued on page 2)

Also in this Issue

- MSD Debate derailed page 1
- Civil Society Organisations and WSSD CD-ROM page 2
- Being Old and Sustainable Page 3
- An Afterthought from the NGO MSD Facilitator Page 4

Visit the SDIN Morning Strategy Meetings for reports from working groups, information sharing, and strategic discussions. SDIN Morning Meetings are open to all NGOs.

Meetings will be held in Conference Room 6 from 9.00 to 10.00.

Co-ordination meetings will be held on Monday, Wednesday and Thursday in Conference Room D: 6.00 to 7.00 PM

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MSD debate derailed

session a great deal of discussion was held on the number of major groups and on the role and function of those major groups.

Representational issues were also discussed in detail.

The dialogue made it clear that there is no such thing as an implementation NGO. Yet the text of the Chair clearly points out that they are more needed in the process. The CSD is not served by splitting the NGO community, where advocacy, policy and implementation have been working together in harmony and solidarity.

The dialogue also made it clear that there is a need for opening up space further for major group participation. However, the discussions so far do not warrant an immediate decision by the CSD.

What next on Major Groups

There is an UN Panel of Eminent Persons on UN-Civil Society Relations that is working to clarify civil society engagement with the UN. In the case of the CSD, a forum that has been in the forefront of developing mechanisms for major group participation, it may be feasible to set up a taskforce that considers in depth the merits of increasing the number of major groups, the type of major groups and the mechanisms to be put in place to ensure their adequate and effective participation. NGOs should be part of that mechanism.

Agenda 21 defined the major groups and their role. Renegotiating that is not an option for this or future CSDs.

Confusion and irritation spread among major groups as Minister Valli Moosa, Chair of the 11th CSD, wrapped up multi-stakeholder dialogue on Thursday. The Thursday morning dialogue sessions started with carefully crafted statements from each of the 9 major groups. Governments responded, Minister Moosa chaired and all seemed well for a long while. Perhaps too well, because suddenly something went seriously wrong.

The chair derails the debate

One of the official delegates asked why there were only 9 major groups. Why were education, or consumers, or the disabled not represented among the major groups, the delegate wondered. Despite the fact that few delegates responded to this question, the Chair kept asking why the disabled were not represented as a major group. And with the authority the chair commands, the following debate kept revolving around the issue of the disabled. When the chair concluded the debate at one in the afternoon, more than 1/3 of the time had been spent on this debate.

An old debate

This debate is not new, and will not end here. But it is wrong to assume that the 9 major groups were arbitrarily chosen. At the close of the Rio conference in 1992, most people present felt they had helped select 9 groups that had high relevance to both the debate as well as the implementation of sustainable development. Many had argued strongly for a 10th group – the educational community. This group resurfaced at the Johannesburg conference without receiving sufficient official support, and with the WSSD conference concluding it had no interest in opening the debate on new and additional groups. Was the present chair of CSD not aware of this?

Speculation in the Vienna Cafe

Speculation ran high in the Vienna Café after this bizarre turn of events. Some accused the Chair of trying to split the civil society community. Others felt this was a distraction from more serious debate on the role of major group involve-

ment. For who in their right mind could say they would oppose the inclusion of the disabled? Perhaps the introduction of the new major group was a welcome break for the Chair in a debate he perhaps considered rather futile? Whatever the reasons, the major groups felt the debate was actually a missed opportunity to have a substantive discussion on the role of civil society in the implementation of sustainable development, and that the debate was being led into an unfair and irrelevant direction. Despite several efforts by other interventions to discuss mechanisms of engagements in a principled way, the Chair took the debate back to the issue of the Disabled.

All stakeholders can participate

Do we need to revise the existing major group system to allow for other stakeholders to participate effectively? When tourism was debated in CSD 7, all major groups allowed the groups working on tourism to participate. Should the topic of the disabled and sustainable development be put on the agenda, it would be unthinkable not to include the disabled group. The same holds true for the faith based groups, or the elderly or any other conceivable group. Is it too much to expect that the Chair of the CSD also understands this?

MSD - from one UN forum to another

Having been introduced as a way to continue the Rio process and begin serious interaction between civil society and delegates at the Habitat Plus Five in Istanbul in 1996, these dia-



(Continued from page 2)

Dialogues now seem to have been firmly placed as an integral segment of the CSD agenda. For major groups these dialogues are a means to reach out and interact with delegates. The dialogues are as close to negotiations with governments as it is possible for civil society to have today. The sessions represent participation and transparency at a level not found in the UN system prior to this. Efforts have been made to replicate this model to other parts of the UN, not without success.

MSD is serious business

Major groups take these dialogues seriously, and put much effort into presenting their statements. When called upon the UN to speak in the halls constructed for "We the peoples of the United Nations", the major groups make every effort to rise to such an occasion. And the occasion was serious, as the agenda dealt with the future of the CSD, the fate of sustainable development for the next decade, policy development that supposedly would determine the well being of millions of people.

Missed opportunities

It is easy to conceive of ensuing battles and endless debates over what new groups to include if any. It is also equally conceivable to think that the present major groups would start to fight over what new groups to include. However, the MSD on Thursday morning was supposed to deal with the future work programme of CSD, the future organizations and methods of the work of the CSD, the role of the implementing actors and implementation and monitoring of sustainable development partnerships.

By derailing the debate, the Chair took away an opportunity for us all to discuss the MSD agenda in a serious way.

...jgs

Civil Society Organisations and WSSD CD-ROM

Tom Bigg, IIED

IIED and ANPED are collaborating to produce a CD-ROM which will present a detailed record of civil society priorities and contributions for the Johannesburg Summit, including several thousand documents in a fully searchable format. The purpose is to bring together the broad range of ideas and information generated by the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) which would otherwise be lost – focusing not just on the inter-governmental process, but on the range of meetings and initiatives developed in the space created by the official event.

The CD-ROM will be distributed free of charge to all organisations accredited to attend WSSD and through existing international civil society networks, which have already agreed to assist in this way. It is hoped that it will be available by mid-2003. We will also make all of the contents available on a dedicated website.

This side event will provide the following:

- An introduction to the initiative and an explanation of our approach
- An outline of the scope – what will be included on the disk
- Details of how the disk will be distributed and when
- A request for further input and comments from CSD delegates
- A chance to see a draft version of the disk

We are also very keen to get your feedback and advice on the CD-ROM. Please use the form below to give us your thoughts on the initiative and to point us to additional materials which should be included on the final version. These can be sent to the contacts listed below or given to IIED or ANPED representatives during this CSD session.

Being Old and Sustainable? - A thought by Mary Racelis

Norma grew up with the cultural belief that Asian families respect and take care of their members in old age. At 72, she now realizes the futility of holding on to the dream of a golden age when she and her husband will be able to rest and enjoy their privileged status as grandparents. Although their 11 adult children and innumerable grandchildren show them respect, continuing poverty in those generations means they, as elderly parents cannot expect the kinds of care they had anticipated.

Grandmother Norma's reflections on poverty:

"Being poor means not eating three meals a day. My son, who lives a few houses away from me, sometimes asks me, 'Mother, have you eaten?' I see that he and his family have only enough for themselves, so I say, yes, even though it isn't so. I can afford not to eat. After all, he has four children. How can you ask from them what they haven't enough of themselves?"

To publish articles in this newsletter, please submit your text to one of the SDIN facilitating organisation's staff.

SDIN Facilitating organisations:

ANPED, the Northern Alliance for Sustainability
ELCI, Environment Liaison Centre International
TWN, Third World Network

Editors reserve the right to refuse articles or edit for length and clarity

We're on the Web:
www.sdissues.net

What is the Sustainable Development Issues Network (SDIN)?

The Sustainable Development Issues Network for 2002 is a collaborative effort among civil society networks and non-governmental issue caucuses. SDIN aims to improve communications and access to information on sustainable development issues, and improve communications among NGOs engaging in the World Summit on Sustainable Development.

The Issues Network is not meant to compete with or replace the networking and organizing efforts of other NGO bodies, but to assist and promote the efforts of civil society networks working on sustainable development issues. In this sense, SDIN is not another "network" *per se* but hopefully a useful tool of NGO networks.

The CSD NGO Schedule 2 May 2003

9:00-10:00 SDIN Morning Meeting, Conf. Rm 6.

Agenda:

- Meeting with ECOSOC
- Report backs of negotiations and corridors
- Input to CSD for Friday

Conference Room D:

10:00 -11:00 Fresh Water Caucus

11:00-12:00 Youth Caucus

2:00-3:00 Indigenous Peoples Caucus

5:00-6:00 Womens Caucus

6:00-7:00 SDIN Issue Group
Co-ordinators meeting

An afterthought - by Torleif Jonasson, Chairman, Danish '92 Group (and NGO MSD Facilitator)

Are Multi-stakeholder Dialogues a convenient way to sideline NGOs while the governments negotiate the real stuff? In Bali, they certainly were, the rooms were empty except for the major groups who were in heated debate.

Are the Multi-Stakeholder Dialogues an end in themselves to be pursued by the CSD? No, they are a supplementary tool that if used correctly can contribute significantly to furthering the causes of Major Groups and in informing governmental decision-making.

Are we happy with the process this week? 24 interventions from NGOs in the first three days seem like a good score. Especially as these were high-level dialogues. Yet the constraints of intra-major group consensus written down in statements, victimized the wish of the chair for an open and spontaneous dialogue.

Was the Thursday Dialogue an example for the future? No, as long as a Chair functions as a tabloid journalist, aiming for simple headlines and hitting hard without really listening, they are likely to scare away the serious participants. The purpose and agenda of the dialogues were lost in the twisting and turning of the chair. Let's hope that the item on the agenda, the future of the CSD, is not lost, at least from the unheard perspectives of the Major Groups.

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