



**A Strengthened Commission on Sustainable Development: Compilation of Civil Society Responses to the Report of the High Level Panel on System Wide Coherence
23 February 2007**

Problem Statement

Despite 15 years and several reform measures the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) remains a weak global authority on sustainable development; the two-year process has highlighted inherent flaws in its mandate; the secretariat is very weak; and it continues to be dominated by the Ministries of the Environment who are in most cases the weakest in governments with inadequate funding. As the UN's high level forum on sustainable development, the CSD has struggled to appropriately address the three pillars of sustainable development, and as a functional commission of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) often lacks the appropriate political decision making powers of the General Assembly or its subsidiary organs. The CSD has been particularly inefficient in addressing the means of implementation, such as finance and technology transfer- as per its UNCED/WSSD mandates. Major concerns remain related to: heavy agenda; disconnected cross-sectoral issues; lack of time; re-negotiating principles and past agreements; failure to recall previous agreements; monitoring financial contribution; national progress; reporting; and Ministerial-level representation (Dodds et al, 2002).

Despite its weaknesses the Commission has over the years proved to be an important 'home' for keeping the broad sustainable development agenda under active review, and has been instrumental in launching a number of new initiatives and securing intergovernmental cooperation. The UN system's follow-up to Johannesburg has been

Civil Society Responses to the Report of the High Level Panel

On 9 November 2006, the UN Secretary-General's High-level Panel on UN System-wide Coherence in areas of Development, Humanitarian Assistance, and Environment released its report Delivering As One.

In July 2006, Stakeholder Forum (SF), the Brazilian Forum of NGOs and Social Movements for Environment and Development (FBOMS) and the UN Non-Governmental Liaison Service (UN NGLS) organized the only civil society discussion with the Panel on sustainable development. Building on this work, the coalition, with the Northern Alliance for Sustainability, initiated a Call in November 2006 to gather further submissions from civil society.

This paper presents a range of civil society views in relation to the High Level Panel's recommendations related to a strengthened Commission on Sustainable Development. This paper includes recommendations related to:

- **Mainstreaming Sustainable Development in the UN;**
- **A Strengthened CSD;**
- **Role of Civil Society;**
- **CSD Secretariat;**
- **UN Sustainable Development Board;**
- **Sustainable Development at the Country Level; and**
- **ECOSOC.**

In addition, compilations of civil society views on the strengthening of UNEP and the UN systems work on environment, and on the Global Environment Facility have also been prepared. All civil society contributions are available at the SF website: <http://www.stakeholderforum.org>

The views expressed in this paper do not represent a consensus view, and are not necessarily the views of the facilitating organizations.

encouraging. Most, if not all, multilateral environmental agreements and UN agencies, programmes and funds have engaged in the process of integrating their work with the goals set out in the JPOI. Sustainable development has become a priority of the intergovernmental system. However, the CSD and its parent body ECOSOC are currently failing to effectively oversee the system-wide coordination of sustainable development, as well as the balanced integration of economic, social and environmental aspects of United Nations policies and programmes. Attempts to reform both bodies have provided limited remedial benefits and the renewed focus on system-wide coherence in light of the World Summit 2005 and the urgent need to meet the MDG and JPOI targets in itself points to a problem with the current system.

High Level Panel Recommendations

In its report, the HLP recommended that “the status of sustainable development should be elevated within the UN institutional architecture and in country activities. The United Nations system must strive for greater integration, efficiency and coordination of the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. At the operational level, the Panel supports a strong partnership between UNEP (normative) and UNDP (operational) and a sharper focus on environment by the resident coordinator system as part of the One United Nations at the country level. The Panel calls for the Economic and Social Council to establish a sustainable development segment — and for continuing reform of the Commission on Sustainable Development that truly leads to integrated decision-making on economic, social and environmental issues.” The Panel also recommended the establishment of a Sustainable Development Board. “Reporting to the Economic and Social Council, the Board would provide the decision-making and monitoring framework for implementation of One United Nations at the country level. The Board would be responsible for oversight of the implementation of the pilot programme to create unified United Nations country programmes.”

CIVIL SOCIETY VIEWS

Mainstreaming Sustainable Development in the UN

“The experience of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) processes might be summarized in this way: From broadly engaging people in sustainability to evaluating the shifting mosaic of development, humanitarian assistance, and environment, education transcends the dimensions of a cross-cutting issue to function more centrally and strategically as a foundation for both international institutional coherence for sustainable development and achieving real outcomes. How well the institutional framework can learn, adapt and adjust itself to empower all actors determines -- or, at least, strongly influences -- the fulfillment of commitment to a shared agenda. One of the strengths of CSD is its capacity for sustained interaction among governments, inter-governments and the major groups as identified in Agenda 21, and civil society. This capacity can be further strengthened given the UN Coherence panel’s proposed superstructure.¹”

“Integrating environment into development decision making: Sustainable development should be viewed as the central development paradigm, and, as mandated by UN GA Resolution 57/253, constitutes ‘a key element of the overarching framework of United Nations activities. There is similarly a need to integrate the Commission on Sustainable Development into ECOSOC’s deliberations on development and the follow up to UN Conferences and Summits.’²”

“There is a need to establish sustainable development as the UN’s overarching development framework, including implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). While the panel’s recommendations make some headway on centralizing sustainable

¹ Submission from the CSD Education Caucus, January 2007

² Submission by ANPED to the Panel Consultation with Civil Society (June 2006)

development as the UN's primary development framework, through a UN Sustainable Development Board under ECOSOC, the suggested structures may not be sufficient for ensuring that sustainable development is the overall approach. Governments should call for stronger measures to install sustainable development as the UN's conceptual and practical development agenda³.”

“There must be an immediate shift in emphasis in UN development work from ‘development’ to ‘sustainable development’ and to protecting the delivery of environmental services. This goes beyond a focus on national policy making and implementation. It would be of symbolic and practical importance to name any new proposed development bodies ‘sustainable development’ bodies⁴.”

“There is a need to ensure that sustainable development is not being differentiated from development, but characterized as the main strategy for achieving effective and long-term poverty eradication and economic and social well being; the Rio principles, especially the precautionary principle, are prioritized; and work towards fulfilling the MDGs is strengthened⁵.”

“Based on the Rio principles, we need to strengthen the 3 major institutions of sustainable development, i.e. the CSD, the UNEP and the multilateral agreements and secretariats. (MEAS). All three have to expand the rights and roles of civil society organizations in their activities, operations and decisions. The MEAs should be strengthened individually and should collaborate together among themselves and with UNEP and CSD. The CSD is the child of Rio and guardian of the Rio principles. The Rio framework should also be adopted by UNEP and should guide the operationalizing of UNEP's work. If this is done, there could be the framework for greater collaboration between the CSD and UNEP⁶.”

“A balanced approach to economic, social and environmental issues is more important than ever. Progressive businesses are today putting sustainable development at the heart of their long-term strategy. We firmly believe that this approach would greatly enhance the work of the UN. We agree with other major groups that development and environment should be fully integrated, and that environment should be strengthened in all areas of the UN's work. There is a need to simplify the entry-points into the UN. For the business community the Commission on Sustainable Development represents an important entry-point in the UN. So our wish is to see it strengthened, with clear priorities and long-term frameworks. It should also strike a fair balance between the three pillars of sustainable development and hence be supported not only by environmental ministers, but also those concerned with finance, habitat and development cooperation. We also need strong coordinating units at the UN (for ex on water), otherwise our efforts to engage are dispersed⁷.”

“The UN regional commissions have to be strengthened so as to support the discussions and organize regional preparation meetings, such as the Regional Implementation Meetings for CSD. The role of the CSD itself has to be improved so that it can better play its integrative function. An enhanced UNEP will make the environmental dimension of the CSD stronger⁸.”

“By 2015, there must be full integration of sustainable development principles in all UN development policymaking and operational activities by instituting standards, benchmarks, and

³ Draft Submission from the Womens Environment and Development Organization, January 2007

⁴ Statement by Gordon Shepard, WWF International, to the Panel Consultation with Civil Society (June 2006); <http://www.stakeholderforum.org/fileadmin/files/WWF.pdf>

⁵ Submission from WWF, ANPED and Greenpeace International to the Panel Consultation with Civil Society (June 2006); <http://www.stakeholderforum.org/policy/ieg/SubmissionsToThePanel/WWFANPEDandGreenpeace.pdf>

⁶ Statement by Meena Raman, Third World Network, to the Panel Consultation with Civil Society (June 2006); http://www.stakeholderforum.org/policy/ieg/Statements/third_world_network.pdf

⁷ Statement by Jacqueline Cote, World Business Council for Sustainable Development, to the Panel Consultation with Civil Society (June 2006); <http://www.stakeholderforum.org/policy/ieg/Statements/wbcsd.pdf>

⁸ Submission by the Brazilian Forum of NGOs and Social Movements for the Environment and the Development to the Panel Consultation with Civil Society (June 2006); <http://www.stakeholderforum.org/policy/ieg/SubmissionsToThePanel/BRAZILIANFORUMOFNGOS.pdf>

models that include environment considerations throughout UN, and IFI policies and implementation⁹.”

“Given the broader scope of issues and intergovernmental fora dealing with the themes of the CSD multi-year programme of work, there is a need for the CSD to address the congruence between its work and that of other international forums, in particular the governing bodies of UN Agencies, Programmes and Funds, as well as multilateral treaty bodies¹⁰.”

A Strengthened CSD

“To parallel CSD negotiated outcome texts, a “Challenge Document” prepared by the CSD Bureau should identify themes to be addressed in the standing or permanent forums for dialogue. These themes should aim to clarify the qualities of a sustainable (-- that is, economically, environmentally and socially just) -- future for all. In view of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), one example of a thematic forum would be to discuss interlinkages between and syntheses with peace and human security as qualities of the three pillars (economic, social and environmental) of sustainable development.¹¹”

“There is a need to revamp the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) to focus on implementation, and replicate the CSD Major Groups model for stakeholder participation throughout the UN system. While the current 2-year policy and review cycle at CSD is meant to catalyze implementation, in reality meetings of the Commission are largely devoid of intergovernmental cooperation on implementation and CSD decisions do not have leverage within ECOSOC. The CSD model for stakeholder participation has been successful and should be improved upon and replicated in other UN bodies.¹²”

“There is a need for the CSD to address politically sensitive issues. The fact that the CSD is currently avoiding certain discussions on issues that are still critical to sustainable development remains a challenge. During the first cycle, for example, the almost total lack of discussion on international waters, the role of large-scale water infrastructure, subsidies, trade, etc. due to the ‘political sensitivity’ of such issues, clearly demonstrates one of the great weaknesses of a body like the CSD and why so many actors do not see it as ‘the authoritative body on sustainable development.’ If the CSD is to remain relevant, it must have the political will to discuss sensitive issues and deliver advice. The first cycle resulted in an outcome that contains both normative (the negotiated decision) and non-normative outcomes (the Matrix and voluntary commitments). While each is important in moving the sustainable development agenda forward, each also has an appropriate place in the process. There is also a need to streamline, not eliminate, the negotiation process. Similarly a more elaborate preparatory process where important actors receive the necessary support in order to make an active contribution to the preparatory negotiation process is necessary¹³.”

“As organizing partners of the Business & Industry Major Group at the CSD, ICC and the WBCSD believe that, in order to make progress, the Commission must be strengthened, with clear priorities, long-term frameworks and accountability to deliver results. The CSD must obtain the mandate and resources within the UN to ensure that its policy recommendations are fully

⁹ Submission from WWF, ANPED and Greenpeace International to the Panel Consultation with Civil Society (June 2006); <http://www.stakeholderforum.org/policy/ieg/SubmissionsToThePanel/WWFANPEDandGreenpeace.pdf>

¹⁰ Input from Stakeholder Forum, based on the 2006 report: Strengthening The Johannesburg Implementation: Considerations for enhancing the Commission on sustainable development’s multi-year programme of work; <http://www.stakeholderforum.org/CSDAprilReport.pdf>

¹¹ Submission from the CSD Education Caucus, January 2007

¹² Draft Submission from the Womens Environment and Development Organization, January 2007

¹³ Input from Stakeholder Forum, based on the 2006 report: Strengthening The Johannesburg Implementation: Considerations for enhancing the Commission on sustainable development’s multi-year programme of work; <http://www.stakeholderforum.org/CSDAprilReport.pdf>

integrated into other UN programmes and activities and in individual national policies. It should also strike a fair balance between the three pillars of sustainable development and hence be supported not only by environmental ministers, but also those concerned with finance, habitat and development cooperation. A committed Chair and Bureau are required to ensure that the outcomes are focused and pragmatic. Calls for input of the Bureau to all stakeholders on the currently discussed sustainable development topics would increase the understanding of the participants of the issues, barriers and problems leading to better informed discussions. The majority of discussions should be held in small working groups or task forces, which report their findings back to the Bureau or plenary rather than having large sessions with the reading of various statements. Examples of these practices are the meetings of the UNFCCC. Business needs to be engaged in the sessions including those associated with investment, access and technologies. A transparent and consultative process with the major group organizing partners needs to be undertaken in the selection of speakers/panelists¹⁴.

“In moving towards a stronger implementation focus the CSD needs to address the challenge of how to scale up localized examples of good practice¹⁵.”

“Structural and policy issues in the UN itself may contribute to such lack of coherence. Placing a higher priority on the target-setting, monitoring and reporting obligations of governments could be a first step to address this problem, as it would serve to identify duplication, and contradictions¹⁶.”

“The current CSD should be transformed into a subsidiary organ of the General Assembly, renaming it the Council on Sustainable Development, including assuming responsibilities of the sustainable development decision making functions of the Second Committee. The Council would be mandated to address the poorly constructed relationship between the Council, treaty bodies and governing councils and include the authority to address coherence and gaps in international decision-making related to sustainable development. The Council would thus be empowered by the General Assembly to address the lack of coherence in the normative approach to sustainable development across UN decision making bodies. A key feature of the new Council would be a strengthened knowledge and leadership base, which could include the mandate to establish Open-Ended Consultative Groups, creating ministerial-led time-limited Council Panels, and establishing expert scientific and technical bodies. A more robust Council would be situated with the context of a more tightly managed UN system at the intergovernmental decision making level, and concurrently with a revised UN system-wide approach to sustainable development at the operative level.

The new Council on Sustainable Development would be based on a new relationship with an enhanced economic pillar for sustainable development. Of immediate concerns is the lack of a political agreeable forum to discuss the relationship between trade and sustainable development, particularly as it relates to multilateral environmental agreements, the UN system and the World Trade Organisation. Given this situation, the Council would provide a high level space to address options and common approaches for addressing system-wide coherence. As a key element of system-wide coherence the scenario introduces the idea of the Council conducting a triennial assessment of the UN’s sustainable development work, in conjunction with similar reviews for the environment, social and economic pillars. The scenario also envisages the strengthening of the environment and economic pillars at the country-level, in particular addressing the environment and sustainable development work of the UN’s country and regional operational presence¹⁷.”

¹⁴ Submission for the World Business Council on Sustainable Development to the Panel Consultation with Civil Society (June 2006)

¹⁵ Submission from the Local Government International Bureau, January 2007

¹⁶ Statement by Laura Martín Murillo, Sustainlabour Foundation, to the Panel Consultation with Civil Society (June 2006); <http://www.stakeholderforum.org/policy/ieg/Statements/SustainLabour.pdf>

¹⁷ Submission from Stakeholder Forum to the Panel Consultation with Civil Society (June 2006)

Role of Civil Society

“Establishing a standing or permanent forum for multilateral and multistakeholder as well as high-level dialogues: This non-normative approach -- especially taken where a country’s people have no recourse to a National Sustainable Development Strategy (NSDS), a Local Agenda 21 initiative, or a country-level platform for negotiation -- can bring about new policy options and new partnerships to resolve “deadlocks” in adaptation, response measures, coordination, and partnerships. This forum would be a way to capture, for example, innovations exemplified by Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and also the indigenous work in the Arctic Polar region¹⁸.”

“If a sufficient number of local government officials were part of national delegations this would ensure that local governments would not necessarily have to be present as a separate stakeholder group in the CSD¹⁹.”

CSD Secretariat:

“New York based UNDESA should be strengthened in the regions and Social Affairs should become a central core area of all development & humanitarian aid programmes. Otherwise, it has no raison d’être in HQ²⁰.”

“The position of the CSD Secretariat needs to be strengthened and enhanced to address the new programme of work and to continue the innovative practices that have featured in the Commission’s methods of work since the WSSD. Changing the scope of the Secretariat’s responsibilities will require a clear change of mandate, some additional resources, and clear guidance to the Secretariat from the Bureau and Member States²¹.”

UN Sustainable Development Board

“The proposed Sustainable Development board should include - in a formal or advisory capacity - representatives from each of the major groups, including local government, to ensure effective assessment and broad accountability by the UN One Country programmes²².”

“Of a truth, there is a need for the establishment of such a body as the UN Sustainable Development Board. As we are advancing, humanitarian needs and issues are becoming more complex and as such we need effective leadership and new governance mechanism as suggested by the report in order for UN to do better. It is a step in the right direction.²³”

“The UN Sustainable Development Board should address the public by way of a periodic report that: translates progress on the sustainable development agenda within the context of normative frameworks; e.g., Agenda 21, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and NSDS; presents the challenge of learning, adjustment and engagement/empowerment in the areas of governance and civil society partnership, with the aid of case studies; and discusses approaches to integrating environmental, social, and economic concerns, highlighting the impacts on global youth and women.²⁴”

“It is essential that the upgraded UNEP be part of and be given a prominent role within this body. The concept of Sustainable Development that guides this Board must be understood as

¹⁸ Submission from the CSD Education Caucus, January 2007

¹⁹ Submission from ICLEI to the Panel Consultation with Civil Society (June 2006)

²⁰ Submission from the International Rainwater Harvesting Alliance to the Panel Consultation with Civil Society (June 2006)

²¹ Input from Stakeholder Forum, based on the 2006 report: Strengthening The Johannesburg Implementation: Considerations for enhancing the Commission on sustainable development’s multi-year programme of work; <http://www.stakeholderforum.org/CSDAprilReport.pdf>

²² Submission from the Local Government International Bureau, January 2007

²³ Submission from Hopelink International, January 2007

²⁴ Submission from the CSD Education Caucus, January 2007

the integration of environmental, economic, and social concerns in accordance with the following: UN system-wide coherence in the area of the environment needs to be considered within the broader context of sustainable development, in which all three pillars of sustainable development are addressed in a comprehensive and integrated manner, safeguarding the environment and promoting social equity; and there is an urgent need for a stronger international authority on environment to safeguard the environmental pillar of sustainable development. UNEP's present mandate and resources prevent it from achieving this. Allocation of resources should reflect country and regional sustainable development priorities²⁵."

Sustainable Development at the Country Level

"At the country level, there is very weak capacity of UN system on environment and development and in supporting the work of environment NGOs and that support the rights of local communities. The country level work of the UN should accord much greater priority to environment and sustainable development²⁶."

"The lack of an operative function, particularly at the country level, for sustainable development within the UN system and the fragmented coordination of the UN's work has led to overlap, duplication, and confused priorities. The time has come for the country office of the UN to be put under the UN Secretary General and for the UN to operate at the country level as one body. The CSD could make an effective linking between the UN and the national governments for the purposes of mainstreaming sustainable development. This would require a radical transformation of the current commission into one that could guide national action (SF)."

"A key challenge to a coherent role for the UN at the country level is to link implementation of international and national sustainable development goals with the activities at the local level, as linked to local production and consumption patterns. There can be no coherence without concrete linkage to the workplace²⁷."

"Regarding coherence in development policy, the Panel must emphasize the need to ensure that: UN country programmes focus on sustainable development as their overarching priority, provide mechanisms for integrating environment in development policy, and function on the basis of the precautionary principle; UN country programmes are assessed regularly/annually against environmental sustainability and sustainable development obligations and criteria and adapted accordingly; UN country programmes have the authority to assess the environmental sustainability of development driven by trade, both bilateral and through the WTO, by the World Bank and other MDBs and by foreign investment; UN resident coordinators promote and support the UN's work on environmental sustainability and facilitate development which is long term and sustainable; UN country offices have expertise in the three areas of development: economic development, social development and environmental protection; and the UN resident coordinator system promotes and supports the UN's work on environmental sustainability, particularly in regard to climate change mitigation and adaptation and halting biodiversity loss at the country level²⁸."

"Under section 39 the Panel states that, "Countries should consider integrating implementation needs of multilateral environmental agreements into their national sustainable development strategies, as part of the One Country Programme." Integrating implementation of the multilateral environmental agreements into national sustainable development strategies needs

²⁵ Reforming International Environmental Governance: Statement representing views expressed at two meetings of stakeholders held at UNEP GC 2007. It does not represent a consensus view.

²⁶ Statement by Meena Raman, Third World Network, to the Panel Consultation with Civil Society (June 2006); http://www.stakeholderforum.org/policy/ieg/Statements/third_world_network.pdf

²⁷ Statement by Laura Martín Murillo, Sustainlabour Foundation, to the Panel Consultation with Civil Society (June 2006); <http://www.stakeholderforum.org/policy/ieg/Statements/SustainLabour.pdf>

²⁸ Submission from WWF, ANPED and Greenpeace International to the Panel Consultation with Civil Society (June 2006); <http://www.stakeholderforum.org/policy/ieg/SubmissionsToThePanel/WWFANPEDandGreenpeace.pdf>

to be a requirement and not a request. As it is, only about half of the UN Member States have completed their National Strategy Plans and perhaps only a third have begun to implement them – though all committed to begin implementation by 2005. Thus, a focused review process must be undertaken at the global level to ensure that all UN Member States develop and begin to implement their national sustainable development strategies. Such a review process must ensure that all of these country strategies do include and focus on the integration of the multilateral environmental agreements. Going beyond the One Country Programmes, it should also be stipulated that the developed countries have a particular responsibility to develop their National Sustainability Strategies based upon and in conjunction with their Ten Year SPAC Frameworks and that these must be based upon the need to make a rapid transition to full sustainability²⁹.”

ECOSOC

“The Panel recommendation for the Economic and Social Council to establish a sustainable development segment—and for continuing reform of the Commission on Sustainable Development that truly leads to integrated decision-making on economic, social and environmental issues. This recommendation is of such importance that specific recommendations must be developed in order to decide how it can be carried out. A primary focus should be to look at how the development and adoption of sustainable practices can and will indeed lead to improvements in economic and social conditions and must thus be given priority both in terms of sustainable development and more importantly in terms of economic planning at the country level³⁰.”

²⁹ Submission from World Citizen, January 2007

³⁰ Submission from World Citizen, January 2007