



Sustainable Development

ROUND TABLE ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Chairman's Summary Note of the 27 March Meeting of the Round Table on Sustainable Development

For further information please contact Vangelis Vitalis, Chief Adviser, Round Table on Sustainable Development, OECD, 2 rue André Pascal, 75016 Paris, tel: +33 1 45 24 14 57;
fax: +33 1 45 24 79 31; email: Vangelis.Vitalis@oecd.org

The Tenth Meeting of the Round Table on Sustainable Development at the OECD
was held at the Château de la Muette on
Thursday 27 March 2003 at 9.30 a.m. in Room Roger Ockrent

The following is a short summary note (issued under the Chairman's responsibility) of the discussion on 27 March. Please note, in keeping with Round Table procedures a detailed note of the meeting will not be circulated.

The Role of CSD

Discussion on this subject was prompted by short presentations by the five former Chairmen of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development between 1992 and 2002 (Mr Klaus Toepfer (CSD2), Mr Henrique Cavalcanti (CSD3), Rt Hon Simon Upton (CSD7), Mr Juan Mayr (CSD8) and Mr Bedrich Moldan (CSD9)). The main points arising from their presentations and the ensuing discussion were that:

- The experience of chairing a CSD varied depending on timing. Those who chaired a CSD shortly after Rio and in advance of the WSSD, found the experience more positive than those who chaired the process in the latter part of the 1990s;
- Clarity was needed about the role and status of CSD within the UN system (i.e. a subsidiary body of ECOSOC);
- Countries needed to stop treating the CSD as a negotiating forum;
- Making progress was difficult, complicated, at times frustrating and generally incremental;
- Ministerial engagement was, for the most part, desultory and limited;
- Capitals were not engaged often enough in the process, leaving it to delegations in New York to manage the agenda;
- The most interesting and effective innovation pioneered by the CSD was its use of multi-stakeholder dialogues; and
- Set piece forums where participants spoke from prepared statements were considered of less value than the range of regional and issue-oriented meetings where the exchanges were more free-flowing.

Time-Bound, Issue-oriented Commissions: Past Experience

Mr Achim Steiner (former Chef de Cabinet of Kader Asmal, Chairman of the World Commission on High Dams) and Professor Jeffrey Sachs Advisor to Kofi Annan on the Millennium Development Goals (and former Chairman of the Commission on Macroeconomics and Health) gave brief presentations on their experience of working on a Commission-like structure related to sustainable development, but not linked directly to the CSD process. The main points arising from their presentations and the ensuing discussion were that:

- Tightly focused and time-bound Commissions could deliver results on even the most controversial topics;
- Multi-stakeholder dialogues were crucial for legitimacy and could measurably assist in making progress on difficult issues;
- Depending on the topic, Commissions worked best when all the protagonists were brought together;
- Disagreements could be reflected in any report; and
- Commission reports could be used to frame future consideration of the issue.

WSSD Follow-up

It was noted that 17 of the 21 OECD countries which had responded to a Round Table survey reported that the follow-up to WSSD was in the hands of Ministers of Environment. Many participants believed it was time for Ministers of Economy and Ministers of Finance to be more directly engaged. In response to a question, only five of the Ministers present reported that they planned to attend CSD. None planned to attend anything other than the Ministerial segment. It was also noted that Ministers attended CSD meetings only to deliver their statements. Generally, they left immediately afterwards, vacating the seat for junior staff. Substantive political engagement was therefore more difficult.

In terms of the role of the CSD in the follow-up to WSSD, there were a variety of views. Many of the UN Secretary-General's proposals for reform and those recently introduced by Minister Moosa were strongly supported. There was, for instance, support for the decision to have the Ministerial segment first. This would set the tone for the remainder of the meeting.

Notwithstanding this, there was some concern expressed about the ability of the CSD process to quickly deliver on the WSSD Plan of Implementation. It was acknowledged that, for the CSD to retain any credibility, it would need to make progress swiftly and substantively on the Plan of Implementation. Failure to do so within a year or two could lead to disillusionment and damage to the reputation of CSD.

A number of the stakeholders reported that they were considering whether to continue to devote so many of their scarce resources on the CSD process, or to focus attention elsewhere. Particular frustration was expressed about the multi-stakeholder dialogues. For the most part, they were seen as being of only limited value. Ministers (and senior country representatives) rarely participated, almost never listened to the exchanges and, other than to make some general statement, their level of involvement was considered disappointing.

Some participants argued that the CSD should undertake more of a monitoring role, including in particular verification of progress towards the WSSD targets. The OECD's role in monitoring developed-world progress was noted.

The utility of targets in the Plan of Implementation was discussed. While some questioned the utility of such targets given the previous failure to meet them, others noted that it would be an act of bad faith to treat them as an irrelevance.

Several participants spoke in support of a greater link between the CSD and the scientific community. There was support for the view that, if Ministers were to persuade their Cabinet colleagues of the dangers ahead, scientific evidence was required. This had helped ensure the rapid implementation of the Montreal Protocol and similar work was required to underpin the various WSSD targets.

Time-Bound, Issue-Oriented Taskforces

Particular emphasis was placed by many participants on the concept of time-bound, issue oriented task forces. This was referenced in the UN Secretary-General's report on the future of the CSD. Many participants believed that such taskforces could materially advance progress towards the Plan of Implementation targets.

There was support for the view that any task force/commission should:

- Involve Ministers with a balance to be struck between developed and developing country representatives. The selection of Ministers would depend on the issue, but the Ministerial

composition should comprise Ministers who had a close interest in the issue, as well as a capacity to deliver;

- Operate for a limited time, i.e. eighteen months to two years;
- Engage in a wide ranging multi-stakeholder dialogue at the global and regional level which included the active participation of representatives from business, NGOs and inter-governmental organisations working on the same issue;
- Examine specific issues related to the Plan of Implementation, preferably focussed on how to meet the targets established at WSSD; and
- Bring its findings to the CSD, as well as any other relevant inter-governmental organisation.

It was acknowledged that ministerially-led taskforces could certainly assist CSD but the CSD was not the place from which to launch them.