

History of the Stakeholder Dialogues at the UN Commission for Sustainable Development (CSD)

(The following is a brief outline of the history of the CSD Dialogue Sessions which was produced by UNED Forum in preparation for the Dialogue Sessions at the Informal Environment Ministers meeting in Bergen, Norway, Sept 2000.

The report is available at <http://www.earthsummit2002.org/es/2002/bergen/bergen.pdf>)

In 1996 we asked governments and DESA to support the introduction of Dialogue Sessions at the CSD in 1997. The General Assembly in 1996 agreed that in 1997 there would be half a day on Dialogues. The suggestion was that each Major Group have half a day to examine:

- what they had done;
- what they wanted to see Earth Summit II deliver;
- what they would contribute to the future.

Unfortunately there was little 'dialogue' in the **1997 CSD**. The sessions were held, as in Istanbul, at the same time as the negotiations. Although some government delegates did attend, they tended to be those from developed countries, with large delegations, and were often not key members of their delegations. Although the Dialogues were not labeled a total success, the Commission addressed the weaknesses in this approach, and improvements were written into the work programme for the CSD for the next five years.

In 1998, the first real 'Dialogue' session was to be on "Industry". The then - director of the UN Division on Sustainable Development, Joke Waller Hunter, brought together in Geneva in September 1997 the key Major Group representatives. Attending were the CSD NGO Steering Committee, the World Business Council on Sustainable Development (WBCSD), the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) and the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU).

These groups helped frame the approach taken to the Dialogue Sessions. Each group was asked to consult with its members and produce position papers to be given into the UN by mid January 1998.

These were on:

- Responsible Entrepreneurship;
- Corporate Management Tools;
- Technology Cooperation;
- Industry and Freshwater.

The significant development that year was that each group was asked to produce a paper that had been peer group reviewed by its stakeholder group. This was important as it moved away from papers that merely expressed 'opinions', towards more referenced and researched positions. This would have even more significance than had been thought at the time.

Many breakthroughs in international negotiations come because groups are able to build a level of trust among those participating. In the preparations, and at the Dialogue on "Industry", two elements helped improve the chance of success. First was that the ICC sat as a member of the CSD NGO Steering Committee and so was fully aware of NGO preparations. Second, was the extraordinarily close relationships that had been built between several individual NGOs and industry representatives. This enabled a level of trust to exist that countered any disturbances by the more extreme members of each sector.

At the CSD meeting in 1998 there were two additional developments. The first was the opportunity to have "peer group"(review by experts from the different stakeholder groups) review between different stakeholders. Second, governments were given the opportunity to challenge ideas put forward. The normal UN procedure is for Major Groups to make isolated presentations and for these to be noted, rather than discussed, or more importantly challenged.

To ensure that governments took the Dialogues seriously, they were moderated by that year's Chair of the CSD, the Minister for the Environment from the Philippines, Cielito Habito. This persuaded governments to provide high level representations for the Dialogue sessions. Positions put forward were at times questioned by the Chair or governments and this resulted in one of the key outcomes - where the Norwegian delegation played a major role in bringing this about -- a multi-stakeholder working group set up to review voluntary initiatives by industry. NGOs had been campaigning for years through groups such as the Task Force on Business and Industry (TOBI) to try and have a review of voluntary initiatives put on the table, without any success. The 1998 CSD Dialogues succeeded in creating a process which would involve everybody.

The Dialogue process for **1999** focussed on tourism. The new CSD Bureau under Simon Upton (Environment Minister for New Zealand), decided that there would be four major groups involved that year: NGOs (co-ordinated by the CSD NGO Steering Committee), business and industry (World Travel and Tourism Council and the International Hotel and Restaurant Association), trade unions (International Confederation of Free Trade Unions) and local authorities (International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives).

The subject of tourism presented problems for NGOs, as it is not a chapter of Agenda 21. The CSD NGO Steering Committee, which did not have a caucus to work on that topic, did a massive outreach to tourism orientated NGOs. It carried out a mailing to over 300 organizations with:

- information on the UN Commission on Sustainable Development;
- information on the Steering Committee itself;
- a questionnaire requesting information on their work on tourism.

The result of this was the setting up of a new NGO caucus on tourism under the co-Chairs of the Steering Committee. Recognising that there were some lessons learnt from the 1998 Dialogue Sessions, the Steering Committee made a recommendation that the papers produced by the Major Groups should be no longer than four pages and should be structured to describe the following aspects of each of the four sub themes of the Dialogues.

1. Problem
2. Solutions offered
3. Institutional responsibility (intergovernmental, government and Major Groups)
4. Identifying possible partnerships

This approach was agreed by the CSD Bureau and the Major Group representatives. As well as bringing in a whole new set of NGOs who had never participated at the CSD before, two of the Major Group co-ordinating bodies were new to the Dialogue process. The local government organization ICLEI had been very active at the CSD over the previous six years and had participated in the 1997 model of the Dialogues, but had not participated in the new model of the Dialogues. The industry organizations had attended a CSD, but only as observers. The NGO Steering Committee offered advise and training for the industry groups which was subsequently accepted. Again this helped in the building up of a level of trust between the industry groups and the NGOs.

As in the first Dialogue Session there were significant breakthroughs. The outcome from the 1999 Dialogues were placed in front of the government negotiators by the Chair of the CSD as they started negotiating on tourism. The second important outcome was the setting up of another multi-stakeholder working group under the World Tourism Organization. It was to look at issues such as information provision and participation of indigenous and local communities, financial leakages in the tourism industry, etc. This working group is perhaps the only global committee where industry and NGOs sit together to problem solve on tourism.

At the CSD in **2000** the Dialogue session was on Agriculture and has also initiated an ongoing process with stakeholders. Another success of the Dialogues was the first ever joint statement by industry, NGOs, farmers, trade unions and indigenous peoples.

The Bergen Dialogues in September 2000 built on this.