

NWMUN 2009



The Premier Model United Nations Conference in the Northwest

Background Guide:
Commission on Sustainable Development



Northwest Model United Nations | November 13-15 | Grand Hyatt Seattle

August 25, 2009

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the 2009 Northwest Model United Nations (NWMUN) Conference and the Commission on Sustainable Development. My name is Lauren Judy and I will be serving as your Director this year along with Mara Pfneisl as your Chair. We are very excited to work with you in November and appreciate the hard work and research you are undertaking in preparation for what we are confident will be a great conference!

The topics for this year's Commission on Sustainable Development are:

- I. Inclusive and Sustainable Approaches to Poverty Alleviation
- II. Disaster and Vulnerability Reduction

Every participating delegation is required to submit a position paper prior to attending the conference. NWMUN will accept position papers by **Sunday, November 8th at 11:59 pm. Please submit all position papers to: dg@nwmun.org**. Please refer to the sample position paper on the NWMUN website for paper requirements and restrictions. Delegates' adherence to these guidelines is crucial, because it not only ensures a well prepared committee, but is also a key component of the awards process.

We wish each of you the best as you prepare for this conference and committee. We urge you to move beyond the background guide as you learn more about both the State you will represent and the topics we will be discussing. Please do not hesitate to direct any questions or concerns toward your Director or the Director General. We look forward to meeting you at the conference!

Sincerely,

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Committee History & Background

The Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) is a functional commission of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).¹ The Commission was first established by the General Assembly in December 1992 following the 1992 Earth Summit, which addressed problems relating to environmental protection and socio-economic development, and was held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.¹ Besides allowing for the creation of the CSD, the Earth Summit also led to the publication of five major documents relating to international development. Two of the most significant are the *Rio Declaration* and *Agenda 21*.²

The *Rio Declaration*, commonly referred to as the “Earth Charter” aims to set a balance between environmental principles and development principles. The *Rio Declaration* consists of 27 key principles for both developing and developed UN Member States to consider within their international development projects.³ A few of these principles include: “a state’s sovereign right to exploit its own resources in accordance with its own policies, without harming the environment elsewhere (Principle 2)” and “sustainable development that requires reducing ‘unsustainable patterns of production and consumption,’ and that promotes ‘appropriate demographic policies’ (Principle 8).”⁴

Though *Agenda 21* also aims at accomplishing global sustainable development, it “is the only document signed at [the Earth Summit] that attempts to embrace the **entire** environment and development agenda.”⁵ It is not a legally binding document but rather is classified as a “work plan,” with a political commitment to pursue a specified set of goals in order to obtain global sustainable development.⁶ To achieve this goal, *Agenda 21* is divided into the following four major headings: Social and Economic Dimensions, Conservation and Management of Resources for Development, Strengthening the Role of Major Groups and Means of Implementation.

To assure that what was produced at the Earth Summit would be further implemented, the General Assembly formed the CSD as a high-level Commission on Sustainable Development. The main functions of the CSD are outlined in the *General Assembly resolution 47/191* passed in December 1992.⁷ Guided by the principles found in the *Rio Declaration* and all other aspects mentioned at the Earth Summit, the CSD’s main objectives are to monitor and report on the various ways in which the Earth Summit’s goals are being carried out on a local, national, regional and international level.¹ This includes, enhancing international cooperation and rationalizing intergovernmental decision-making capacity for the integration of environmental and development issues.⁸

In 2002 the CSD acted as the Preparatory Committee at the 10-year review session of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) held in Johannesburg, South Africa.⁹ During this session the *Johannesburg Plan of Implementation* (JPOI) was written. The JPOI sets out priorities of action on sustainable development in numerous areas including: poverty eradication, health trade, education, science and technology, regional concerns, natural resources and institutional arrangements.¹⁰ After the establishment of the JPOI, the CSD took on the additional responsibility of

¹ “About the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD).” UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Division for Sustainable Development. http://www.un.org/esa/dsd/csd/csd_aboutcsd.shtml.

² Hass, Peter M., Marc A. Levy & Edward A. Parson. “A Summary of the Major Documents Signed at the Earth Summit and the Global Forum.” *Environment* 34 (4): 12-15, 34-36. <http://www.ciesin.org/docs/003-312/003-312.html>.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ “Mandate of the Commission on Sustainable Development.” UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Division for Sustainable Development. http://www.un.org/esa/dsd/csd/csd_mandate.shtml.

⁸ A/RES/47/191. *Institutional Arrangements to Follow Up the UN Conference on Environment and Development*. United Nations General Assembly.

⁹ “Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD).” Australian Government. Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts. <http://www.environment.gov.au/about/international/uncsd/index.html#jpoi>.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

providing policy guidance to the JPOI in order to help spread sustainability all around the world through international cooperation.⁹

Further changes to the CSD's functions and responsibilities were made the following year, in 2003, at the WSSD.¹¹ For example, the cycle of review was extended from one year to two, with the first year principally focusing on review, and the second focusing on policy.¹¹ The goal of the review year is to assess the progress made in implementing sustainable development goals from previous years and identifying obstacles and constraints within the CSD.¹¹ On the other hand, the aim of the policy year is to decide on concrete measures that will speed up the implementation process and mobilize action in order to overcome identified obstacles and constraints within the CSD.¹¹ After the CSD agreed on the two year implementation of cycles, a Multi-year Programme of Work was signed outlining a time frame of seven, two year cycles (2003-2017).¹¹ Each two-year cycle consists of specified themes that the organization mainly concentrates on during the duration of the cycle. However, commonly certain "cross-cutting issues" are present and are also taken into consideration even though they may not be included as one of the cycle's themes.

Current Programme of Work

During the 2008/09 cycle the CSD is concentrating on the following themes: agriculture, rural development, land, drought, desertification and Africa.¹¹ In addition to this, a theme that will be present in the 2008/09 cycle is poverty and the desire to eradicate poverty. As the number of people living in absolute poverty is increasing, the Commission decided that poverty eradication should be considered as a "cross-cutting" theme of sustainable development. CSD's attempts to alleviate poverty are reflected in Chapter 3 of the *Agenda 21* and in Chapter 11 of the *Johannesburg Plan of Implementation* (JPOI).¹² The Commission views the goal for eradicating poverty as highly important, and thus, it appears as an "overriding issue" on the CSD each year in relation to each new implementation cycle.¹²

Another theme that will most likely come up in the 2008/09 cycle is disaster relief and vulnerability reduction in regards to desertification and drought. Though Disaster Management and Vulnerability is a specific theme to be reviewed in the fifth cycle (2014-2015) of the Multi-year Programme of Work, issues with in Disaster Management and Vulnerability relating to water, drought, desertification, sanitation and human settlement are considered to be "cross sectional issues".¹³ The desire to help individuals in need is outlined in the *Johannesburg Plan of Implementation* (JPOI) under Chapter IV, the commitment to assist in disaster and vulnerability reduction is specified and was adopted by the Commission at the 2002 WSSD.¹³

Membership

The CSD is made up of 53 Member States with about a third of the members being elected on a yearly basis.⁷ Members are elected by the Member States and Special Agencies within ECOSOC to serve on the Commission for a three-year term.⁷ At the termination of their term Member States are eligible for re-election.⁷ The regional allocation of seats within the Commission is based off of the regional distribution for the Commission on Science and Technology for Development which consists of: thirteen members from Africa, eleven from Asia, ten from Latin America and the Caribbean, six from Eastern Europe and thirteen from Western Europe and other.⁷

¹¹ "CSD Multi-Year Programme of Work." UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Division for Sustainable Development. http://www.un.org/esa/dsd/csd/csd_multyearprogwork.shtml.

¹² "Poverty." UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Division for Sustainable Development. http://www.un.org/esa/dsd/susdevtopics/sdt_poverty.shtml.

¹³ "Disaster Reduction & Management." UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Division for Sustainable Development. http://www.un.org/esa/dsd/susdevtopics/sdt_disaredumanag.shtml.

Additionally, each session held by the CSD is led by a five person Bureau consisting of one Chair and four Vice-Chairs.¹⁴ As of recently, the CSD has opened up its sessions to a broader range of participants including Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). The majority of NGO participants consist of the following: other states, other UN organizations, accredited inter-government and non-governmental organizations. However, it must be noted that **all** NGOs that participate maintain **only** an observer status.⁷

For the upcoming CSD-18 (Session 18) and Fourth Implementation Cycle of the Program of Work in May 2010, the following Member States will be present: Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Australia, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Cape Verde, China, Colombia, Costa Rica, Croatia, Cuba, Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea, Estonia, Ethiopia, France, Gabon, Gambia, Germany, Guatemala, Guinea, Haiti, India, Iran, Israel, Japan, Kyrgyzstan, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Malawi, Mauritius, Monaco, Namibia, Netherlands, Nigeria, Pakistan, Philippines, Poland, Romania, Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Sweden, Switzerland, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, United States of America, Uruguay, Venezuela.¹⁵

* Please note that there are currently two vacancies that need to be filled for the 2009-2012 term (2 Members from the Western Europe and Other States regional group).¹⁶

¹⁴ "Bureau of the Commission on Sustainable Development." UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Division for Sustainable Development. http://www.un.org/esa/dsd/csd/csd_bureau.shtml.

¹⁵ "CSD-CSD18- Member States." UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Division for Sustainable Development. http://www.un.org/esa/dsd/csd/csd_csd18_membstat.shtml.

¹⁶Ibid.

I. Inclusive and Sustainable Approaches to Poverty Alleviation

Introduction

The United Nations (UN)'s Member States have used the organization and its related agencies to address issues of global poverty since the organizations inception. Most recently, the body's membership demonstrated their commitment to this issue by highlighting ending poverty and hunger as the first of the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2000.¹⁷ In so doing, not only did the Member States recommit themselves to making meaningful strides towards eliminating poverty but they also emphasized a modern understanding of poverty, which moves beyond just having sufficient financial resources to encompassing a lack of resources including food and shelter.¹⁸

In reality the underlying problem of poverty is quite complex. Scholars who examine issues of poverty note that the concept is dynamic and related to more than basic financial solvency.¹⁹ The World Bank, which examines poverty from a wide variety of angles, notes that poverty involves more than a lack of financial capabilities and touches upon access to health care and educational opportunities.²⁰ According to the World Bank:

“Poverty is hunger. Poverty is lack of shelter. Poverty is being sick and not being able to see a doctor. Poverty is not having access to school and not knowing how to read. Poverty is not having a job, is fear for the future, living one day at a time. Poverty is losing a child to illness brought about by unclean water. Poverty is powerlessness, lack of representation and freedom.”

With such an understanding, the challenges for poverty alleviation include not only defining poverty but understanding the problem and its symptoms as complex and interrelated challenges to development.

Due to the complex nature of poverty, programs that aim to alleviate poverty may take a variety of approaches to doing so. These approaches to poverty alleviation range from small, grassroots economic or social development projects to expansive national, international or global policy frameworks aimed at bettering the situation of the world's poorest inhabitants. While the challenges are difficult to understate, in fact, they also present a moment for stakeholders (including individual Member States' governments, international organization and private donors) to impact the economic and social development of a country in significant and positive ways. Thus, often poverty alleviation programs, whether enacted at the local, regional, national or global level may sometimes include guidelines that incorporate previously disengaged sectors of communities by extending the benefits of development to these groups.

International Efforts to Alleviate Poverty

The United Nations System has for the entirety of its existence prioritized poverty alleviation as a key priority. Moreover, it has sought to address the root causes, such as educational disparities, and resulting social conditions such as lack of access to adequate health care, food and clean water. Some of the key program initiatives the UN has undertaken include the selecting of eight Millennium

¹⁷ United Nation. (N.D.). *Millennium Development Goals: Background*. Retrieved on June 28, 2009 from: <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/bkgd.shtml>

¹⁸ World Bank. (N.D.) *Overview: Understanding Poverty*. Retrieved on June 26, 2009 from: <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTPOVERTY/0,,contentMDK:20153855~menuPK:373757~pagePK:148956~piPK:216618~theSitePK:336992,00.html>

¹⁹ Danziger, Sheldon. (N.D.) *Changing Poverty: A Podcast*. Retrieved on June 26, 2009 from: <http://www.ns.umich.edu/podcast/audio.php?id=878>

²⁰ World Bank. (N.D.) *Overview: Understanding Poverty*. Retrieved on June 26, 2009 from: <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTPOVERTY/0,,contentMDK:20153855~menuPK:373757~pagePK:148956~piPK:216618~theSitePK:336992,00.html>

Development Goals, or key priorities to be achieved by 2015. Of these, the ending of poverty and hunger were prioritized as the first of the eight goals.²¹ In 2008, the UN re-emphasized poverty and declared the decade of 2008 through 2017 as the Second United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty. In so doing, the body “reiterat[ed] that eradicating poverty was the greatest global challenge facing the world and a core requirement for sustainable development, especially for developing countries.”²²

The UN’s poverty alleviation programs are carried out through various agencies and subsidiary bodies. Besides the CSD, another key agency is the United Nations Development Programme’s (UNDP) Poverty Reduction Unit. This organization works to alleviate poverty through a variety of methods including: advocacy, capacity building, implementing programs and building partnerships, among other activities.²³ The UNDP also supports the International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth (IPC-IG).²⁴ This organization approaches poverty alleviation by initiating and supporting South-South dialogues on processes and policies of poverty alleviation.²⁵

Inclusivity and Development

An examination of economic information demonstrates clearly that certain demographic groups are more prone to live in states of poverty. In developing countries, some of these groups include: women, indigenous and racial minority groups, handicapped persons as well as internally displaced persons (IDPs) and immigrants. While these groups are considered to be living in poverty due to their economic status, in reality their experience of poverty includes a lack of access to the resources with which they could potentially improve their situations, often including food, clean water, health care, education and economic and professional opportunities.

Women in many developing countries have yet to benefit from their countries’ economic process. In fact, according to the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), globalization has actually widened the economic gap between men and women in some parts of the world as some “women los[e] more than their share of jobs, benefits and labour rights.”²⁶ Despite this fact, international organizations, governments and independent development financiers have begun to take note of and include women in development projects. In 2008 at the 52nd session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), CSW Member States noted the existence of “a multiplier effect of gender equality on sustained economic growth requires gender-responsive macroeconomic policies as well as greater resources at all levels.”²⁷ Later, in September of 2008, these same states declared that “gender equality, respect for human rights and environmental sustainability are cornerstones for achieving enduring impact on the lives of poor women, men and children” and the need to increase the capacity of national development actors “to take an active role in dialogue on development.”²⁸ Thus, governments and international organizations have noted that considering the special role of women in development as well as including them in project planning will enhance the projects’ overall outcomes.

²¹ United Nations. (N.D.) *Background*. Retrieved on August 8, 2009 from: <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/bkgd.shtml>

²² United Nations. (N.D.) *Second Decade for the Eradication of Poverty*. Retrieved on August 8, 2009 from: <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/social/poverty/2nddecade.html>

²³ United Nations Development Programme. (N.D.) *Poverty Reduction: About Us*. Retrieved on August 8, 2009 from: http://www.undp.org/poverty/about_us.shtml

²⁴ United Nations Development Programme. (N.D.) *Welcome to IPC-IG*. Retrieved on August 8, 2009 from:

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ UNIFEM. (N.D.). *Reducing Women’s Poverty and Exclusion*. Retrieved on July 6, 2009 from: http://www.unifem.org/gender_issues/women_poverty_economics/at_a_glance.php

²⁷ UNIFEM (2008). *Financing Gender Equality Key to Sustainable Development Results*. Retrieved on July 6, 2009 from: http://www.unifem.org/resources/item_detail.php?ProductID=142

²⁸ Commissions for Sustainable Development. (2005). *Human Settlements*. Retrieved on July 18, 2009 from: http://www.un.org/esa/dsd/susdevtopics/sdt_humasett.shtml

Indigenous and racial minority groups also are disproportionately impoverished relative to other groups living within most countries.²⁹ While these groups comprise around 5% of the world's population, they equate for 15% of the world's poor and nearly a third of the world's rural extremely poor.³⁰ In most countries', these groups' access to and success within national education programs are also well below national averages.³¹ Disturbingly, these groups are especially at-risk of displacement and further economic losses due to climate change.³² These groups are also more likely to live in rural areas that lack infrastructure and resources.

Another significant group that has yet to receive the benefits of many economic and social poverty alleviation programs includes physically disabled persons. The UN General Assembly has noted that the statistical makeup of this group is not well known or well documented.³³ This group has been the focus of high-level expert meetings increasingly over the previous decade, as the extent to which they had been previously excluded is understood. Under the auspices of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), these meetings are focusing on ways in which physically challenged communities can be included more fully in development projects.³⁴

The Commission for Sustainable Development and Inclusive Programming

One of the Commissions for Sustainable Development's (CSD) most significant goals is:

“to promote dialogue and build partnerships for sustainable development with governments, the international community to promote dialogue and build partnerships for sustainable development with governments, the international community and the major groups identified in Agenda 21 as key actors outside the central government who have a major role to play in the transition towards sustainable development including women, youth, indigenous peoples, non-governmental organizations, local authorities, workers and trade unions, business and industry, the scientific community, and farmers.”³⁵

As the statement demonstrates, inclusivity and dialogue with relevant and impacted parties from the global to the local level remains both a goal of the CSD's work and also a key tenant for the Commission's projects. They included calls for the inclusion of women and youth in State-level discussions of housing situations.³⁶

Adequate Housing

From 2004 through 2005, one of the CSD's most significant projects involved the provision of adequate housing to those in developing states. The goal of this program was to examine ways in which the Commission could assist Member States in achieving the Millennium Development goal of “achieving a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers (JPOI: 11, MDG Goal 7).”³⁷ The ultimate outcome of the CSD's emphasis on adequate housing included the

²⁹ UNPFII. (N.D.). Indigenous Peoples and the Millennium Development Goals. Retrieved on July 6, 2009 from: <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/en/mdgs.html>

³⁰ IFAD (2007), *Statistics and key facts about indigenous peoples*.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ United Nations. (N.D.). Data and statistics concerning persons with disabilities

³⁴ United Nations. (N.D.) *Enable*. Retrieved on July 31, 2009 from:

<http://www.un.org/disabilities/default.asp?navid=3&pid=17>

³⁵ Commission on Sustainable Development. (N.D.). *Commission on Sustainable Development*. Retrieved on August 18, 2009 from: http://www.freshwateraction.net/web/w/www_72_en.aspx

³⁶ General Assembly Second Committee. (N.D.). *Implementation of the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) and strengthening of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat)*. Retrieved on July 18, 2009 from: http://www.un.org/esa/dsd/susdevtopics/sdt_humasett.shtml

³⁷ CSD. (N.D.). *Human Settlements*. Retrieved on July 18, 2009 from: http://www.un.org/esa/dsd/susdevtopics/sdt_humasett.shtml

publication of reports and the holding of conferences on the subject. Throughout this process, the CSD considered the status of the housing status of the world's poor and strove for inclusive dialogues and considerations.

Rural Development

The CSD's current program focuses for 2008 and 2009 include: agriculture, rural development, land, drought, desertification and Africa.³⁸ In looking at these issues, their importance to the lives, livelihoods and statuses of the world's poorest populations cannot be understated. In examining these key areas, the CSD has also taken note of key cross-cutting issues including "poverty eradication... health and sustainable development... gender equality, and education."³⁹

Rural areas often lack the resources and infrastructure that brings and sustains development. The CSD has been a key advocate of responsible development in this area that includes minority and previously excluded communities. Most often this involves working with state governments and regional organizations in promoting inclusivity and advocating for the inclusion and protection of specific target communities or constituencies, including women, racial minorities and handicapped persons.

Regional Inclusivity Initiatives

International organizations have examined the work of regional groups more often as examples of leading project initiatives that effectively address problems in order to learn from their experiences. In addressing the complexities of the global financial crisis, the African Development Bank (AfDB) called for increased cooperation among all levels of society in addressing the challenges the region is currently facing.⁴⁰ The AfDB has previously championed inclusivity and dialogue between diverse and often-excluded stakeholders, including women and minorities to address a variety of development challenges.⁴¹ Similarly, the Organization of American States (OAS) has repeatedly called for the involvement of diverse groups of stakeholders to ensure the inclusivity of their projects.⁴² One key way it has done so involved the establishment of the Inter-American Committee on Social Development, which champions inclusivity in development projects throughout the region.⁴³

Challenges to Inclusive Programming

The groups highlighted by the CSD in Agenda 21 have traditionally been excluded for a variety of reasons. In many cases, top-down projects wherein policy or program decisions are made from executive levels and managed downward, the perspectives, input and expertise of the local and mid-level gets lost or minimized when decisions are being made. While macro organizations may attempt to incorporate these views, one major reason for the exclusion of these individuals involves a disparity of education levels. At the regional and local level, the problem becomes quite complex as it is sometimes impacted by long-held prejudices or biased views. Sexism, racism, xenophobia, classism and prejudices against the physically disabled all present social dynamics that hinder the progress of poverty alleviation programming.

³⁸ CSD. (N.D.) CSD's Multi-Year Programme of Work. Retrieved on July 18, 2009 from: http://www.un.org/esa/dsd/csd/csd_multyearprogwork.shtml

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ African Development Bank. (2008). *African Development Bank calls for global and inclusive solution to financial crisis*. Retrieved on August 18, 2009 from: <http://www.afdb.org/en/news-events/article/afdb-calls-for-global-and-inclusive-solution-to-financial-crisis-african-gdp-growth-revised-downwards-2407/>

⁴¹ Abiye, Yonas. (March 10, 2009). *Africa: AfDB, ECA Launch Coalition Forum On Continent's Development*. Retrieved on August 18, 2009 from: <http://allafrica.com/stories/200903100278.html>

⁴² Organization of American States' Department of Social and Economic Development. (2009). *Inter-American Committee on Social Development*. Retrieved on August 18, 2009 from: http://www.sedi.oas.org/ddse/english/cpo_cides.asp

⁴³ Organization of American States' Department of Social and Economic Development. (2009). *Inter-American Committee on Social Development*. Retrieved on August 18, 2009 from: http://www.sedi.oas.org/ddse/english/cpo_cides.asp

Another key challenge to inclusive programming involves the difficulties inherent to monitoring the implementation of inclusivity in programming initiatives. Currently, the CSD attempts to monitor its undertakings in a variety of ways, ensuring that attention is paid to the inclusion of minority groups in development projects. One principle way of doing so involves tracking the case studies via CSD's database.⁴⁴ This database allows groups to examine their projects and similar efforts in order to improve inclusive efforts; however, the impact has been negotiable at best.

Conclusion

While universally inclusive development remains an incomplete goal at present, the global community has made many strides in recent years to improve inclusivity and allow more groups and individuals to participate in development. Much remains to be done however. As such, the CSustD has an important role in monitoring inclusivity and providing assistance to groups and UN Member States working on development projects.

Questions remain for the CSustD to consider and these include:

- How can and should the Commission work to ensure that its endeavors are inclusive?
- In what ways does state sovereignty impact the goal of inclusivity in development projects?
- Have the efforts, successes and failures of the regional organizations (OAS, AfDB, LAS, etc.) made any innovations in inclusive programming that could be replicated on a wider scale? What have these been and what lessons have been learned?

⁴⁴ UN Department of Economic Affairs' Division for Sustainable Development. (N.D.) *Sustainable Development Case Studies*. Retrieved on June 28, 2009 from: <http://webapps01.un.org/dsd/caseStudy/public/Welcome.do>

II. Disaster and Vulnerability Reduction

In the fall of 2002, 191 United Nations (UN) Member States sent representatives to meet in Johannesburg, South Africa at the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD).⁴⁵ This meeting allowed Member States the opportunity to discuss a wide range of development topics including health, education, climate change and resource management.⁴⁶ In the Conference's key document, known as the *Johannesburg Plan of Implementation*, Member States noted the importance of stability and sustainability in development projects. The Plan called specifically for "an integrated, multi-hazard, inclusive approach to address vulnerability, risk assessment and disaster management, including prevention, mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery" and noted that such an approach would be "essential element of a safer world in the twenty-first century."⁴⁷

Disaster, Vulnerability and Development

The *International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR)* classifies disaster in three specific categories: (1) Hydrometeorological, (2) Geological and (3) Biological.⁴⁸ Hydrometeorological disasters include drought, extreme temperatures, floods, mudslides, wild fire and windstorms.⁴⁹ Geological includes earthquakes and tsunamis (as the causation of a tsunami is a movement of the earth's crust) as well as volcanoes.⁵⁰ Finally, biological disasters include both pandemic and insect infestations.⁵¹ As evidenced by the preceding lists, natural disasters, as defined by the international scientific community, include both significant natural crises, such as a cyclone, earthquake, hurricane or landslide as well as other more long-lasting events and occurrences such as droughts or annual flooding.⁵²

According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the number of people around the world who have been affected by natural disasters has tripled over the previous decade.⁵³ Currently, 2 billion people's lives have been impacted by natural disasters; moreover, also over the previous decade 800,000 people died as a direct result of such disasters.⁵⁴ Such events or situations thus lead to extreme costs and human vulnerabilities. They also involve significant costs and threats to sustainable development projects.

The threat of natural disasters significantly impedes development in many areas of the world today in both regional and extremely localized manners. In the Americas, for example, the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) estimates that over the previous decade, natural disasters such as floods, earthquakes, hurricanes, landslides, volcanic eruptions and drought" caused more than \$30 billion dollars (USD) in damage and led to the deaths of more than 45,000 people, as well as a significant impact on an additional 450,000.⁵⁵

On the state and local levels, relatively smaller disasters can still wreak great havoc. In Yemen, for example, a rash of storms in late 2008 devastated several small communities and crippled the

⁴⁵ The Commonwealth. *Understanding the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation*. Retrieved on July 24, 2009 from: http://www.thecommonwealth.org/Internal/145632/understanding_the_johannesburg_plan_of_implementation

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ ECOSOC. Division for Sustainable Development. (N.D.). *Johannesburg Plan of Implementation IV. Protecting and managing the natural resource base of economic and social development*. Retrieved on July 30, 2009 from: http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/documents/WSSD_POI_PD/English/POIChapter4.htm

⁴⁸ UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction. (2006). *Introduction*. Retrieved on July 30, 2009 from: <http://www.unisdr.org/disaster-statistics/introduction.htm>

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Irin. In-Depth: Disaster reduction and the human cost of disaster. Retrieved on July 28, 2009 from: <http://www.irinnews.org/InDepthMain.aspx?InDepthId=14&ReportId=62446>

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Inter-American Development Bank. (2007). *Disaster Risk Management*. Retrieved on July 27, 2009 from: http://www.iadb.org/sds/ENV/site_2493_e.htm

country's infrastructure in several less-populated regions.⁵⁶ As a result, more than 30,000 people lost or experienced damage to their homes; infrastructure including vital communications links, bridges and roads were destroyed and, owing to a mismanaged relief effort, the area is now considered to be at risk for the outbreak of infectious disease.⁵⁷

Disasters thus can cripple or set back development and aid efforts. In fact, the connection between disasters and development is actually much more complex. In a recent report, analysts for the Inter-American Development Bank illuminated this fact, commenting that:

*“the fundamental problems of development that the region faces are the very same problems that contribute to its vulnerability to the catastrophic effects of natural hazards. The principal causes of vulnerability in the region include rapid and uncontrolled urbanization, the persistence of widespread urban and rural poverty, the degradation of the region's environment resulting from the mismanagement of natural resources, inefficient public policies, and lagging and misguided investments in infrastructure. Development and disaster-related policies have largely focused on emergency response, leaving a serious underinvestment in natural hazard prevention and mitigation.”*⁵⁸

In this realization it is noted that international preparation and mitigation efforts relating to natural disasters have yet to have much of an impact in terms of lessening the burden on UN Member States, many of which already face trying socioeconomic development challenges.

Disasters and the Commission for Sustainable Development

As part of the *Johannesburg Plan of Implementation*, the CSD laid out its strategy for dealing with disaster management. It prioritized a variety of activities relating to disaster preparedness and vulnerability mitigation and stressed the cooperative participation of states, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), regional and inter-governmental organizations in preparing for and managing disasters.⁵⁹ Some key goals that the CSD established in Chapter IV Part 37 of the Document mention specifically:

- Using the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction's resources and providing adequate funding for the ISDR's Trust Fund;
- Assisting and supporting Member States and IGOs in establishing “effective regional, sub-regional and national strategies and scientific and technical institutional support for disaster management;”
- Promoting responsible resource management and protection practices by “promoting wetland and watershed protection and restoration, improved land-use planning, improving and applying more widely techniques and methodologies for assessing the potential adverse effects of climate change on wetlands and, as appropriate, assisting countries that are particularly vulnerable to those effects;
- And, enhancing “early warning systems and information networks in disaster management, consistent with the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction...”⁶⁰

Since releasing the *Johannesburg Plan*, disaster preparedness and risk mitigation been discussed in the CSD most often in the context of the Commission's other “thematic clusters.”⁶¹ Most specifically,

⁵⁶ Novak, Jane. Global Crises, natural disaster shake Yemen's economy. In *Yemen Times*. Retrieved on July 30, 2009 from: <http://www.yementimes.com/article.shtml?i=1212&p=front&a=2>

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Inter-American Development Bank. (2007). *Disaster Risk Management*. Retrieved on July 27, 2009 from: http://www.iadb.org/sds/ENV/site_2493_e.htm

⁵⁹ ECOSOC. Division for Sustainable Development. (N.D.). *Johannesburg Plan of Implementation IV. Protecting and managing the natural resource base of economic and social development*. Retrieved on July 30, 2009 from: http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/documents/WSSD_POI_PD/English/POIChapter4.htm

⁶⁰ *Ibid*

the CSD has broached the issue in discussions relating to desertification, water, sanitation and human settlements.⁶² The CSD has dedicated the 2014-2015 two-year cycle to Disaster Management and Vulnerability.⁶³

In preparation for the upcoming focus on Disaster Management and in keeping with its broader goal of monitoring the implementation of its key documents, the CSD has sponsored the registration of partnerships around two key concepts: Disaster Management and Vulnerability and Disaster Reduction and Management.⁶⁴ In so doing, the Commission has underscored the two-pronged approach to disaster preparedness by simultaneously emphasizing preparing for and dealing with disasters.

Partnering to Prevent, Manage and Reduce Disasters and Vulnerabilities

The CSustD has played a key role in coordinating responses and providing assistance for UN Member States in dealing with both planning for and the aftermath of crises. It has also made a wealth of information available to non-State actors involved with disaster management and vulnerability reduction. This group includes regional and global NGOs and sub-state and sub-regional organizations. Due to the collaborative nature of the CSustD's work, it has been able to provide guidance and information to a variety of "voluntary multi-stakeholder initiatives contributing to the implementation of Agenda 21, Rio+5 and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (JPOI)."⁶⁵ In general terms and in context of disaster management and vulnerability reduction these partnerships have clustered around two specific aspects relating to disasters.

Disaster Management & Vulnerability Partnerships

While crises may sometimes occur with little foreknowledge, partnerships have emerged between groups that have expertise in managing the after effects and later vulnerabilities. These groups, for example, focus on the best practices learned for responding to specific types of crises and managing the effects of hasty relief efforts by consulting about things such as health during crises. The CSD has managed a list of such collaborative efforts in its online database in order to assist Member States and NGOs to best coordinate their efforts. Some common themes within these partnerships include dealing with annual flooding, educating rural populations regarding emergencies, various mapping and water-resource issues.⁶⁶

Disaster Reduction & Management Partnerships

Due to the nature of environmental and natural crises, partnerships are often fostered before the onset of an actual event. For example, around the world today many partnerships between governmental and non-governmental organizations have emerged to manage the encroaching problem of climate change and related meteorological situations. The CSD also has worked to ensure that these partnerships are fostered and developed through a database listing such groups. Common themes include climate change and water resource management partnerships.⁶⁷

⁶¹ *Ibid*

⁶² ECOSOC. Division for Sustainable Development. (N.D.). *Disaster Management* Retrieved on July 28, 2009 from: http://www.un.org/esa/dsd/susdevtopics/sdt_disaredumanag.shtml

⁶³ ECOSOC. Division for Sustainable Development. (N.D.). *Multi-year Program of Work*. Retrieved on July 30, 2009 from: http://www.un.org/esa/dsd/csd/csd_multyearprogwork.shtml

⁶⁴ ECOSOC. Division for Sustainable Development. (N.D.). *Disaster Management* Retrieved on July 28, 2009 from: http://www.un.org/esa/dsd/susdevtopics/sdt_disaredumanag.shtml

⁶⁵ ECOSOC. Division for Sustainable Development. (N.D.). *Partnerships for Sustainable Development*. Retrieved on August 21, 2009 from: http://www.un.org/esa/dsd/dsd_aofw_par/par_index.shtml

⁶⁶ ECOSOC. Division for Sustainable Development. (N.D.). *Disaster Management Partnerships* Retrieved on July 28, 2009 from: <http://webapps01.un.org/dsd/partnerships/public/search.do?dispatch=search&searchLogic=searchTypeAnd&keywords=&partnerFreetxt=&themeSearchType=0&themes=140&subRegion=&from=s&resultPerPage=0&search=Search>

⁶⁷ ECOSOC. Division for Sustainable Development. (N.D.). *Disaster ReductionPartnerships* Retrieved on July 28, 2009 from:

Conclusion

According to various sources, including the Inter-American Development Bank, the number of natural disasters has risen significantly over the last few years. In 2005, a tsunami in the Indian Ocean left more than 150,000 dead and an additional 130,000 missing.⁶⁸ Environmental degradation and climate change are forcing a growing number of people to migrate annually.⁶⁹ In the United States in 2006, Hurricane Katrina caused more than 1,300 deaths and an additional 6,000 missing persons; an incalculable number of people have been displaced due to the disaster.⁷⁰ Natural disasters are a significant threat to international peace and security but they are also a sometimes insurmountable obstacle to sustainable development. Too often, previous development projects ignored the environmental impact their projects would have in the long run. Rapid urbanization and a reliance on fossil fuels in developing and developed States have contributed to the increase in disasters, and thus the increase in human displacement and deaths.

Questions to Consider

Several questions remain for the CSD to consider as they take up the topic of disaster and mitigation:

- What role should the CSD take in addressing disasters as part of the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation?
- What can the CSD do to ensure best practices are used in development projects both now and in the future?
- In what ways can the CSD assist with disaster readiness programs around the world today?
- How can the CSD mitigate or assist in alleviating the post-disaster costs and programming flaws that often lead to worse conditions for survivors?
- What role should environmental conservatism play in development and how can development be promoted while maintaining environmental integrity?

<http://webapps01.un.org/dsd/partnerships/public/search.do?dispatch=search&searchLogic=searchTypeAnd&keywords=disaster+reduction+and+management&partnerFreetext=&themeSearchType=0&subRegion=&from=s&resultPerPage=0&search=Search>

⁶⁸ CNN. (2005). Tsunami Death Toll. Retrieved on July 30, 2009 from:

<http://www.cnn.com/2004/WORLD/asiapcf/12/28/tsunami.deaths/index.html>

⁶⁹ Boanao, Camillo, R. Zetter and T. Morris. Environmentally displaced people Understanding the linkages between environmental change, livelihoods and forced migration. Retrieved on July 30, 2009 from: www.reliefweb.int/rw/lib.nsf/db900sid/OCHA.../rsc_Nov2008.pdf

⁷⁰ Johnson, Kevin. 6,644 are still missing after Katrina; toll may rise. In *USA Today*. Retrieved on July 30, 2009 from: http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2005-11-21-katrina-missing_x.htm