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Lessons learned from the Commission on Sustainable Development**Report of the Secretary-General***Summary*

The present report responds to General Assembly resolution 67/203¹ which requests the Secretary-General to submit a focused report on lessons learned from the Commission on Sustainable Development. Its purpose is to inform the General Assembly negotiations to define the format and organizational aspects of the high-level political forum created in Rio+20 to follow-up on the implementation of sustainable development. As mandated by the General Assembly, it was prepared in consultation with Member States, and benefiting from the inputs of major groups and other relevant stakeholders.

The report shows that the Commission on Sustainable Development played an important role in keeping sustainable development high on the international agenda – demonstrating the importance of having a high-level body on sustainable development. The Commission made important contributions in a number of areas and was very innovative in engaging Major Groups. But the report also highlights several

¹ OP 3 recalls paragraphs 84 to 86 of the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, calls for the negotiation process under the General Assembly to define the format and organizational aspects of the high-level political forum to start in January 2013 at the latest and to aim to conclude by May 2013 so as to provide enough time to prepare the first high-level forum to be convened at the beginning of the sixty-eighth session of the Assembly, and requests the Secretary-General to submit a focused and concise report on lessons learned from the Commission on Sustainable Development, compiling relevant existing information in consultation with Member States and benefiting from the inputs of major groups and other stakeholders, to inform the negotiations;

shortcomings in the work of the Commission. The Commission for example did not succeed in fully integrating economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development in its work and outcomes. Its review of and impact on implementation of sustainable development remained weak and it was not able to adequately respond flexibly to new and emerging issues. The Commission's monitoring and review of the progress in the agreements related to the means of implementation – finance, technology and capacity building – has also been inadequate. These lessons may be taken into account in designing the format and modalities of the high-level political forum.

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I. Introduction

1. This report was prepared in response to the General Assembly's request for a focused report on lessons learned from the Commission on Sustainable Development (A/RES/67/203). It aims to serve as a background document for the General Assembly deliberations to define the format and organizational aspects of the high-level political forum created in Rio+20 to follow-up on implementation of sustainable development. As mandated by the General Assembly, Member States have been invited to provide a contribution to the report². Inputs were also sought from major groups and UN system organizations.
2. The Commission on Sustainable Development created at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, was the first United Nations body on sustainable development, a relatively new concept then. The Commission's creation was part of more general guidance on international institutional arrangements, including on the role of the General Assembly and Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). It was intended to be the cornerstone of the UN intergovernmental framework for sustainable development governance. The Commission in broad terms lived up to expectations in the early years after its establishment.
3. Many Member States, UN system organizations and major groups share the view that the Commission progressively lost its lustre and its effectiveness. They point to several shortcomings. Those relate, among others, to the Commission's impact on implementation of sustainable development; to its role in integrating economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development in the work of the UN system; as well as to its decision making processes and outcomes. At the same time, it is also broadly recognized that without the Commission, sustainable development would not be at the stage of maturity where it is today. In several instances, CSD proved instrumental in launching initiatives and introducing new topics into the intergovernmental debates.
4. The report provides a background on the establishment of CSD (Section 1) as well as lessons learned from the work of the Commission since its establishment in 1992 (section 2). The last section points to the way forward which will be important as Member States define the format and organizational modalities of the high-level political forum.

II. Establishment and mandate of the Commission on Sustainable Development

Establishment of the Commission

5. The 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development decided to establish the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) "in order to ensure the effective follow-up of the Conference, as well as to enhance international cooperation

² The following Member States provided written inputs: Australia, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Costa Rica, EU, Guatemala, Israel, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, Montenegro, Saudi Arabia, Switzerland, Senegal and USA.

and rationalize the intergovernmental decision-making capacity for the integration of environment and development issues and **to examine the progress in the implementation of Agenda 21** at the national, regional and international levels”³. It **defined the mandate of the CSD**, which was reaffirmed in General Assembly resolution 47/191 in 1992 that established CSD as a functional commission of ECOSOC. **The CSD was mandated by this resolution:**

- a. **To monitor progress in the implementation of Agenda 21** and activities related to the integration of environmental and developmental goals throughout the United Nations system organizations through analysis and evaluation of reports from all relevant organs, organizations, programmes and institutions of the United Nations system dealing with various issues of environment and development, including those related to finance;
- b. To consider information provided by Governments, including, for example, information in the form of periodic communications or national reports regarding the activities they undertake to implement Agenda 21, the problems they face, such as problems related to financial resources and technology transfer, and other environment and development issues they find relevant;
- c. **To review the progress in the implementation of the commitments contained in Agenda 21**, including those related to provision of financial resources and transfer of technology;
- d. To receive and analyse relevant inputs from competent non-governmental organizations, including the scientific and private sectors, in the context of the overall implementation of Agenda 21;
- e. To enhance the dialogue, within the framework of the United Nations, with nongovernmental organizations and the independent sector, as well as other entities outside the United Nations system;
- f. To consider, where appropriate, information regarding the progress made in the implementation of environmental conventions, which could be made available by the relevant Conferences of Parties;
- g. To provide appropriate recommendations to the General Assembly through the Economic and Social Council on the basis of an integrated consideration of the reports and issues related to the implementation of Agenda 21;
- h. To consider, at an appropriate time, the results of the review to be conducted expeditiously by the Secretary-General of all recommendations of the Conference

³ Agenda 21, paragraph 38.11

for capacity-building programmes, information networks, task forces and other mechanisms to support the integration of environment and development at regional and subregional levels.

6. GA resolution 47/191 also tasked CSD to incorporate all Rio Principles in implementing Agenda 21 and to keep Agenda 21 under review; monitor progress in promoting, facilitating and financing, as appropriate, access to and transfer of environmentally sound technologies and corresponding know-how, in particular to developing countries and consider issues related to the provision of financial resources from all available funding sources and mechanisms as defined in Agenda 21.
7. The General Assembly also underscored that all relevant parts of the UN system and other relevant organizations, including international financial institutions and regional development banks would assist and advise the Commission in its work. It provided for the innovative engagement of non-governmental sectors in the work of the Commission through the nine major groups as defined by Agenda 21. This mandate was further expanded at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002 in Johannesburg (WSSD).
8. The Commission has 53 members elected by ECOSOC for a three-year mandate. Its work was guided by a 5-member Bureau with representatives from all five regions. The chair rotated among the regions and has almost always been at the ministerial level – but mostly ministers of environment. The Commission held a main session *of two weeks each year in May*.

The Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21

9. At its 19th special session in 1997, the General Assembly assessed the progress since the Rio Conference in 1992. It recognized that while much still had to be done, the Commission “has catalyzed new action and commitments and had contributed to the new deliberations on sustainable development”.⁴ It also reviewed implementation of Agenda 21 in areas requiring urgent action from the “integration of economic, social and environmental objectives” to “sectors and issues and means of implementation”.
10. Regarding international institutional arrangements on sustainable development, it underlined that greater coherence was necessary in various intergovernmental organizations and processes. To this end, it called for strengthening of Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development (IACSD) together with its system of task managers. This aimed at further enhancing system-wide intersectoral coordination and cooperation for the implementation of Agenda 21. The GA special session also underlined the importance of Commission’s role in increasing regional implementation

⁴ A/S-19/33

of Agenda 21 and in this regard mandated increased cooperation with regional commissions.

11. The outcome of the special session of the GA also stated that the future programme of work of the Commission needed to continue reviewing progress of Agenda 21; conducting high-level policy debate aimed at consensus-building on sustainable development; and catalyzing action and long-term commitment to sustainable development at all levels. It also underlined the links to other subsidiary bodies of ECOSOC and with related organizations and institutions, including making recommendations within its mandate to ECOSOC.
12. In this regard, it recommended a multiyear programme of work from 1998 to 2002, an example of which is shown below:

1998 session: Overriding issues: poverty/consumption and production patterns		
Sectoral theme: STRATEGIC APPROACHES TO FRESHWATER MANAGEMENT Review of outstanding chapters of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States ^a	Cross-sectoral theme: TRANSFER OF TECHNOLOGY/ CAPACITY-BUILDING/ EDUCATION/SCIENCE/ AWARENESS-RAISING	Economic sector/major group: INDUSTRY
Main issues for an integrated discussion under the above theme: Agenda 21, chapters 2-8, 10-15, 18-21, 23-34, 36, 37 and 40	Main issues for an integrated discussion under the above theme: Agenda 21, chapters 2-4, 6, 16, 23-37 and 40	Main issues for an integrated discussion under the above theme: Agenda 21, chapters 4, 6, 9, 16, 17, 19-21, 23-35 and 40

13. The GA special session five years after Rio also made recommendations regarding the working methods of the Commission, such as on the need for high-level participation from economic, social and environmental sectors or the role of the Commission to allow the exchange of national experiences [See box 1].

Box 1: Recommendations of the 19th special session of the GA regarding working methods of the Commission for Sustainable Development

- a. Greater involvement of ministers and high-level national policy makers responsible for specific economic and social sectors, together with ministers and policy makers responsible for environment and development with the high-level segment that needs to be more interactive and should concentrate on priority issues;
- b. Continue to provide a forum for the exchange of national experience and best practices including through voluntary national communications or reports and to

consider more effective modalities for the further implementation of commitments in Agenda 21 with appropriate emphasis on means of implementation;

- c. Take into account regional developments and provide a forum for exchange of regional experiences and initiatives for sustainable development including through modalities for possible national reviews of regional implementation of the countries who voluntarily agree to do so;
- d. Establish closer interaction with international financial, development and trade institutions;
- e. Strengthen its interaction with major groups, including through better use of focused dialogue sessions and round tables;
- f. Organize its multiyear work programme in the most effective and productive way. The inter-sessional ad hoc working groups should help to focus the Commission's sessions by identifying key elements to be discussed and important problems to be addressed within specific items of the Commission's programme of work.

The Commission's work after the World Summit on Sustainable Development

14. The WSSD in Johannesburg in 2002 adopted the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (JPOI) which outlines the roles of the General Assembly, ECOSOC and CSD respectively. The General Assembly was asked to adopt sustainable development as a key element of the overarching framework for United Nations activities and give overall political direction for the implementation of Agenda 21. ECOSOC was asked, *inter alia*, to increase its role in system-wide coordination and integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development; organize periodic considerations of sustainable development themes including means of implementation; use its substantive session segments to make full use of all relevant aspects of the work of the United Nations on sustainable development; promote greater coordination, complementarity, effectiveness and efficiency of activities of its functional commissions and other subsidiary bodies that are relevant to the implementation of Agenda 21; and increase participation of major groups and functional commissions in its high-level segment.
15. The JPOI further stipulated that the Commission should give more emphasis on actions that enable implementation at all levels, including promoting and facilitating partnerships involving Governments, international organizations, major groups and relevant stakeholders for the implementation of Agenda 21. In order to achieve this, it has been recommended that the Commission should focus in particular on the cross-sectoral aspects of specific sectoral issues and provide a forum for better integration of policies, including through interaction among Ministers dealing with the various dimensions and sectors of sustainable development through the high-level segments; focusing on actions related to implementation of Agenda 21, limiting negotiations in the sessions of the

Commission to every two years; and limiting the number of themes addressed in each session.

16. The JPOI also recommended that CSD allows greater involvement of international organizations and major groups and gives greater attention to the scientific contribution to sustainable development.
17. Subsequently, at its 11th session, the Commission adopted a multi-year programme of work. The programme involved seven two-year cycles with a review year and a policy year, starting in 2004. It was envisaged that the review year would discuss the themes, while the policy year would adopt policy decisions. *Eight sessions of the Commission were held and four cycles were completed*⁵.
18. After 19 sessions of the Commission, the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) in 2012 decided “to establish a universal intergovernmental high-level political forum, building on the strengths, experiences, resources and inclusive participation modalities of the Commission on Sustainable Development, and subsequently replacing the Commission⁶. The forum is “to follow-up on the implementation of sustainable development and should avoid overlap with existing structures, bodies and entities in a cost-effective manner”.

III. Lessons learned from the Commission

19. When assessing the Commission’s performance as an institution, it is important to appreciate the exceptional breadth and scope of sustainable development. Perhaps the most important achievement of CSD was that it provided a distinct “home” for keeping the sustainable development agenda under active review. However, the Commission was not as successful in attracting participation from representatives from all three dimensions of sustainable development. It attracted only environmental community and thus was largely perceived as an “environmental commission”. Nonetheless, CSD provided the space for multi-stakeholder participation and interactive dialogue, including at the ministerial level and recognized the importance and value of voluntary, multi-stakeholder partnerships for sustainable development.
20. Lessons learned from CSD may be grouped broadly under three headings:

⁵ The themes for the three remaining cycles were forests, biodiversity, biotechnology, tourism, mountains (one cycle); oceans and seas, marine resources, small island developing States and disaster management and vulnerabilities (second cycle); and the last cycle: Overall appraisal of implementation of Agenda 21, the Programme of Further Implementation of Agenda 21 and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation

⁶ Paragraph 84 “The future we want”, A/66/288

- a. Reviewing and monitoring progress on the implementation of the Agenda 21 and Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (JPOI) and related outcomes (BPOI and MSI);
- b. Agenda setting: developing policy recommendations; and
- c. Major groups' engagement and participation and multi-stakeholder partnerships.

A. Reviewing and monitoring progress on the implementation of Agenda 21 and Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (JPOI) and related outcomes

21. One of the core functions of the Commission has been to review progress in the implementation of Agenda 21, engaging Member States and all relevant stakeholders. Some Member States are of the view that in some areas it was quite successful such as chemicals, energy, oceans and forests. This was especially so in the first ten years when Commission's recommendations resulted in concrete actions in these areas.

National level

22. There has been a process of national voluntary reporting on issues under consideration by CSD to review progress in implementation. The purpose was to share country experiences, case studies and best practices in policy formulation, strategy development, and implementation of nationally or regionally agreed commitments. Some countries are of the view that these reports mobilized relevant actors at the national level. Still, as noted by one Member State, guidelines for reporting were very loose and therefore reports were not comparable. There was also little support to build capacity for undertaking such reporting in developing countries. Those often lacked data and were overburdened with other reporting. The best use of the accumulated national reporting information was in the synthesized country profiles prepared on the occasion of the World Summit on Sustainable Development. Beyond that, the reports were used for illustrative purposes in Secretary-General's reports. But they actually had very little impact on the discussions at the global level.
23. In order to strengthen the management and implementation of sustainable development priorities defined at the national level, and improve coherence between national, regional and global levels, both in Rio in 1992 and in the GA 19th special session called for national sustainable development strategies (NSDS). A sustainable development strategy may be defined as a "coordinated, participatory and iterative process of thoughts and actions to achieve economic, environmental and social objectives in a balanced and integrated manner at the national and local levels"⁷. Johannesburg called for immediate

⁷ Guidance in preparing a national sustainable development strategy: managing sustainable development in the new millennium, Background paper no. 13, CSD acting as the preparatory committee for WSSD, 28

steps to make progress in the formulation and elaboration of national strategies for sustainable development and their implementation to start by 2005.

24. Many countries have developed NSDS and prepared reports on their implementation. Strategies and plans were also widely developed under different regional auspices. A number of collaborative efforts among governments and technical assistance projects have been implemented to promote shared learning and capacity building within and among countries. But the Commission never dedicated time to a systematic review of NSDS⁸. This despite the fact that the progress made in formulating and adapting NSDS in each country through multistakeholder consultations was included in national reporting and the NSDS map was made available to the CSD on an annual basis.
25. To enhance the ability of countries to monitor progress towards sustainable development priorities, Agenda 21 called on countries and the international community to develop indicators for sustainable development. In 1995, the Commission adopted a Work Programme of Indicators of Sustainable Development, which resulted in a preparation of an initial indicator set in 1996. It was further revised through a consultative process of testing and refinement with government experts from both developed and developing countries, UN-system organizations and other relevant international entities and endorsed by the Commission for use at the national level, in 2001. A further revision of the indicator set was released in 2006, reflecting progress in methodologies, data availability and utilization. To some extent this effort was successful as a number of countries compile data on these indicators for use in decision-making processes. However, the lack of systematic monitoring and interaction between national and international levels has hampered assessments of how effective NSDS and indicators have been in supporting implementation of agreements on sustainable development.

Regional level

26. From Rio in 1992 to Rio in 2012, all international agreements have called for a strong regional component and increasing the role of regional commissions.
27. The 11th session of the CSD mandated to hold regional preparatory meetings (Regional Implementation Meetings - RIMs) in review years. A few Member States indicated that they found these meetings to be useful, but that their impact at the global level was relatively small.
28. Subsequent CSD sessions held regional discussions during review years and regional perspectives session during policy years. The regional discussions provided an

January – 8 February 2002,

http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/nsds_guidance.pdf

⁸ Ibid.

opportunity for back-to-back presentations of the outcomes of RIMs and for interactive dialogue on region-specific barriers, constraints and lessons learned related to the thematic cluster. Those meetings however had little influence on the discussions in general, because they were held in parallel with official plenary meetings.

29. During the 18th session of the Commission an inter-regional dialogue was held. It was well-attended, allowed regions to listen to each other and illuminated that many faced similar challenges.

Global level

30. Many Member States felt that CSD was not sufficiently effective in reviewing countries' progress towards sustainable development and their related commitments. It did not provide sufficient space to reflect on gaps in implementation and barriers to progress at the global level. CSD also had limited success in analyzing implementation of its own decisions. One notable exception was when commitments on water made at CSD-13 were mandated to be reviewed at CSD-17. UN-Water conducted a study on how countries were progressing in this area. This shows that including a review mechanism in policy-decisions is of value in reviewing the implementation of these decisions.
31. Nonetheless, many Member States and United Nations system organizations find that CSD had a strong capacity to enable the sharing of best practices and lessons learned. This is found to be increasingly important in helping countries and other stakeholders to exercise policy choices and adopt sustainable development paths.
32. Many Member States and UN system organizations mention that the link of CSD with the operational part of the UN system has not been strong enough. Neither the governing bodies nor their secretariats looked to the Commission for guidance. Even though some of them participated fairly regularly in the Commission's work, CSD decisions were not seen as driving change in their own work and they felt that their governing bodies provided sufficient guidance in this area. However, some United Nations system organizations stated that, even though CSD was not very successful in having a large impact on policy decisions, it provided in some cases a platform for inspiring action.
33. Additionally, some themes on the agenda attracted involvement of the United Nations System agencies. Thus in CSD-16/17, the theme of agriculture and rural development saw increased engagement of FAO, IFAD and WFP, while CSD-18/19 attracted more involvement from UNEP in the context of the 10-Year Framework of Programmes (10YFP) on sustainable consumption and production.
34. Coordination was another challenge. While the GA special session⁹ called for strengthening the IACSD, it was abolished in 1998. It was replaced by overarching inter-

⁹ Paragraph 120 of the A/S-19/33

agency coordinating mechanisms (such as CEB and its subsidiary bodies) and ad hoc collaborative arrangements. Those have generated mixed results in the mainstreaming of sustainable development in the work of the United Nations system.

B. Agenda setting and developing policy recommendations

Themes and programme of work

35. Responses to the questionnaire suggest that the Commission has played an important role in setting the international agenda on sustainable development in some cases. Its recommendations on specific issues have been taken forward by ECOSOC and the General Assembly. Member States mention a number of its successes. For example, CSD established the United Nations Forum on Forests that was created by ECOSOC in 2000 to promote the management, conservation and sustainable development of forests¹⁰. This filled a gap from Rio Conference in 1992 and paved the way for the Non-Legally Binding Instrument on All Types of Forests adopted by UNFF in 2007.
36. On oceans, it was on the recommendation of CSD-7 that the General Assembly established the UN Informal Consultative Process on Oceans to review developments in ocean affairs.
37. The recommendation of the 2nd session of CSD also led to processes to establish of the Rotterdam Convention on Prior Informed Consent (PIC) and the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs).
38. Another example where the Commission pushed the agenda forward is energy. CSD-9 systematically covered key energy aspects – accessibility, energy efficiency, renewable energy, nuclear energy and identified related challenges. Given that energy lacked an institutional “home” in the UN system, this provided an opportunity to consider energy within the broader sustainable development context. Its work was done through an ad hoc working group which integrated the perspectives of relevant actors in various groups of countries- which helped generating consensus. As a result, negotiations during the main session of the Commission were easy. Building on CSD-9, WSSD made some advances including on financing for modern energy services, as well as diversification of energy resources towards cleaner and renewable energy.
39. It is however on the same topic that CSD-15 did not reach consensus. This may be because it had too many issues on its agenda and lacked a preparatory process akin to the ad hoc working group used for CSD-9.¹¹ However, CSD had interesting discussions on energy that subsequent decisions built on, namely the MDG Summit in 2010 reviewed

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Industrial development, Air pollution/Atmosphere and Climate Change

energy most probably because of discussions during the CSD. This also paved the way for the SG's SE4All initiative, according to one United Nations programme.

40. The Commission has also been the only forum reviewing the implementation of outcomes of global conferences on small island developing States (SIDS). At its 6th session in 1998, the Commission called on UN DESA, UNEP and UNCTAD to help develop a vulnerability index for quantitative and analytical work on the vulnerability of SIDS. Since CSD 12, the Commission has also dedicated a day - the SIDS-Day- for discussing CSD themes from the perspective of SIDS. The Commission was also used in the preparation for the Mauritius Conference.
41. Support to SIDS materialized through the creation of a SIDS Unit in the Division for Sustainable Development and the SIDSNet web platform. After the Mauritius Conference, the Inter-Agency Consultative Group on SIDS was created. It consists of both UN and non-UN organizations active on SIDS issues. It is instrumental in joint planning for SIDS conference in 2014 and coordinating substantive work related to SIDS issues.
42. After the World Summit on Sustainable Development, CSD adopted a multi-year programme of work. The intention was to make the agenda more predictable and to allow better preparation and increased engagement of all stakeholders at all levels. More discussions were also expected to be held during the review year. However, most Member States, United Nations system organizations and Major groups are of the view that setting the multi-year programme of work so many years in advance was not beneficial to the work of the Commission. It proved too rigid to allow the Commission to address critical contemporary challenges and new and emerging issues. It has also did not succeed to allow the Commission to better integrate policies as recommended in Johannesburg. Doing so would have required CSD to allow interaction among Ministers dealing with the various dimensions and sectors of sustainable development at the high-level segments and focus on actions aimed at implementing Agenda 21. In the view of many Member States, this did not happen. They also note that issues related to the environment dominated the agenda.
43. A number of Member States also felt that too many issues were clustered for each given year. This prevented in-depth discussions. A few Member States indicate that debates in the review year were congenial, inclusive and focused, but that this was not carried over to the policy year. The review year allowed focusing more on progress, challenges and exchange of experience, than on lengthy negotiations. Overall, the two-year cycle did not result in action oriented outcomes.
44. With too many issues on the agenda, CSD decisions on the various thematic issues were contained in one single lengthy outcome document. So lack of agreement on one area jeopardized progress on the others. An example is the 10-Year Framework of Programmes for Sustainable Consumption and Production (10YFP). While generally agreed ad referendum at CSD-19, lack of consensus on the overall outcome in the

Commission prevented its adoption. Rio+20 adopted it eventually as a part of the outcome document. On the other hand, the text on mining that was also agreed ad referendum during the 19th session was never formally agreed, although some of its elements are mentioned in the Rio+20 outcome document.

45. CSD also had the mandate to consider funding and technology for sustainable development. All outcomes of CSD had a dedicated section on means of implementation. However, this section rarely went beyond what was already agreed in other fora. CSD-17, however, identified the need for adequate financial resources and technology transfer for each thematic area which contributed to an overall consensus on the outcome document.

Science-policy interface

46. Some Member States and a number of UN system organizations as well as other stakeholders underlined the importance of science-policy interface. Some find that the documentation prepared for the sessions of the Commission taking into account views of Member States, UN system and relevant stakeholders has been useful even though it may not have been utilized to its full potential. They are of the view that some of this documentation is still relevant for the issues discussed.
47. However, some Member States feel that policy decisions have not been sufficiently based on scientific findings as there was too little space for scientists to interact with policy makers even though science and technology was engaged as one of the nine major groups.

Policy decisions and negotiations

48. Several Member States and other stakeholders feel that review years did not contribute to building consensus on issues that were negotiated in the policy years. This was because too many issues stiffened the agenda, prevented in-depth discussions and consensus building and precluded examination of interlinkages among issues as well as with other issues on the international development agenda. Discussions at the Commission often emphasized challenges at the national level and lack of implementation of global commitments, but there was not enough time for building consensus on the various issues and finding common solutions.
49. Processes to prepare for the CSD were not robust enough nor adequately used. A one week intergovernmental preparatory meeting was held every second year. It was mostly used for preparing Chair's text which was the basis for negotiations during the policy session in the same year. The Chair's text usually went with the least common denominator without really looking at the challenges and constraints identified during the review year. As a result, with some notable exceptions like CSD-17 outcome, the outcome was too rigid and not implementable or action-oriented. Regional preparatory meetings were also not sufficiently used and taken into consideration. Nor was national

reporting, which should have contributed to more focused discussions during review years.

50. As a result, many Member States found that negotiations in the policy year were prolonged and tiresome. They sometimes failed to lead to an agreed outcome (CSD-15 and 19). They sometimes had little value added.
51. One Member State indicated that, because CSD was a functional commission of ECOSOC, its decisions depended on additional deliberations in ECOSOC and the GA. This limited their authority and impact. One Member State also points out that this positioning also prevented the commission from becoming the place for dialogue on sustainable development given that ECOSOC was already charged with integrating the three dimensions of sustainable development.

Integration of three dimensions of sustainable development

52. In the eyes of some Member States, United Nations system organizations and stakeholders, a major shortcoming of CSD has been its inability to integrate by attracting participation of representatives from all three dimensions of sustainable development. The Commission, especially in the last ten years, has become a forum for environment ministries at times supplemented by agriculture or other line ministries if the topics warranted it. But, ministries of finance, planning or development have not been represented¹². Some CSD decision however did look at issues from the point of view of all three dimensions. But they lacked legitimacy since other line and core ministries were not present in the discussions and adoption of policies. This undermined implementation of the Commission's outcomes. It also contributed to the Commission being perceived as an environmental body.
53. This was further amplified, in the view of a few Member States, by the diminished participation of developing countries, including least developed countries, in the sessions of the Commission – due to lack of funding.
54. A few Member States expressed the views that having a stronger secretariat of the Commission would have helped monitor progress and provide specific support to countries. This was done more systematically in the earlier days of the establishment of the CSD secretariat, but was later scaled down due to many other pressing issues.

¹² Issue brief, No.3, October 2011, UNCSO Secretariat

C. Major Groups' engagement and participation and multi-stakeholder partnerships

55. Most Member States and other respondents agree that a major characteristic of the Commission has been its openness to the participation of major groups¹³ organizations (non state actors). Multistakeholder dialogues were formally introduced at CSD-6 in response to a mandate of the GA special session.
56. Major Groups produced official papers. They were given a space to intervene during the discussions. They could also comment on the negotiated text. One member of the Bureau of each session of the Commission was charged with liaising with major groups and briefing them on the intergovernmental process. The multistakeholder dialogues also enhanced dialogue with Member States. But, as recognized by a few Member States, their impact on decision-making process was mixed, and at times limited and indirect¹⁴.
57. It is generally perceived that stakeholders bring essential perspectives and expertise to intergovernmental discussions, allowing more informed deliberations. CSD showed great potential as a platform for dialogue and exchange of best practices between stakeholders of all types, including those organizations and implementers that have a substantial political, intellectual, and operational presence in the field.
58. Nonetheless, a few Member States find that major groups were not sufficiently engaged notably in implementation. Few NGOs from the South attended due to lack of funding and those who did were mostly from the environmental sector. Two Member States stated that major NGOs, local governments and the private sector no longer see CSD as a major focus of their work.
59. WSSD recognized the role of voluntary multistakeholder partnerships in implementation of sustainable development (while not substituting for intergovernmental commitments). CSD-11 then mandated the Secretariat to establish a database to register what became known as CSD Partnerships. Those had to fulfill a number of criteria in order to be registered. These developments provided a flexible framework and a solid mandate to work with all stakeholders, including business and industry.

¹³ Business and Industry, Children and Youth, Farmers, Indigenous Peoples, Local Authorities, NGOs, Scientific and Technological Community, Women, Workers and Trade Unions

¹⁴ Dodds, F, Gardiner, R, Hales, D, Hemmati, M and Lawrence, G., Post-Johannesburg: The Future of the Commission on Sustainable Development, Stakeholder Forum Paper, No.9, November 2002 and also see http://www.johannesburgsummit.org/html/documents/prep3_background_papers/msdhstudy2.pdf

60. A Partnership fair has been an official part of all Commission's sessions. It showcased the role and importance of partnerships as an implementation and engagement mechanism and the challenges they face. But it overlapped with the official sessions of the CSD which hindered the review of the contributions of partnerships and opportunities for the CSD to provide guidance. While the Secretary-General report provided summary reports based on voluntary self-reporting from registered partnerships, obtaining current information on partnerships was difficult. The partnerships database never became a well-resourced and modern platform.
61. Since CSD-11, another part of the work of the Commission was the SD-Learning Center. It consisted of courses designed to impart practical knowledge of sustainable development and enhance implementation. However, some sessions were used to showcase existing initiatives without providing enough scope for replicability and scaling-up. This limited the impact on implementation in the view of one Member State. On the other hand, there were some popular courses which provided specific knowledge.
62. In the view of some Member States, side events, even though, not an official part of the Commission's sessions, contributed greatly to further engagement of non-state actors. They have provided a platform for showcasing implementation, networking and enlisting support for partnerships. However, their quality was uneven.

IV. The Way Forward

63. This section highlights some possible implications of the lessons learned from the Commission for the format and organizational aspects of the high-level political forum established at Rio+20. It is not meant to be exhaustive or to preempt the intergovernmental discussions on the forum.
64. Section III shows that issues of integration, implementation, coherence, coordination and agenda setting would need to be central to any discussion on the forum if it is to add value and engage all relevant actors needed to implement sustainable development at all levels.

A. Reviewing and monitoring progress

65. For the forum to be able to follow-up and give high-level policy guidance on implementation, as suggested in Rio+20, sufficient time should be allocated to preparing its high-level meetings as suggested by a few Member States. At the same time, a few Member States stress that the task to review implementation of sustainable development commitments should be handed over to ECOSOC.
66. A thorough and inclusive process to prepare for the forum would also help to spur progress in sustainable development. It would help to avoid protracted negotiations at the forum – which would undermine the impact of the forum's outcomes. It would generate ownership of the forum's outcome from the "bottom-up" and thus greater legitimacy.

67. Such preparations can be done formally or informally. They need to be undertaken from the country level up to the regional and global levels, including discussion on the means of implementation.
68. At the **country level**, the forum could encourage the creation of platforms for sharing experiences and lessons learned among governmental, non-governmental stakeholders including multi-stakeholder partnerships, and the UN system present on the ground, as well as the launch of voluntary commitments.
69. Some Member States underscored the important role of the forum in fostering an exchange of national experiences and lessons learned both among Member States and with other actors. A limited number of national voluntary presentations could be made at each session of the forum. This would allow countries to share their experiences and lessons learned and to learn from others. Such presentations could be made by both developed and developing countries.
70. It would be important to strengthen national capacities to engage in the forum and its preparations. The UN system could help in this regard. One Member State suggests that the forum maintain an interactive and up-to-date sustainable development knowledge management platform and a database for sharing practices and lessons learned.
71. At **regional level**, regional commissions would need to strengthen sustainable development as an overarching framework of their work. They should help discuss issues that are specific to each region. They need to review progress against commitments, gaps and challenges. They need to engage with all relevant regional actors, including major groups, the rest of the UN system and other partners. They should develop recommendations for the forum, either on its theme or on emerging or other issues, for its consideration. They also need to foster the mainstreaming of sustainable development at national level, ensuring that the policy decisions taken at the global level are relevant to regional and national levels as well as supporting their implementation.
72. Several Member States recommend that the forum engage regional commissions more systematically in its sessions, including through their involvement in an enhanced reporting and accountability mechanism for implementation. Interregional dialogues might be a useful component of the forum's programme.
73. At the **global level**, inputs from regional and national level need to have a space so that they are duly taken into consideration when policy decisions are taken.
74. One issue raised by many Member States is how the forum can attract high-level participants from all three areas of sustainable development. One suggests holding the forum at the time of important meetings engaging various communities such as ECOSOC. Another idea might be for the forum to have three co-chairs, one from each area of sustainable development. *Underpinning the work of the forum should indeed be the guiding principle of integration. The forum should foster it (i) at the normative level through appropriate political guidance, (ii) at the regional and country levels through*

promoting implementation and practical approaches. It needs to set its agenda with a view to addressing high priority, timely and relevant issues and challenges facing Member States. It needs to make sure that its decisions are action-oriented and implementable at all levels.

B. Agenda setting and developing policy recommendations

75. The agenda of the forum is central to promoting an integrated discussion of the three dimensions of sustainable development and to ensuring that the forum has an impact on the lives of people. It is also critical to assure engagement of all relevant actors in the economic, social and environmental areas around themes that are not discussed in other places, especially SIDS.
76. To promote integration of the three dimensions, the forum could address annually a cross-sectoral theme. This would attract participation from across relevant line ministries as well as United Nations system organizations. Such theme could build on those identified in Rio+20 but does not need to be limited to them.
77. The forum could also focus on a nexus of issues or cluster of critical themes, such as water, energy, climate change, food, and agriculture. Several Member States underscore that any theme should be reviewed from the vantage point of the three dimensions of sustainable development and that the Forum should focus on interrelationships among issues and possible trade offs.
78. The choice of theme(s) or cluster of themes should ensure focus on relevant and current themes where the Forum can contribute to “pushing the envelope”, as the Commission did in the areas of forests, chemicals, energy and oceans.
79. The forum should also find appropriate ways to continue addressing issues related to small island developing States, for example by dedicating a special day to those countries and mainstreaming their concerns throughout its work.
80. The forum could also be a natural platform to follow-up on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) since they “should address and incorporate in a balanced way all three dimensions of sustainable development and their interlinkages”¹⁵. One Member State suggested developing a common framework to review progress towards sustainable development, including indicators accepted by all.
81. There is also a need to address means of implementation in an adequate and coherent way. The forum will need to take into consideration the future report of the intergovernmental committee of experts that will examine a financing strategy for sustainable development and build further on the mandate of the CSD in this area.

¹⁵ Paragraph 246 of A/66/288

82. Agenda setting should assure a balance between (i) ensuring a degree of predictability which would require establishing the agenda in advance to allow for enough time to prepare for the forum's sessions, and (ii) allowing the forum to address new and emerging sustainable development issues. For example, there could be a 2-3 year advance agenda and a dedicated item for addressing new and emerging issues.
83. The work and guidance of the forum needs to be supported with a much stronger science-policy interface. Documentation should be prepared with closer involvement of the scientific community. The global report on sustainable development mandated in Rio+20 will be critical in this regard.
84. The Secretariat should thus be strong enough to be a link with the scientific community. At the same time, it should have a sufficient capacity to help respond to country needs for support related to their engagement in the HLPF, working closely with the UN system.
85. As noted by several Member States, the forum should provide high-level policy guidance and leadership to the UN system and spur system-wide coordination and coherence. The UN system, including international financial institutions, should be engaged at all levels to prepare for the meetings of the forum, with specialized agencies contributing important expertise as noted by one Member State. This would develop a greater sense of ownership of the forum's recommendations and a greater commitment to mainstream them in their respective strategic plans, thus spurring implementation.
86. A few Member States consider that a negotiated outcome may not be the best way for the forum to advance sustainable development. In this regard, it might be considered to have varied types of outcomes, such as a communiqué, technical decisions and the launch of new initiatives.
87. Many Member States stress that the forum should avoid duplicating and instead achieve synergies with existing fora, including the GA, ECOSOC, other UN system organizations and MEAs. In view of the latest governance changes, it is important to maintain a strong link to UNEP with its universal membership and United Nations Environment Assembly, as part of the closer integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development. The same holds for relevant bodies in the economic and social domains. Two Member States see the forum reporting directly to the General Assembly, without prejudice to its relationship with ECOSOC. Two note that ECOSOC, as a functions-based body, can add value notably by guiding its subsidiary machinery and fostering greater coordination among subsidiary bodies in pursuit of sustainable development.

C. Involvement of non-state actors

88. In the view of many Member States and other stakeholders, an important challenge for the forum will be how to engage non-state actors in a more meaningful way in its work, while retaining its intergovernmental nature. The preparatory process for HLPF could be multistakeholder in nature, so that recommendations to be considered by policy makers

also benefit from inputs of major groups as was done at the ministerial level multistakeholder dialogues in CSD.

89. It will also be important to explore different modalities for participation and consultation of non-state actors going beyond the modalities of CSD. Member States suggest giving more time to major groups in official debates, and engaging more effectively the private sector. Innovative models might be studied such as the creation of an Advisory Group in ECOSOC, as suggested by one Member State. Besides CSD good practices, the FAO Committee on Food Security and the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM) are also possible models. One Member State suggests reviewing the structure of major groups.
90. Partnerships for sustainable development and voluntary commitments also need be strengthened to boost implementation of sustainable development. One Member State suggests that the forum focus on innovative partnerships in priority areas and on their role in implementation.
91. It might also be considered to hold an implementation segment to feature progress made by partnerships and voluntary commitments in implementation, in the interest of fostering accountability. Such a meeting could engage different stakeholders, focusing on thematic priorities. It could also be considered to organize intersessional workshops for major groups to build capacity and broker activities, exchange good practices and lessons learned.
92. Some Member States and other stakeholders consider that funding should be provided to support participation of developing countries and major groups from those countries in the forum, in order to assure better representativeness. National and regional preparations would also need to be supported.

Conclusion

93. The lessons learned from twenty years of the work of the Commission on Sustainable Development should be the starting point for giving final shape to its replacement, the high-level political forum on sustainable development. The setting of a focused agenda, its working methods and the related challenge of energized and high-level engagement will be the key to its success. As part of the institutional framework for sustainable development, the forum should have a clear niche, strongly linked to the follow-up of Rio+20 and other related conferences and summits, while at the same time helping mainstream sustainable development in the work of the United Nations, including the General Assembly and ECOSOC. To overcome the shortcomings and build on the strengths of the Commission on Sustainable Development, the forum would need to maintain a strong focus on implementation at all levels, including sharing of experiences; furthering integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development, engaging more strongly the economic and social policy making communities; enhancing the engagement of major groups, the academic and scientific community; having a focused and flexible

agenda and a robust preparation process, with support from a stronger UN inter-agency process; encouraging and strengthening partnerships, initiatives and voluntary commitments, and reviewing and monitoring progress on a regular basis.