

speaking for the CSD/NGO Steering Committee

“Working Towards Earth Summit III”

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SIDS NGOs – Encouraged but Fearful

NGOs in Small Island Developing States (SIDS) fear that their governments may sign agreements which are detrimental to the economy, culture and welfare of their people, writes John Maskell in this commentary.

The NGOs from Small Island Developing States (SIDS) are somewhat encouraged by progress on the Program of Action (POA) since the World Conference on SIDS (Barbados 1994). Still they remain fearful that their governments will let them down. The Barbados World Conference singled out 41 SIDS as needing special consideration with respect to sustainable development. This is encouraging.

The fact that a POA was negotiated and agreed upon by the world community, is also encouraging. It is also positive that industrialized countries have committed and expended financial resources to the SIDS POA.

More is promised

There are even indications that more is to be promised. Unfortunately, much of this spending was not linked to the POA. How strong is the world's commitment and how willing are the nations of the world to follow through? Will CSD-7 and the UNGASS in September become more rounds of words, words, words and defer, defer, defer or will there be decision, commitment and action?

The SIDS NGOs fear that their governments may sign agreements with multilateral agencies, developed country governments and transnational corporations (TNCs) which are detrimental to the economy, culture and welfare of their people. They fear that many politicians and government officials are ill prepared for high level negotiations and will consequently be poor players in the “big league.”

The NGOs recognize that some developed country governments and TNCs wield enormous power in both public

and private sector institutions and that their interests may be diametrically opposed to the interests of SIDS. NGOs feel that there are double standards at work. SIDS are forced to pursue policies that are democratic, open and transparent for donor country's and corporations' information, evaluation and assessment. Whereas donor countries enforce policies that are far from being democratic, such as Structural Adjustment Policies (SAPs) on SIDS.

SIDS NGOs still hopeful

The Structural Adjustment Policies of the IMF and the World Bank have been demonstrated to further impoverish the economy, culture and welfare of the target communities. Yet the international community continues to enforce them and be blind to the devastating effect of SAPs on SIDS.

SIDS NGOs hopes and expectations are reasonable. They hope that out of the deliberations of CSD and UNGASS the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) and its regional focal points of the South Pacific, Indian, Caribbean and Atlantic Oceans will be strengthened with staff and resources. They hope that the SIDS UN Secretariat, which is now buried in the Water Management Branch, will become a stand-alone unit in the Commission for Sustainable Development.

EU pledging one billion?

They expect that some developed countries and TNCs will fund a few initiatives although they hope for a program approach to the POA rather than a project approach.

Some, if not complete, debt cancellation should be possible. They will also be pushing for the “engagement” if not the

“marriage” of the SIDS POA (a UN planning process) and the African/Caribbean/Pacific Countries and the European Community Agreement (ACPC-EU) in which there is over one billion dollars committed for SIDS.

There are challenges inherent in sustainable development for SIDS such as the reduction of donor duplication, greater donor co-ordination and the integration of the multi-stakeholder approach to development. When the major groups in society such as national and local government, NGOs, business and banking cooperate together in the SIDS much can be accomplished.

But the greatest challenge is to the whole world community. If we, the citizens of planet Earth are not ready, willing and able to do sustainable development in the SIDS, where the cost is relatively minimal and manageable, then where in the world will we do it?

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Major Challenges for the Oceans & Seas

CSD must address international mechanisms on the oceans and seas, and activities must be in support of action at national and regional levels. If not, major challenges facing the oceans and seas will probably never be resolved, writes Siân Pullen, WWF-UK.

The elements for a draft Decision by the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) addresses the major challenges facing the oceans and seas at the national, regional and international levels. It emphasizes the importance of international cooperation in ensuring that all States can benefit from the rational use of the oceans and seas and their resources and in ensuring that biological diversity is conserved. In order to achieve these goals, the draft.

Decision indicates that the CSD should recommend that priority is given to the major challenges facing the oceans and seas, the conservation and sustainable management of fisheries and the prevention of pollution and degradation of the marine environment from land-based sources.

CSD decision not a definitive statement

The draft Decision also emphasizes the importance of improving the understanding of how oceans and seas interact with the world climate system. It further asks for enhancing international cooperation in support of action at the national level in developing countries and in countries with economies in transition.

While perhaps not the definitive statement on the oceans and seas, the final element is absolutely fundamental to achieving the goals of rational use and conservation of biological diversity. Since the first Earth Summit in 1992, a large number of international agreements have been concluded and commitments have been made addressing the major challenges facing the oceans and

seas. Yet few have been fully implemented worldwide.

Demands must be met

CSD must address the mechanisms dealing with international cooperation, the provision of technical assistance, transfer of environmentally sound technology and finance. All activities must be in support of action at national and regional levels. If above demands are not met, the major challenges facing the oceans and seas will probably never be resolved.

These statements were made yesterday at the Roundtable on Oceans - the Challenges in Front of Us - organized by The Norwegian Forum for Environment and Development.

NGOs can contribute to making CSD on oceans a success

Almost 40 NGOs and delegates were present at the roundtable on oceans and seas organized by the Norwegian Forum for Environment and Development yesterday.

The panelists were Special adviser Bill Mansfield, to Simon Upton, Chair of the CSD, Deputy Director Arab Hoballah from UNEP, Jane Earley, Chief Executive of the Marine Stewardship Council and Sian Pullen of WWF UK .

Challenging issues

Several challenging issues were raised after the interventions by the four panelists. There was however, unanimous agreement among the panelists and the participants that the most important issues to be dealt with by the CSD on oceans, were overfishing and eliminating the sources of land based activities leading to the pollution of the oceans.

An overwhelming majority of the participating NGOs pointed to the fact that subsidizing the fishing fleets was one of the major forces behind the global overfishing.

NGOs with new alliances

How could the NGOs participate in promoting a sustainable management of the oceans and seas? Jane Early of the MSC observed that CSD and the participating NGOs often showed an unnecessary hostility towards the private sector and marked based solutions to environmental problems.

Early pointed to the fact the consumers themselves could help promote sustain-

able fishing through responding positively to eco-labeling of fish products. The criteria for eco-labeling was already developed by FAO.

Frightening pollution

Sian Pullen of the WWF-UK drew a frightening scenario on marine pollution. More than 20 million tonnes of pollution were emptied annually into the oceans. Were we not to experience dead oceans, international conventions forbidding all land based activities that would pollute the oceans and seas, must be ratified as soon as possible.

Deputy Director Arab Abholla of UNEP and Special Adviser Bill Mansfield both

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phasized the positive role NGOs often played in international negotiations. NGOs are added value at the local level by pushing for practical programmes here. Mr. Mansfield pointed to the fact that NGOs had to ensure the support of local communities in order to be successful in fighting marine pollution. A point sometimes overlooked by NGOs that had grown to be large international organizations.

Corrigendum on GESAMP – we apologize

OUTREACH unfortunately gave the acronym GESAMP an incorrect interpretation yesterday. The name was changed in the mid-nineties to “Joint Group of Experts on the Scientific Aspects of Marine Environmental protection”. The acronym however, stays the same.

There will be an interagency meeting this summer to review its work. For more information, see doc. E/CN 17/ 1999/4, para. 53

Announcements

Announcements		
Thursday		
9.00-8.00	NGO Strategy Session	Conference Room D
2.00-3.00	US-NGO Briefing regarded Oceans and SIDS	Conference Room 4
Friday		
9.00-10.00	NGO Strategy Session	Conference Room D
10.00-11.00	Human Rights Caucus	Conference Room D
1.15-2.45	NGO/CSD Steering Committee	Conference Room D
3.00-4.00	Energy and Climate Change Caucus	Conference Room D

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