



EARTH SUMMIT+5

Special Session of the General Assembly to Review and Appraise
the Implementation of Agenda 21

Sustaining the Future

The environment became an international issue in 1972, with the UN Conference on the Human Environment, held in Stockholm. In the following years, only limited results were achieved in making the environment part of national development plans and decision-making. While some progress was made on scientific and technical issues, politically, the environment continued to be neglected with ozone depletion, global warming, forest degradation and other environmental problems becoming more serious.

When the UN set up the World Commission on Environment and Development in 1983, environmental preservation was clearly becoming a matter of survival for everyone. Led by Gro Harlem Brundtland of Norway, the Commission concluded that to meet "the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs," environmental protection and economic growth would have to be tackled as one issue.

As a result of the Brundtland report, the UN General Assembly convened the UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED). The Conference -- known as the Earth Summit -- took place in Rio de Janeiro from 3 to 14 June 1992. It was a turning-point in international negotiations on issues of environment and development.

The primary goal of the Summit was to find an equitable balance between the economic, social and environmental needs of present and future generations and to lay the foundation for a global partnership between developed and developing countries as well as between governments and sectors of civil society based on common understanding of shared needs and interests.

The Earth Summit Agreements



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In Rio, 172 Governments, including 108 Heads of State or Government, adopted three major agreements to guide future work: Agenda 21 -- a global plan of action to promote sustainable development; the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development -- a set of principles defining the rights and obligations of States; and a Statement of Forest Principles -- to guide more sustainable management of the world's forests.

In addition, two legally binding Conventions, one on Climate Change and the other on Biological Diversity were opened for signature at the Earth Summit. At the same time, negotiations got underway for a Convention to Combat Desertification which was opened for signature in October 1994 and entered into force in December 1996.

Agenda 21

Agenda 21 addresses today's pressing problems with over 2,500 recommendations for action. It aims to prepare the world for the challenges of the next century and contains detailed proposals in social and economic areas, such as combatting poverty, changing patterns of production and consumption, demographic dynamics, conserving and managing our natural resources, protecting the atmosphere, oceans and biodiversity, preventing deforestation, and promoting sustainable agriculture, among others.

Agenda 21 recommends ways to strengthen the role of major groups--women, trade unions, farmers, children and young people, indigenous peoples, the scientific community, local authorities, business, industry and non-governmental organizations (NGOs)-- in action for sustainable development.

In adopting Agenda 21, the Conference called for several major initiatives in key areas of sustainable development. These included a global conference on small island developing states (SIDS) resulting in the SIDS Programme of Action, a legally



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binding UN Convention to Combat Desertification, and talks on preventing the depletion of stocks of highly migratory and straddling fish stocks.

The Rio Declaration

The Rio Declaration defines the rights and obligations of States with respect to basic principles of environment and development. It includes the ideas that: scientific uncertainty should not delay measures to protect the environment; States have a "sovereign right to exploit their own resources" but should not cause damage to the environment of other States; eradicating poverty and reducing disparities in worldwide standards of living are "indispensable" for sustainable development; and, the full participation of women is essential for achieving sustainable development.

Forest Principles

The non-legally binding statement of principles for the sustainable management of forests was the "first global consensus" reached on forests. Its key provisions include that "all countries, notably developed countries, should make an effort to "green the world" through reforestation and forest conservation; States have a right to develop forests according to their socio-economic needs," and that specific financial resources should be provided to developing countries to establish forest conservation programmes to encourage economic and social substitution policies.

The Forest Principles were followed in 1995 by the establishment of an Intergovernmental Panel On Forests (IPF), as a subsidiary body of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD).

The UN Commission on Sustainable Development



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The Commission on Sustainable Development was set up following the Earth Summit to support, encourage and monitor action by Governments, UN agencies and major groups, such as, business and industry, non-governmental organizations and other sectors of civil society to implement the agreements reached at the Earth Summit.

The Commission is made up of representatives of 53 Governments elected from UN Member States, based on equitable geographical balance. Each member serves a three-year term. Elections are held annually to fill the seats vacated on a rotational basis. Intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations accredited to the Commission can attend sessions as observers.

The Commission reports to the Economic and Social Council and makes recommendations to the General Assembly. The Commission meets annually in New York. The first session was held one year after Rio, from 14-26 June 1993; the second session took place from 16-27 May 1994; the third from 11-28 April 1995; and the fourth session from 18 April to 3 May 1996.

The Commission's mandate is to review implementation of the Earth Summit accords, provide policy guidance to Governments and major groups involved in sustainable development and strengthen Agenda 21 by devising new strategies where necessary. It seeks to promote dialogue and build partnerships between Governments, UN agencies and major groups which are key to achieving sustainable development worldwide.

Under a multi-year thematic work programme, adopted at its first session, the Commission monitors Agenda 21 and receives annual reports from Governments and inputs from major group organizations. In 1997, the General Assembly will review overall progress since the Earth Summit and make recommendations for future action as we enter the 21st century.



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Cross-sectoral issues that are considered in conjunction with sectoral issues include: trade and environment; patterns of production and consumption; combating poverty; demographic dynamics; financial resources and mechanisms; education, science, transfer of environmentally sound technologies, technical cooperation and capacity building; decision-making; and activities of major groups.

Reports submitted annually by Governments are the main basis for assessing progress and identifying problems faced by countries. By mid-1996, some 75 Governments reported having established national sustainable development commissions or other coordinating bodies. Many countries were seeking legislative approval for sustainable development plans and the level of NGO involvement remains high in most countries.

To help countries formulate policies for sustainability and regulate their impact, Agenda 21 recognizes the need for a set of internationally accepted indicators of sustainable development. It is planned that a set of indicators, from which Governments may select those most appropriate to local conditions, will be available to all countries by the year 2000. The Commission's work on changing patterns of production and consumption, particularly in developed countries, includes promoting changes towards more sustainable patterns of consumption and production and assessing the impact on developing countries of changing consumption and production in developed countries. Transfer of environmentally sound technologies is another area where the Commission approved a programme of work designed to further progress towards cleaner forms of industrial production.

The Commission is expanding the outreach of Agenda 21 in other areas by working with the World Trade Organization (WTO), the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) to



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ensure that trade, environment and sustainable development issues are consistent and mutually supportive.

Work in various sectoral areas is also being strengthened. After identifying an emerging water crisis, the Commission called for a global assessment of all freshwater sources to be completed by 1997. The Commission also called for more coordinated and focused work on energy issues. In 1994, it established the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests (IPF), as a subsidiary body, to study in greater detail and report on the sustainable management of the world's forest resources.

UN Agency Cooperation

Recognizing that UN agencies and programmes are well placed to assist Governments in implementing Agenda 21, the Earth Summit called on the UN system to streamline its operations and to make better use of expertise in different parts of the system.

In response, the UN Secretary-General established in October 1992, the UN Inter-agency Committee on Sustainable Development (IACSD) to identify major policy issues and ensure effective system-wide cooperation and coordination in the follow-up to the Earth Summit.

UN agencies act as Task Managers for different chapters of Agenda 21, based on their areas of expertise. They are responsible for organizing UN system-wide activities in implementing Agenda 21 and reporting on progress. The Committee reports to the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC), which is chaired by the Secretary-General.

High-Level Advisory Board



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The UN Secretary-General also set up a High-Level Advisory Board (HLAB) on Sustainable Development, in July 1993, following a recommendation of the Earth Summit.

Made up of 21 eminent persons acting in their personal capacities, the Board advises the Secretary-General and the Commission on emerging issues related to sustainable development. It helps to formulate policy proposals, devise innovative ways for resolving problems and identify new issues which should be brought to the attention of UN committees, programmes and agencies.

In the four years of its operation, the High-Level Advisory Board has been an active proponent of measures to achieve sustainable development. Its influence is felt not only through the quality of its policy guidance, but also in the range of its contacts with community and professional groups.

Intergovernmental Panel on Forests

The Intergovernmental Panel on Forests was established with a two-year mandate at the Commission's third session in April 1995, reflecting the widespread concern for the world's forests and the critical goods and services -- economic, social, cultural and environmental -- that they provide. The purpose of the Panel is to give concentrated attention to sustainable forest management and implementation of the Earth Summit decisions related to forests. The Panel's mandate includes the need to formulate national forest programmes, the productive role of forests, trade in forest products and the environment, the conservation of biological diversity, the role of forests in mitigating global climate change, and respect for the rights of indigenous people and forest dwellers. It also covers issues of technical and financial cooperation between countries. The Panel is expected to deliver its final report to the 1997 session of the Commission on Sustainable Development.



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The Spirit of Rio

Since the Earth Summit in 1992, the "Spirit of Rio" lives on through the actions of governments, international organizations, major groups, and individuals around the world.

The Commission can justifiably be called the steward of the "Rio Spirit" and of sustainable development. The CSD has not only managed to mobilize the interest and active involvement of Governments and the United Nations system, including the development banks, but has also captured the attention of non-governmental groups and the public-at-large.

The response to Agenda 21 and the work of the Commission has been encouraging with a multitude of public and private initiatives aimed at implementing the results of the Earth Summit. The Commission has gotten this response because of the urgency of its subject matter and the open and transparent way it has conducted its business. The effort to be inclusive has generated support for the Commission and commitment to its work programme. The main issues facing countries in their development agendas are being urgently addressed by the Commission as it attempts to integrate economic, social and environmental concerns.

Action by Major Groups

Inspired by the Earth Summit and encouraged by the work of the Commission, people and organizations all over the world have translated Agenda 21 into practical action in local communities. The following examples are illustrative of the range of action that has been undertaken.

In early 1994, the Confederation of Zimbabwe Industries launched a "Clean, Green and Profitable" (CGP) programme to assist selected industries in Zimbabwe in developing their



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managerial and technical capacity to improve environmental performance. The initial focus is on working with management to develop commitment and corporate strategies to improve performance, and on environmental and "housekeeping" audits to seek immediate opportunities to reduce inputs of materials, water and energy and outputs of wastes.

In Metro Manila a quiet revolution is going on with the Metro Manila Resource Recovery Program which is supported by three groups: the Clean and Green Foundation, the Metro Manila Linis-Ganda, and the Department of Environment, River Rehabilitation Secretariat. They have organized junk shop owners into environmental cooperatives registered with the Cooperative Development Authority. There is an orderly system where eco-aides collect and buy materials and the junk shop owners sort out the material and sell it to factories and other buyers. This collection system helps to reduce the pressure on dump sites by 60 to 70 per cent. It is a local initiative run by local people with local resources.

In Namibia, women, youth and NGO groups are actively involved in national efforts to combat desertification in the country's three desert areas: the Namib, Kalahari and Karoo. Media coverage is expanding, villages are involved and drama group performances, workshops and newsletters try to educate the citizenry on this issue. Sociological surveys and rainfall mapping have been undertaken in 1993-94 and the Directorates of Environmental Affairs and Resource Management, together with the Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Rural Development, are responsible for national actions. The country faces many problems, but there is a national priority campaign to deal with the economic, social and environmental challenges of desertification.

In Nepal, the Community Forestry Project is engaged in the reforestation of severely eroded areas of the country through the establishment of community managed forests. This



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community based effort is intended to reduce the demand for fuel wood by spreading knowledge on the construction and use of fuel efficient stoves.

Uruguay and the World Federation of Engineering Organizations have agreed to set up a regional centre for Latin America and the Caribbean to promote engineering for sustainable development. The Centre will gather and disseminate information to engineers, organize training course on sustainable development themes and promote the study of engineering projects in the region.

A coalition of 40 groups from 16 Latin American countries, supported by the Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO, USA) and backed by UN agencies, is helping local women to train others at the grassroots level to promote environmental education and awareness of sustainable development issues. In Europe, North America and other industrialized countries, women are promoting consumer awareness of the environmental impact of products, especially toxic chemicals, pesticides and radiation. They have played a key role in recent intersessional meetings on changing consumer buying habits and patterns of production.

Earth Summit+5 in 1997

The Earth Summit agreed that a five-year review of progress would be made in 1997 by the United Nations General Assembly meeting in special session. The special session is to evaluate how well countries, international organizations and civil society have responded to the challenge of the Earth Summit. "Earth Summit+5" will involve heads of State and Government policy-makers in broad-based consultations at all levels, from the local to the international, to undertake a comprehensive and honest assessment of where we stand in realizing the goals set out at the Earth Summit. Its purpose is to identify and recognize the positive achievements in implementing the Earth Summit



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agreements and promote their replication throughout the world. It will also seek to pinpoint shortcomings and failures and suggest corrective action. The review will further the global partnership needed to achieve sustainable development and will strive to renew the commitment of Governments, non-governmental organizations, major group representatives and citizens-at-large to the challenges of the next century. An important aim is to identify the priorities and objectives and outline a work plan for the next phase of Earth Summit implementation leading into the 21st century.

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