

The UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) An Overview

What is the CSD?

The Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) is a functional commission of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). Created in December, 1992, the CSD was one of the major outcomes of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), also known as the Earth Summit. The CSD is mandated to track the implementation of the Earth Summit's outcome documents—Agenda 21 and the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development—as well as the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation.

Because the CSD brings together government, international and civil society sectors, it is one of the most important forums within the UN to discuss the environment and sustainable development. The CSD provides an opportunity for stakeholders to network, share best practices, lobby the CSD and forge cross-sector partnerships to address the economic, social and environmental aspects of sustainable development. The CSD offers the opportunity each year to stress the importance of gender equality as a cross-cutting issue within sustainable development.

Who participates in the CSD?

The Commission is composed of 53 member states, elected according to geographic distribution for three year terms. Additionally, other states, UN organizations, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) participate as observers.

NGO participation is governed by the NGO Steering Committee, established to guide NGO and Major Group involvement. Within the Committee, Caucuses are established to further focus activities. Leadership of the Caucuses is designed to be representative of geographic diversity, as well as gender balanced. Caucuses can be regionally, issue, or “Major-Group” based. These major groups are those identified by Agenda 21 as critical to the development process, and include: Women; Children and Youth; Indigenous People; NGOs; Local Authorities; Workers and Trade Unions; Business and Industry; Scientific and Technological Communities; and Farmers.

How does the CSD work?

Annual meetings of the Commission are structured in two year cycles that focus on different sustainable development and cross-cutting issues. Each cycle consists of a Review Year and a Policy Year. The Review Year, which is the first meeting in the cycle, evaluates the state of sustainable development and the problems and obstacles in implementing sustainable development practices. The Policy Year, which is the second meeting, aims to generate policy guidelines to address the obstacles raised in the previous year's session. The work of the CSD also includes inter-sessional meetings, and takes into consideration submissions from the Secretary-General, Major Groups and Regional Implementation Meetings.

The CSD session itself consists of thematic and regional discussions, multi-stakeholder dialogues, a high-level segment, a Partnership Fair to share experiences of registered “Partnerships for Sustainable Development”, a Learning Centre and multiple side events.

What are the outcomes of the CSD meetings?

The CSD usually ends in a series of reports, statements, and recommendations to governments. Additionally, Regional Implementation Meetings produce reports on the progress of implementing sustainable development goals in different geographic areas. Following the CSD 17 in 2009, a Multistakeholder Dialogue on Implementing Sustainable Development was established to further facilitate implementation of the CSD goals. Specifically, this dialogue evaluates the progress that implementing partners have made toward achieving CSD decisions; raises awareness of better technologies and strategies; and builds stronger relationships between different levels of government, as well as between government and civil society.

Because CSD 18 is a Review Year, the outcome of this year’s meeting will be a report summarizing the discussions at the session and the Partnership Fair and Learning Centre. The report from CSD 18 will inform the policy decisions made in the second year of the cycle at CSD 19.

How is this year important for women?

This year will review the thematic cluster of transport, chemicals, waste management (hazardous and solid waste), mining, and the ten-year Framework of Programs on Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns. Sustainable consumption and production patterns are particularly relevant to gender issues and gender equality. Women tend to be responsible for household consumption decisions, generally consume less than men, and are often excluded from decision making processes regarding these issues. Women’s voices are therefore critical in the discussion of consumption and production.

Additionally, this year’s CSD is followed by a preparatory committee meeting for Rio+20 (Earth Summit 2012). The CSD affords participants an opportunity to discuss important sustainable development issues as well as to plan for the upcoming international summit. Rio+20 also marks WEDO’s 20th anniversary and raises the possibility of a second world women’s conference.

How does WEDO participate in the CSD?

For years, WEDO served as an organizing partner in the Women’s Major Group. Most recently, WEDO partnered with Energia in 2006-2007 to convene the Women’s Caucus when the thematic focus areas included climate change, energy efficiency and renewable energy, and air pollution. This year, WEDO will attend the CSD and side events, connect with colleagues and offer a gender perspective in the appropriate forums. Additionally, WEDO is convening an unofficial side event on the importance of the new gender entity at the UN for furthering gender equality in sustainable development.