

Informal summary of ECOSOC 2008 Annual Ministerial Review Preparatory Meeting

6 March 2008

1.) AMR Global Preparatory Meeting

Opening of the Meeting:

Welcome by H.E. Ambassador **Léo Mérorès**, President of ECOSOC;
Opening remarks by Mr. **Sha Zukang**, Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs

Ambassador Mérorès set out the main objectives of the AMR Global Preparatory Meeting. Highlighting that the meeting can provide important impetus to ECOSOC's two new mandates, he pointed to delivering on implementation as the focus of today's first panel, and ECOSOC's role in achieving sustainable development as the focus of the second panel discussion of this meeting. He stressed that National Voluntary Presentations should not be a one time event but a continuous process that allows to share experiences and incentives to step up implementation efforts. In exploring ways to enhance impact at country level, the Council could learn from other review processes such as those undertaken by the OECD and the African Union.

He mentioned four points about the implementation of sustainable development agendas that can be drawn from the ongoing Ediscussion: (i) there is a need for greater policy coherence at all levels, (ii) countries are still struggling to integrate sustainable development's three pillars, (iii) as well as different time horizons, and (iv) capacity needs to be built in both developed and developing countries.

Today's key preparatory event, with the active participation of multiple stake-holders, could be instructive on how July's high-level dialogue can take place in an open, candid and interactive fashion.

Mr. Sha suggested the AMR should be the implementation of the UN's ARM, where A stands for Accountability, R for Review and Renewal of Commitments and M for Mobilizing and Maintaining the Momentum.

As regards accountability, Mr. Sha argued that all those who signed up to the UNDA are accountable to themselves, their people and the international community. AMR can help facilitating this accountability process at the global, regional and national levels. The annual global ministerial deliberations focus on lags in meeting commitments and how these can be addressed. At the regional level, Mr. Sha suggested that each region should hold consultations to bring to the global AMR a consolidated regional picture. Similarly, national workshops or preparatory consultations held by countries that volunteer for National Voluntary Presentations (NVP) can further enhance accountability.

The spirit of the AMR should be a cooperative one, where commitments are reviewed and renewed and specific measures adopted to meet them. To make a real dent on implementation, AMR must be established as a process with a proper preparation and, most importantly, follow-up action in order to maintain and mobilize momentum. The E-discussion and the AMR Innovation Fair are steps in this direction. The Innovation Fair should now evolve from a showcase of successful practices to a “Solution Finding Forum” for problems with implementing UNDA. To keep NVP countries engaged in the process and to provide ECOSOC with an update, an NVP alumni roster could be created. UNDESA will also launch a new NVP website this year, which will display “policies that work”, identified by different countries and will provide access to a global network of experts to support states in assessing the implementation of their development strategies.

Panel 1 – Annual Ministerial Review: Delivering on Implementation

How to strengthen the follow-up to the review? How to promote action where volunteering countries need help from the international community?

H.E. Mr. Antonio Pedro Monteiro Lima, Permanent Representative of Cape Verde to the United Nations, New York.

Mr. Eckhard Deutscher, Chair, Development Assistance Committee, Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development.

Mr. Lima argued that NVPs need to have an impact and this requires them to be embedded in a proper preparatory and follow-up process. Preparations for last year’s NVPs were somewhat rushed due to late decisions by the Council. He welcomed the fact that the Secretariat will assist countries in preparing for and defining the objectives of their NVPs this year. More guidance from the Council was however needed for the follow-up of NVPs. The guiding principle should be how to facilitate maximum progress in implementation on the ground. Therefore, AMR findings should be fed back into national development strategies. In the year following the NVP a list of proposed, well-targeted interventions to address unforeseen obstacles could be identified and presented during the ECOSOC coordination segment. This list should clearly spell out which interventions need support from the international community and the UN system.

Mr. Lima welcomed the proposed NVP web platform to help countries learn how other countries addressed similar challenges. A regional level exchange between former NVP countries and other countries from the region on lessons learned would also be something very useful.

Mr. Deutscher highlighted the multitude of events that have taken place so far and that are scheduled for this year to increase aid and development assistance. To achieve MDGs it is crucial to increase both the quantity and the quality of international aid, which was also endorsed in the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness. He agreed with the President of ECOSOC on the need of promoting greater interactive among different stakeholders. The OECD will ensure that the linkages among the various processes are visible and

meaningful and will facilitate knowledge-sharing between the Accra and regional FfD preparatory events and the DCF. He underscored that crucial to fulfilling the commitments to implement the MDGs are mutual accountability, knowledge sharing, policy dialogue, cooperation and follow-up mechanisms.

Discussion:

The purpose of the AMR should be to identify successes and challenges at the national and international levels in implementing development strategies, as well as development partners and policy recommendations to advance the implementation process. It thereby takes a broader look at development as such and goes beyond discussions of development aid or cooperation effectiveness. There is, however, a need for clearer recommendations for actions. Also, the AMR needs to remain a global framework; it must find a balance between **accountability at the national, as well as at the international level.**

For the NVPs, there is a need to ensure as much diversity as possible because it can be learned from NVPs so far that **there is no “one size fits all” policy.** There is a need for NVPs to remain voluntary, and a need for a balanced selection of countries making presentations. **The same number of developed and developing countries should prepare national voluntary presentations (NVPs).** Also, there is a need to look at some specific issues that countries face. For instance, there is a lack of studies concerning the vulnerability of recent graduates from LDC status, especially environmental vulnerability. Several countries stressed that it is necessary to decide whether as many countries as possible should give NVPs, whether there should be a targeted approach or whether the presentations should focus on countries implementing strategies that have already been presented.

Several countries mentioned that allowing for proper preparation to NVPs is important. The Council should therefore provide assistance to countries preparing them. After all, each NVP sets benchmarks to follow. A successful AMR event requires the preparation of a timetable and specific guidelines. The chair proposed that a peer review by other organizations would be a good way to assist in the preparation of NVPs. Referring to its experience of undergoing OECD peer review, Luxembourg stressed that it is a very useful but demanding process. It was proposed that DESA should hold technical seminars to learn from existing peer review mechanisms to help develop an approach appropriate for ECOSOC. Several countries also endorsed the proposal for **regional and sub-regional preparatory workshops**, which can also serve to draw lessons learnt.

Member States agreed that the follow-up to NVPs is another issue to be addressed and welcomed the new web database. Follow-up mechanisms on implementation are necessary because most development problems are common but there is a need to **avoid one size fits all recipes.** Specific characteristics of developing countries (i.e. island vs. landlocked countries) should be duly taken into account.

It was stressed that further international support is needed for development efforts at the national level. Such support could take the form of ODI, fair trade rules and debt relief.

In this context, countries would have benefited from the presence of major donors and Bretton Woods institutions. Several Member States also stressed that ECOSOC's outcomes should be spread more widely. AMR's findings could for instance be distributed to the WTO, the Bretton Woods institutions and UNCTAD.

It is also important to create synergies between the many development related meetings this year, such as those in Accra, Doha, or the G8 and Tecap meetings, and ECOSOC's DCF.

The ECOSOC Ministerial Declaration should include an assessment of progress and recommendations for action that is based on the actual debate during the AMR, DCF and thematic discussion. Because the AMR themes vary every year, the central issues might be easily forgotten the following year. There is a need to link the AMR, DCF and thematic discussions with the operational activities segment. The idea of a Spokesperson for the President of ECOSOC to help raise the organ's profile was put forward.

Panel 2 – Annual Ministerial Review: Delivering on Implementation

How can ECOSOC foster the integration of sustainable development principles in policy-making and development cooperation? How can the AMR help to bring different actors together, including through the AMR innovation fair? How can ECOSOC help strengthen other partnerships for sustainable development?

Prof. Adil Najam, The Frederick S. Pardee Professor for Global Public Policy, Boston University

Mr. Olav Kjørven, Director of the Bureau for Development Policy, UNDP

Prof. Adil Najam introduced his presentation with a thought experiment: “*if our world was a country, it would be divided, insecure and unsafe*” and thus “*our planet is a developing country*”. In this light, he reasoned that the environment should be seen as a development issue.

During his presentation, he gave a short description of the historical evolution of sustainable development as a concept. On the positive side, he mentioned that sustainable development has already been realized as a development challenge. But he drew attention to three challenges that hinder sustainable development being put into practice: lack of political will to scale-up implementation from pilot schemes to something bigger, such as national policy; reluctance at national and local levels to tackle this global problem; and lack of partnerships.

Lastly, he underlined the importance of ECOSOC and AMR in regard to sustainable development and identified the following four contributions they can make:

- (i) Scale up the process into policy-making;
- (ii) Capacity building for implementation;

- (iii) Gather knowledge/debate on how to “measure the unmeasurable”: both qualitative and quantitative data is needed for measuring success;
- (iv) Inventing sustainable development as a policy instrument.

Mr. Olav Kjørven touched upon the unique role of ECOSOC and AMR in implementing sustainable development and agreed with Mr. Najam on the need to scale up capacities for implementation. However, he recognized the imbalance within the international governance to address such issues at global, national and local levels.

He pointed out what ECOSOC and UNDP should undertake. According to him, the former should act as an “*agenda energizer*”, which brings stakeholders for further dialogue, and generate new mechanisms to foster global learning through experience sharing. To ensure compliance, the latter should support partner countries on the ground and help them scale up capacity building for the implementation of sustainable development policies. ECOSOC can also contribute by encouraging measurement of progress towards sustainable development, provide new ideas and mechanisms to increase financial flows for sustainable development and to foster global learning about sustainable development. The UN has a role in helping to build measurement and monitoring skills among states.

He also referred to a recent study conducted by the Commission on Legal Empowerment of the Poor which reports that four billion people in both developed and developing countries are excluded from rule of law. Additionally, he took into account the considerable imbalance between laws of humankind and nature.

Linda Ghanime, Senior Policy Adviser, Environment and Energy Group, Bureau for Development Policy, UNDP, presented highlights from the e-discussion on sustainable development that is being held by UNDP and UNDESA (please see <http://www.un.org/ecosoc/newfunct/amredis.shtml> for background information and the full summary, upon conclusion). More than 4500 individuals subscribed to the discussion, which will provide input to both the ECOSOC debate and the report of the Secretary-General on the theme of the 2008 AMR. Part I of the discussion focused on challenges confronting countries in achieving sustainable development and Part II on concrete policy initiatives towards achieving sustainable development.

Discussion:

A Member State representative raised the point that there is a need for a conceptual revolution rather than an evolution of ideas for positive steps to be achieved. Only a very small percentage of humanity is aware of the sustainable development problematique. Thus, when facing a choice between the economy and the environment most would chose the economy, a point reiterated by participants in the e-discussion. National governments must ensure the importance of sustainable development is realized, and the UN must facilitate this. One measure to facilitate this would be to disseminate a global environmental acquis communautaire to all Member States.

Prof. Najam added that it is also important for global policy to stress that there is no tradeoff between the environment and the economy but that they are two sides of the same coin. In this sense, it is necessary to “developmentalise” discussion on environmental issues, particularly climate change. Yet, there is resistance to change among governments and citizens. Furthermore, governments lack capacity, resources, and access to data with which to make sound decisions, while inequities remain entrenched and many are still marginalized.

Several Member States reiterated that ECOSOC’s work must not substitute for the UNFCCC or the work of UNEP. It has its own clearly spelled out charter functions. Its principal role is to coordinate. It should rely on what has been debated already in other fora and follow up on the implementation of commitments and consensuses instead. Implementation and follow-up through the functional commissions, such as CSD, must be strengthened. The AMR should focus on problematic areas and on how to resolve them. The e-discussion can contribute by bringing diverse perspectives to ECOSOC and to contribute to knowledge-sharing and provide a platform to discuss actions that might be taken to respond to the challenges. The NVP highlights that in implementing sustainable development strategies many countries are still faced by problems such as perennial poverty and disasters. Solving them is sometimes a question of ability or lack of resources and knowledge rather than lack of political will. It is necessary to identify and address such problems so as to enhance country capabilities during the AMR. After all, NVPs also highlight a lot of positive experience to be shared within ECOSOC.

In addition, ECOSOC has a lot of appeal as a charter organ. It should use its appeal to generate attention and mobilize additional resources for its agenda as well as to involve more actors in its efforts. The traditional challenge is to get actors other than environmentalists involved. UNEP urged ECOSOC to engage finance and development ministers in the High-level segment in order to reinforce the relationship between the economic, social and environmental pillars. Other member states expressed their preference for an action-oriented Ministerial Declaration with stronger linkages between the AMR discussion and the Declaration text.

Upon requests from Member States to clarify his comments about exclusion from the rule of law, Mr. Kjørven stated that the rule of law does not fully embrace a large part of the world’s population. This has environmental impacts. Lack of access to secure land rights for instance can lead to environmental degradation or lack of rights to property assets prevents participation in emissions trade.