

AUSTRIA

Experiences in Preparing National Reports

National Reports to the CSD are an important instrument for governments to assess the implementation of specific Chapters of Agenda 21 in their country and to prepare for the following CSD-Session. It is also a useful instrument to get information from other countries and to learn from each other. One of the great assets of reporting requirements is that they keep commitments in the forefront of the decision-makers' mind.

1. The Role of the National Focal Points

The National Focal Point is part of the Austrian Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management – Division for International Environmental Affairs.

Together with officials of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management the National Focal Point is in charge of the coordination and preparation of the National Reports, the Country Profile and the organization of the meetings of the Austrian Council for Sustainable Development.

2. Preparation of National Reports in Austria

Austria regularly has submitted national reports to the Commission on Sustainable Development in order to give information on the implementation of Agenda 21 at the national level.

The work of the National Focal Point in preparing the reports is accompanied by the "Austrian Council for Sustainable Development" (ACSD). The ACSD was founded in the year 1991 by the Austrian Ministry for Environment as a "UNCED-Commission" to prepare the Austrian participation in the Rio-Conference 1992. This Commission was renamed 1997 to "Austrian Council for Sustainable Development". The members of the ACSD (representatives of all ministries, provincial and local governments, business, science, major groups, NGOs, etc.) are meeting regularly – approximately every month. The ACSD's main task is to share information on sustainable development, to prepare the national reports for the CSD and the national position for negotiations within the CSD context.

The meetings of the ACSD are organized and prepared by the Austrian National Focal Point, who also asks the members to submit comments and information on the basis of the guidelines of the Secretariat of the CSD for the National Reports. These comments are consolidated by the Focal Point. The last version of the report has to be approved by the ACSD before it is submitted to the Secretariat of the CSD.

The ACSD is also the overall committee for the national review of progress in the implementation of Agenda 21, as invited by the UN Commission on Sustainable Development and UN General Assembly with regard to the World Summit on Sustainable Development 2002. This review is expected to be completed by the end of 2001.

The general preparations of the World Summit on Sustainable Development 2002 in Austria are coordinated between several ministries and institutions.

3. Reporting requirements from different UN system bodies

Austria is submitting reports to a number of other UN system bodies. In general the National Focal Point is in charge of the preparations of the reports for the Commission on Sustainable Development. Mandatory reporting for environmental conventions in Austria is being prepared by the competent division of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management in cooperation with the Division for International Environmental Affairs and other relevant ministries. As a matter of practice, existing reports, be they CSD-reports or others, are often used as a basis for the preparation of new reports. This procedure allows for a considerable degree of coherence and further permits to easily identify progress being made in certain areas.

The significant number of reporting requirements puts a great burden on the administration of the countries, be they from the developing or the developed world. We, therefore, feel that a need exists to explore synergies between the various reporting requirements (e.g. through the utilization of standardization or at least compatible reporting guidelines and questionnaires) in order to allow for efficient and effective reporting. In any case, reporting requirements should not be of such a magnitude as to constitute an obstacle for the effective implementation of commitments to be reported on.

4. Experiences/Difficulties/Obstacles in preparing National Reports

The Guidelines for preparing of the National Reports, which are submitted by the Secretariat of the CSD are very useful.

We deem the time frame given by the Secretariat since CSD 8 to be sufficient as it allows for a comprehensive review with input from all stakeholders.

In principle, the deadline set for the October is adequate. But given the fact, that many countries sent their reports later, it might be useful to set the deadline earlier. The guidelines could be sent in May (but not before the end of the previous CSD) so that the deadline could be set by the end of September. This would ensure that more national reports are used as input for the reports of the Secretary-General and for the Intercessional work.

Since in Austria the same officials are in charge of the preparation of the National Report, the CSD as well as other international environmental issues, the elaboration of the report has to be done under great time pressure.