

BAHRAIN

National Focal Points Meeting Bahrain National Report

The State of Bahrain is fulfilling its charter and mandate of environmental conservation and protecting the health of the residents, as well as coordinating and cooperating either the national regional and international organizations and agencies. Over the past decade, the Ministry of State for the Municipalities Affairs and Environmental Affairs, represented by the Environmental Affairs (EA), has been consistently submitting reports to the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) of the United Nations, on the required formats.

The experience in national reporting is based on the two pronged approach i.e. communicating and coordinating with the national organizations, institutions and government departments as well as with the CSD. Our reactions, based on previous experience, are briefly mentioned below:

A. The role of the National Focal Point in Bahrain

EA at the Ministry of State for Municipalities Affairs and Environmental Affairs is the National Focal Point and the responsible national authority for coordinating all national efforts to implement the programs and activities related to Agenda 21 and the national environmental policy and strategy.

The role assumed by EA includes but is not limited to:

- Coordinate efforts among all official authorities, private sector, community and NGOs;
- Take the lead in providing support to all concerned with the preparations of the UN reports;
- Lead the national team on Agenda 21 in their execution of the national programs related to the environment;
- Communicate and coordinate with all regional and international authorities and specialized organizations concerned with the environment; and
- Provide all possible logistical support and facilities to all committees and task teams designated to implement local programs on Agenda 21.
- Disseminate all information among public and private sectors that is required to promote the incorporation of the concept of sustainable development in their national policies.

B. Inter-Ministerial Coordination in Preparing National Reports:

Bahrain has established a National Sustainable Development Committee (NSDC) chaired by the Director General for Environmental Affairs, with representatives from all relevant Ministries, Chambers of Industry and Commerce, Universities and research centers, women's civil societies and other NGOs. The main objectives are to implement the Agenda 21 program, review international environmental conventions, and define priorities of national environmental issues and follow-up with the implementation of the national action plan.

The major terms of reference of this committee are to:

- Review all chapters of Agenda 21 and reprioritize them annually to fulfill the global Agenda and national environmental strategy;

- Prepare and review national reports for submission to the Commission on Sustainable Development, UN organizations, Secretariats to the Conventions, conferences of parties, etc.;
- Secure all support required by the task teams and provide all available assistance and logistics; and
- Submit periodical progress report on achievements and obstacles to the Cabinet of Ministers through the Minister of State for Municipalities Affairs and Environmental Affairs.

The NSDC achieves its plan of action through the formation of Task Teams. Each team is headed by a member of the committee who formulates his/her team from all relevant authorities, such as public and private sectors, NGOs, social and professional societies and academic institutions.

Through such task teams Ministerial coordination is achieved. It may not be very efficient all the time, as Ministries have their own commitments, priorities and programs, which are controlled by most important constraints, i.e. limited manpower and budget.

C. How Bahrain has reconciled reporting requirements from different UN-System bodies including mandatory reporting for conventions:

Bahrain is a signatory to most of the environmental conventions and protocols and also has excellent cooperation with UN specialized organizations, such as UNEP, UNDP, ESCWA, UNESCO, etc., where national and regional programs have been or are being implemented.

This situation exerts more workload and obligations to meet the diverse reporting mechanism required by each specialized agency. And yet, we have been consistently trying to fulfill our obligations toward national programs related to the conventions we ratified, along with the international and regional obligations on implementing other programs and reports, in spite of the shortage of manpower and budget constraints.

This workload and increased demand for reporting creates uncontrolled delay in response, mainly due to the following:

- Increased public awareness and community demands for dealing with locally pressing environmental issues;
- Delay in receipt of data and information from the national agencies and government departments;
- Evaluation and scrutiny of the data received from the respective national agencies and government departments before sending it to the CSD and other UN organizations;
- Short and conservative deadlines being given to provide the data, information and report;
- Delays in receiving comments and acknowledgement of receipt of reports;
- Limited capacity of manpower and budget;
- Sparse and very limited technical and financial support from the specialized UN agencies and organizations;
- The need for frequent reporting on programs to the UN organizations; and
- The vast activities of the UN organizations in the field of the environment that requires precise input, comprehensive reporting and effective participation.

D. What capacity and resource issues do you have in preparing your national report:

The coordinating role of EA with all ministries, private sector and NGOs has provided some flexibility to overcome the hard work required in preparing the national reports. EA depends to some extent on its partners in the provision of data, review and update of information and the final draft. However, EA takes the lead in preparing most of the data required by preparation of the first draft, circulating it for comments and updating of information.

EA, despite a heavy workload and financial constraints, endeavors its best to meet its obligations. However, manpower and limited budget, as mentioned earlier, are the main constraints expressed by all partners involved in the preparations of national reports.

E. Other Issues including difficulties/obstacles encountered in national reporting.

In coordination with the National Agencies and Government Departments, the EA has tried its best to establish and maintain effective communication with the national agencies and government departments regarding this subject and has been sending the fact sheets to them as and when required. The delay in response occurs mainly due to the following:

- Insufficient manpower and resources of the designated officers within the national agencies and government departments to rapidly obtain the pertinent data and information, as required by the National Focal Point (NFP);
- Involvement of the designated officer in other urgent and emergency work;
- Transfer of the designated officer from the respective section to another department or his/her absence due to on job training or official leave;
- Restructuring of sections, departments and government ministries;
- Prevailing inefficient coordination and communication mechanisms within the institutions;
- Lack of awareness and training on the required subject; and
- Lack of incentives.

Recommendations for Improving the National Reporting System

Based on our limited experience, the following recommendations that may improve the National Reporting System to the CSD are broad-based.

- Simplification and standardization of Country Profile and reporting formats. The existing fact sheets can be revised and re-structured to provide minimum descriptive details but with tangible outputs;
- Organizing and conducting periodic training workshops at international, regional and national levels. Exclusive training needs to be imparted to the NFP and to the national agencies and government departments responsible for responding to and preparing the reports;
- Special information and data collection techniques need to be highlighted and adopted by the national agencies and government departments;
- The need for international technical and financial support for:
 - a) Engaging experts in preparation of the country profile. Financial assistance needs to be extended to the developing countries for hiring private experts and consultants;
 - b) Organizing capacity-building workshops and in-house training for the responsible officers of the national agencies and government departments;
 - c) Organizing regular coordination meetings of the involved national agencies and government departments to assess achievements, progress of work, and any

deficiencies, shortcomings and constraints that can be addressed appropriately by the NFP;

- d) Periodic assessment of data, information and reports by the national agencies and government departments as well as by NFP;
 - e) Evaluation and scrutiny of data, information and reports before dispatching to the CSD;
 - f) Involvement of other para-statal bodies, educational and academic institutions, NGOS, private and civil societies and other major groups in the program.
- Delineating specific tasks, duties and responsibilities to the participating officers of the National Sustainable Development Coordination Committee, highlighting their scope, role, and mandate and reporting mechanisms.
 - Enhancing regional coordination between the NFP and especially between countries in the same geographical area facing similar environmental problems;
 - Regularly updating the guidelines for national reporting to the CSD; and
 - Periodic updating the UN system wide sustainable development website and enhancing the guidelines for the users/NFP on issue-by-issue basis and country-by-country scale.