

Cameroon

Meeting of National Focal Points for Agenda 21 New York, 12-13 February 2002

A. Role of the National Focal Point in your country

The role of the Focal Point for Agenda 21 is to design the plan of work for the implementation of Agenda 21, in particular to establish the annual programme of activities in accordance with the guidelines from the Division for Sustainable Development as defined in the work plan adopted at the session of the Commission on Sustainable Development. The Focal Point oversees the drafting of national reports in conformity with the guidelines of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development, prepares inter-ministerial meetings at the national level to draft the national reports and performs the preparatory work for missions of official delegations dealing with the themes selected by the Commission on Sustainable Development to participate in the work of the Commission. The Focal Point also supervises the proper execution of those tasks and maintains direct contacts between the diplomatic mission of Cameroon to the United Nations and the office of the Commission on Sustainable Development in charge of receiving national reports.

B. Inter-ministerial coordination in the drafting of national reports

In connection with the preparation of the national reports, the national Focal Point sets up all the meetings and sends invitations through the Minister of the Environment and Forests to the various inter-ministerial meetings held at that level. During the annual sessions of the Commission on Sustainable Development, these meetings are held on sectoral and intersectoral themes, as well as on major issues or specific economic topics. The various sectoral ministries receive a list of subjects and a questionnaire to fill out relating to the selected themes. Since the environment is a cross-cutting sector, occasionally even ministries not directly concerned with a specific theme are invited to take part in preparatory work and to make a contribution, in particular concerning problems of financing, cooperation, capacity-building, awareness-raising, training and education of the public. General coordination of all ministerial departments occurs most often when dealing with an assessment report, such as, for example Rio+5 (an examination and evaluation of the Agenda 21 decisions taken in Rio five years after the 1992 Summit), which took place in 1997. Currently work is under way for the preparatory meetings for Rio+10 in accordance with the guidelines received from the Division for Sustainable Development of the United Nations.

It should be noted that after the sectoral evaluations, which are done in small working groups with heads of teams, a drafting committee is established to produce an agreed text. That text is submitted to a Validation Committee made up of all the participants, that is, public and private administration, non-governmental organizations, civil society, the private sector and major groups, the composition having been established in the decree creating the National Advisory Commission for Environment and Sustainable Development. After this inter-ministerial endorsement, the document is submitted to the Office of the Prime Minister, who chairs the Commission. After approval by the Prime Minister's office, a draft

statement is prepared to the attention of the Minister for the Environment and Forests, which is to be delivered at the United Nations during the annual session of the Commission. The Prime Minister's office is also notified that this document has been prepared.

C. How has your country managed to harmonize requests for information from various United Nations agencies, including the mandatory reporting regarding the Conventions?

The various conventions of the United Nations system require that reports be submitted in accordance with the guidelines they provide. Some examples are the Convention on Biological Diversity, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, and many others to which Cameroon is a party.

The Office for the Coordination of the Implementation of Agenda 21, under the supervision of the National Focal Point, is responsible for integrating the information contained in the various reports in accordance with United Nations guidelines. This work is done by a team consisting of the various participants, in particular the heads or Focal Points of these Conventions or specific projects. It should be stressed that we are usually dealing with scientific reports most often written either by the scientific community, consultants or the agencies involved in these processes. The Office for the Coordination of the Implementation of Agenda 21 only considers reports that have received prior endorsement by the Scientific Committee. In the event of any doubt, the Coordination Office refers the matter to government agencies with expertise or with oversight in these fields. Sometimes, to verify certain information, the Focal Point can conduct on-site inquiries if the means are available. If doubts remain, no information on the question can be validated.

The following are the various reports requested by the agencies of the United Nations system: country reports, monographs, studies leading to national strategies for the implementation of Conventions, mid-term evaluations of specific programmes, for instance the management and conservation of biodiversity programme. None of these reports can be transmitted unless the validation Committee, which is an ad hoc group, meets. Even if there were data and reports, none of it can be used by the Agenda 21 coordination office without the authorization of that body.

D. What national capacities and resources are available in the preparation of your national report?

In general, we do not have any capacity beyond what is made available to us, that is, the officials who participate in the preparatory working groups and who come from the agencies and ministries involved in the process of drafting as described under question A. If possible and on a case-by-case basis, we call on university professors, researchers or other specialists.

The financial resources area is the most difficult. Even if technical and scientific expertise are offered on a voluntary basis, financial resources are not found by chance. They must be entered in the budget before being released. Most

often the needs are difficult for the budget officials to predict despite the terms of their mandate. Some resources from the operations budget are used when available. All in all, it is difficult to find the funding necessary for us to do our work.

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

The difficulties are those mentioned in the reply to question D above, but they are spelled out in greater detail here.

- It is difficult to obtain information in time when our reports are being drafted. Ministerial coordination presents problems, especially in the area of human resources: sometimes the staff changes between meetings; sometimes those participating in the meeting do not have the information needed. Moreover, since expertise costs money, experts are difficult to recruit for a project for which no funds are budgeted and where financing from agencies of the United Nations system is not involved, as in the case of the standard Conventions.
 - The national coordination office does not have the funding enabling it successfully to complete its task of drafting and producing national reports on time. This handicap has a number of implications, in particular, the need to recruit experts and finalize reports by the deadlines imposed by the officials of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development.
 - Among the obstacles it encounters, the coordination office has to share a workspace with the Focal Point. The lack of funds and insufficient awareness on the part of high-level officials, the National Focal Point still does not have a budget allocation. This lack of funding leads to a lack of infrastructure: computers set aside for the implementation of Agenda 21, telephones and fax machines, Internet site and e-mail connection.
 - We would like to stress the obstacles to communication due to the lack of financial means, especially as they apply to equipment and supplies. The Focal Point is virtually cut off from the rest of the world and often uses his or her own funds for necessary communication with the Division for Sustainable Development.
 - Another difficulty lies in the participation of the Focal Point in various meetings held by the Commission on Sustainable Development. Funding is difficult to obtain and the Focal Point is not able to participate in the intersessional meetings and sometimes in the sessions of CSD and other meetings involving costs to participants. Focal Points have difficulty training their colleagues in the drafting of national reports.
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