

The Egyptian Experience
Preparing National Reports to the CSD

I. The Role of the Focal Point for CSD National Reporting:

1. In Egypt, the role of the national focal point for the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD), including the coordination of national reporting, has been assigned to **the Environment and Sustainable Development Unit in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (ESDU/MOFA)**.
2. This Unit was established as a separate entity within the Sector for International Economic Relations for the first time in early 1992, when it was named Unit for Environmental Affairs, in response to the increased national concern with environmental questions, as well as in anticipation of the increasing importance of environmental issues in the UN system and in regional and international fora, particularly after the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (Rio 1992). The new entity was mandated to contribute to Egypt's representation in multilateral negotiations and activities in the field of Environment in conjunction with the participation of other ministries and government bodies.
3. After the conclusion of the Rio conference and the establishment of the CSD, this unit, which was renamed Environment and Sustainable Development in 1994, was assigned an increasing role in national coordination for the participation in multilateral (regional and international) Sustainable Development fora, including the coordination of national information for the CSD.
4. It is important to highlight that the role of this unit as a focal point for the coordination of national reports to the CSD, as well as other sustainable development fora, has been part of an **evolutionary process**, that is, in many respects, still underway. **This on going process is, in fact, part and parcel of the attempt to respond to the evolution of the concept of sustainable development and its international dimensions with an appropriate national institutional set up.**
5. As far as National Reporting is concerned, the objective of the CSD National Focal Point is to **compile, develop and supply required information through cooperation and coordination with the relevant ministries and government bodies**. This compilation is not important only as a response to the request of information by the CSD Secretariat; it is also a useful instrument that serves as a basis for the participation of the national delegation in the CSD sessions.
6. At the start, this work was pursued essentially through cooperation with the Ministry of State for Environmental Affairs (MSEA) and its affiliate the Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency (EEAA), but the coordination process conducted by ESDU/MOFA gradually widened to include other ministries. **Such widening was not only welcome by MSEA and EEAA, but was specifically requested and encouraged by them as the need to include the different aspects and sectors involved in Sustainable Development became obvious and the value of such widening became important for all the parties concerned** Cooperation and coordination with the MSEA and EEAA continues to be closer and more intensive than any other single institution, and this is only logical given the Environmental context out of which the CSD and the concept of Sustainable Development evolved and the particular importance of the Environmental

component in Agenda 21, however it is still noteworthy that coordination did widen significantly over the past 5 years.

7. **In preparation for CSD 9** (April 2001), and upon the initiative of the ESDU/MOFA, a committee was formed in the Ministry of Electricity and Energy including participants from the relevant agencies of that Ministry as well as from the Ministry of Petroleum, ESDA/MOFA, and MSEA/EEAA. Among other preparatory tasks, this committee was given the task of updating the national information related to the implementation of Agenda 21 in fields related to Energy in accordance with the guidelines of national reporting provided by the CSD Secretariat. It is true that the work of this committee was completed late and was, therefore, not reflected in the CSD 9 documentation, however, it provided the national focal point and the national delegation a better basis for participation in the session and for future participation in the CSD. It will also hopefully be reflected in the documentation for the World Summit for Sustainable Development (WSSD) and in the Sustainable Development Website.
 8. **As for the national reporting for WSSD**, the ESDU/MOFA took the initiative, in close cooperation and coordination with MSEA and EEAA, to establish **a national steering committee to prepare for the summit**. This committee, which is co-chaired by both ministries with wide participation from relevant ministries, bodies and experts, is contributing to, and overseeing the process of a comprehensive updating and enrichment of the national information presented to CSD on the implementation of Agenda 21 over the past ten years in Egypt as well as a qualitative assessment of this implementation over the past 10 years. This work started in May, and is still underway. It is supported, in part, by UNDP Capacity 21 project in Egypt. **The outcome is expected to provide the basis for Egypt's participation in the preparatory process, as well as a better start in the new phase of work of the CSD.**
 9. It is worth mentioning that the situation of the national focal point of CSD in MOFA has its advantages, as well as its disadvantages, as far as the compilation of national information is concerned. The **remoteness of MOFA, from the actual process of national implementation of Agenda 21, by virtue of its mandate and expertise**, prevents it from contributing either to a more effective implementation or reporting about it. However **this very remoteness makes it imperative for the ESDU to seek better coordination with other ministries, a coordination that is essential in all sustainable development activities**. It also has **no institutional bias or leaning in favor of any objective, sector or activity**. This provides a good potential for **more comprehensive and inclusive national reports**, a potential that still waits to be fully used.
- II. Reconciling Reporting Requirements from different UN system bodies and Environmental Conventions :
10. It is obvious to all those involved, that **the requirements of national information in the fields of Environment and Sustainable Development have reached unprecedented proportions**. When we consider the information required in the context of the **Environmental Conventions**¹, as well as the information required by the different UN bodies, particularly in conjunction with the **follow-up of other UN conferences** (e.g.

¹ *Egypt is a party to over sixty global and regional Environmental Agreements, although not all of them are equally demanding in terms of national information requirements.*

Population, Environment, Social Development, Women, Human Settlements...), as well as **regional Sustainable Development fora** (e.g. MCSDD, Arab League) it gets to be very clear that these requirements represent a burden on already over-stretched national institutions. This necessitates seeking ways and means to enhance coordination and improve synergies within both the **national** and **international** institutional set up to decrease this burden and maximize the benefits of exerted efforts for national planning.

11. **On the National level**, Egypt has **developed and continues to improve a constellation of national coordination mechanisms (National Committees)** for overseeing the national implementation of many of those conventions and conference outcomes, including the implementation of reporting requirements. Successful examples of such processes include the National Committee for the implementation of the Montreal Protocol for the Protection of the Ozone Layer, the National Committee for Climate Change, The National Committee for the implementation of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species, and the National Committee for Human Settlements... These national committees, whose secretariats are each entrusted with the ministry most involved in the implementation of each convention or program, include representatives from all the relevant stakeholders and are mandated to contribute to, and oversee, the process of implementation, including meeting reporting requirements.
12. As far as national reporting is concerned, successful examples of such efforts in Egypt include the outcome of the work of the **National Committees and technical units for the Protection of the Ozone Layer and Climate Change, which are based in EEAA**. For example the first **Egyptian National Communication** in accordance with the UN FCCC was presented by Egypt in 1999 and was referred to positively by the UNFCCC Expert Group on non-Annex1 country communications. There is also the **National Committee and Technical Secretariat of CITES based in the Ministry of Agriculture and Land Reclamation**, which managed in the last few years to achieve considerable improvement in the institutional set-up and the technical capacities which showed itself in improved national reporting in accordance with the convention. **There is also an ongoing effort to improve the capacity of the ESDU/MOFA as a coordinating unit for the CSD, which will hopefully have its first fruits in the comprehensive updating of the CSD information currently underway.**
13. Due to various reasons, however, those mechanisms sometimes have a tendency to go in **parallel lines**, which leads to **duplication and flaws in coordination** Those reasons include:
 - multiplicity of the focal points that lead each process,
 - the diversity of the kind of expertise required for each process,
 - and the divergence of the quality and nature of the information required for each process.

Due to those same reasons, it is not expected that any national arrangement could completely eliminate those negative consequences, which must be particularly obvious for **the CSD focal points because of the wide scope of work of that committee.**

14. To minimize such negative consequences ESDU/MOFA sought to **involve in the steering committee for the preparation for the WSSD focal points of other related national processes** (e.g. those of Istanbul +5, Copenhagen +5, CITES focal point) **as well as representatives of ministries or individual experts that are personally involved or**

acquainted with those processes. Moreover, the committee is trying to **benefit as much as possible from the recent national information already prepared in other contexts.**

15. However, and given the burden on national institutions, particularly in developing countries, **it is also essential that the United Nations System, and particularly the CSD with its wide scope of work, find ways and means for minimizing the burden of national reporting and improving the benefits of the wealth of relevant information presented by governments in different contexts.**

III. Obstacles facing the Preparation of National Reporting:

16. The experience of ESDU/MOFA points to a variety of obstacles and difficulties that face national reporting for the CSD.
 - **The lack of clarity about the purposes and consequences of reporting to the CSD compared to the time, effort and expertise required to prepare the appropriate national information.** This discrepancy has improved over time, as a result of the dissemination of information about the CSD, the gradual development of cadres and expertise in the field of Sustainable Development and the increased importance of environmental considerations in National Planning in general. But there is no doubt that such a gap still exists.
 - **The difference between the organization standards and categories of information on the national level and the information required by the CSD.** This requires a higher level of capacity to be developed on the national level, but it probably also requires **more flexible guidelines that are more adaptable to national situations and systems of reporting and statistics.**
 - **The amount of coordination required for compiling and reviewing the information to specifically suit it to the guidelines can sometimes be prohibitively time consuming.** This improves over time as mechanisms and channels of coordination get to be more established.
 - **The clarity and consistency of the guidelines are sometimes also a problem.** This is a problem that needs to be addressed by the CSD Secretariat in its fine tuning of the guidelines.

IV. National Capacity and Resource Issues:

17. **Capacity Building (technical and institutional) is one of the main and primary objectives in the field of environment and sustainable development in Egypt.** The past ten years saw considerable improvement in national capacities in the field of the Environment, as a result of willful national planning supported by bilateral, regional and multilateral cooperation.
18. However, this is, and will continue to be, an ongoing process that faces many challenges ahead, not least among them the **proliferation and diversity of reporting requirements**, the **complex and evolving scientific and technical base** in the field of Sustainable Development and the **rapidly changing international context in which such reporting is taking place with the evolution of globalization and the response to it.**
19. Particularly important areas where further capacity building, with its technical as well as its institutional components, is essential include:

- **The development of expertise and mechanisms to deal with cross-sectoral, interdisciplinary, and cross-ministerial questions.**
 - **The development of expertise and mechanisms that contribute to a better understanding of the interaction and integration of the economic, environmental and social dimensions of sustainable development.** This is useful, on the one hand, for the organization of sustainable development reporting, which is our focus here, and on the other, for sustainable development planning and implementation itself.
 - Another important capacity building area is **the development of appropriate SD indicators and their application on the national level and primarily for national purposes.** This will clearly allow Egypt the opportunity to apply tools in assessing its national policies, and in the process will enable it to report better about such policies.
20. An exchange of experiences between national focal points can contribute to an improvement of reporting to CSD through dissemination of best practices and highlighting problems that need to be addressed in the reporting requirements themselves.