



Commission on Sustainable Development  
Sixteenth Session  
5 - 16 May 2008  
New York

**Background Note on the Ministerial Dialogue with Representatives of the Major Groups**  
*(11:30 am – 1:00 pm, 15 May 2008, Conference Room 4)*

*One of the fundamental prerequisites for the achievement of sustainable development is broad public participation in decision-making (Agenda 21, Section III, Chapter 23.2)*

During the High-level Segment of CSD-16, there will be a ministerial dialogue with representatives of the major groups. This dialogue session will provide a further opportunity to have a focused, yet informal, discussion on the role that major groups play in implementation, how they have been able to expedite and contribute to progress in implementation, and which challenges and obstacles they face in their activities relevant to the thematic issues.

This background note on the dialogue session, prepared by the Secretariat, includes a few questions to facilitate discussions. Ministers may choose to address any of these questions and should not feel obliged to address all of them. Ministers and major groups' representatives may also address any aspects of the issues they think relevant to the discussions.

The dialogue session will be informal and there will be no delivery of official statements. Interventions will be limited to 3 minutes to encourage interactive discussions. The identification of major groups' speakers will be coordinated through the major groups organizing partners.

The session is organized in three blocks of time that include interventions from both major groups and Governments, with closing remarks by the Chair. The three blocks of presentations and their order will be as follows:

- Women, Children and Youth, Indigenous People (3 minutes each), followed by responses from delegations and open dialogue (15 minutes)
- NGOs, Local Authorities, Workers and Trade Unions (3 minutes each), followed by responses from delegations and open dialogue (15 minutes)
- Business and Industry, Scientific and Technological Community, Farmers (3 minutes each), followed by responses from delegations and open dialogue (15 minutes)
- Closing remarks by the Chairperson (15 minutes)

The official discussion papers submitted by the major groups<sup>\*</sup> to facilitate discussions during CSD-16 identified a number of important challenges that must be addressed if progress in implementation is to be achieved in relation to the thematic issues, including the following:

- Lack of stakeholder participation in decision-making processes
- Lack of access to land and security of tenure
- Lack of capacity building for both rural and urban women
- Poor agricultural extension services, lack of agricultural infrastructure, inadequate or inappropriate technologies, high cost of agricultural structures, lack of investment in agriculture
- Negative impacts of climate change and climate variability on agricultural production and food security, pre- and post- harvest losses, high demand for agricultural goods
- Expropriation of forests giving way to industrial logging and mono-cropping plantations

<sup>\*</sup> E/CN.17/2008/13/Add. 1 through 9, available at: [tp://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/documents/docs\\_sdissues\\_major\\_groups.htm](http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/documents/docs_sdissues_major_groups.htm).

- Disagreements among societal groups about the role of technology and innovation in agriculture and food production
- Weak institutional frameworks with insufficient attention to soil and water systems and natural resource management programs
- Water shortages and increasing competition over fresh water; the need for better water management practices
- Impacts of dams and mines on water resources
- Over-cultivation of land, overgrazing of land and soil erosion
- Harmful impacts of unsustainable livestock production
- Insufficient monitoring of drylands, and difficulties turning dryland and degraded land areas into economic assets
- Lack of investment in innovative sustainable agricultural practices adapted to dryland areas
- Lack of financial resources and limited attention to income-generating activities
- Limited attention to gender issues
- Unsustainable economic and trade policies
- Lack of effective monitoring and evaluation systems
- Cross-cutting issues including low level of education, loss of agricultural workers due to HIV/AIDS, rural-urban migration and displacement, and child labour

These points relating to agriculture, rural development, land, drought, desertification and Africa help provide the context for the dialogue. Ministers are invited to address any of the following questions:

1. Local sustainable development includes many different themes and systems. For example, a concern for sustainability may require changes to transportation modes, land uses and their interaction; consideration of long-term as well as immediate costs and benefits, or innovation in the use of resources and energy. How can local governments apply sustainable principles to their operations?
2. What steps has the private sector taken to recognize the impacts of privatization and deregulation of public services on disadvantaged groups? What further could be done?
3. What are some of the ways that gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment can be achieved in the thematic areas?
4. In what concrete way could the knowledge and expertise of the indigenous communities be used when implementing more sustainable methods in the agricultural sector?
5. What framework can accommodate both the needs of entrepreneurs in market economies and indigenous people's demands for the protection of traditional land and practices?
6. When focusing on reducing food insecurity, what measures would allow indigenous livelihoods to be protected at the same time?
7. How can the capacity of smallholders to become full participants in modern production systems be improved?
8. What incentives could be given to small-scale farmers to enhance their transition to more sustainable practices?
9. What concrete measures should be taken to strengthen the link between farmers and extension services/workers?
10. What adjustments are necessary for biofuel production to be compatible with global food security, given the finite resources on which agriculture depends?