

17th session of the Commission on Sustainable Development
Ministerial Dialogue with Major Groups
12 May 2009, 10:00 am – 1:00 pm

Introduction to the Session

By Rachael Mayanja, Assistant-Secretary-General, UN-DESA

Chairperson, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honor to welcome you to this Ministerial Dialogue with the major groups and the UN system.

This dialogue session provides an opportunity for us to engage in a focused, yet informal, discussion on the role that major groups and other stakeholders play in implementation.

The international community recognized long ago that public participation in decision making is a fundamental prerequisite for the achievement of sustainable development.¹ The Commission on Sustainable Development takes this mandate seriously, and is widely renowned for its tradition of cultivating innovative mechanisms for channeling major groups' perspectives into its intergovernmental deliberations, and for its efforts to strengthening the role of the major groups in the broader context of sustainable development implementation.

Major groups' participation in this year's CSD is no exception. Your contributions are critical to the success of this meeting, and the issues being addressed in this cycle are close to the hearts of us all.

We are living in an unprecedented time of uncertainty and instability, and our growing global crises will only abate when we can find ways, both large and small, to work together in partnership. Today's dialogue provides a new opportunity to elaborate on how the international community—Governments, major groups, and the UN system—can work together as one to achieve progress toward shared goals. When our priorities diverge, we must summon understanding and strive for cooperation. What do we need from each other to be more effective partners in implementation, and how can we support one another?

A wise leader once wrote that “communities had to be created, fought for, tended like gardens”.² As I look around the room, I see the many faces of a global community that shares a commitment to working together to implement the principles of sustainable development:

- Ministers of Agriculture and Environment from the North and South, whose decisions shape global policies;
- African women who have traveled far from their small farms and villages, and whose role as primary food producers and environmental managers in most of the developing world demands that they be placed at the center of decision-making processes;

¹ Agenda 21, paragraph 23.2.

² Barack Obama, *Dreams from My Father*, page 134.

- Scientists and researchers trying to solve the problems related to drought and desertification brought on by climate change;
- Indigenous peoples, whose traditional knowledge is often undervalued and whose rights must be respected;
- NGOs, with your extensive experience on the ground, working tirelessly at the grassroots level;
- Local authorities, whose everyday decisions enable progress in our towns and cities;
- Trade unions fighting to ensure decent jobs and better livelihoods for those who toil on a farm or in a factory;
- Representatives of the UN system who work in the field among you; and finally...
- Our future world leaders—the Youth.

On behalf of UNDESA, I want to express my sincere appreciation for your commitment and contribution to sustainable development, and your presence here today.

I would like to close with the observation that ensuring better livelihoods for small-scale farmers and rural communities lies at the heart of the work ahead, and to ask you to consider how we can move forward in establishing favorable conditions for secure land tenure and rights to land, particularly for women. How can we enable and empower rural women and indigenous communities as implementation actors, and not simply as target beneficiaries? How can decision-making processes related to natural resources management become more participatory? What role can major groups play in ensuring a sustainable green revolution in Africa?

I hope that this morning's session will bring forth new insights and information on these and other crucial issues. I wish you all a very productive and enlightening discussion.