

The UN Commission on Sustainable Development: Which Mechanisms Explain Its Accomplishments?

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The UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) was established in 1993 in order to follow up the commitments from the UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. An overall goal was to enhance the integration of environmental, economic and social dimensions of sustainable development at the national, regional and international levels. The CSD was established as the first and only true sustainable development commission. Agenda 21 called for the establishment of the CSD within the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).¹ A special session of ECOSOC in 1993 agreed on the CSD's mandate: to monitor and review progress on the implementation of Agenda 21 at local, national and international level; to develop policy recommendations; and to promote dialogue and build partnerships for sustainable development among governments, the international community, and major groups.²

The establishment of the CSD was seen as one of the main outcomes of UNCED, as it was agreed that the follow-up activities would be of vital importance for sustainable development. However, there has been growing concern as to whether the CSD has succeeded in fulfilling its mandate and has further advanced the sustainable development agenda.³ Some observers have even argued that the CSD is merely a "talk shop." A question that should be answered is whether this criticism is well founded.

The main objective for the analysis in this article is to evaluate which mechanisms affect the work of the CSD, in order to understand how it would be

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1. UN 1992.

2. Chasek 2000, 383ff; and UN 1993a.

3. Chasek 2000, 379.

possible to enhance the potential for effectiveness. A starting point for the evaluation is an assessment of the CSD's accomplishments during its first ten years. The study is based heavily on interviews, which have served as sources of information that has been difficult to obtain through written documents.⁴ Earlier work on the CSD has also been very useful for this analysis. Given the scope of the analysis, some limitations have been made. After the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg in 2002, the delegates at the CSD's eleventh annual meeting (CSD-11) decided to introduce several reforms. As it is considered premature to determine the effects of these reforms, the CSD sessions after WSSD have not been evaluated in this study. Also, an evaluation of the CSD's relations to other UN bodies, and possible spillover effects from the CSD process to other processes, have not been included here due to the need for brevity.

The first section of the article will present the analytical framework. In Section Two, the analysis will focus on evaluating the CSD's accomplishments against the goals formulated by the commission's mandate. Based on my analytical framework, I will evaluate which mechanisms explain the CSD's goal attainment and summarize the main findings in Section Three. In Section Four, some of the future prospects for the CSD will be discussed.

1. Analytical Framework

One of the main challenges concerning research on regimes and institutions has been how to evaluate and measure effectiveness. In general, "a regime [or an institution] can be considered effective to the extent that it successfully performs a certain (set of) function(s) or solves the problem(s) that motivated its establishment."⁵ The concept of effectiveness has evolved as scholars have addressed the question of why some efforts at developing and implementing joint solutions to international problems succeed while others fail.⁶

In order to evaluate and measure effectiveness, scholars often distinguish between three types of institutional consequences: output, outcome and impact.⁷ When an agreement is made and an institution is established, this will lead to consequences such as the norms, principles, and rules generated by the

4. As the study is based heavily on interviews, it is important to note some shortcomings. The selection of respondents has been based on availability, on their degree of involvement and/or their position in the decision-making process. Availability has been one of the main challenges when selecting respondents. Thus, almost half of the interviews have been conducted in Oslo, with representatives from the Norwegian Ministry of Environment and Ministry of Foreign Affairs. As the eleven interviewees are not a representative sample, the information might be somewhat imbalanced.

5. Underdal 2001, 4.

6. Underdal 2001, 3. For more in-depth discussions, see for instance Levy, Young, and Zürn 1995; Krasner 1983; Keohane 1984; Keohane, Haas, and Levy 1993; Young 1994; Underdal 1992; and Young and Levy 1999.

7. Easton 1965, 351f.

institution itself, that is, the output. Further, when an agreement is implemented, it is expected that this will lead to consequences in form of behavioral changes, which is regarded as the outcome of the agreement. Finally, when measures are in effect and target groups are adjusted, this may in turn affect the physical problem at hand, that is, the impact of the agreement.⁸

Preferably, a study of effectiveness should concern the effects of an institution (impact), but such a study can be extremely difficult due to methodological problems. Thus, most studies are concerned with the output or the outcome.⁹ In order to study the outcome, the consequences of an institution must be evaluated several years after the institution's entry into force.¹⁰ As the CSD can be considered an immature institution, it is too early to determine possible behavioral change of target groups. I will therefore base my study of the CSD on data about the output, in order to indicate its potential for effectiveness. In this regard, it can be noted that isolating the effect of the CSD is a methodological challenge. The CSD's accomplishments may be affected by a complex interplay between multiple factors. A correlation between the CSD and the actual achievements does not necessarily indicate a causal relationship. As the correlation may be spurious, the findings of the analysis are not necessary robust.

Underdal proposes two perspectives, "problem-solving capacity" and "the character of the problem", to evaluate effectiveness.¹¹ To explain which mechanisms affect the performances of the CSD, the former perspective is the most fruitful approach to use. Whereas the "character of the problem" is a more static explanatory perspective, the "problem-solving capacity" perspective can provide useful insights on how to improve the work of the CSD. In general, the "problem-solving capacity" perspective may explain why some problems are solved more effectively than others due to variations in the institutional design or because they are attacked with greater skill or energy.¹² Based on "problem-solving capacity," two perspectives will serve as a starting point for the analysis of the CSD: "distribution of capabilities" and "institutional setting."¹³

1.1 *Distribution of Capabilities*

It is reasonable to assume that the distribution of capabilities—understood here as economic and intellectual resources—among state actors will affect the problem-solving process and have an impact on an institution's effectiveness. In order to evaluate how the relevant capabilities are distributed, it is first necessary to explore the state actors' interests in order to understand the positions states

8. Andresen and Skjærseth 1999, 4; and Underdal 2001, 7

9. Underdal 2001, 6f.

10. Underdal 1992, 230.

11. Underdal 2001.

12. Underdal 2001, 23.

13. See Underdal 2001.

have in the negotiation process. Presumably, interests will affect whether a state acts as a pusher or a laggard.¹⁴ However, states' positions alone do not determine which states achieve actual breakthrough in the negotiation process. It is capabilities that give the states the potential for influence.¹⁵ The distribution of capabilities among state actors will presumably affect the decision-making process of an institution, because the decisions most often reflect the interests of the most powerful actors. It is therefore necessary to take the state actors' capabilities into account when identifying which states have been the most powerful in the negotiation process and have achieved actual breakthrough for their interests.

1.2 Institutional Setting

Even though a basic presumption here is that institutions matter, some international institutions have more impact and contribute to greater effectiveness than others, due to their specific institutional features. It is therefore important to analyze how an institution is designed in order to understand why it is effective or ineffective, and moreover, to understand how it would be possible to enhance its effectiveness. For the case of the CSD, the exploration of institutional design will concern several institutional factors: the role of the secretariat, representation of state sectors, access and participation of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and entrepreneurial leadership.

The role of the secretariat: Since state actors often have different interests and preferences, a well-functioning secretariat can assist actors in cooperating and thereby solving the problems at hand more effectively.¹⁶ A distinction between two main roles of secretariats can be made: assistant or player. The *assistant secretariat* acts as a behind-the-scenes adviser; provides administrative assistance to the parties in document preparation as requested; and collects and compiles follow-up reports from the parties. The *player secretariat* is an active and independent actor, as it initiates and actively participates in agenda setting and protocol development; facilitates, and in some cases initiates, the development of negotiating texts; frames central questions; acts as moderator or mediator in the event of negotiation stalemates; and takes an active role in the analyses and dissemination of the parties' follow-up reports.¹⁷ It will be assumed that a player secretariat may affect goal attainment to a larger degree than an assistant secretariat.

14. The term "pusher" refers here to an actor who wants a strong CSD and a high degree of goal attainment, and therefore tries to enhance the decision-making process and push it in a positive direction. The opposite, an actor who wants a weak CSD and a low degree of goal attainment, and attempts to slow down the decision-making process, will be referred to as a "laggard" (Rosendal 2000, 117).

15. Rosendal 2000, 117.

16. Andresen and Skjærseth 1999, 2, 6.

17. Wettestad 1999, 26–27.

Representation of state sectors: It is important to evaluate the sectors of the national arena from which the ministers at the CSD are drawn, because “national interests” are most often represented differently by different sectors.¹⁸ Exemplified by Allison’s words, “*where you stand depends on where you sit,*” ministers from different sectoral ministries are expected to promote their sector’s issues and interests.¹⁹ The CSD’s work concerns advancing the environmental, social and economical dimensions of the sustainable development agenda. In order to address sustainable development issues in a comprehensive way, broad and diversified participation of sector ministers should be represented. It can also be noted that some sector ministries are likely to have more power in their home governments than others, underscoring the importance of which sectors are represented. Following this, it will be assumed that a broad sector representation is needed to advance the sustainable development agenda and, thus, will enhance the CSD’s goal attainment.

*Access and participation of nongovernmental organizations:*²⁰ Concerning the effect of NGOs’ access and participation, it is important to evaluate the difference between open and inclusive rules of access and exclusive opportunities for participation.²¹ In general, NGOs can be considered a diverse group of actors with multiple and often conflicting interests. However, as a starting point, it will be assumed that broad participation of NGOs may have a positive impact on the work of the CSD.²² It will therefore be assumed that NGOs may enhance the CSD’s achievements by providing information, creativity and new ideas to the process; helping states to identify their interests; framing issues for collective debate; proposing specific policies; and identifying salient points for negotiation.²³

*Entrepreneurial leadership:*²⁴ Entrepreneurial leadership refers to a person who “relies on negotiating skill to frame issues in ways that foster integrative bargaining and to put together deals that would otherwise elude participants endeavoring to form international regimes through institutional bargaining.”²⁵

18. Rosendal 2000, 87.

19. Allison 1971, 176.

20. In broad terms, a nongovernmental organization can be defined as any organization that does not have a formal or legal status as a state or agent of a state (Raustiala 2001, 97f). In this regard, it is important to note that the term is “challenged by a host of alternative usages” (Gordenker and Weiss 1996, 18). However, as noted by Gordenker and Weiss, “there seems no quarrel [. . .], with the notion that these organizations consist of durable, bounded, voluntary relationships among individuals to produce a particular product, using specific techniques.”

21. Wettestad 1999, 21.

22. This point is further discussed in the analysis of institutional setting in Section 3.

23. Haas 1992, 2.

24. Scholars often distinguish among three types of leadership. Young refers to structural, entrepreneurial and intellectual leadership. Interest-based perspectives, such as the problem-solving perspective, are mostly concerned with entrepreneurial leadership (Young 1991, 287).

25. Young 1991, 293.

The political engineering of effective solutions may be a central dimension to evaluate in order to explain an institution's effectiveness. An entrepreneurial leader's ability to find means to solve collective solutions is determined by his or her capabilities, that is, skills, energy and status.²⁶ The *means* an entrepreneurial leader uses can be linked to the different tasks facing a leader. Underdal points out three major tasks: designing substantive solutions that are politically feasible; designing institutional arrangements that are conducive to the development, adoption, and implementation of effective solutions; and designing actor strategies that can be effective in inducing constructive cooperation.²⁷ Entrepreneurial leadership is exercised if an individual performs one or more of these tasks.

2. To what Degree has the CSD Achieved its Goals?

In order to explain which mechanisms affect the work of the CSD, it is necessary to begin with an evaluation of what the CSD has accomplished during its first ten years. Its performance will be evaluated against the goals formulated by the Commission's mandate. As the CSD was established with a very vague mandate and a broad program of work, there is quite a lot of room for interpretation of what the CSD actually has achieved.²⁸ Thus, evaluating and determining the CSD's goal attainment is a difficult matter. In broad terms, the mandate consists of three major goals:

- monitoring and reviewing progress on the implementation of Agenda 21;
- elaborating policy guidance and options for future initiatives aimed at achieving sustainable development; and
- promoting dialogue and building partnerships for sustainable development between governments, the international community, and major groups.²⁹

Monitoring and Reviewing Progress on the Implementation of Agenda 21

In order for the CSD to monitor and review progress on the implementation of Agenda 21, it was decided that the CSD would analyze and evaluate reports from governments, NGOs and UN bodies. The CSD's mandate does not, however, oblige states and others to submit information to the Commission.³⁰ Due

26. Skills, both substantial and political, are here understood as negotiation skills. Energy refers to a combination of capacity and interest, while status includes both formal position in the negotiations and the vaguer notion of "reputation."

27. Underdal 2001, 35.

28. Chasek 2000, 383.

29. Chasek 2000, 383ff; and UN 1993b.

30. Yamin 1998/99, 53ff. According to Bergesen and Botnen (1996, 47), a strong coalition of developing countries headed by India, China and Brazil, with support from the US, argued that sov-

to the voluntary nature of the national reports, it is therefore up to the governments to decide on the timing, format, and content of reports.³¹

Concerning the actual record of eliciting reports from national governments, the CSD has been rather successful.³² Eighty of 114 countries that reported to the CSD during the period 1993–1997 did so on more than one occasion. Also, 105 of 149 countries submitted reports to the CSD more than once during the period 1998–2002.³³ However, the formatting of the reports has been difficult, as the reporting guidelines proved to be too vague to facilitate a comprehensive reporting process.³⁴ The commission has therefore worked on streamlining the national reporting, developing sustainable development indicators and introducing country profiles.³⁵ As many of the countries, and especially the developing countries, are still concerned about too much reporting to the various UN bodies, the CSD has continued its streamlining process.³⁶

There have also been several problems concerning the content of the reports. First, the reports are difficult to compare. Since the CSD does not have any “baseline” for measuring performance, many of the reports are based on estimates rather than on statistical data, and much of the information reported is of a qualitative nature.³⁷ Even though the CSD has worked on developing sustainable development indicators, the use of indicators has not functioned as well as intended.³⁸ Second, widespread use of self-reporting also raises a general question of the reliability of the reports. However, Yamin points out that systematic falsification is rare; non-reporting or provision of incomplete information is a more typical state reaction.³⁹ It seems that many states tend to make their implementation performance look good, or perhaps better than it is in practice. It appears that some states are also reluctant to give information on certain issues, such as climate-related issues.⁴⁰ Due to reporting problems, the national reports have therefore played a marginal role when the Commission meets.⁴¹

However, the reporting process receives credit for strengthening coordination and dialogue among government agencies and between them and major groups. The report preparation process has also served as a good starting point

foreign states cannot be required to submit formal reports under Agenda 21. Most of the African countries and most of the OECD countries were in favor of a formal reporting arrangement.

31. UN 1993c.

32. Agarwal et al. 2001, 183.

33. 1992–1997 figures from DPCSD table (Yamin 1998/99). 1998–2002 figures from DPCSD table (on file with author).

34. Chasek 2000, 384.

35. Country profiles were introduced at the UN General Assembly’s Special Session in 1997. These profiles were first compiled by the CSD Secretariat by using all past reports, and then sent to their respective governments for updates and corrections. They have since been updated on an annual basis (Yamin 1998/99, 55).

36. Mabhongo 2005 [interview].

37. Chasek 2000, 384; Yamin 1998/99, 56; and Zhu and Morita-Lou 2005 [interview].

38. Skåre 2005 [interview].

39. Yamin 1998/99, 56.

40. Eidheim and Hofseth 2005 [interview]; and Yamin 1998/99, 56.

41. Bergesen and Botnen 1996, 53; and Eidheim and Hofseth 2004 [interview].

for states' preparation for the annual CSD session. Moreover, national reporting is a useful mechanism to get first-hand information from the states, instead of getting the information from other sources.⁴² The reports have also contributed to outward- and inward-looking processes, where countries have been able to "monitor their own progress, provide transparency and share experience and information with others, and indicate areas of priority, progress and constraint," and where stakeholders at the national level have been brought together to review their progress, interact, and work towards a common assessment and common purpose.⁴³

Developing Policy Recommendations

The CSD's record in elaborating policy guidance is a mixed one. As the Commission does not have a mandate to make legally binding agreements for states, its task on policy guidance is limited to passing resolutions that "recommend" and "urge."⁴⁴ It has also been challenging for the CSD to achieve any substantial results on difficult issues such as consumption and production patterns, atmosphere, energy and agriculture. The agenda-setting role has, however, been highlighted by many, as the CSD puts issues on the agenda and initiates processes that continue into other forums.⁴⁵ The main issue areas where the CSD has had some success are forests, oceans and freshwater.

Forests: In order to follow up the Forest Principles from Rio, the CSD was to discuss the issue of forests at its third session in 1995. The delegates then called for the establishment of the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests (IPF). This decision was seen as a watershed event that helped focus the international dialogue on forests.⁴⁶ In 1997, the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests replaced the IPF. Even though both forums came up with several good recommendations, some countries stressed the need for a more permanent and legally binding instrument on forests.⁴⁷ At CSD-8, the delegates were not able to agree on a legally binding treaty, and instead recommended ECOSOC and the General Assembly (GA) to form a permanent intergovernmental body charged with fostering a multilateral process on forests. This recommendation was acted on, and the United Nations Forum on Forests was established.⁴⁸

Oceans: When the issue of oceans and seas was on the agenda at CSD-7, the delegates stressed the importance of finding ways and means to enhance the an-

42. Mabhongo 2005 [interview]; Wagner 2005, 115; and Yamin 1998/99, 57.

43. UN 1997, 25.

44. Chasek 2000, 385.

45. Eidheim and Hofseth 2005; and Mabhongo 2005 [interviews].

46. Chasek 2000, 382.

47. Agarwal et al. 2001, 202; and Chasek 2005 [interview].

48. UN 2000, 40.

nual debate on oceans and the law of the sea. A recommendation to the GA resulted in the establishment of the UN Open-Ended Informal Consultative Process on Oceans.⁴⁹ The aim was to take stock of the inputs provided by UN bodies, facilitate deliberations in the GA on developments in oceanic affairs and strengthen international coordination and cooperation for achieving a more holistic approach.⁵⁰ As noted by Hyvarinen and Brack, the process “may contribute to revitalizing the Assembly’s oceans debate.”⁵¹

Freshwater: At CSD-2, the CSD requested preparation of a Comprehensive Assessment of the Freshwater Resources of the World to be submitted at its fifth session in 1997.⁵² As a consequence of the assessment, the CSD decided to make freshwater a priority issue at CSD-6. Since there has not been a body within the UN system on the issue of freshwater, the CSD has been important for putting freshwater on the agenda and keeping it there. Following this, the CSD has had some success in agenda setting, but the discussions carried out during the CSD sessions have resulted in few action-oriented proposals.⁵³

*Promoting Dialogue and Building Partnerships for Sustainable Development*⁵⁴

Achieving the goal of promoting dialogue and building partnerships for sustainable development between governments, the international community, and NGOs is generally seen as the most successful accomplishment of the CSD. One of the main reasons is that the CSD has been in the forefront of involving NGOs.⁵⁵ Agenda 21 identified nine major groups of nonstate actors and recognized that the participation of these groups would be necessary for advancing the sustainable development agenda.⁵⁶ At CSD-1, the importance of engaging the major groups in dialogue and interaction was acknowledged.⁵⁷ The multi-stakeholder dialogues, which were introduced at CSD-6, have been seen as the most innovative measure to involve major groups as they participate in a roundtable discussion with state delegates on relevant issues. The intention was to generate action-oriented dialogue between governments and major groups and identify future policies and actions that would contribute to advancing sustainable development objectives.⁵⁸

One major problem of the dialogues, however, has been that not enough

49. ENB 1999a; UN 1999; and Wagner 2005, 116.

50. Hyvarinen and Brack 2000, 28.

51. *Ibid.*

52. Chasek 2000, 385.

53. Agarwal et al. 2001, 172.

54. The term “partnerships” is used here as a general term.

55. Chasek 2005 [interview].

56. The nine major groups identified in Agenda 21 are women, youth and children, indigenous people, nongovernmental organizations, local authorities, workers and trade unions, business and industry, scientific and technological communities, and farmers (Agarwal et al. 2001, 196).

57. UN 1993c.

58. Dodds et al. 2002b, 25.

NGOs from developing countries have been participating. Also, while the dialogues have been interesting and useful in terms of information sharing, they have not had a clear impact on the intergovernmental process. As noted by Dodds et al., "The dialogues remained tied to the effectiveness of the chair to ensure that governments receive the conclusions of the dialogues."⁵⁹ One reason has been that many of the diplomats do not attend the dialogues. The mechanism of linking stakeholder contributions to the decision-making process has therefore been a shortcoming. The multi-stakeholder dialogues have, however, been an important mechanism for building partnerships between relevant parties in the work on sustainable development.

3. Which Mechanisms explain the CSD's Accomplishments?⁶⁰

Distribution of Capabilities

Most states have used negotiating coalitions at the CSD. I will therefore focus primarily on these coalitions.

The European Union (EU): The EU, which consisted of 15 member states for most of the period 1993–2001, has addressed sustainable development issues domestically for many years.⁶¹ Some respondents note that the coalition has had some problems with internal disputes, but has become a much more coordinated actor in international negotiations. As the EU has a centralized bureaucracy in Belgium, the states' representatives have been able to develop common positions prior to most conferences, including the CSD sessions.⁶² According to Wagner, this allows the coalition "to arrive at the CSD with relatively well prepared positions and alternatives and a 'driving strategy'; thus, it often presents action proposals rather than solely responding to others' suggestions."⁶³ The position and priorities change somewhat, depending on the issue and on who has the (rotating) EU presidency. This affects whether the EU is willing to compromise or takes a hard line. The EU is often seen as a pusher on environmental issues, as it has become a progressive actor in international negotiations. On other issues, the EU has had a more intermediate position, and has mediated some disputes between the United States and the G-77/China.⁶⁴ Even though the EU would like to have a green image, it is not willing to part with the necessary resources. Most of the EU countries have not fulfilled their commitment to

59. Ibid.

60. When not specified, the information is based on interviews with Chasek 2005; Eidheim and Hofseth 2004; Eidheim and Hofseth 2005; Leiro 2004; Pietracci 2005; Schei 2004; Skåre 2005; Strandenæs 2006; and Zhu and Morita-Lou 2005.

61. Wagner 2005, 113. The EU was expanded from 12 to 15 member states in 1995, and from 15 to 25 states in 2004 (Europa 2006).

62. Wagner 1999, 113f.

63. Wagner 2005, 113.

64. Wagner 1999, 114.

reach the UN target of 0.7 percent of GNP for Official Development Assistance (ODA).⁶⁵ On issues such as agricultural subsidies, the EU has acted more as a laggard.

JUSCANZ: The JUSCANZ group consists of Japan, the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. Norway, Switzerland and other non-EU OECD countries also consult with this relatively unstructured group. The group members discuss their views during the CSD sessions, but do not develop a joint position to be presented by a single speaker.⁶⁶ The interests and positions of the group members are quite broad, with Norway and Switzerland on one wing, the US and Australia on the other, and Japan, Canada and New Zealand somewhere in the middle. The positions of Canada and New Zealand have changed somewhat during the 1990s. Where they often used to share the same position as the Nordic countries, they now cooperate more often with the US and Australia. Norway, together with the Nordic states of Denmark and Sweden, has often been given credit for acting as a pusher on environmental and developmental issues. However, Denmark and Sweden are restricted to pushing their interests through the EU, due to their EU membership. The Nordic countries, together with the Netherlands, are the only countries that have achieved the ODA target.⁶⁷

The US position, however, is a different matter. In general, the US counters proposals from others more often than exploring options.⁶⁸ It has also been reluctant to make any commitments. According to several respondents, a main reason is that the US position has been greatly affected by domestic politics and constituency, and the negotiators are very much guided by instructions from home. The US has often stressed economic interests, and has opposed any increase in financial aid to developing countries.⁶⁹ According to one respondent, the US does not look upon the CSD as an arena to promote its interests so much as a place to explore and test proposals: "If they get some good feedback on proposals, they may want to launch the proposals elsewhere, where it may matter more." In general, the US has been considered as a laggard on most issues.

The Group of 77 and China: The G-77/China group consists of 132 developing countries.⁷⁰ Internally, the group has often had diverging interests, with the small island states on one side and the oil-producing states on the other.⁷¹ Nonetheless, this group most often presents a joint position by a single speaker

65. Only four countries have achieved the 0.7 percent of GNP target for ODA: Norway, Denmark, the Netherlands and Sweden (Agarwal et al. 2001, 221).

66. Wagner 1999, 114; and Wagner 2005, 113.

67. Agarwal et al. 2001, 221.

68. Wagner 1999, 115.

69. The US has never accepted the UN target of 0.7 percent of GNP for ODA (Brown 1998, 4)

70. G-77 2006.

71. Wagner 2005, 112.

at the CSD. One reason is that the countries realize that they are strong as long as they stand together and have a joint position. However, they most often “do not have the time, resources, or a centralized bureaucracy comparable to the EU’s to prepare a joint position prior to the CSD sessions.”⁷² Therefore, the G-77/China has many coordination meetings during the sessions, which often leave the countries focused on their joint position because they lack time to develop alternatives or fallback positions.⁷³ Since it is difficult for the group to agree on many issues such as atmosphere and energy, the G-77/China tends to focus on issues for which the countries have shared interests, that is, issues related to finance and technology transfer. Consequently, the G-77/China group has consistently stressed the industrialized countries’ commitment to reach the ODA target. According to some of the respondents, they have been reluctant to accept any commitments for themselves as long as the Northern countries have not met the ODA target.

The focus on financial matters and technology transfer can also be explained by the fact that many of the G-77 delegates are diplomats from the permanent UN missions in New York.⁷⁴ As most diplomats are generalists, they do not necessarily have great knowledge on sustainable development issues. Since the G-77 diplomats do not always consult their capitals or the people who have expertise on these issues, they often attend the CSD with limited knowledge on the sectoral issues on the agenda.⁷⁵ As a result, they have often stressed the importance of finance and technology transfer, without discussing these cross-sectoral issues in the context of the sectoral issues.⁷⁶ Wagner points out that “consideration of the cross-sectoral themes in the context of the sectoral and economic sector issues provided greater opportunities to identify concrete concerns and shared values, which should lead to more problem solving and integrative outcomes.”⁷⁷ Since financial concerns and technology transfer have often been emphasized without being connected to the sectoral issues, the G-77/China group have often given general and rhetorical statements rather than action-oriented and concrete policy recommendations.⁷⁸

Further, it seems that the chair of the G-77/China group has a role in deciding the positions and the main interests of the group. One example is the positions on energy-related issues during the period 1998–2001, when most of the G-77/China chairs were from the OPEC countries.⁷⁹ According to one respon-

72. Wagner 1999, 113.

73. *Ibid.*

74. One reason is that the CSD secretariat has limited funds to support participation from developing countries (Zhu and Morita-Lou 2005 [interview]).

75. Chasek 2005 [interview].

76. Interviews; and Wagner 2005, 112.

77. Wagner 1999, 126.

78. Interviews; and Wagner 2005, 112.

79. The G-77 had chairs from three OPEC countries during this period: Indonesia (1998), Nigeria (2000) and Iran (2001) (G-77 2006).

dent, the group often acted as a laggard on energy-related issues during this period due to the interests of the chair.

Considering the possibility to achieve breakthrough in the decision-making process, the EU and the JUSCANZ countries have had the best potential because of the group members' varied arsenal of capabilities. Based on the assessment of the CSD's accomplishments, however, the actors with the potential for influence did not necessarily achieve breakthrough. The evaluation showed that the CSD has had some problems achieving results in reviewing progress and has accomplished few results in policy guidance. As noted, a strong coalition of developing countries, headed by India, China and Brazil, as well as the US, opposed a formal reporting arrangement, whereas a majority of African countries and most of the OECD countries were in favor of such arrangements. On policy guidance, both the US and the G-77/China have been reluctant to make any commitments, while the EU has had a "driving strategy" and has often presented proposals for action. Considering the accomplishments of the CSD, it seems that the US and the G-77/China group have achieved breakthrough for their interests, rather than the EU.

In this regard, it is important to note that the CSD practices the rule of consensus, like the UN in general. Underdal points out that in a system practicing the rule of consensus, "coalition size will be an asset, exerting social pressure on a reluctant minority."⁸⁰ The G-77/China group is by far the largest coalition. As noted, the G-77/China and the US have acted as laggards on most issues; together, these states represent the majority at the CSD. Due to the consensus rule, these states have been able to achieve breakthrough for their interests. Thus, it is reasonable to say that the G-77/China and the US have contributed to slowing down the decision-making process and reducing the CSD's performances.

Thus, the perspective of "distribution of capabilities" does not provide a significant explanation as to which mechanisms affect the work of the CSD. However, the evaluation of the coalitions' interests and positions has still been useful for understanding why the CSD has not been able to achieve more results, especially in the area of policy guidance. Since the majority of states have acted as laggards, however, one would have expected low goal attainment overall. In order to gain a broader understanding of the mechanisms that affect the CSD's accomplishments, I will now turn to evaluation of the institutional setting.

Institutional Setting

The Role of the Secretariat: States gave the CSD secretariat, the Division for Sustainable Development, a very dependent role at the time of its establishment. The CSD was placed within ECOSOC, which in turn is under the UN General Assembly. Lack of financial resources has been a continuous problem, which

80. Underdal 2001, 31.

has led to difficulties when organizing expert meetings and other intersessional meetings. Moreover, the secretariat has only been able to support the attendance of 15–25 representatives from developing countries to each session.⁸¹ Despite the lack of resources, the secretariat has received credit for its work preparing and organizing the annual CSD sessions, preparing comprehensive documentation, developing sustainable development indicators, compiling national reporting information, and integrating the contributions of NGOs into the CSD process.⁸² Due to learning effects, the secretariat has also improved its capacity as it has become more technically adept and has acquired more expertise. This fits the “assistant secretariat” model sketched previously. However, the secretariat has been more active than merely playing a role as an assistant secretariat. According to most respondents, it has taken an active part in the analyses and dissemination of the countries’ national reports. Further, it has initiated and actively participated in agenda setting as it prepares the CSD sessions and contributes to the preparation documents for the delegates. Most of the respondents also asserted that it is mostly the secretariat that writes the negotiation drafts and the Chairman’s summary.⁸³ One respondent indicated that the chair has sometimes had to negotiate with the secretariat in order to get breakthrough for ideas and proposals. Thus, the secretariat has had both a role as an assistant secretariat and as a player secretariat.

Representation of state sectors: Chasek notes that “to be truly effective in setting the sustainable development agenda, the CSD must [. . .] attract and involve ministers of foreign affairs, finance, trade, agriculture, development or development assistance, forests, and so on.”⁸⁴ However, a continuous problem for the commission has been that the majority of ministers represent the environmental sector.⁸⁵ This has led to two main problems. First, since the CSD has primarily attracted environmental ministers, the parties have given most attention to the environmental agenda. This has also been a cumulative development; as the environmental ministers have been in the driver’s seat when defining the CSD agenda, it has become less relevant for other ministers to attend the meetings. Second, the environmental ministers are understood to have less political influence in their home governments than, for instance, the ministers of finance, trade and industry.⁸⁶ Due to the limited participation by ministers other than those with environmental backgrounds, sectoral representation has been narrow.

81. Zhu and Morita-Lou 2005 [interview].

82. Chasek 2000, 393.

83. The Chairman’s summary summarizes the sessions and the state delegates’ and major groups’ views and statements.

84. Chasek 2000, 394.

85. Agarwal et al. 2001, 173.

86. Ibid.

Access and Participation of Nongovernmental Organizations: During UNCED, NGOs and other major groups achieved greater access than before. This process continued with the CSD, as it continuously developed new ways of involving NGOs into its work. For instance, NGOs have access and are invited to speak at all sessions, unlike at most other intergovernmental meetings. The commission is therefore often seen as a pioneer in involving NGOs. The participation of NGOs has also been highlighted as of major importance for the work of the CSD. NGOs have received credit for contributing to enhancing the quality of the decision-making process, creating attention and pressure on governments, initiating processes, informing the member states and pushing for policies. According to Pietracci, NGOs have advocated certain issues and have tried to influence the states, which is sometimes reflected in the final document through the use of NGO language in some portions of the text.⁸⁷ Many NGOs have, however, been quite dissatisfied at times with how they affected the CSD's output. Many delegates stress that the NGOs have been heard, but that there is a limit to how much delegates can listen given the constraint of instructions from home. In the words of one government representative, "All delegations from a country have a mandate, and you cannot go around the mandate. NGOs have to lobby at home, before the mandate gets written." This has improved, however, as many of the NGOs have learned that much advocacy work must be done at home.

Even though the rules of access have included more and more NGOs in an increasing number of areas within the CSD, some problems can be noted. Many of the larger and more representative NGOs, such as Oxfam, Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth, did not attend the sessions because they did not take it seriously.⁸⁸ Furthermore, according to Agarwal and colleagues, the contributions of Northern and Southern NGOs have been unbalanced: "while NGOs from some European countries such as Denmark, Germany, Norway and the UK are better informed and often work in close cooperation with their governments, NGOs from the South remain outsiders."⁸⁹

Finally, it is important to understand that the NGOs active within the CSD represent diverse and often conflicting interests. According to Wettestad, "General open access will seldom mean the actual participation of environmental NGOs only. It is for instance likely that private industry groups will frequently

87. Pietracci 2005 [interview].

88. Agarwal et al. 2001, 197; and Strandenæs 2006 [interview]. Some of these NGOs have attended the CSD after WSSD, as coordination among the NGOs has improved.

89. Agarwal et al. 2001, 198. Some of the problems with uneven participation or unbalanced representation can be explained by the difficulties of coordination among the NGOs. At CSD-1, an NGO steering committee was formed in order to facilitate NGO participation and speak for all the NGOs at the CSD (ibid.). As more NGOs attended the CSD sessions, the NGOs experienced increasing problems of coordination. Due to the diversity of interests, it became more challenging for the Steering Committee to speak with one voice. Internal conflict among the NGOs led to a collapse of the Steering Committee in 2000. As the NGOs had to restructure the organizational input into the CSD process, the coordination among NGOs has improved (Strandenæs 2006 [interview]).

use their lobbying skills to obtain contrary goals to the green NGOs.⁹⁰ However, as most of the NGOs attending the sessions have been regarded as “pushers,” the involvement of NGOs has generally had a positive impact on the CSD’s performance. Most important, a broad participation of NGOs with diverse views and interests has been considered essential to achieve a democratic decision-making process at the CSD.

Entrepreneurial Leadership: The formal leadership of the CSD is represented by the secretariat and the CSD Bureau. It is therefore relevant to evaluate the capabilities of the individuals leading these bodies. During the period 1993–2001, the CSD secretariat has had two different directors. Joke Waller-Hunter was appointed as the first director, and led the secretariat from 1994 to 1998. JoAnne DiSano has been the secretariat director since then. Of the two directors, Waller-Hunter has most often been given credit for her leadership. Several respondents emphasized that she was competent, and that she was proficient in maintaining informal contact with the countries. However, the secretariat director is not authorized to contact countries informally. DiSano has therefore been more proficient in following the rules and doing her job well according to the secretariat’s mandate. Even though both directors have had a formal position as a leader, and Waller-Hunter established a good reputation for leadership, it does not seem likely that either of the secretariat directors has actually exercised *entrepreneurial* leadership.

Nitin Desai had a formal position as UN Under-Secretary-General, and thus was number two under the UN Secretary-General. He headed the Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development (DPCSD), within which the secretariat was placed. After a UN reorganization, when DPCSD was renamed the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), Desai continued as head of DESA.⁹¹ Even though he had a formal position as a leader, there are mixed views about his reputation for exercising entrepreneurial leadership. Desai has been given credit for having charisma and being able to talk to politicians and make them feel comfortable, which is an important ability in order to be heard. He has also been an intellectual capacity for the CSD and has shown great interest in the sustainable development agenda. However, the general view has been that he has been a good administrator rather than an entrepreneurial leader.

The CSD has had ten chairs during the period 1993–2001, one for each session.⁹² According to some of the respondents, most of the chairs have not provided the necessary leadership to enhance the CSD’s achievements. The general perception of the respondents is that only the CSD-1 chair Ismael Razali of Malaysia and the CSD-7 chair Simon Upton from New Zealand showed sub-

90. Wettestad 1999, 22.

91. Wagner 2005, 105. The secretariat is now placed within DESA.

92. The CSD elects a new chair every year, as is the case for all UN commissions.

stantial leadership. Razali has been highlighted by many as being the most important chair during the first phase of the CSD, and has therefore had the status of a significant leader. He has been given credit for being a highly competent diplomat and a tough politician due to the way he led the negotiations. It has also been stressed that he was innovative concerning the dialogue between participants and the involvement of nonstate actors. Furthermore, he efficiently explored the possibilities for collective solutions, and worked with the purpose of obtaining agreements. The fact that he was from the South was also an advantage, enhancing the willingness of Southern countries to cooperate. It is therefore reasonable to say that Razali had the skills and energy to act as an entrepreneurial leader.

Upton has been most often pointed out as the most significant chair during the second phase of the CSD, and has therefore had the status of an important leader. He was the first chair to be elected a year in advance, and therefore had the benefit of establishing important one-on-one relationships with ministers prior to the session.⁹³ He also introduced a number of innovations such as video conferencing for bureau meetings, and thus made it easier for developing countries to participate at these meetings. Accordingly, it can be noted that CSD-7 attracted more high-level representation than ever before.⁹⁴ At the session itself, Upton had "a backup plan to continue circumventing any attempt by delegates from the New York missions to return to the old ways, by working the phones behind the scenes, making use of a list of direct telephone numbers collected during his ministerial tête-à-têtes."⁹⁵ He also encouraged the negotiators to place their failure to agree on record in the CSD-7 text on Oceans and Seas: "Upton preferred to celebrate this frankness rather than support the Commission's tradition of protracted negotiations leading to a lowest common denominator agreement."⁹⁶ However, as noted, the CSD did achieve some results on the issue of oceans. Upton also improved the multi-stakeholder dialogues by involving more major groups. As with Ismail Razali, the review shows that Simon Upton had the skills and energy to act as an entrepreneurial leader for the CSD.

The CSD's Potential for Effectiveness

The analysis has illuminated how the CSD process has been pulled in both negative and positive directions. The evaluation of the states' interests and positions gave some valuable insights as to why the CSD has achieved few results in some areas, such as policy guidance. As the majority of states, represented by the G-77/China group and the US, have acted as laggards in the CSD process, it is rea-

93. The CSD resolution to elect the chair and the bureau a year in advance of the next session enabled the bureau to prepare for the session, rather than to take over after the previous bureau did all of the preparations.

94. ENB 1999b.

95. Ibid.

96. Ibid.

sonable to say that it has been difficult for the CSD to achieve its goals. However, the perspective of distribution of capabilities did not serve as a significant explanation for the CSD's accomplishments. An evaluation of institutional design has therefore given a broader understanding of which mechanisms affect the work of the CSD.

As the majority of states have not been willing to push the process forward and enhance the CSD's goal attainment, the CSD has needed entrepreneurial leaders with the necessary status, skills and energy to steer the process in a positive direction. However, only two of the CSD chairs actually exercised entrepreneurial leadership during its first ten years. Even though their leadership contributed to achieving some results, their impact was limited as the CSD chairs serve only for one year. Some respondents pointed out that most of the chairs did not have the ability to exercise substantial leadership, due to limited resources and manpower. If this has been a major problem for many chairs, it is reasonable to assume that this has led to some kind of leadership vacuum. The evaluation showed that the secretariat has been rather active, acting as both an assistant and player secretariat. It is therefore possible that the secretariat has, to some degree, filled the leadership vacuum in cases where the chair has not been able to provide the necessary leadership. In any case, the secretariat has contributed positively to the CSD's goal attainment by maintaining continuity. The secretariat has also received credit for its work of preparing comprehensive documentation, developing sustainable development indicators and compiling national reporting information, and has therefore had a positive impact on the CSD's achievements in the area of monitoring and reviewing progress. As the secretariat has also received credit for integrating the contributions of NGOs into the CSD process, it has likely affected the work of promoting dialogue and building partnerships for sustainable development. Finally, since the secretariat has participated actively in agenda setting, with the opportunity to determine the focus of the sessions, it may have been able to affect the states' positions indirectly.

The involvement of a great number of NGOs has also been of great importance for the CSD's performance. Their participation has been important to ensure a democratic decision-making process and to put pressure on reluctant states. Moreover, NGO involvement has been significant to improve the dialogues at the CSD sessions. However, a major disadvantage for the work of promoting dialogue and elaborating policy guidance has been limited attendance by ministers other than those with environmental background. The narrow sectoral representation may indicate that there is a lack of interest at the national level for the work of the CSD.

Considering this background, the perspective of institutional design provides some explanation as to why the CSD has achieved some results in the areas of reviewing progress and promoting dialogue. These results should not be underestimated, as these tasks are important means of advancing the sustainable development agenda. However, the evaluation of the states' interests and positions shows that the future prospects for achieving greater results, especially

in the area of policy guidance, may be considered limited as long as the majority of states are not willing to push the process forward.

4. Conclusion

Improving the CSD's potential for effectiveness is not an easy task if the states' political will is lacking. One suggestion is to address the CSD's very broad and vague mandate in order to clarify the commission's role and tasks for the future. There are likely two strategic alternatives for change. First, if the CSD is to continue with a main focus on reviewing and monitoring progress on the implementation of Agenda 21 and elaborating policy guidance and options for future initiatives, then a strengthened CSD is needed. In order to successfully perform such tasks, the CSD would need legal authority and enforcement powers. Only then would states be obliged to submit information to the commission and be held accountable for their actions and commitments. This would, however, never be accepted by the states. As the evaluation has shown, it has been difficult to introduce measures that aim at affecting the states' interests and positions. The second alternative is a more likely option, as it concerns the institutional setting of the CSD. Agenda setting and dialogue between relevant parties are seen as the CSD's strongest assets. The commission should therefore focus on its strength as a soft forum. In this regard, several improvements are needed. Instead of continuing with the type of negotiations seen thus far, the CSD should concentrate on developing and improving the dialogues. One of the most important measures in this regard would be to give additional funding to support increased representation from national capitals. The coordination with other UN bodies should also be improved, especially concerning the reporting process. Moreover, the CSD needs a more focused agenda. It should therefore address a few issue areas where no other forum has primary responsibility, such as freshwater.

Some of the main questions regarding the CSD's future were considered during WSSD in 2002. As the states agreed on the need to revitalize the CSD, several reform proposals were discussed. CSD-11 approved a new work program, which was organized in thematic two-year implementation cycles. The delegates also recommended arrangements to enable the commission to serve as a focal point for public-private partnerships.⁹⁷ Another outcome was the decision to focus on the cross-sectoral aspects (such as finance and technology transfer) of specific sectoral issues. A greater focus on the environmental, economic and social dimensions of sustainable development was also apparent. Moreover, the delegates agreed on a greater emphasis on regional activities and new organizational approaches, including a learning center and partnerships fair, as ways to share experience and good practice.⁹⁸

A final and essential question, then, is, whether these improvements will

97. Referred to as "type II" partnerships before WSSD.

98. Bigg 2003, 23; and Gardiner 2002, 5.

be sufficient to enhance the CSD's potential for effectiveness. Even though many CSD participants have expressed their disappointment with the achievements after WSSD, a final judgment of the "new" CSD is premature. The introduction of a two-year cycle is promising, but the states' political commitment will be essential to moving forward.

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