

United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD)

Organization: United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD)

Author: Joanna Langille , University of Toronto

Date Entered: 2005-05-06

Description In 1992, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), or Earth Summit, was held in Rio de Janeiro. The 179 states that attended agreed to a plan for achieving sustainable development in the twenty-first century entitled Agenda 21. In order to implement and monitor the progress of Agenda 21, the UN General Assembly created the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD). It began its work as a functional commission of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) in 1993, and has since met annually. Following the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002 (WSSD 2002), at which the international community decided to focus on achieving the political impetus for sustainable development, CSD's program of work has shifted from simply bringing awareness to environmental issues to searching for practical, long-term solutions.

The three major roles of CSD are: to review progress in the achievement of the Earth Summit outcomes; to formulate further policy and guidelines for achieving sustainable development; and to facilitate communication and coordination between governments, non-governmental organizations, civil society, and other groups and organizations on sustainable development issues. The fifty-three members of CSD are elected by ECOSOC in a geographically representative manner. Other states, UN organizations, and non-governmental organizations can attend CSD conferences as observers.

Transboundary pollution, environmental interdependence, and global environmental degradation make evident the globalization of environmental problems and the need for a sustainable method of development. With the creation of the CSD, the international community has recognized that autonomous responses by individual countries to environmental problems and sustainable development will be ineffective and thus require a globally coordinated effort. The CSD is one initiative, like the prominent United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), to facilitate joint solutions to global environmental problems. However, unlike the UNEP, the CSD has attempted to simultaneously promote environmental preservation and sustainable development, the difficulty of which has revealed an inherent tension between global development and increasingly globalized environmental concerns. The CSD, as an institution concerned with a broad sustainable development agenda, also focuses on issues surrounding autonomy, local participation, and innovation, working with limited success to implement Agenda 21, and improving the lives of

individuals and communities around the world.

Suggested Reading: **UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs - Division for Sustainable Development website.** *About the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD)*, www.un.org/esa/sustdev/csd/about_csd.htm (accessed 3 January 2005).
UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs - Division for Sustainable Development website. *Mandate of the Commission on Sustainable Development*, www.un.org/esa/sustdev/csd/csd_mandate.htm (accessed 3 January 2005).