**About Major Groups**

Since the first UN Conference on Environment and Development in 1992 - the Earth Summit - it was recognized that sustainable development could not be achieved by governments alone. This notion is reflected emphatically in the landmark outcome document of that Summit, "[Agenda 21](http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/index.php?page=view&type=400&nr=23&menu=35)". Section 3 underscores the criticality of harnessing expertise and capacity from all sectors of society and all types of people: consumers, workers, business owners, farmers, students, teachers, researchers, activists, indigenous peoples, and other communities of interest.

Agenda 21 formalized this concept by recognizing nine sectors of society as the main channels through which citizens could organize and participate in international efforts to achieve sustainable development through the United Nations. These nine sectors are officially known as "major groups".

Twenty years later, major groups continue to demonstrate a high level of engagement with this process. [*The Future We Want*](http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/index.php?menu=1298) likewise reaffirms that sustainable development requires the meaningful involvement and active participation of major groups and all relevant decision makers in the planning and implementation of sustainable development policies. It acknowledges efforts and progress made at the local and sub-national levels and the key role that local, regional and national legislatures and judiciaries play in promoting sustainable development. This includes their role in engaging citizens and stakeholders and providing them with information relevant to the three dimensions of sustainable development. Additionally *The Future We Want* highlights the importance of involving other stakeholders such as local communities, volunteer groups and foundations, migrants and families, as well as older persons and persons with disabilities.

Governments have committed to work more closely with major groups and other stakeholders and to encourage their active participation in processes that contribute to decision-making, planning and implementation of policies and programmes for sustainable development at all levels. They have likewise agreed to work towards improved access to information and communications technologies, especially broadband networks and services, in order to bridge the digital divide through greater international cooperation.

**An Overview of the Organizing Partners**

To fulfil the General Assembly and CSD's mandates regarding multi-stakeholder engagement, the CSD Secretariat works with and supports the major groups to facilitate their inputs into the UN CSD process in an efficient, participatory and transparent way. Working arrangements are in continuous evolution and often serve as a model to other UN led processes.

The nine Major Groups, identified in Agenda 21 in 1992, are called major group sectors and include:

* Women
* Children and Youth
* Indigenous Peoples
* Non-governmental organizations (NGOs)
* Local Authorities
* Workers and Trade Unions
* Business and Industry
* Scientific and technological Community
* Farmers

The Private Sector falls under the umbrella of Business and Industry. Each sector is treated equally in the CSD intergovernmental process. No one-size-fits all and each sector has a distinct process to select Organizing Partners that act as liaison with the Secretariat and their sector during a CSD cycle.

**Criteria for Eligibility, Roles and Responsibilities**

The preparation of multi-stakeholder participation within the CSD is itself a multi-stakeholder process. Key major groups' networks are invited by the CSD Bureau to form a facilitating group called "organizing partners", which coordinates the preparations and assists the Secretariat in generating and guiding the engagement of stakeholders for each major group sector. The Secretariat chairs the facilitating group and supports its work throughout the preparatory process and a given CSD session.

The organizations serving as Organizing Partners (often up to 5 organisations per sector) are facilitators working through and with large global constituencies. They are accountable to their constituents, to the CSD Bureau and to the CSD Secretariat, although they do not represent them.

The criteria for eligibility include Organisations:

* with expert knowledge and competency on the CSD cycle’s[cluster of issues](http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/csd/csd_multyearprogwork.shtml)
* that have demonstrated over time their competence and commitment to work in collaboration with the CSD Bureau and the Secretariat
* that are recognized and well respected in their communities and by other organizations in the same sector, and have contacts reaching into different branches of their respective sectors
* that have a global or regional geographical scope and membership
* with representative structures and appropriate mechanisms of accountability to members
* with a solid understanding of intergovernmental decision-making processes, and in particular of the CSD process
* with a knowledge of respective regional players and regional groupings
* with a commitment to remain engaged throughout the two-year CSD implementation cycle
* that have the organizational means and time to perform the required tasks un-paid and responsibilities, including participation in CSD meetings in New York throughout the two-year CSD implementation cycle
* that have members who shall exercise effective control over its policies and actions through the exercise of voting rights or other appropriate democratic and transparent decision-making processes
* that are preferably in consultative status with ECOSOC or are on the CSD Roster

The major groups organizing partners' main responsibilities include:

* Consult with networks to prepare written inputs in the form of discussion papers and priorities for action papers addressing the specific themes of each CSD implementation cycle-including the cross-sectoral themes-that reflect their group's views on progress made, outline obstacles and constraints to implementation, and identify new challenges to be met by major groups to expedite implementation.
* Organize manage and disseminate data and information on major groups and the given CSD cycle
* Consult with networks to identify participants to serve on their sector's delegation
* Provide and develop logistics and process understanding so the major groups will be able to maximise their presence at CSD in accordance with the UN and CSD engagement practices and procedures
* Provide guidance and find expertise to develop policy positions representing the best from the major groups? constituencies relevant to the agenda points of the CSD implementation cycle/programme of work
* Coordinate and facilitate the participation of representatives of their respective sector throughout the CSD sessions, working in collaboration with other major groups' sectors' representatives present at the [RIMs](http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/mg_meetwork.shtml), the [IPM](http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/mg_meetwork.shtml) and the [CSD](http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/mg_meetwork.shtml) sessions
* Have proper and valued knowledge of the UN in general and the CSD process in particular to provide the major group constituency with background information and/or capacity building to understand and function within the CSD two year cycle.

**Milestones in the evolution of self-organization mechanisms and collaboration with the CSD Secretariat and Bureau**

* International Facilitating Committee [IFC]: established by NGOs and other stakeholder from civil society in the lead-up to UNCED to provide non-political organizational support, including organizing the Global Forum. It dissolved after Rio.
* International Non-Governmental Organizations Forum [INGOF]: also established by NGOs, creating an international "space" to develop common political positions (not including industry). It dissolved in 1995.
* CSD-1: A facilitation mechanism was needed to assist NGOs and major groups in maximising their participation. NGO working groups from Rio, -which had already formed again - convened to discuss how NGOs might best organize themselves. The UN- Non Governmental Liaison Service (UN-NGLS) facilitated a series of follow-up regional telephone conferences and a meeting for NGOs attending the Down to Earth conference in Copenhagen (December 1993)
* CSD-2: The results of these discussions were brought to CSD-2 in 1994, where NGOs and major groups' representatives established the NGO Steering Committee to the UN Commission on Sustainable Development. [1/](http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/orgpartners.html#1/) The CSD NGO Steering Committee (a multi-major groups' structure) had a Southern and Northern Co-Chairs and two representatives from each of the identified regional caucuses, issue-based caucuses and major groups sectors.
* 1996: revivified interest in the intergovernmental sustainability process leading up to Rio +5; increased number of major groups participating in the Preparatory Committee of the 19th Special Session of the General Assembly (Earth Summit +5) in September 1997
* UN General Assembly (GA) decides to include stakeholder dialogue as part of preparations for the 1997 Earth Summit + 5, inspired by the UN Habitat Conference in Istanbul 1996, and by various stakeholders active at CSD.
* CSD Secretariat convenes a meeting with major groups in Geneva, "and agreement was reached to proceed with stakeholder dialogue sessions at CSD-5, which served as the preparatory meeting for Earth Summit + 5 review." [2/](http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/orgpartners.html#2/)
* Earth Summit + 5: stipulated that the CSD should conduct "a high-level policy debate aimed at consensus-building on sustainable development."[3/](http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/orgpartners.html#3/) As an integral part of that effort, the CSD should strengthen its interaction with representatives of major groups, including through greater and better use of focused dialogue sessions, and round tables.
* CSD-6 through CSD-10: To support the coordination and preparation for the multi-stakeholder dialogue segments, the CSD Secretariat broadens its interfacing beyond the CSD NGO Steering Committee and opens to a greater multi-sectoral coordinating mechanism (the early stages of the Organizing Partners) to respond to the new mandate and the focus of each multi-stakeholder dialogue segments. The content of the multi-stakholder dialogues was determined in consultation with the CSD Bureau and the Steering Committee/organizing partners, facilitated by the CSD secretariat. The organizing partners engaged in consultations with their major group to draft a 'dialogue starter paper' (a position paper) and determine who would speak for the group during the dialogue. The dialogue papers were released as part of the official documentation in languages without editing the content.
* CSD-8 Preparation: In the meantime, the CSD NGO Steering Committee experiences internal challenges linked to fundraising and accounting for the finances and election-procedures, representativity and participation leading to its disintegration in June 2001.
* Preparation for the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) : In 2001 SDIN - the Sustainable Development Issues Network is created, with the aim to support a broader NGO alliance of issue networks, caucuses and groups in the lead up to WSSD, and overcome the stalemate in the Steering Committee, as well as to provide finance and facilitation to those groups travelling to the Preparatory Committee's meetings and Johannesburg, and training on the WSSD process (the core group included ANPED, TWN, ELCI, the Danish 92 Group and the Heinrich B�ll Foundation). SDIN was entrusted by the CSD Secretariat to organise the multi-stakeholder dialogues at the WSSD and coordinate the daily NGO driven morning information meeting open to all major groups.
* WSSD gave CSD a renewed and updated mandate and CSD 11 in 2003 adopted a new multi-year work programme and devised new and enhanced modes of engagement of the major groups.
* CSD-11 - present: the Organizing Partners system is operating mechanism that allows the Secretariat and the Bureau to consult with major groups in a timely fashion, during preparatory phases as well as during the CSD sessions, and to organize multi-stakeholder participation in a harmonious, inclusive, targeted and coordinated fashion.
* The post-WSSD era has been characterised by a growing intra-major groups collaboration that led to some tangible partnerships and new forms of cooperation.

**Notes**

1/ M. Howell: The NGO Steering Committee and Multi-stakeholder Participation at the UN Commission on Sustainable Development, FIM Montreal, Canada, 1999.

2/ M. Howell: Talking our way into sustainable development: An Analysis of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development Multi-stakeholder Dialogues, University of Auckland, New Zealand., PhD dissertation.

3/ A/RES/S-19/2, 1997