

Climate Change and Sustainable Development

The Role of Indicators

**Department of Economic and Social Affairs
Division for Sustainable Development
Expert Group Meeting
New York, 15-16 October 2008**

Concept Note

Climate change is a sustainable development issue, impacting on and impacted by a wide range of economic, social and environmental factors and policies. On the one hand, climate change impacts could erase the progress made in achieving the goals of sustainable development. On the other, controlling greenhouse gas emissions will depend ultimately on underlying economic and technological development pathways. However, despite this general agreement it remains often unclear how to ensure that climate change adaptation and mitigation are indeed considered in the framework of sustainable development. Linking quantitative information on climate change mitigation and adaptation to sustainable development information systems is a means to make the fact “climate change is a sustainable development issue” relevant in practice.

The World Summit on Sustainable Development (Johannesburg Summit) recognized the linkages between climate change and sustainable development, which was reinforced by the Delhi Declaration adopted at 8th Conference of the Parties (COP-8) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in New Delhi in 2002. The Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) considered climate change as a major sustainable development theme in the CSD 14/15 cycle (2006/2007). In December 2007, the COP-13 adopted the Bali Action Plan, the crucial mandate to launch negotiations for the achievement of a comprehensive global agreement by the end of 2009. The Bali Action Plan not only confirmed the existing principles and commitments, including those referring to sustainable development, but also explicitly calls to consider in the negotiations “nationally appropriate mitigation actions by developing country Parties in the context of sustainable development, supported and enabled by technology, financing and capacity-building, in a measurable, reportable and verifiable manner”.

Many countries utilize indicator sets to measure progress towards sustainable development. In most cases, indicators of sustainable development (ISD) are linked to national sustainable development strategies (NSDS), which are participatory, country-driven, integrative, inter-sectoral and comprehensive strategies. However, some countries also use ISD as stand-alone tool to assess national sustainable development. ISD as well as NSDS have been recognized already in Agenda 21 as tools for decision-making. The link between climate change and NSDS has been explored in an Expert Group Meeting organized by UN DESA in November 2007.¹ ISD typically include a wide range of indicators relevant to climate change, even though they may not be utilized in political climate change processes. A set of Indicators of Sustainable Development, including guidelines and methodologies, has been prepared under a mandate from the CSD.²

This Expert Group Meeting, organized by the Division for Sustainable Development of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, examines the usefulness of ISD for climate change

¹ See http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/natlinfo/nsds/egm_ClimateChange/index.htm

² See <http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/natlinfo/indicators/isd.htm> for details and the latest revised set of indicators from 2007.

adaptation and mitigation policies and frameworks. Its objective is to help countries harness the linkages between ISD and climate change. It will review national and international experiences in this regard, discuss an indicator framework for linking sustainable development and climate change, and identify areas of future work, both methodological and awareness-related. By bringing together indicator practitioners and climate change negotiators and experts, it also aims at fostering a dialogue among different sets of actors in this area.