



## INSPECTION AND EVALUATION DIVISION

# EVALUATION REPORT

### **Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the evaluation of the Division for Sustainable Development (DSD)**

*“The Division effectively supported the intergovernmental process, but needs to further clarify internal priorities and strengthen internal and external communication and coordination”*

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**01 June 2011**

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# INSPECTION AND EVALUATION DIVISION

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## FUNCTION

*“The Office shall evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of the implementation of the programmes and legislative mandates of the Organisation. It shall conduct programme evaluations with the purpose of establishing analytical and critical evaluations of the implementation of programmes and legislative mandates, examining whether changes therein require review of the methods of delivery, the continued relevance of administrative procedures and whether the activities correspond to the mandates as they may be reflected in the approved budgets and the medium-term plan of the Organisation;” (General Assembly [Resolution 48/218 B](#)).*

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## **Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the evaluation of the Division for Sustainable Development**

*“The Division effectively supported the intergovernmental process, but needs to further clarify internal priorities and strengthen internal and external communication and coordination”*

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This report presents the results of the [Inspection and Evaluation Division \(IED\)](#) of the [Office of Internal Oversight Services \(OIOS\)](#) evaluation of the [Division for Sustainable Development \(DSD\)](#), which was undertaken as part of an evaluation of the [Department of Economic and Social Affairs \(DESA\)](#) endorsed by the [Committee for Programme and Coordination \(CPC\)](#).

The overall objective of the evaluation was to determine, as systematically and objectively as possible, the relevance, efficiency and effectiveness (including impact) of DSD. This evaluation considered DSD’s Strategic Framework and budget for the 2010-2011 biennium as the primary benchmark against which to measure its performance, and also reviewed data from the past three biennia.

In conducting this evaluation, OIOS used a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, including a document review, staff and stakeholder interviews, staff and stakeholder surveys, field missions and direct observation of intergovernmental meetings. The evaluation was undertaken in accordance with the norms and standards for evaluation established by the United Nations Evaluation Group.

The Division fulfilled a crucial role in supporting the inter-governmental process on sustainable development and in keeping sustainable development on the global agenda, both as a substantive framework for policy making and a basis for coordination among entities and other stakeholders. The enhanced inclusion of Major Groups into the intergovernmental process has in particular been a major achievement for the Division.

DSD’s mandate is generally well defined and distinct from those of other United Nations entities operating in the sustainable development arena. Nevertheless, perceptions of overlap with other entities have persisted, and respective roles and responsibilities related to sustainable development were not commonly understood by the Division’s staff, United Nations system entities and other stakeholders. Communication and coordination have been insufficient, and the “Rio+20” preparations have added to the challenges the Division is already facing.

In recent years, the Division has introduced some structural changes to strengthen the substantive dimension of its work, and put greater focus on emerging issues, such as climate change. While it is too early to assess the full impact of these efforts, sustainable development has achieved greater prominence in international discussions and some DSD reports have received positive attention. At the same time, some internal management processes have

resulted in inefficiencies and the recent restructuring of the Division has left staff unclear on divisional priorities. Human resources management and internal communication issues have further challenged DSD.

In the area of research, notwithstanding the importance of DSD's contributions to key policy debates, the usage of DSD publications remained unclear and specific target audiences have not been defined. And in the area of capacity building, DSD has not yet positioned itself clearly. Its strategy is not recognized by staff and lacks alignment with DESA's overall plans.

OIOS therefore makes three recommendations to the division management, including:

- ⇒ to organize a staff retreat to foster cohesion and move forward with discussion on how to address challenges that emerged through the restructuring;
- ⇒ to further clarify the scope of work in the area of technical cooperation and capacity building; and
- ⇒ to further develop and implement a comprehensive publication, marketing, and dissemination strategy for each DSD publication.

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## Abbreviations

CPC	Committee for Planning and Coordination
CSD	Commission on Sustainable Development
DESA	Department of Economic and Social Affairs
DSD	Division for Sustainable Development
EA	Expected Accomplishment
ECESA	Executive Committee for Economic and Social Affairs
ECLAC	Economic Commission of Latin America and the Caribbean
ECOSOC	Economic and Social Council
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency
IED	Inspection and Evaluation Division
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IoA	Indicator of Achievement
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
NRF	National Resources Forum
NSDS	National Sustainable Development Strategy
OIOS	Office of Internal Oversight Services
OUSG	Office of the Under-Secretary-General
PANB	Policy and Analysis Branch
SIDS	Small Island Developing States
ST/SGB	Secretariat Secretary-General's Bulletin
UNCBD	United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity
UNCCD	United Nations Convention on Combating Desertification (UNCCD)
UNCED	United Nations Conference on Environment and Development
UNCSD	United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme

UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UN-HABITAT	United Nations Human Settlements Programme
UNIDO	United Nations Industrial Development Organization
UNOPS	United Nations Office for Project Services
USG	Under-Secretary-General
WESB	Water, Energy and Strategies Branch
WHO	World Health Organisation
WSSD	World Summit on Sustainable Development (“Rio+10”)
WTO	World Trade Organisation

## I. Introduction

1. The [Inspection and Evaluation Division \(IED\)](#) of the [Office of Internal Oversight Services \(OIOS\)](#) identified the [Department of Economic and Social Affairs \(DESA\)](#) as a priority programme for evaluation based on a strategic risk assessment exercise carried out in 2008. The forty-ninth session of the [Committee for Programme and Coordination \(CPC\)](#) selected that evaluation to be presented for consideration at its fifty-first session.<sup>1</sup> The selection was formally mandated by the ensuing General Assembly [Resolution 64/229](#) on Programme Planning.

2. The present evaluation of the [Division for Sustainable Development \(DSD\)](#) is being issued to DESA, along with assessments of all of the Department's divisions and offices, including its Executive Direction and Management, as an internal management report. It was undertaken as part of the larger DESA evaluation.<sup>2</sup> OIOS had previously assessed DSD in 2001.<sup>3</sup>

3. In accordance with the Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, Aspects of the Budget, the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation, the overall objective of the evaluation was to determine, as systematically and objectively as possible, the relevance, efficiency and effectiveness (including impact) of DSD in DESA.<sup>4</sup>

4. This evaluation considered DSD's Strategic Framework and budget for the 2010-2011 biennium as the primary benchmark against which to measure its performance, and also reviewed data from the past three biennia. The evaluation did not include an assessment of Development Account projects managed by DSD.

5. This report incorporates revisions based on comments received through ongoing dialogue with DSD during the drafting process. DSD's final comments are appended in full, as per General Assembly Resolution 64/263.

6. OIOS expresses its appreciation for the collaboration and cooperation offered by the Division management, focal point and staff in undertaking this evaluation.

## II. Methodology

7. In conducting this evaluation, OIOS utilised a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, drawing on data from the following sources:

- i. A **document analysis** of DSD's strategic framework and other programme and project documents; monitoring and reporting information from IMDIS and senior

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<sup>1</sup> [A/64/16](#), Report of the Committee for Programme and Coordination, July 2009; paragraph 41.

<sup>2</sup> Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the programme evaluation of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) [E/AC.51/2011/2](#).

<sup>3</sup> [E/AC.51/2001/2](#), In-depth evaluation of sustainable development, 27 March 2001.

<sup>4</sup> [ST/SGB/2000/8](#), Regulation 7.1.



management compacts; General Assembly resolutions; and prior evaluations, studies and audit reports;

- ii. **Interviews of all seven DSD senior managers** based in New York **and of a stratified random sample of eighteen DSD staff** in New York;<sup>5</sup>
- iii. **Thirty-one interviews of DSD stakeholders** (including Member States permanent representatives, government officials, civil society organisations, academics, and staff and management from the United Nations System), conducted in New York and over the telephone;
- iv. **Field missions** to Thailand, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi and South Africa;<sup>6</sup>
- v. **A web-based survey of DSD management and staff;**<sup>7</sup>
- vi. **A web-based survey of a non-random sample of DSD stakeholders;**<sup>8</sup>
- vii. **Observations of selected CSD-18 meetings** serviced by DSD;<sup>9</sup> and
- viii. **An independent expert panel review** of the quality and usage of a non-random sample of eighteen DESA key publications and databases, including two DSD reports.<sup>10</sup>
- ix. **A bibliometric analysis** of the usage of DESA publications, including citation metrics (Google Scholar), website traffic data, publication download data, and the dissemination practices of the same DSD publications also assessed by the expert panel.

8. The evaluation was undertaken in accordance with the norms and standards for evaluation established by the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG). The evaluation results are derived from a combination of documentary, testimonial, observational and

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<sup>5</sup> A stratified random sample of DSD staff was drawn to ensure representation of staff at all levels and a confidence interval of 90 per cent.

<sup>6</sup> These countries were chosen for field missions based on a mapping of DESA's stakeholders, including capacity development and technical assistance projects, and DSD-level regional and country level engagement.

<sup>7</sup> The survey was sent to 49 staff members and 31 responded, yielding a 63 per cent response rate.

<sup>8</sup> The survey was sent to a total of 126 individual DSD stakeholders, and 27 responded, yielding a 21 per cent response rate. The universe of DSD stakeholders used for that survey had been identified through consultations with the Division.

<sup>9</sup> A total of 15 CSD-18 meetings were observed during the period 3-14 May 2010.

<sup>10</sup> The panel consisted of three independent academic researchers with economic and social matter expertise covering a broad range of regional specialization and topics. The 18 publications and databases were selected in consultation with DESA as representative of the key work of the Department and its divisions/offices. The DSD publications reviewed were: (1) Sustainable Development Innovation Briefs, Issue Nr. 6, (2) Progress to date and remaining gaps in the implementation of the outcomes of the major summits in the area of sustainable development, as well as an analysis of the themes of the Conference (A/CONF.216/PC/2).

analytical evidence. Individual citations have been used as illustrative of wider testimony resulting from multiple stakeholders.

9. At the request of the UNEG Task Force on Human Rights and Gender Equality, the evaluation participated in the pilot of a handbook currently being developed to assist evaluators to incorporate human rights and gender equality into evaluations in the United Nations system.

10. The evaluation had three principal limitations. First, the relatively low response rate achieved in the stakeholder survey means that the results cannot be generalized to represent the views of all DSD stakeholders including Member States. Second, the expert panel review included only two DSD publications; although these were recommended by the Division as representing its key publications, the small sample size limited the extent to which findings of the review can be generalized to the universe of all DSD publications. Lastly, the bibliometric analysis permitted only limited comparability of the data from one type of publication to another and noted the inherent difficulties of capturing these types of publications through conventional index citation. To address these limitations, OIOS triangulated data from multiple sources to support the results.

### **III. Background**

#### *The concept of sustainable development*

11. “Sustainable development” was popularized as a term by the Brundtland report in 1987, which defined it as “development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”.<sup>11</sup> The General Assembly’s acceptance of this report endorsed the concept. In 1992, world leaders agreed on the principles of sustainable development at the (first) United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (also known as “Rio Summit” or “Earth Summit”).

12. Since its origin, the overall concept of sustainable development has found general acceptance. Although there are many nuances to the term as it has evolved in global debates, most definitions share the following principles: (i) integration of the three pillars of sustainable development - economic development, social equity, and environmental protection; (ii) precaution; (iii) commitment to equity and fairness; and (iv) partnerships between governmental and non-governmental actors, including all Major Groups. Member States refer to it as a desirable goal, and measurements for capturing sustainable development have been developed. However, its implementation has been challenging, and intergovernmental debates on goals and policy setting are often disconnected from implementation and adaptations to national challenges.

13. As such, the promotion of sustainable development entails both substantive and procedural components. On the substantive side, the challenge is to articulate an integrated framework or approach to policy making and encourage its adoption by policy makers and

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<sup>11</sup> World Commission on Environment and Development, *Our Common Future*, Oxford, Oxford University press, 1987, p.43.

stakeholders in all relevant sectors. On the process side, the challenge is to facilitate consultation within and between entities, ministries, and stakeholder groups, thus enhancing synergy, coherence, and convergence between their actions.

### *History of DSD*

14. DSD was created in 1992 to follow up on Earth Summit outcomes and to promote sustainable development, in particular by providing substantive secretariat support to the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD), which reviews progress, monitors and reports on implementation of Agenda 21 and subsequent decisions pertaining to sustainable development. The succeeding conferences and summits and their respective decisions have further contributed to DSD's mandate.<sup>12</sup> On a more limited scale, the Division also provides (direct) technical cooperation and capacity building services to developing countries and countries with economies in transition at international, regional and national levels.

### *The divisional structure*

15. Structurally, the Division has been reorganized several times. With the creation of DESA in 1997, technical cooperation activities in the areas of natural resources, water, energy and infrastructure were further added (from the Department for Development Support and Management Services) to DSD's intergovernmental servicing role.

16. The most recent restructuring of the Division in 2009 was intended to better balance substantive and process-related work. It was also planned to reposition the Division with a clearer vision on priorities, in order to better respond to expectations of Member States and other stakeholders. It entailed the following steps:

- Reorganizing the Division's branches by viewing sustainable development as a substantive category rather than a collection of individual thematic sectors. Each branch is now responsible for promoting an integrated sustainable development framework in the different stakeholder communities, such as negotiators, government planners, experts, and Major Groups;
- Developing a matrix structure to encourage staff to combine substantive expertise in sustainable development with specialization in specific sectors;
- Putting more emphasis on analytical work in order to create a sounder basis for organizing capacity development work; and
- Investing in emerging themes in order to establish the relevance of the sustainable development framework.

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<sup>12</sup> The prominent decisions reflected explicitly in DSD's mandate include: Agenda 21, the Five Year Review for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21, the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, the Barbados Programme of Action for Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, and the Mauritius Strategy for the Implementation of the Programme for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States.

17. Currently, DSD is organized into five branches, each headed by a Chief of Branch at the D-1 level (one OIC P-5) who report to the Division Director. The Division also includes special units, such as the Small Island Developing States (SIDS) Unit and five field-based project offices, headed by managers at P-5 to D-1 levels, which directly report to the Director.<sup>13</sup> Further, the organisational structure lists 24 cross-cutting themes, such as climate change, national sustainable development strategies or security and has internal focal points responsible for most of these. (See Annex 3).

### ***Other United Nations entities engaged in sustainable development***

18. In terms of process-related goals, the number of related organisations active in sustainable development has always been large because of the extensive reach of the interconnected spheres of sustainable development – economic development, environmental protection, and social equity. The United Nations entities most closely involved in the topic are:

- the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP),
- the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP),
- the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO),
- the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC),
- the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (UNCBD),
- the United Nations Convention on Combating Desertification (UNCCD),
- the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO),
- the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT), and
- the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO).

19. Other relevant entities include:

- the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD),
- the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD),
- the World Health Organisation (WHO),
- the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA),
- the regional commissions,
- the Bretton Wood Institutions, and
- the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

20. There have also been a number of relevant high-level ad hoc initiatives, such as the Global Compact Office or the High-Level Panel on Global Sustainability, which was established in September 2010 by the Secretary-General with the objective to formulate a new vision for sustainable growth and prosperity, along with mechanisms for achieving it.

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<sup>13</sup> (i) the United Nations Water Decade Programme on Advocacy and Communication in Zaragoza, Spain; (ii) the United Nations Centre for Regional Development in Nagoya, Japan and (iii) its related Disaster Management Office, (iv) the Africa Office in Nairobi, Kenya and (v) the Latin America Office in Santiago, Chile.

### *Scope of work*

21. DSD's work programme is embedded in the 2010-2011 Strategic Framework for DESA, which articulates its overall orientation and objective as promoting and supporting international cooperation in the pursuit of sustained economic growth, the eradication of poverty and hunger, and sustainable development for all.<sup>14</sup> (See Annex 1).

22. The substantive work of the Division corresponds to the multi-year programme of work adopted by the CSD at its 11<sup>th</sup> session in 2003. The current programme extends until 2017 and is organized around clusters of topics, each including a set of cross-cutting issues that are interlinked and also affect a broad range of human needs and ecological imperatives, such as climate change, food security, rights of indigenous peoples, etc. (See Annex 2). The Division has responded to system-wide priorities by using an integrated framework for sustainable development on issues such as on climate change, food security, energy security, and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

23. DSD also provides secretariat services to UN-Water, UN-Energy and is a member of UN-Oceans, mechanisms that were put into place by the Chief Executives Board for Coordination to support and provide emphasis to these issues critical for achieving sustainable development. The Division also convenes and chairs the SIDS Inter-Agency Consultative Group, which is an informal coordinating mechanism that includes focal points of all relevant United Nations agencies, regional commissions and regional intergovernmental organisations for monitoring the implementation of the Mauritius Strategy for the Implementation of the Programme for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States. Further, DSD supports the Secretary-General's Advisory Board on Water and Sanitation; staff members serving the secretariat are recruited under a project to support the work of the Advisory Board.<sup>15</sup>

### *Rio+20*

24. Recently, DSD started preparations for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD) also known as "Rio+20" that will be held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil from 4 to 6 June 2012. The General Assembly, in its resolution A/RES/64/236, established the conference objective as: securing renewed political commitment for sustainable development; assessing the progress to date and the remaining gaps in the implementation of the outcomes of the major summits on sustainable development, and addressing new and emerging challenges. The themes of the conference are: (i) green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication and (ii) the institutional framework for sustainable development.

25. In May 2010, the Secretary-General nominated the Under-Secretary-General (USG) of DESA as the "Conference Secretary-General"; he is supported by a dedicated secretariat drawn

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<sup>14</sup> [A/63/6 \(Progr. 7\)](#); Proposed strategic framework for the period 2010-2011: plan outline.

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.unsgab.org/>.

largely from the staff of DSD for steering the preparatory process leading up to the conference.<sup>16</sup> The Secretary-General has subsequently appointed two Executive Coordinators to support the Secretary-General of the conference.

### ***Budgetary resources***

26. DSD's proposed budget for 2010-2011 was estimated at USD 27.6 million, comprising 66 per cent regular budget (RB) and 34 per cent extrabudgetary (XB) resources.<sup>17</sup> It represented a 26 per cent decrease from the 2004-2005 biennium, due to a 61% reduction of XB resources.<sup>18</sup> For 2010-2011, the Division had 64 posts established (as during 2004-2005), 59 of which were RB (1 more than in 2004-2005). (See table 1 below). Within DESA, DSD's 2010-2011 budget allocation was the third largest among divisions, representing a 12.3 per cent share of DESA's overall total.<sup>19</sup>

**Table 1: DSD Resources 2004-2011**

<b>Year</b>	<b>2004-2005</b>	<b>2006-2007</b>	<b>2008-2009</b>	<b>2010-2011</b>	<b>Total DESA 2010-2011</b>
<b>Regular Budget Resources</b>	\$13,221,300	\$ 16,849,500	\$ 18,168,200	\$ 18,165,200	\$ 168,444,300
<b>XB resources</b>	\$23,928,100	\$ 13,982,800	\$ 9,208,200	\$ 9,450,800	\$ 133,929,000
<b>Total Budget</b>	<b>37,149,400</b>	<b>\$30,832,300</b>	<b>\$27,376,400</b>	<b>\$27,616,000</b>	<b>\$ 302,373,300</b>
<b>Staff RB</b>	58	60	61	59	-
<b>Staff XB</b>	6	5	5	5	-
<b>Total Staff</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>581 (RB &amp; XB)</b>

Source: Proposed programme budget for the biennium 2004-2005, 2006-2007, 2008-2009, and 2010-2011 Subprogramme 9, Sustainable development, A/58(60/6 (Sect. 9), A/60/6 (Sect. 9), A/62/6 (Sect. 9) and A/64/6 (Sect. 9).

## **IV. Results**

### **A. The Division has effectively supported the intergovernmental process on sustainable development topics**

#### ***Servicing intergovernmental processes has been a primary focus of the Division's work***

27. Of the four functions specified in the Division's 2010-2011 Strategic Framework, normative and policy support to United Nations intergovernmental processes is the most

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.uncsd2012.org/rio20/index.php?menu=14>.

<sup>17</sup> Proposed programme budget for the biennium 2010-2011 Subprogramme 9, Sustainable development, A/64/6 (Sect. 9) excluding Part XIII, Section 35 of the United Nations budget, Development Account [A/64/6 \(Sect.35\)](#)

<sup>18</sup> Total of USD 31.1 million (USD 13.2 million RB, USD 23.9 million XB), excluding resources allocated through the Development Account.

<sup>19</sup> [A/64/6 \(Introduction\)](#), Proposed programme budget for the biennium 2010-2011.

resource-intensive. This consists primarily of servicing the General Assembly's Second Committee, the ECOSOC and the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD). It also includes planning and organizing high level events, such as the five-year review of the Mauritius Strategy of Implementation that was held during the 65<sup>th</sup> session of the General Assembly, and convening ad-hoc expert group meetings on current CSD topics, for example on challenges and responses regarding sustainable consumption and production, as well as preparing and servicing international conferences, such as Rio+20.

28. According to IMDIS data, substantive servicing of meetings, parliamentary documentation and expert group meetings accounted for the majority (more than 80 per cent) of the Division's recorded outputs over the last two biennia. This represented between 36 and 45 per cent of recorded work-months in DSD over the last two biennia. In comparison, the remaining areas of work (see (4) to (11) in table below), such as publications, advisory services and field projects accounted for a very limited number of outputs that required a higher level of input. (See table 2 below).

**Table 2: Outputs and work months per DSD activity**

Division for Sustainable Development (subprogramme 4)	No. of outputs implemented			Work Months taken to implement outputs	
	2006-07	2008-09	2010-11	2006-07	2008-09
(1) Substantive servicing of meetings	280	285	280	166	176
(2) Parliamentary documentation	68	65	61	122	114
(3) Expert groups, rapporteurs, depository services	14	10	11	153	119
<b>Percentage of total outputs</b>	<b>82 %</b>	<b>82 %</b>	<b>85 %</b>	<b>36 %</b>	<b>45%</b>
(4) Recurrent publications	19	16	16	71	47
(5) Non-recurrent publications	19	21	11	69	52
(6) Other substantive activities	41	38	30	200	107
(7) Advisory services	1	1	1	185	113
(8) Training courses, seminars and workshops	1	1	1	100	93
(9) Fellowships and grants	-	-	-	-	-
(10) Field projects	1	1	1	148	84
(11) Conference services, administration, oversight	-	-	-	-	-
<b>TOTAL OUTPUTS</b>	<b>444</b>	<b>438</b>	<b>412</b>	<b>1214</b>	<b>905</b>

Source: IMDIS data

***DSD has been successful in servicing the intergovernmental process***

29. DSD's primary value added resided in its support to the intergovernmental process. It has a unique mandate to articulate an integrated approach to addressing diverse challenges in

sustainable development, and to convene a diverse and representative set of actors on a platform for dialogue on a wide range of themes at the international level. This combination of an integrated approach (covering the three pillars of sustainable development – economic development, social equity and environmental protection) and broad convening power are not vested in any other United Nations system entity. Many stakeholders interviewed and surveyed also viewed this as the Division’s niche.

30. Further, the majority of DSD’s stakeholders surveyed (68 per cent) expressed their satisfaction with the support received from DSD when attending meetings organized and/or supported by the Division. An example frequently referred to as indicative of DSD’s successful intergovernmental support was the 2009 inter-sessional meeting for CSD-17 in Namibia: DESA’s USG and DSD staff were intensively engaged in the discussion with African delegates to reach agreement on a joint declaration. As a result, many African Member States brought with them a list of policy options and items, which were finally included into the CSD decision at the main CSD session in New York. Also, during CSD-18, in 2010, OIOS observed a meeting where several delegates commented that DSD had the convening power and access to information at the global level that enabled it to engage actors at all levels.

***DSD has also been successful in promoting sustainable development on the intergovernmental agenda***

31. In the last two years, sustainable development has re-emerged as a theme of high political importance to the international community. It has been declared by the Secretary-General to be one of his highest priorities. The General Assembly has decided to convene a summit conference (Rio+20) to revive political commitment to it. The theme has made its way into key policy discussions, including those pertaining to climate change, food security, energy security, the MDGs and post-conflict reconstruction. While it is difficult to attribute this improved visibility of sustainable development generally to the Division, DSD’s renewed focus on promoting sustainable development can be seen as one among many contributing factors.

32. In interviews, almost half of the Division’s staff including managers named promoting sustainable development and keeping it on the agenda of intergovernmental discussions as their top priority. While staff recognized the need to further promote better understanding and more effective implementation of sustainable development concepts among Member States, they also cited important achievements in that area. One staff member interviewed offered as an example: “Sustainable development is no longer a United Nations agenda, it is something that is already embedded, and everybody knows it. Everybody may have some doubts on how to implement, but overall it is seen as positive.”

33. Further, the majority of stakeholders surveyed identified DSD’s reports as important to their work. In interviews, they expressed their general appreciation of the broad arena of topics covered by DSD publications and the comprehensiveness of perspectives reflected in the publications. In that context, the independent OIOS expert panel that assessed two DSD reports confirmed that these were overall logical, well structured, coherent, and clearly written



for a non-technical audience, as well as of relevance to the intergovernmental debate and policy discussions.<sup>20</sup>

***The intended usage of DSD's publications was mixed***

34. Whereas ultimate responsibility to adopt and implement adequate policies for sustainable development rests with Member States, a key element of DSD's support was its provision of Secretary-General Reports and other intergovernmental documentation. Among surveyed stakeholders, the most commonly cited use of DSD publications was to assist with policy work. Similarly, several participants attending CSD-18 meetings observed by OIOS commented that DESA reports and technical advice provided important input to policy discussions.

35. The intended usage of DSD publications other than Secretary-General reports was, however, less defined. In the DSD stakeholder survey, respondents reported that they had not used most of the Division reports identified on a list of 57 DESA publications.<sup>21</sup> According to the same survey, four out of eight DSD publications had been used only to a limited extent over the past five years; only three intergovernmental DSD publications were used more frequently. In stakeholder interviews, on the question which, if any, publications by DSD they recalled having read or used for their work, most stakeholders referred to preparatory documentation for the CSD process without naming a specific report.

36. Furthermore, DSD staff interviewed acknowledged that the usage of DSD publications, apart from website statistics of report downloads, was to a certain degree unknown and unmeasured, and therefore of some concern considering the resources dedicated to their production.<sup>22</sup> To increase the usage of its publications and to improve the service to Member States, DSD has been distributing USB sticks containing all relevant DSD documents to delegations during the review sessions.

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<sup>20</sup> The two DSD reports assessed by the OIOS Independent Expert Panel were: (i) Progress to date and remaining gaps in the implementation of the outcomes of the major summits in the area of sustainable development, as well as an analysis of the themes of the Conference (A/CONF.216/PC/2) and (ii) Sustainable Development Innovation Briefs, Issue Nr. 6, <http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/publications/innovationbriefs/no6.pdf>.

<sup>21</sup> Respondents were given a list of 57 DESA reports that had been compiled following consultations with each DESA Division. For DSD, the following 8 publications were included in that list: (1) Harmony with Nature: Report of the Secretary-General (A/65/314); (2) Africa: Report of the Secretary-General (E/CN.17/2008/8); (3) Implementation of Agenda 21, the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21 and the outcomes of the World Summit on Sustainable Development: Report of the Secretary-General (A/61/258); (4) National Resources Forum. A United Nations Sustainable Development Journal; (5) Progress to date and remaining gaps in the implementation of the outcomes of the major summits in the area of sustainable development as well as an analysis of the themes of the Conference: Report of the Secretary-General (A/CONF.216/PC/2); (6) Review of implementation of Agenda 21 and the Johannesburg Plan of Action: a 10 year framework of programmes in support of sustainable consumption and production patterns: Report of the Secretary-General (E/CN.17/2010/8 - E/CN.17/2010/8/CORR.1); (7) Sustainable Development Innovation Briefs; and (8) Trends in Sustainable Development.

<sup>22</sup> Until 2009, DSD used the tool "Web Trends" to monitor the number of visitors and the length of their visit on the DSD website. However, the information gathered did neither contain any additional measurements nor did these include information about the users.

37. Also, while the Division had commissioned a plan for marketing and distributing its publications in 2009, it has not yet started implementing such a strategy.<sup>23</sup> So far, all DSD publications except its core publications, such as the Secretary-General reports for the CSD process, have been addressed to the sustainable development community at large. However, those encompassed a large and very diverse range, including: (i) periodical publications, such as Trends, Innovation Briefs and the “National Resources Forum” (NRF); (ii) monographs or books, such as the United Nations World Water Development Report; and (iii) papers and other reports, such as newsletters, background and guidance documents. If the audience for each type of publication issued by DSD was more defined, the Division could better tailor the specific reports to the target audience.

38. While DSD has started to invest efforts to improve the quality of its publications, for example by intensifying internal quality assurance processes for Secretary-General reports, the quality of its publications was mixed. The results of the analysis of two DSD publications conducted by an independent expert panel engaged by OIOS also flagged that readership and usage of the publications seemed undefined. For example, the panel indicated that information on data collection and analysis was not always clearly listed and focus of recommendations showed some weaknesses.<sup>24</sup>

### ***The inclusion of Major Groups was a success***

39. The Division has been effective in supporting and in increasing the participation of Major Groups in the sustainable development dialogue. Many stakeholders and staff interviewed identified this greater civil society involvement as a positive component of the intergovernmental process. Following the adoption of Agenda 21, DSD was mandated to include civil society and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in the intergovernmental process. As called for by Agenda 21, the Division then organized civil society groups and partners in nine “Major Groups” and set up a support structure to facilitate the involvement of these groups in the intergovernmental process as well as to facilitate interactions among the groups, such as launching multi-stakeholder partnerships, organizing side-events during the CSD-sessions, and assisting them in developing coordinated positions. The number of accredited organisations affiliated to these groups in the area of sustainable development has been increasing to currently 4,505 organisations (see table 3 below).

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<sup>23</sup> “Master marketing and Distribution Plan Division for Sustainable Development Publications”, December 2009, shared with OIOS.

<sup>24</sup> The two DSD reports assessed by the OIOS Independent Expert Panel were: (i) Progress to date and remaining gaps in the implementation of the outcomes of the major summits in the area of sustainable development, as well as an analysis of the themes of the Conference (A/CONF.216/PC/2) and (ii) Sustainable Development Innovation Briefs, Issue Nr. 6, <http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/publications/innovationbriefs/no6.pdf>.

**Table 3: Distribution of accredited organisations among the nine Major Groups**

Major Groups	Number of affiliated organisations
Business and industry	212
Children and youth	569
Farmers	232
Indigenous people	313
Local authorities	260
Non-governmental organizations	1993
Scientific and technological communities	287
Women	515
Workers and trade unions	124
<b>Total Number of Organisations Accredited</b>	<b>4 505</b>

Source: <http://www.un.org/esa/coordination/ngo/>.

40. Stakeholders and staff agreed that the work of DSD to include the voice of Major Groups has increasingly been accepted within the intergovernmental process and has become a respected and essential practice in the sustainable development debate. Comments from delegates that OIOS heard when observing several sessions during CSD-18 included: “the added value of CSD was the participation of the major groups”,<sup>25</sup> and “CSD provides an effective platform to bring together scientists, governments, Major Groups and the United Nations system to discuss challenges and opportunities in sustainable development.”<sup>26</sup> A Major Group representative interviewed summarized: “The partnership approach and involvement of stakeholders are quite key to the success of work on sustainable development... The United Nations provides this platform for various stakeholders. Of course, there are tensions, but it helps breaking down these tensions.”

41. A look at guidance material for Major Groups provided by the CSD bureau and secretariat as well as feedback from Major Group representatives also showed that, over the years, their presence and participation in the official CSD sessions have become more and more supported by the Division and have therefore increasingly been accepted within the official intergovernmental process as respected partners. The recent “CSD-18 Guidelines for Major Groups”, for example, listed all necessary background, logistical and procedural information necessary for facilitating the contributions of the Major Groups, quite similar to the documents shared with Member States. These efforts have resulted in well prepared and wider information exchange with non-governmental stakeholders and have enabled these actors to actively participate in intergovernmental meetings.

<sup>25</sup> Comment heard by OIOS when observing the CSD-18 session on “Multi-Stakeholder dialogue on partnerships for sustainable development”, 11 May 2010.

<sup>26</sup> Comment heard by OIOS when observing the CSD-18 Opening of the High Level Segment, 12 May 2010.

**B. Although the Division's mandates have become more focused over the years, perceptions of overlap still remained**

*Despite no clear overlap in mandates, perceptions of overlap between DSD and other entities persisted*

42. A comparison of DSD's roles and responsibilities as spelled out by the Secretary General's Bulletin of DESA (ST/SGB/1997/9) with similar planning documents from other United Nations entities revealed no direct areas of potential overlap. The ST/SGB/2006/13 of UNEP showed no areas of overlap with DSD. A comparison with the strategic plan 2008-2011 of UNDP, however, indicated similarities in the area of capacity development. For example, UNDP's Strategic Plan 2008-2011 indicates "UNDP and UNEP are strengthening their global, regional and country-level cooperation to help countries accelerate progress toward sustainable development (...);"<sup>27</sup> while the ST/SGB/1997/9 for DESA lists among DSD's functions "Providing advisory services at the national and regional levels, including through training workshops, to promote sustainable development, and strengthen relevant institutional capacities at the national level."<sup>28</sup>

43. Whereas DSD management and staff did not refer to duplication of work with other United Nations system entities as being problematic, many of their external colleagues did. Several United Nations stakeholders, in interviews and in the stakeholder survey, mentioned instances of overlap of their work with that of DSD. Typical and frequent reactions included: "DSD duplicates the work mandated to the other organisations"; "DSD overlaps with UNEP and UNDP"; and "DSD should not be engaged in normative or operational work outside the United Nations Secretariat as that is the work of other United Nations organisations and entities in the field." When asked to provide further details about duplication between DSD and other entities, however, few stakeholders were able to elaborate beyond this general perception.

44. Although many stakeholders acknowledged that DSD was challenged in clearly communicating its roles and responsibilities to external stakeholders, these were not always well understood by DSD and its stakeholders, in particular by other United Nations system entities. In the stakeholder survey, 62 per cent reported "excellent" or "good" ratings regarding the clear definition of roles and responsibilities between DSD and their entity, while 21 per cent indicated this being "fair" and another 21 per cent said "poor" or "very poor". Furthermore, in interviews, stakeholders expressed opposing opinions, with almost half saying roles and responsibilities of the Division were generally clear to them and about 20 per cent citing examples of misunderstanding and difficulties they had encountered when working with DSD. Some stakeholders also mentioned the restructuring of DSD as potentially having negatively affected clarity of understanding. One stakeholder interviewee stated that, "these [roles and responsibilities] are very blurred; about four years ago, they [DSD] had a division of work, but it has been changing so many times in the recent years that I am a bit lost."

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<sup>27</sup> UNDP Strategic plan 2008-2011, Accelerating progress on human development, DP/2007/43/Rev.1, para. 111.

<sup>28</sup> ST/AGB/1997/9 Section 16, para 16.2 (h).

### ***Work plan and mandates became more aligned with CSD's programme of work***

45. The Division's strategic frameworks over the past four cycles have become more aligned with the CSD's multi-year programme of work, predetermining the thematic topics until 2017. With regard to National Sustainable Development Strategies (NSDS), the Division's work plan seemed, however, less aligned. The indicators of achievement became more focused on the implementation of NSDS and defined the divisional role as monitoring NSDS implementation, but DSD's work plan for 2010-2011 did not indicate how the Division monitored at the national level or how it ensured quality. DSD management clarified that NSDS was intended to be used as an instrument for promoting an integrated approach to policy making. However, this has not yet been adequately reflected in both the strategic framework and the divisional work plan.

### **C. The Division's role with regard to capacity building was somewhat unclear**

#### ***Capacity building mandates have been reformulated and remain important***

46. One of DSD's key functions has been the promotion of sustainable development "through technical cooperation and capacity building at international, regional and national levels".<sup>29</sup> An analysis of DSD's strategic frameworks between 2006-2007 and 2012-2013 showed that capacity building represented two of the four subprogramme expected accomplishments (EAs) until 2006-2007, thereby suggesting a higher importance than the number of dedicated work months recorded in IMDIS. (See Annex 1 as well as table 2 above).

47. Since 2008, one of the EAs was reformulated into Member States' accessibility to information on policy options related to the adoption/ implementation of sustainable development at the various levels; the other EA - "enhanced capacity of developing countries and countries with economies in transition to develop and implement national sustainable development strategies, information systems and databases for sustainable development" (EAc) - was further specified with regard to the type of capacity development (technical, human and institutional capacities) and priority issues (sustainable consumption and production, in line with CSD themes).<sup>30</sup>

#### ***DSD's focus and resources for capacity building have decreased***

48. The current (2010-2011) strategic framework continues to list capacity development of developing and emerging Member States as one of DSD's expected accomplishments, although the Division has decreased its focus on that area. This can be noted in the internal restructuring of the Division: Compared to the other three functional areas (intergovernmental

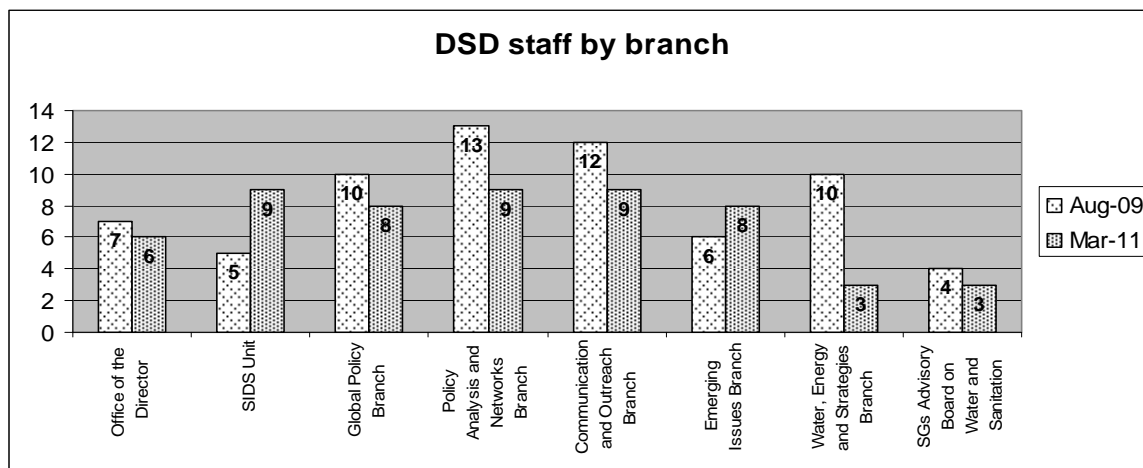
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<sup>29</sup> DSD website, mission statement, [http://www.un.org/esa/dsd/dsd/dsd\\_index.shtml](http://www.un.org/esa/dsd/dsd/dsd_index.shtml), accessed 8 March 2011.

<sup>30</sup> In this context, DSD has been involved in the internationally agreed development goals, including the MDGs through undertaking MDG-related capacity building activities, such as training in indicator development for monitoring sustainable development at the country level to support monitoring of progress. (See MDG Goal 7 - environmental sustainability and related target 9 - Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programs and reverse the loss of environmental resources and target 10 - Halve, by 2015, the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation - constitute the framework of action of DSD capacity building activities in that area).

support, research and analysis, communication and outreach), divisional resources allocated to capacity building, in particular for the Water, Energy and Strategies Branch (WESB), have declined the most. For instance, in August 2009, WESB counted ten staff members including two inter-regional advisors; in March 2011, the number of staff in WESB had declined to three staff members (1 P-5 OIC, 1 P-4, 1 G-6).(See also table 4 below). According to DSD management, this has been part of the recent restructuring in order to shape the technical cooperation agenda more strategically and to focus on the areas needing the greatest attention by the Division.

**Table 4: DSD staffing changes 2009-2011**



Source: OIOS, based on DSD staff lists dated August 2009 and March 2011.<sup>31</sup>

49. The decreased focus on capacity development was also reflected in reported work months in IMDIS. Time spent on advisory services decreased from 185 work months during the 2006-2007 biennium to 113 months in 2008-2009, and months spent on the implementation of field projects went from 148 during 2006-2007 down to 84 months during 2008-2009 (see also table 2 above).

***The strategy for capacity building is not recognized by all divisional staff and lacks alignment with DESA’s overall plans***

50. Some managers and staff interviewed expressed being somewhat unclear about the current divisional strategy and prioritization of capacity building. Some mentioned examples of projects, mainly on capacity building and/or technical assistance, that had evolved from research activities undertaken by the division that have been discontinued without any prior discussion on their relevance to the wider Division strategy. A few staff interviewed also stated that, while understanding the downscaling the area of capacity building/ technical cooperation, they did not understand why posts that had been vacant in this area still remained unfilled. Others interpreted the downscaling of this business area as a statement of the Director

<sup>31</sup> Staff listed are P and G staff combined. Numbers also include staff funded through other resources, e.g. from other entities (UNOPS), government-funded Junior Professional Officers and secondments.

on current priorities of the division. While some staff and managers voiced the need to revive this area of work, stakeholders interviewed did not express any strong views on DSD's technical cooperation work. They indicated, however, that DSD should not duplicate any operational activities of UNDP, UNEP and other actors at the national level.

51. Furthermore, the downscaling of DSD's capacity building work did not seem to align with larger DESA capacity development strategy. The strategy developed by the Capacity Development Office, established in February 2009 and attached to OUSG DESA, is still in progress ("draft roadmap") and has not yet defined how DSD and other divisions will identify, frame and implement capacity development projects. For example, at present, Division-level planning documents do not consistently contain linkages between the five DESA-wide capacity development focus areas and Division-level outputs. Furthermore, the revised version of the DESA ST/SGB projects an increased prominence for capacity development activities within the DESA work plan while DSD's approach intends to limit such activities to its specific niche.<sup>32</sup>

#### **D. Communication and coordination with partners have been insufficient**

##### *Stakeholders perceived limited communication and coordination by DSD*

52. Given the substance of DSD's work, coordination with stakeholders and partners has always been crucial, and this has not always been adequate. Stakeholder feedback on DSD's coordination and communication was not always positive. Stakeholders, especially Member States and civil society organisations (represented by the Major Groups) agreed that DSD had reached out to them more frequently over the past five years.

53. Perceptions of DSD communication and coordination were generally less favourable among staff from United Nations entities also working on sustainable development, e.g. UNEP, UNDP, FAO or UNIDO. In interviews, a few shared their frustration about limited inclusion of their inputs into Secretary-General Reports for the CSD, coordinated by DSD. One said, for example, "the Secretary-General report that went to CSD-18 did not reflect what we had said, we felt side-tracked and our view was not incorporated. We tried to follow-up, but it was too late." Other examples included tight, last-minute timeframes given by the Division to other entities to provide their input.

54. A few United Nations partners also indicated that they were given insufficient guidance on the length or scope of their inputs when these inputs were requested by the Division. In response to this concern, DSD staff explained that for Secretary-General reports, DSD's requests for input could be on short notice, because DSD must synthesize a multitude of inputs into a meaningful report informing Member States deliberations. During that process, DSD encountered several time- and logistics-related challenges, such as word limits and slot dates to ensure timely publication, translation, and printing of the reports.

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<sup>32</sup> ST/SGB/1997/9 of 15 September 1997, para 2.1 (d); see also revised ST/SGB draft of 2010.

### ***The complex governance structure and human resources added to the challenges***

55. Another factor hampering effective coordination and communication between DSD and its partners was the governance structure of sustainable development in the United Nations system. For example, DSD, UNEP and UNDP all have governing bodies that differ in membership but take decisions on sustainable development topics. Further, some stakeholders mentioned the difficulty of addressing sustainable development as a topic. This is a systemic challenge that many staff and stakeholders expect Rio+20 to address under the conference theme “institutional framework for sustainable development”.

56. Both staff and stakeholders additionally pointed to several other constraints to more effective communication and coordination between DSD and other entities, such as human resources constraints, with limited staff time being available to coordinate. Some stakeholders also alluded to the divisional clearance process by sharing, for example: “When you need to discuss anything, you are referred to the Director. That creates bottlenecks.” These perceptions might be due to the fact that the Director, as the designated Programme Manager for Sustainable Development, may have to be consulted on higher level commitments.

### **E. Rio+20 preparations have added to challenges faced by the Division**

#### ***The Division faces resource constraints for the conference preparations***

57. While being in charge of the Rio+20 Secretariat has provided an opportunity for DSD to play a major role in leading the process to a decisive summit for the future of sustainable development, it has resulted in resource, work process and coordination constraints. The preparation for the summit has added a heavy workload to the Division without additional resources for the logistical administration and substantive preparation, such as compiling inputs from the United Nations system. Although preparations for Rio+20 started in 2009, DSD did not receive additional resources during the 2010-2011 biennium for organising this major event. The Division requested additional resources also for the 2012-2013 biennium; should these be granted, it would, however, be late in the process for the conference, which is scheduled for early June 2012. DSD is trying to address this gap through a fund raising campaign to obtain extra-budgetary resources for the preparation of the conference itself, which adds additional tasks to the regular work load of DSD staff.

#### ***Coordination and communication with partners has been challenging***

58. With regard to coordination, many stakeholders interviewed would have favoured a more diverse composition of the secretariat and underlined their concern that the current set-up was not sufficiently representative of all the United Nations entities involved. However, the USG of DESA had asked for secondments from all entities, but their response has been small.<sup>33</sup> Stakeholder feedback from the survey and interviews on the preparatory process so

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<sup>33</sup> The USG DESA had requested all members of the expanded Executive Committee on Economic and Social Affairs (EC-ESA+) to second staff to the secretariat to gather all expertise available in the various entities. So far, three entities have sent one senior staff member each on secondment: UNEP, the Economic Commission of Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), and UNDP.



far has been somewhat negative, in particular highlighted that many did not understand why DESA/DSD was chosen for that role and not the High-level Committee on Programmes or the Chief Executives Board on Coordination; according to these stakeholders, both mechanisms had greater system-wide reach and coordination power. It is important to note that, despite the fact that these are coordination mechanisms, these do, however, not have a dedicated substantive support and research capacity, which would enable them to prepare such an event. Some stakeholders, in interviews, also voiced concerns that this new preparation set-up could create parallel processes between DESA/DSD and other entities involved in Rio+20.

59. Stakeholder comments, in interviews, also pointed out that the time frame for the preparation process had not been optimized by DSD. After the kick-off in late 2009, the first preparatory conference (“PrepCom”) took place in May 2010 only, when the USG DESA was appointed Secretary-General for the conference. Several agencies, in interviews, expressed concerns as to whether developing a common position and ensuring to speak with one voice was still feasible within the short time frame left until the conference. The timetable for the three Rio+20 PrepComs has been predetermined by General Assembly Resolution 64/236 and is out of DSD’s control.

## **F. Some internal management processes hampered the work of the Division**

### *The new matrix structure has led to some staff concerns*

60. According to DSD management, the restructuring of the Division has resulted in several positive changes. These include increased networks with the policy research community, improved quality of Secretary-General’s reports, and greater efficiency in supporting the intergovernmental process. At the same time, staff and management interviewed shared various sceptical views on the divisional restructuring, on internal communications, on the leadership style at the higher levels and on human resources management, which they identified as the main hindering factor in their work. Similarly, in the staff survey conducted by OIOS, DSD staff (including managers) were divided in their opinion whether DSD had an internally shared vision of the best way to implement its objective.<sup>34</sup>

61. Overall, staff have not fully bought into the internal restructuring, which has contributed to low staff morale in the Division. The restructuring has created several challenges that many staff interviewed and surveyed alluded to. For example, many staff members were allocated new focal point roles that did not always match their expertise or interests. While some managed to take on these new roles, many still needed support of the previous focal points to master the task, which has resulted in decreased efficiency for the Division as a whole. Certain focal point areas, such as the work on the partnerships database or the involvement in MDG activities, have been neglected due to changed roles and responsibilities.

62. Further, any matrix structure requires flexibility with regard to reporting lines, as staff members may work for more than one supervisor, as well as continuous communication among

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<sup>34</sup> 59 per cent of staff and management somewhat or strongly agreed with the statement “DSD has an internally shared vision of the best way to implement its objective whereas 41 per cent somewhat or strongly disagreed.

managers in order to support smooth work flow of the divisional tasks. However, some staff members interviewed pointed at limited flexibility of chiefs to allow staff to work for more than one branch chief. In the staff survey, many (57 per cent) of respondents somewhat or strongly disagreed with the statement “Decision-making in my division is effective overall”.<sup>35</sup> And in interviews, branch chiefs and staff voiced some concerns with regard to decision-making and quality assurance at the top of the division, such as lengthy timeframes for receiving feedback and directorate clearance, which resulted in bottlenecks.

63. A retreat planned for 2009 to address concerns related to the restructuring was postponed and has not been undertaken to date. Preparation documents for the retreat shared with OIOS pointed at the following five key topics that required wider discussion in the Division: (i) vision, purpose, and meaning; (ii) partnerships and networks; (iii) internal and external capacity building for DSD staff; (iv) management and administration; and (v) communications.<sup>36</sup>

***Human resources management, internal communication and operational procedures were not always efficient***

64. In interviews, staff referred to human resources management and internal communication as the primary constraints to their work. They reported a strong perception of unequal distribution of work, partly resulting from the new matrix structure. Managers raised some concern with regard to inflexible staffing in order to have a relevant pool of staff and experts for covering the annually changing CSD topics. They also pointed at recruitment procedures that were too long and difficult to work with in that context. At the same time, they voiced their concern regarding the vacant posts in DSD.

65. Another concern that several staff as well as stakeholders raised in interviews was that some topics, such as water, energy and technical cooperation, operated under very limited resources. For example, UN-Water has been operating with one staff member funded by the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) and a section chief in the role of the secretary, who is mainly in charge of communication and outreach for the Division. While stakeholder feedback has been excellent, many stakeholders considered the UN-Water secretariat to be overstretched.

***Mainstreaming gender and human rights into DSD’s work was mixed***

66. With regard to mainstreaming of gender into the substantive work of the Division, as mandated for all programmes through General Assembly Resolution 52/3/Rev.1, the results have been limited. While a majority of DSD staff survey respondents (67 per cent) and interviewees rated the Division effective in mainstreaming gender, there were only very few concrete examples of such activities. Several staff members referred to the fact that Women and Youth were Major Groups that participated in the CSD process; one indicated that “we pursue it [in the analytical work] whenever it comes up as an issue”. A specific example

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<sup>35</sup> while the remaining 43 per cent strongly or somewhat agreed with that statement.

<sup>36</sup> Background note for DSD staff retreat, 2009.

included the Expert Group Meeting organised by the UN-Water Gender and Water Task Force on “Gender-disaggregated Data on Water and Sanitation” that took place in December 2008.

67. More than half of the stakeholders surveyed (53 per cent) also rated the Division effective in mainstreaming gender. However, interview data as well as the results of a 2010 OIOS evaluation on gender mainstreaming, revealed that many stakeholders did not understand what gender mainstreaming included and how it was done, with some referring only to the positive gender balance of the secretariat.<sup>37</sup>

68. Staff and stakeholders alike were unable to provide specific examples of how the Division incorporated a human-rights-based approach into its work, as called for by the reform agenda of the Secretary-general and as endorsed by member States in the 2005 World Summit Outcome.<sup>38</sup>

## V. Conclusion

69. The Division for Sustainable Development (DSD), through its support for the Commission for Sustainable Development, has been an important contributor to the efforts of the United Nations system in implementing sustainable development goals and in keeping sustainable development as a topic on the global agenda. DSD’s primary value added rested in its unique mandate to articulate an integrated framework for policy making and to convene a diverse and representative set of actors, as well as its ability to provide an inclusive platform for dialogue for a wide range of stakeholders, including non-governmental and civil society organisations, at the international level. While some of its research publications are perceived to be of great value for informing policy debates, more could be done to increase the marketing and readership of the various divisional research products.

70. DSD’s work environment, however, is complex. The governance structure for sustainable development in the United Nations system is scattered around different governing bodies for DESA-DSD, UNEP, UNDP and FAO, each one taking decisions on different aspects of sustainable development. Furthermore, the topic of sustainable development covers vast grounds of development in the economic, social and environmental spheres. This complex environment necessitates clear and systematic communication and coordination between DSD and its stakeholders, something it has not yet fully achieved.

71. The Division’s work on capacity building, although restructured over the past years, still needs to be more clearly defined and prioritized. Further clarification is also needed within the Division on the exact parameters as to what and when it should be carried out by DSD itself versus by other entities. At the same time, the strategy needs to be aligned with the wider DESA plans currently being developed by the Capacity Building Office.

72. The Division’s on-going internal restructuring has yet to show results. Internal management should seek opportunities to obtain greater buy-in from staff for the new

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<sup>37</sup> OIOS Thematic evaluation of gender mainstreaming in the United Nations Secretariat, A/65/266.

<sup>38</sup> A/RES/60/1 paragraph 126.

structure, as well as address other internal issues such as resource allocation, vacancies, and work load distribution.

73. DSD's role in providing secretariat support services to the USG of DESA as the Secretary-General for Rio+20 represents a unique opportunity for the Division to play a major role in leading up the process to a decisive summit in the future of sustainable development. It is also a unique opportunity to bring greater clarity on the governance structure and roles and responsibilities among the United Nations entities involved in sustainable development. DSD should seize this chance to demonstrate its value added to the system by communicating and coordinating with all United Nations system entities involved in order to speak as "One UN".

## **VI. Recommendations**

### **Recommendation 1 (see paras 60-65)**

74. **DSD should organize a staff retreat for all staff members of DSD.** This purpose of the retreat would be to foster greater cohesion and facilitate a discussion on how to address challenges due to the restructuring. DSD can request the assistance of the Office of Human Resources Management in planning for this retreat.

### **Recommendation 2 (see paras 46-51)**

75. **DSD should further define the scope of work and prioritize divisional functions in the areas of technical cooperation and capacity building.** Staff should be consulted in this exercise.

76. The latter may include conducting, in collaboration with the Capacity Development Office of DESA, a mapping exercise of United Nations entities involved in technical assistance and capacity development activities in the three areas of sustainable development, and should culminate in a strategy to communicate emerging priorities to staff at all levels.

### **Recommendation 3 (see paras 35-38)**

77. **DSD should develop and implement a comprehensive publication, marketing and dissemination strategy for its publications.** This strategy should build upon existing documentation and tools.

## Annex I

### Strategic framework - 2010-2011 Sustainable development

<b>Objective</b>	
	<p><b>Objective of the Organization:</b> To accelerate the implementation of sustainable development goals, targets and commitments in accordance with internationally agreed development goals, including those contained in the United Nations Millennium Declaration and the outcomes of major United Nations conferences and summits, in particular the World Summit on Sustainable Development.</p>

<b>Expected Accomplishment</b>	<b>Indicator of Achievement</b>
(a) Effective review of and agreement on key sustainable development challenges and priority actions of the multi-year programme of work to advance implementation in the areas of transport, chemicals, waste management, mining, 10 years framework of programmes on sustainable consumption and production patterns	<p>Increased level of satisfaction by Member States with the support and servicing for the intergovernmental process, including activities related to consensus-building, the functioning of the Bureau of the Commission on Sustainable Development, the partnership fair, the Learning Centre and the participation of major groups</p> <p><i>Performance measures:</i></p> <p>2006-2007: 80 per cent</p> <p>Estimate 2008-2009: 81 per cent</p> <p>Target 2010-2011: 85 per cent</p>
(b) Increased accessibility of information and knowledge on policy options, practical measures and concrete actions needed for the adoption and implementation of sustainable development at the local, national, regional and international levels	<p>(i) Increased number of inputs by Member States into databases on case studies, partnerships, best practices and lessons learned</p> <p><i>Performance measures:</i></p> <p>2006-2007: 30 inputs</p> <p>Estimate 2008-2009: 30 inputs</p> <p>Target 2010-2011: 40 inputs</p> <p>(ii) Increased number of visits to and downloads from the website of the Division for Sustainable Development</p> <p><i>Performance measures:</i></p> <p>2006-2007: 400,000 visits</p> <p>Estimate 2008-2009: 2 million visits</p> <p>Target 2010-2011: 2.1 million visits</p>

(c)	Enhanced technical, human and institutional capacities of developing countries and countries with economies in transition to implement actions and national strategies for sustainable development in energy, water, natural resources, and sustainable consumption and production	<p>(i) Increased number of countries expressing satisfaction with advisory, technical cooperation and capacity-building services to achieve their sustainable development goals</p> <p>Performance measures:</p> <p>2006-2007: 91 per cent of countries indicating usefulness of advisory services and projects</p> <p>Estimate 2008-2009: 92 per cent of countries indicating usefulness of advisory services and projects</p> <p>Target 2010-2011: 93 per cent of countries indicating usefulness of advisory services and projects</p> <p>(ii) Increased number of national staff trained, resulting in enhanced knowledge and skills</p>
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Source: Strategic framework for the biennium 2010-2011, Subprogramme 9, Sustainable development, A/63/6 (Progr. 7).

## Annex II

### Multi-year programme of work around clusters and issues (2004-2017)

	Thematic cluster	Cross-cutting issues
2004/2005 CSD-12/CSD-13 Implementation Cycle #1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Water</li> <li>• Sanitation</li> <li>• Human Settlements</li> </ul>	Poverty eradication, Changing unsustainable patterns of consumption and production, Protecting and managing the natural resource base of economic and social development, Sustainable development in a globalizing world, Health and sustainable development, Sustainable development of SIDS, Sustainable development for Africa, Other regional initiatives, Means of implementation, Institutional framework for sustainable development, Gender equality, and Education.
2006/2007 CSD-14/CSD-15 Implementation Cycle #2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Energy for Sustainable Development</li> <li>• Industrial Development</li> <li>• Air Pollution/Atmosphere</li> <li>• Climate Change</li> </ul>	Poverty eradication, Changing unsustainable patterns of consumption and production, Protecting and managing the natural resource base of economic and social development, Sustainable development in a globalizing world, Health and sustainable development, Sustainable development of SIDS, Sustainable development for Africa, Other regional initiatives, Means of implementation, Institutional framework for sustainable development, Gender equality, and Education.
2008/2009 CSD-16/CSD-17 Implementation Cycle #3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agriculture</li> <li>• Rural Development</li> <li>• Land</li> <li>• Drought</li> <li>• Desertification</li> <li>• Africa</li> </ul>	Poverty eradication, Changing unsustainable patterns of consumption and production, Protecting and managing the natural resource base of economic and social development, Sustainable development in a globalizing world, Health and sustainable development, Sustainable development of SIDS, Sustainable development for Africa, Other regional initiatives, Means of implementation, Institutional framework for sustainable development, Gender equality, and Education.
2010/2011 CSD-18/CSD-19 Implementation Cycle #4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transport</li> <li>• Chemicals</li> <li>• Waste Management (Hazardous &amp; Solid Waste)</li> <li>• Mining</li> <li>• A Ten Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns</li> </ul>	Poverty eradication, Changing unsustainable patterns of consumption and production, Protecting and managing the natural resource base of economic and social development, Sustainable development in a globalizing world, Health and sustainable development, Sustainable development of SIDS, Sustainable development for Africa, Other regional initiatives, Means of implementation, Institutional framework for sustainable development, Gender equality, and Education.
2012/2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Forests</li> </ul>	Poverty eradication, Changing unsustainable patterns

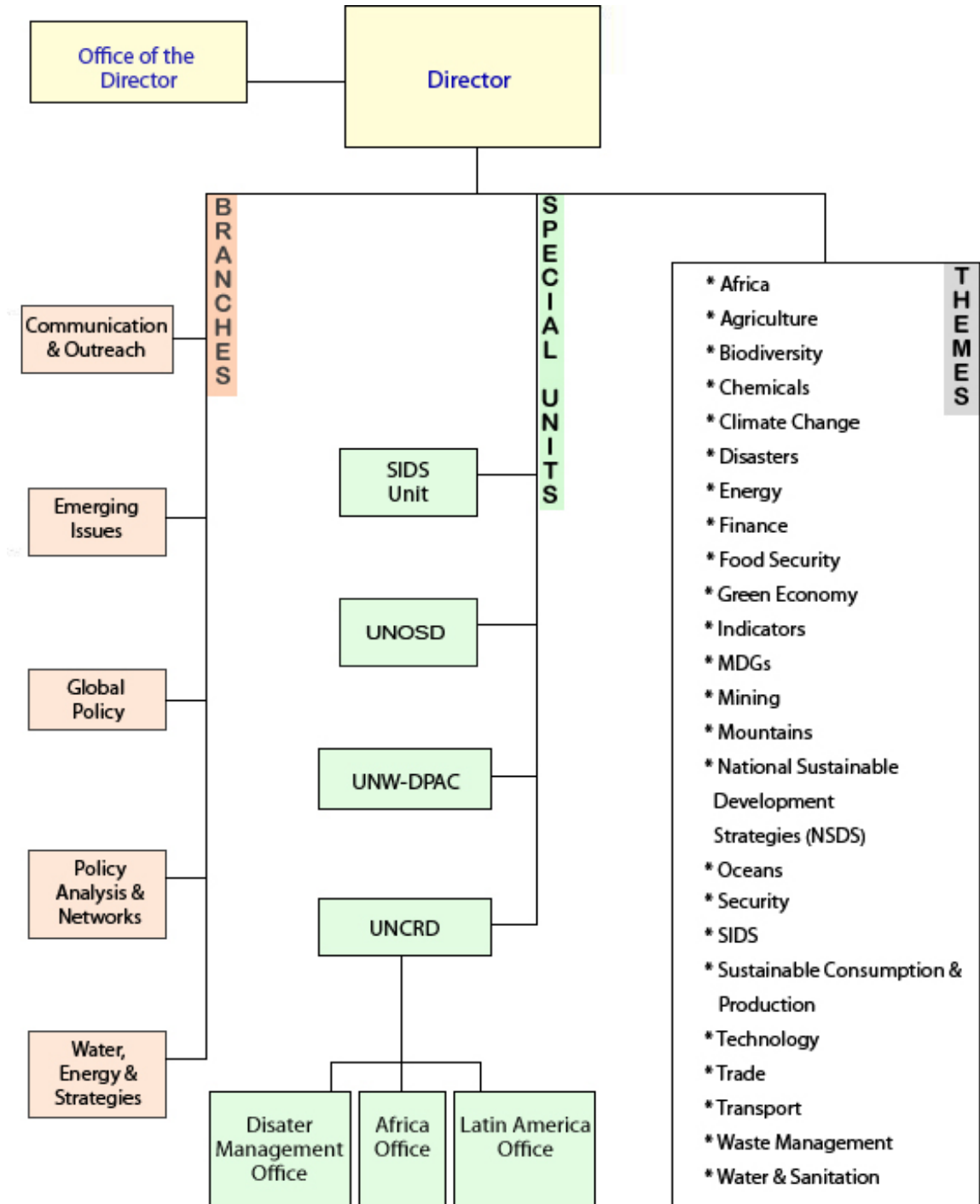
<p>CSD-20/CSD-21 Implementation Cycle #5</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Biodiversity</li> <li>• Biotechnology</li> <li>• Tourism</li> <li>• Mountains</li> </ul>	<p>of consumption and production, Protecting and managing the natural resource base of economic and social development, Sustainable development in a globalizing world, Health and sustainable development, Sustainable development of SIDS, Sustainable development for Africa, Other regional initiatives, Means of implementation, Institutional framework for sustainable development, Gender equality, and Education.</p>
<p>2014/2015 CSD-22/CSD-23 Implementation Cycle #6</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Oceans and Seas</li> <li>• Marine Resources</li> <li>• Small Island Developing States</li> <li>• Disaster Management and Vulnerability</li> </ul>	<p>Poverty eradication, Changing unsustainable patterns of consumption and production, Protecting and managing the natural resource base of economic and social development, Sustainable development in a globalizing world, Health and sustainable development, Sustainable development of SIDS, Sustainable development for Africa, Other regional initiatives, Means of implementation, Institutional framework for sustainable development, Gender equality, and Education.</p>
<p>2016/2017 CSD-24/CSD-24 Implementation Cycle #7</p>	<p>Overall appraisal of implementation of Agenda 21, the Programme of Further Implementation of Agenda 21 and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation</p>	

Source: [http://www.un.org/esa/dsd/csd/csd\\_multyearprogwork.shtml](http://www.un.org/esa/dsd/csd/csd_multyearprogwork.shtml).



# Annex III

## Current Structure of DSD



Source: DSD Focal Point.

## **Annex IV**

In this Annex, OIOS presents the full text of comments received from DSD on the draft evaluation of the Division for Sustainable Development (DSD). This practice has been instituted as per General Assembly [resolution 64/263](#) following the recommendation of the [Independent Audit Advisory Committee \(IAAC\)](#). The comments from DSD on the OIOS draft report have been incorporated as appropriate into this final report.

### **Comments from the Division for Sustainable Development (DSD) on the OIOS draft report:**

United Nations  Nations Unies  
INTEROFFICE MEMORANDUM MEMORANDUM INTERIEUR


TO: Mr. Yee Woo Guo  
A: Acting Director  
Inspection and Evaluation Division  
Office of Internal Oversight Services

DATE: 26 May 2011

REFERENCE: DESA-11/00891

THROUGH:

S/C DE:

FROM:  Juwang Zhu  
DE: Chief  
Office of the Under-Secretary-General  
Department of Economic and Social Affairs

SUBJECT: Draft report of OIOS on the Division for Sustainable Development

OBJET:

1. I refer to your memo of 18 May 2011 addressed to Mr. Sha Zukang, Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, transmitting the final draft report of OIOS on the Division for Sustainable Development (DSD) and inviting comments on the final draft.
2. DSD expresses its appreciation for the evaluation and has requested the Office of Under-Secretary-General to transmit its comments (attached herewith) on the final draft.
3. On behalf of Mr. Sha Zukang, I would like to take this opportunity to thank IED/OIOS colleagues for your evaluation of DSD/DESA.
4. We will follow up on the results of the evaluation and the recommendations.

Thank you.

cc: Ms. Carman L. Lapointe  
Mr. Byung-Kun Min  
Ms. Sabine Becker  
Mr. Tariq Banuri  
Mr. Genene Zewge  
Ms. Ursula Germann

**Department of Economic and Social Affairs  
Division for Sustainable Development**

Response by the Division to the Report prepared by the Inspection and Evaluation Division (IED) of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) on the evaluation it undertook in order to determine, as systematically and objectively as possible, the relevance, efficiency and effectiveness (including impact) of DSD

The Division for Sustainable Development (DSD) received the report on 18 May 2011 and was requested to provide its comments by 26 May 2011. DSD thanks the OIOS for the preparation of the report, and offers the following comments with the aim of removing factual errors and correcting a few other misrepresentations:

1. As a general comment, the value of the report would have been enhanced if it had adhered to the basic norms of research and reporting, including factual reporting of data, providing details on the quality of the information collected, and ensuring that the results are reported honestly and accurately. The report mentions several ‘stakeholder surveys’, but provides no information on the composition of the sample, the response rate, and sources of potential bias. Furthermore, even if the sample survey yield results favorable to the Division, the text and the direct quotes are invariably skewed towards the minority of (adverse) opinions to give a more negative impression. Finally, in some cases, a few quotes are provided as if they were the definitive assessments of the situation without any effort at identifying or correcting sources of bias. One is left with the impression that bias is in the assessment itself rather than in the data.

Concrete examples are provided below.

2. In para 17, the report states correctly that the Division has five Branches, it fails to mention that it also has a Small Island Developing States Unit in the Office of the Director. In order to reflect this we suggest that para 17 be reformulated as follows:

Currently, DSD is organized into five branches, each headed by a Chief of Branch at the D-1 level (one OIC P-5) who report to the Division Director. The Division also includes **special units, such as the SIDS Unit, and** five field-based project offices, headed by managers at P-5 to D-1 levels, which directly report to the Director.

3. In para 23, the report is incorrect in saying that UN DESA provides secretariat services to UN-Oceans. While the secretariats of two other coordination mechanisms (UN-Energy and UN-Water) are located in DSD, the UN-Oceans secretariat rotates with the Chair selected by UN Oceans members every two years. Furthermore, the same para omits mention of another coordination mechanism, namely the inter-agency consultative group on SIDS. It is recommended that the paragraph be reformulated as follows:

DSD also provides secretariat services to UN-Water, UN-Energy and **is member of UN-Oceans**, mechanisms that were put into place by the Chief Executives Board for Coordination to support and provide emphasis to these issues critical for achieving sustainable development, **and also convenes and chairs the SIDS Inter-Agency Consultative Group, which is an informal coordinating mechanisms that includes focal points of all relevant UN agencies, regional commissions and regional intergovernmental organizations for monitoring the implementation of the Mauritius Strategy for the Implementation of the Programme for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States.** Further, DSD supports the Secretary-General's Advisory Board on Water and Sanitation through secondment of staff.

The same para contains another factual misstatement where it refers to secondment of staff. In fact there is no secondment of staff for the secretariat of the Secretary-General's Advisory Board on Water and Sanitation. Staff members serving the secretariat are recruited under a project to support the work of the Advisory Board.

4. In para 27, it would be appropriate to reflect other high level events that are also organized by the Division. We suggest the following reformulation:

Of the four functions specified in the Division's 2010-2011 Strategic Framework, normative and policy support to United Nations intergovernmental processes is the most resource-intensive. This consists primarily of servicing the **General Assembly's Second Committee, the ECOSOC and the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD)**. It also includes **planning and organizing high level events, such as the five-year review of the Mauritius Strategy of Implementation that was held during the 65th session of the General Assembly, and** convening ad-hoc expert group meetings on current CSD topics, for example on challenges and responses regarding sustainable consumption and production, as well as preparing and servicing international conferences, such as Rio+20.

5. It is encouraging to know, as stated in para 34, that "several participants attending CSD-18 meetings observed by OIOS commented that DESA reports and technical advice provided important input to policy discussions". Unfortunately, the italicized heading just preceding this para suggests otherwise: *The intended usage of DSD's research publications remained, however, unclear*. It is not clear what is unclear.

6. Para 35 mentions a stakeholder survey in which 27 respondents (the figure is given in footnote 8) reported that "they had not used most of the Division reports identified on a list of 57 DESA publications". No more information is given on what those publications listed among the 57 were, and who these respondents were. How one is to draw any conclusions from such incomplete information is unclear.

7. The ensuing description of the investigation of prospective users of DSD publications is equally vague. It reads in part: "In interviews, most stakeholders did not recall specific DSD reports other than preparatory documentation for the CSD process". Who were these

interviewees? How many were there? How were they selected? Were they presented with an open-ended question – do you recall any reports? or were they presented with a list and asked to identify any they recalled having consulted". The reason for scepticism on this methodology is that the web download statistics would appear to belie the notion that stakeholders are unaware of DSD's publications. The Trends Reports and Innovation Briefs -- at least the selected ones -- have been heavily downloaded as compared with other Departmental publications.

8. With regard to the reporting of the download statistics, once more the research seems seriously deficient. For example, para 36 states: DSD staff interviewed acknowledged that the usage of DSD publications, apart from website statistics of report downloads, was to a certain degree unknown and unmeasured ..." What does "to a certain degree" mean here? What is "unmeasured" when we have web statistics which the researchers appear to dismiss as a valid measure of readership and interest in the publications?

9. In para 37 it is noted that the DSD's publications have been addressed to the sustainable community at large. It seems that this is meant to be a criticism but it could as well be taken as a compliment. What is the perceived problem of addressing the sustainable community at large?

10. The description of the NRF Board in para 38 is simply wrong, plain and simple and therefore we suggest that it be deleted in its entirety.

11. In para 39, the report gives the impression that civil society groups were categorized into nine major groups by the Division for Sustainable Development. In fact this categorization was introduced in Agenda 21 by Heads of States and endorsed by the General Assembly and **not** by the Division for Sustainable Development. The term "so-called" as a qualifier to the reference to 'Major Groups' should be deleted from the report.

12. In para 48, the report provides the total number of staff in the Water, Energy and Strategies Branch as only three. The actual staff members assigned to the Branch are actually 8: 1 D-1 (Vacant), 2 P-5s, 1 P-3, 1 P-2, 2 G-6 and 1 G-5. In addition, we have also noted that the data on table 4 on page 21 does not provide accurate information with respect to distribution of staff resources in the different branches and entities. With respect to the SIDS Unit although it indicates that there are 9 staff members in the Unit, we only had **3 regular budget** posts and **3 extra-budgetary positions** - total of 6 staff members. This should be correctly reflected.

13. In paras 57 and 58, some doubt is raised with reference to the Rio+20 Secretariat fund raising experience. In fact, DSD has a long history of raising funds successfully for Heads of State Level Conferences, including the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), the International Meeting for the review of Implementation of the Programme to Support the Sustainable Development of SIDS (Mauritius+5), the annual sessions of the CSD, and technical assistance projects. DSD staff members assigned to this function for Rio+20 have experience in raising funds.

14. Para 58 seems to question why DSD was chosen as the Secretariat for Rio+20. This is rather puzzling especially after the report acknowledges the success of the Division in servicing the intergovernmental processes. Stakeholders suggesting that CEB may have been a better choice might not fully understand the role of the United Nations Secretariat and the function of the CEB. Moreover, it is not a new preparation set-up but rather mirrors the arrangement for the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in which the USG and Conference Secretary-General chaired the Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development (IACSD).

15. In para 59 the GA resolution is incorrectly reflected and should read 64/236.

16. Para 66 states, incorrectly, that assessments and lessons learned from the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) were undertaken "only eight years later", when in fact this was done immediately after the Summit. Internal assessments were undertaken in preparation for CSD-11 which took decisions on the future work plan of the Commission. Following that session, internal consultations and a retreat were held that led to a restructuring of the Division to better meet the new working methods of the Commission.

17. In para 77 the Capacity Development Office is wrongly referred to as "Capacity Building Office".