SUMMITS OF THE AMERICAS VIRTUAL COMMUNITY

TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE AMERICAS

(Report of the Virtual Forum held from September 15 to October 15, 2010)

Department of Sustainable Development (DSD) in collaboration with the
Summits of the Americas Secretariat (SAS) of the OAS

TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE AMERICAS

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I. Introduction

Towards Sustainable Development in the Americas

The Second Meeting of Ministers and High-Level Authorities on Sustainable Development "Towards Sustainable Development in the Americas" to be held in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic from November 17 to 19, 2010, offers the opportunity to follow-up on actions identified by the Ministers and High-Level Authorities on the First Ministerial Meeting on Sustainable Development in 2006, as well as on commitments made on sustainable development by the Heads of State and Government at the Fifth Summit of the Americas held in Trinidad and Tobago in April 2009.

The Ministerial meeting aims to identify priorities in the area of sustainable development within the hemispheric agenda, taking as its starting point the Declaration of Santa Cruz+10 and the Inter-American Program on Sustainable Development (PIDS) 2006-2009. The meeting will also address emerging challenges and opportunities for the countries of the region.

As part of the preparation for this Ministerial Meeting, the Department of Sustainable Development, in collaboration with the Summits of the Americas Secretariat of the OAS, held the virtual consultation *"Towards Sustainable Development in the Americas"* from September 15 to October 15, 2010. The forum was held simultaneously in English and Spanish through the new Summits Virtual Community (SVC) and was open to the participation of civil society representatives and other social actors throughout the region.

The Summits Virtual Community (SVC) is an interactive website designed to complement the Summits of the Americas process. By bringing together the diverse groups of actors involved in the Summits of the Americas in a single virtual community, the SVC aims to strengthen the culture of democratic participation and facilitate the development of an inter-American agenda that represents the interests and common challenges of the peoples of the Americas.

II. Purpose of the consultation

The purpose of the consultation was to strengthen and ensure a broad participation of civil society and social actors in the preparatory process of the Second Meeting of Ministers and High-Level Authorities on Sustainable Development, as well as to facilitate discussions between participating organizations on five sub-themes under the umbrella theme "Towards Sustainable Development in the Americas":

- Institutional and management aspects related to climate change;
- Risk management and planning;
- Vulnerability in the context of sustainable development;
- Follow-up on the Declaration of Santa Cruz +10, and
- Implementation of the Inter-American Program on Sustainable Development (2006-2009).

III. General summary of the results of the forum

Virtual Forum Coordinator: Francisco Burgos, Specialist from the DSD/OAS.

During the virtual exchange of the forum, the five sub-themes outlined above were discussed. The forum included related resources for participants, such as supporting documents, videos and reference information, and was moderated by experts from the OAS Department of Sustainable Development.

The following highlights some recurring comments and recommendations made during the forum:

- Participants of the forum made repeated calls to governments to be more proactive in promoting environmental awareness in the region. To this end, general communication, education and public participation campaigns were proposed, coupled with support to specific interest groups in formulating and implementing environmental programs and laws.
- Participants stressed the need to strengthen local communities and initiatives as catalysts for change towards the implementation of sustainable practices by all actors of society. In this sense, participants noted the desirability of tailoring messages and plans to the local reality and of making them specific to the environmental context.
- The importance of strengthening women and children as actors particularly suited to transform societies from the household was mentioned on several occasions.
- The role of businesses to ensure sustainable development was highlighted, as well as the importance of having legislation and local incentives to promote good environmental practices.
- On several occasions, participants drew attention to the need to allocate resources to plans, programs and initiatives that promote sustainable development both at the national and local levels. In this regard, the problem of corruption in the region surfaced and was reiterated many times.

IV. Issues discussed and recommendations

Virtual Discussion Chain 1: Institutional and Management Aspects Related to Climate Change

Presentation: The main objective of this dialogue is to strengthen the discussion of the ministerial meeting about the challenges for the development and implementation of policy strategies for climate change adaptation in the context of sustainable development. Among the areas to be discussed are financing, risk transfer, decentralization and public participation; conflict prevention through programs that support the respect of cultural values and heritage, poverty reduction, promoting gender equity and contribution to achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), including the legal and institutional frameworks necessary for the successful implementation of these policies, programs and strategies.

Moderators: Rodrigo Martínez and Michelle-Ann Williams, specialists from the DSD/OAS

Issues discussed: The following issues were discussed in this session

- It was mentioned that in light of the failures of the 2009 Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen, the Ministerial Meeting on climate change presents an opportunity for governments and social actors to act and agree on solutions. Some of the solutions put forward are:
  - o Given the nature of the Latin American economy and its emphasis on natural resources, the answer lies in a multilateral solution. While a decentralized, public-inspired resolution sounds ideal, it may be perhaps too ideal. The interests of the masses are simply too extensive and other actors, including the public, private, government, and non-governmental sectors, must be involved. In conjunction with an open forum for discussion between all of these actors, a more centralized approach must be the final step taken at the Ministerial Meeting in order to act on theses initial discussions.
  - o Regional cooperation is key. In spite of this, the unique political, economic, social and environmental conditions throughout the Americas have delayed this cooperation. As a result, despite the progressive intentions of the Ministerial Meeting, a more permanent session needs to be assembled in order to deal with the sensitive issues of climate change in a timelier manner.

- Rather than look at just the broad macro institutional framework, the climate change challenge shows more than ever that institutional strengthening must start at local and community levels, and a large part

of that target are women who are often the main movers of community-level economic and social activity. Strengthening and providing them with information and information facilities and resources that are locally adapted to their outlook and needs will go a long way to empowerment and understanding of climate change issues as well as to pursue sustainable livelihoods.

- These types of fora are an example of strengthening institutions through a bottom-up approach.
- In terms of institutionalizing these movements, there needs to be a definitive link between the local community and the governing bodies. This link must include more than resources and information. Legal frameworks, in conjunction with representatives of communities perhaps, are necessary to properly manage and organize local populations in the face of natural disasters. This management and organization will be crucial in the aftermath of a disaster.

- More and more, when we look at what affects the community, the bottom line is that profit-making with no regard for the environment is the chief culprit. Therefore, sound environmental standards for international trading agreements and commercial practices are needed, otherwise we are going in circles; playing politics with people's lives. The only way that we will get around this is by creating standards which profiteers must abide by in investment and business operations.

- We need to have a greater input in the area of information and we also need to analyze what is necessary to each region of the Americas.

- One of the participants highlighted the role and the need for more participation of faith-based and religious organizations. Specifically:
    - Ensure faith based and religious organizations present themselves to society as "stewards of Creation" and express this through tangible action in all states.
    - Apply faith based and religious teachings of creation to nurture the importance of a relationship with Creation as relevant to Life.
    - We need to remember the technical language and the religious language are different. We need to state actions in terms that are inclusive. Faith based and Religious organizations are included in Civil Society but they speak a different technical language and this must be expressed in terms that are interpreted by all.

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- **Information.** One of the main barriers for implementing the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) is the lack of dissemination of information on actions being undertaken by the government in relation to climate change by the competent entities.

- **Local management.** There is a need to strengthen and define the management capacity at local as a way towards real sustainable development. The uncertainty regarding the decentralized powers, especially in budgetary matters, is an obstacle to work in development programs and projects, which is exacerbated by corrupt practices.

- It is necessary to develop, build and strengthen local institutions, within the communities. It would work better to target resources to the communities, since they are ultimately the ones who suffer the impacts of climate change.

- **Awareness.** The lack of awareness of the population around these issues and the lack of accountability by the authorities in the region should be addressed. **Political and social will to do something about climate change must accompany the legislation and the availability of resources.**

- **Participation and Education.** It is emphasized to involve more social actors and the desirability of promoting in a cross-cutting manner the issue of sustainable development into education as a way to raising the awareness in educated children so they can become agents of change in society.

- It is proposed to implement plans of economic development and environmentally sustainability that promote responsible practices by companies.

Virtual Discussion Chain 2: Risk Management and Planning

Presentation: This dialogue aims to explore the best practices in risk management in the context of climatic hazards. Special attention will be given to the instruments and innovative mechanisms for managing risk, including those that contribute to climate change adaptation through conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and ecological services as well as developing capacity building to improve risk management through land use planning, development and implementation of codes, standards and construction standards, enforcement and compliance, quality assurance, planning and land use in urban and rural settlements. Also it will analyze the legal and institutional challenges related to risk management.

Moderators: Andrés Felipe Sánchez and Wilkferg Vanegas, Specialists from the DSD/OAS.

Issues discussed: The following issues were discussed in this session

- The following challenges were identified for the effective development of risk management in the context of climatic hazards:

  - The vast majority of people do not know the dangers generated or generated in different areas of our operation as a society and their particular development as individuals.
  - Citizens do not have a strong sense of belonging to the natural resources and are not aware of their role in the pollution generation of and energy waste as individuals and as a whole.
  - Public and private organizations do not lead by example by implementing best practices in environmental responsibility.

- It is proposed the implementation of strategies or mechanisms that:

  - Present clear environmental alternatives that help to gradually change consumption habits of citizens to be more sustainable and energy efficient. This to achieve a non traumatic adaptation to a new lifestyle, governed by the consequences created by climate change.
  - Involve traditional and virtual media, as well as educational institutions at all academic levels to ensure that the message reaches everyone and establishing it as an academic priority starting with the very young.
  - Propose corporate environmental commitments that are subject to surveys and tax breaks, and aim to meet sustainable development principles daily.

- Providing communities with information that are relevant to their outlook and needs will go a long way to empowerment and understanding of climate change issues. Much of the information being fed to the region are from elsewhere, which while they may be relevant, are not conveyed in a relevant manner. Usually scientists are unable to communicate the science of climate change in non-scientific language to communities so they often seem and sound at loggerheads with local needs. There is certainly need for concerted efforts to bridge this gap, coupled with strengthening local machinery, mechanisms, facilitation and enforcement (eg building codes)that will help with risk management.

- The best practices in risk management incorporate the local population because they are the ones at risk. While a natural disaster is frequently a regional occurrence, the effects are most evident at the local level. As a result, actors from all sectors must come to realize that risk management/planning needs to take place at this level. An integrated system for environmental management functions particularly well because open dialogue, in comparison to the more muddled technocratic approach, will ultimately promote a more transparent, cross-cutting framework to deal with climatic hazards.

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Virtual Discussion Chain 3: Vulnerability in the Context of Sustainable Development

Presentation: The discussion under this thread seeks to analyze the effects of climate change vulnerability in the Americas, including:
- *The challenges for ecosystems, biodiversity and the services they provide in the framework of the current regional economic development models*
- *The growing pressure in the energy sector*
- *The impact on the water dependent sectors including agriculture and infrastructure*
- *The threats to food security*
- *The pressure caused by the rising urbanization trend in the region*
- *The impact on the poverty levels*
- *The emerging challenges related to natural disasters' vulnerability*
- *Climate change, adaptation and vulnerability assessment scenarios*

All these issues will be discussed from an integral perspective, seeking to respond to major social, environmental and economic concerns inherent to sustainable development.

Moderators: Olga Morales and Luisa Neira, Specialists from the DSD/OAS.

Issues discussed: The following issues were discussed in this session

- Targeting women and children in environmental action and recognizing and utilizing their local and traditional knowledge and practices that enhance their own livelihoods towards sustainable development in conjunction with providing them with scientific-based knowledge in culturally-appropriate ways can help to empower this most vulnerable group to take effective action.

- We believe environmental enforcement authorities need to be established to encourage the effectiveness and efficiency to dealing with issues relating to the environment, more transparent and follow good governance principles in their work to interface between government and these agencies.

- We need to encourage in-country and international co-operation, establish a more effective dialogue with authorities, government and civil society from the beginning to take into consideration policy and regulatory development and human behavior as we seek to develop a culture of care for the environment.

- The question now is how are we who are involved completing this activity off the web page? What are we doing to assist those who are not as involved or do not have the know-how to enter the conversations? Can we support what is already in the pipeline? There have been great discussions on climate change and many Faith based and Religious organizations in Trinidad and Tobago have been contributing to the change in behavior with respect to Creation, Life and other factors that lead to the degradation that is being addressed in these forums.

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- In talking about vulnerability with respect to sustainable development, it is not only necessary to evaluate effects on the national economy, but to also evaluate the quality of life of the citizens, especially the poorest communities, which would be the most affected by the effects of climate change.
- It was mentioned that the vulnerability to the effects of climate change in the Americas is clear, and there exists an interconnection in several ways that has, as a consequence, serious chain reactions against any natural disaster. Because of this, we should move forward from specific reactive strategies towards proactive strategies that reduce vulnerability; for example:
  - Protection, conservation and feedback from human populations near local strategic ecosystems with natural and social value that can be used sustainably and/or serve for the environmental stabilization of larger ecosystems; for example: water sources/springs

  - Personal Environmental Responsibility to act sustainably in the day-to-day with the purpose of reducing the probability of natural disaster occurrences and environmental disaster directly generated by man; for example, a forest fire initiated by a cigarette end

- The concept of vulnerability is equated to the condition of poverty of social groups, homes and people, and implies the impossibility of sustainability, development and future projection. It is because of this, that the generation of local capacities is very important to be able to observe and resolve diverse situations in the short and long-term.

- The needs for sustainable development that require immediate responses are connected to the base that supports the environmental system that is the quality of the natural resources that they sustain in time and space the satisfaction of the needs of the local community. Today, they are threatened by processes that are as anthropogenic as they are natural, and with a strong presence of uncertainty. An environmental quality that should be safeguarded not only for the quality of the resources themselves, but for the preservation of the diversity of the ecosystem. A community that knows its own natural resources satisfies its needs with these resources avoiding the creation of an intensive demand for environmental goods and services.

- This initial dialogue between the supply of the local ecosystem and local community is something that has eroded and has been negatively impacted in both cases. There we can find a tapestry that contributes as well to environmental vulnerability because the supply of the ecosystem has been simplified to a few items and the local community cannot always access those goods.

- The environmental education of the local community is required to permit, on one hand, the awareness of the local environmental conditions and, on the other hand, the cause-and-effect relationships, particularly in important areas of environment vulnerability. Encouraging the environmental education and information processes allow all actors to make informed decisions, which is an area of work that should be permanent in our communities, and at the same time systematized, by the competent agencies for the purposes of avoiding duplications and encouraging synergies.

- The processes of environmental education and information will not only allow for better decision-making by the competent organisms, but will also allow the population in general to defender its right to a cared for and protected environment.
- It should be highlighted that a great part of the destruction of our environment is due to the greed of businesses; an economy based on excessive profits has prevailed that does not take into account the disasters that they cause to the environment. This has occurred due to the lack of adequate controls, effective education from basic schooling, and the persistence of corruption.

- Campaigns should be developed that emphasize that the sustainability of the environment is everyone's responsibility, independent of our position in society. These campaigns should contain simple facts that can be understood by everyone, including groups with lower education.

Virtual Discussion Chain 4: Follow up on the Declaration of Santa Cruz + 10 and the Implementation of the Inter-American Program on Sustainable Development (2006-2009)

Presentación: The Ministerial meeting of Santo Domingo will provide a space for Ministers to take note of the progress in implementing the Declaration of Santa Cruz +10 and the Inter-American 20006-2009 Sustainable Development (PIDS). Also, the Ministers will discuss the challenges and opportunities in priority areas in the region such as:

- *Sustainable development of water resources;*
- *Disaster;*
- *Sustainable forest management;*
- *Sustainable agriculture and sustainable tourism;*
- *Conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity;*
- *Coastal Zone Management and Adaptation to Climate Change*
- *Promotion of renewable energy and energy efficiency and*
- *Capacity Building and Institutional Strengthening for Sustainable Development and Environmental Management.*

This discussion chain seeks to explore opportunities to advance the ministerial dialogue on the existing mechanisms within the OAS as well as the possible future actions to track the implementation of the Declaration of Santa Cruz +10 and PIDS.

Moderators: Adriana Jáuregui and Oscar Ceville, Specialists from the DSD/OAS.

Issues discussed: The following issues were discussed in this session

- Developing and strengthening the model adopted by the Active Democracy Network in conjunction with local NGOs for civil society monitoring and assessing OAS member Government's actions to implement OAS commitments and rating performances at local and national levels in the areas identified above, along with OAS peer sanctions, and actions against non-cooperative States can help track implementation, as well as increase pressure on Governments to act.

- Particularly for persons who reside outside the Caribbean Region, it is crucial to understand the prevalence of corruption in the region. Residents of developed nations would not generally be able to imagine how commonplace corruption is and how little it is investigated and penalized. This is a pivotal issue in terms of sustainable development. Programmes, projects, policies and decisions are routinely informed and affected by corrupt practices. This adds a second, surreptitious, decision making matrix to development issues. National bodies within the region are unable and/or unwilling to deal with corruption. Regional and international players must demand accountability and transparency and be willing to demand criminal investigations or sustainable development will remain elusive.

- Society's "ills" can best be challenged through market-based conservation/development. Individuals that have an economic incentive to support sustainable development will help bring about more concrete action. In the sections regarding "Sustainable Forest Management, Sustainable Agriculture and Sustainable Tourism," the Declaration of Santa Cruz +10 begins to shed light on this idea. In conjunction with programs regarding conservation awareness, the future implementation of this

Declaration must involve and support environmentally-sensitive local businesses. The support of all walks of eco-tourism and organic farming practices is an excellent step towards an improved private sector environmental performance, and a step away from "paper" statements.
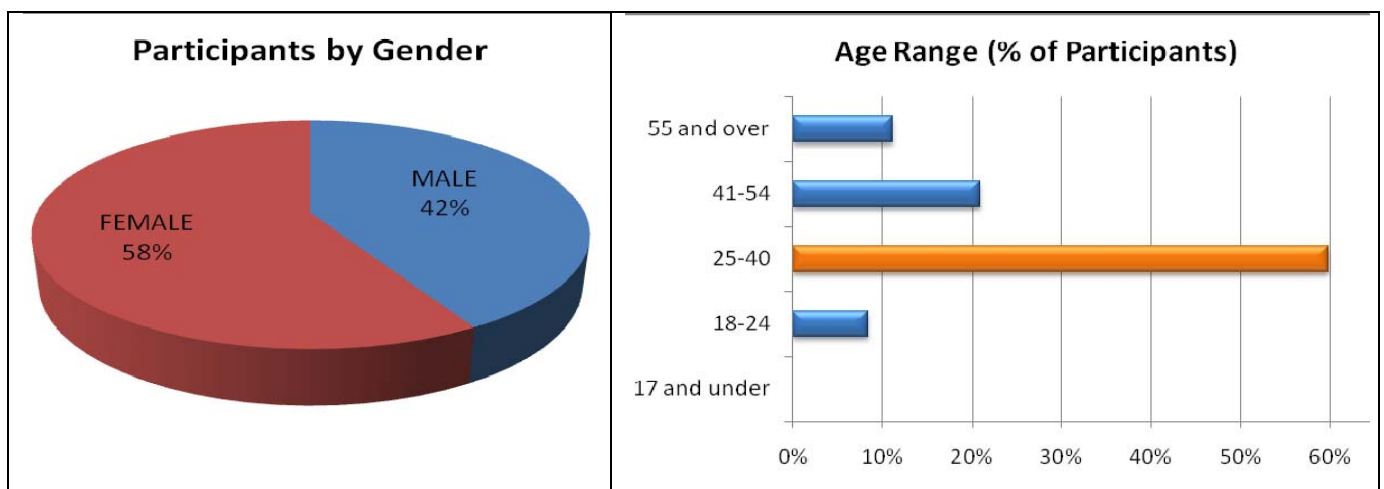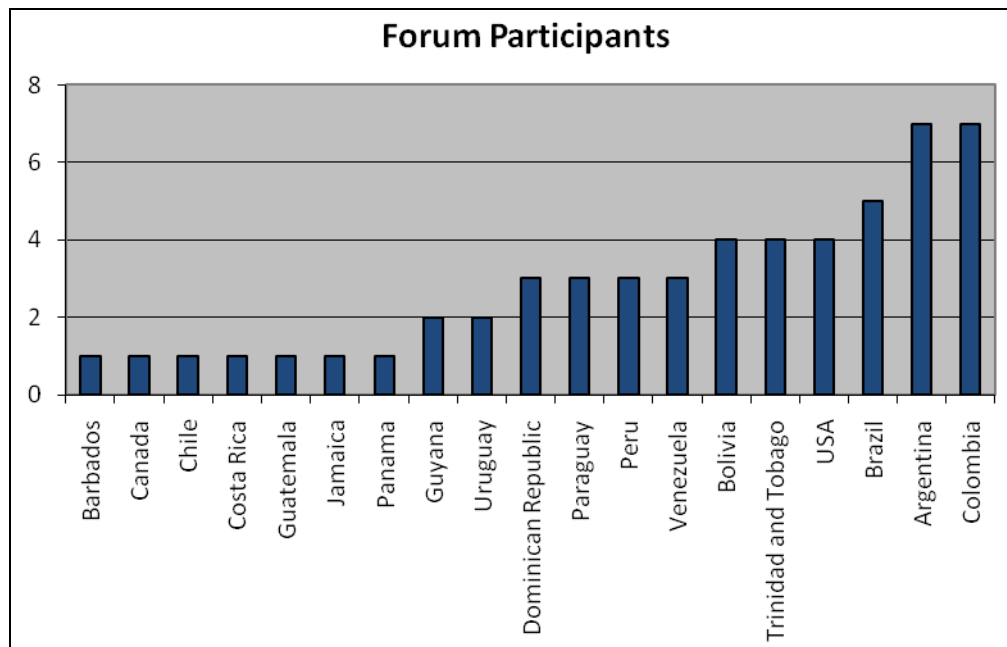
- Top of FormThe proliferation of declarations and plans are highlighted for sustainable development in the Americas that despite reaffirming many commitments, recognizing threats and designing plans, do not show many results in decreasing the negative environmental impacts generated by man. There is not much execution of good practices on the personal and organization levels to decrease levels of contamination and mitigate the effects of climate change. Finally, there is not much information in the hands of the common civil society about what sustainable development is and why it is so important; which means that there is not much support for these persons to act sustainably since they have not seen the financial effects. With this in mind, it seems that there are four macro strategies that should be implemented, or at least attempted in order to create standards for all member states:

  - Form alliances with the media to promote basic concepts of sustainable development, inform others about the negative impacts generated by our consumption habits, and publicize good practices of energy efficiency at all levels; this, with the purpose of reaching out to ALL of civil society.
  - Achieve institutional compromises, at the public and private level, to reduce energy consumption, decrease the production of trash and waste, and efficiently use all resources; this, with the purpose of achieving positive impacts of great magnitudes.
  - Include concepts of sustainable development and good practices of energy efficiency in all academic programs of primary, secondary and higher education for all strata and regions; this, with the purpose of ensuring the necessary awareness for future generations.
  - Create easily accessed national and international funds for the support of projects and initiatives that promote, execute and encourage sustainable development in the Americas; this, with the purpose of finding new and better solutions.

Annexes

A.   Forum Participants

Since its launch on June 8, the number of registered users of the Summits Virtual Community is 398. During the thirty-day virtual exchange, a total of 54 users participated in the debate.

Emphasis is made to the active participation in the forum by users from Argentina, Colombia, and - to a lesser extent - from Brazil, Trinidad and Tobago, the United States, and Bolivia. In general, participants represented civil society organizations; other participants came from international organizations and academia.

Source: Forum statistics, "Towards Sustainable Development in the Americas", Summits Virtual Community, 2010.

B. List of participants

	Country	Name	Institution
1	Argentina	Cesar Vargas	Fundación Hain
2	Argentina	Irene Castillo	Grupo de Estudios Sociales
3	Argentina	Lorena Coria	
4	Argentina	Maria Cecilia Quadri	Miembro BPW Argentina, Bs.As., Recoleta
5	Argentina	Maria Eugenia Pirillo	
6	Argentina	Maria Querol	
7	Argentina	Sofía Cruz	BPW Argentina (Recoleta)
8	Barbados	Roosevelt King	Barbados Associon of Non Governmental Organisations
9	Bolivia	Adriana Jáuregui	Organization of American States (OAS)
10	Bolivia	Stephanie Weiss	Organization of American States (OAS)
11	Bolivia	Teresa Flores	
12	Bolivia	Yolanda Dips	
13	Brazil	Adriana de Queiroz	
14	Brazil	Fernanda Cimini	Opção Brasil
15	Brazil	Katia Dantas	
16	Brazil	Sergio Duarte Segall	A&S Bioenergia
17	Brazil	Thiago Dal-Toe	Organization of American States (OAS)
18	Canada	Luke Sookocheff	Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada
19	Chile	Ruben Contreras	Organization of American States (OAS)
20	Colombia	Andrea Montilla	Organization of American States (OAS)
21	Colombia	Claudia Salazar	Organización de los Estados Americanos (OEA)
22	Colombia	Frank Olaya	www.VERDEate.com
23	Colombia	Luisa Fernanda Neira	Organization of American States (OAS)
24	Colombia	Olga Morales	Organization of American States (OAS)
25	Colombia	Rodrigo Martinez	Organization of American States (OAS)
26	Colombia	Wilkferg Vanegas	Organization of American States (OAS)
27	Costa Rica	Elvira Muñoz	Organización de los Estados Americanos (OEA)
28	Dominican Republic	Denise Hamilton	
29	Dominican Republic	Francisco Javier Burgos	Organización de los Estados Americanos (OEA)
30	Dominican Republic	Massiel Figuereo	Confederación Nacional de Unidad Sindical, CNUS
31	Guatemala	Daniel Cutzal España	Asociación Campesina para el Desarrollo de la Comunidad ACADEC
32	Guyana	Bevon Currie	
33	Guyana	Vidyaratha Kissoon	
34	Jamaica	Michelle-Ann Williams	Organization of American States (OAS)
35	Panama	Oscar Ceville	Organización de los Estados Americanos (OEA)
36	Paraguay	María del Mar Zavala	Instituto de Derecho y Economía Ambiental (IDEA)
37	Paraguay	Mónica Cáceres	Centro Interdisciplinario de Derecho Social y Economía Política (CIDSEP – UC)
38	Paraguay	Patricia Abed	IDEA - Instituto de Derecho y Economía Ambiental
39	Peru	Bertha Cecilia Garcia Cienfuegos	Asociación Regional Mujeres Ingenieras
40	Peru	Osver Jaime Polo Carrasco	Grupo Latinoamericano frente al Cambio Climático
41	Peru	Richard Mauricio Maquera Cutipa	

42	Trinidad and Tobago	Bertrand Bhikarry	Environment Tobago
43	Trinidad and Tobago	Gale Mohammed-Oxley	- None -
44	Trinidad and Tobago	Gia Gaspard Taylor	International Education and Resource Network Trinidad and Tobago (iEARNTnT)
45	Trinidad and Tobago	Kris Rampersad	Network of NGOs of Trinidad and Tobago for the Advancement of Women
46	U.S.	Daniel Dahlman	
47	U.S.	Geoffrey Johnson	Organization of American States (OAS)
48	U.S.	Martin Huenneke	Organization of American States (OAS)
49	U.S.	Steven Greenleaf	Greenleaf Consulting and Training
50	Uruguay	Hector Villaverde	
51	Uruguay	Sabina Inetti Pino	
52	Venezuela	Carmelo Ecarri	Gente de Soluciones
53	Venezuela	Cristina Rasa Tamasauskas Spudis	
54	Venezuela	Isis Marquez	Organization of American States (OAS)

B.   Reference Documents

All reference documents for the Forum were compiled by the OAS Department of Sustainable Development.

To access the list of reference documents and resources, click here.