

The World Summit on Sustainable Development: An assessment

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When the progress from Johannesburg is reviewed in 2012, it will be critical to demonstrate that the people who live in poverty currently have significantly improved quality of life and economic opportunities, and that the next generation will live in a safer and more healthy environment. (South African Government, 2002)

The World Summit on Sustainable Development took place from late August to early September 2002 in Johannesburg. The events held during this period went far beyond the official inter-governmental negotiations at the Sandton Convention Centre: a ten-day International Science Forum; the People's Earth Summit; a full calendar of meetings at the IUCN Environment Centre; a gathering of landless peoples from Africa and the world; the Global People's Forum at the NASREC venue; events and displays in the specially-created Ubuntu Village; the Water Dome exhibition centre; and major conferences organised by business, local government, legislators, parliamentarians and a wealth of other activities. And beyond this, elsewhere in South Africa an international conference on responsible tourism was held in Cape Town; the Children's Earth Summit took place in Soweto; and in Kimberly there was the Summit of Indigenous Peoples.

Each of these was a significant international event in its own right and generated numerous new commitments, ideas, alliances and activities – as well as allowing organisations to learn more about each others' work and take stock of what has happened in different parts of the world and at different levels of governance in the 10 years since the UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio.

What was the significance of Johannesburg?

Compared to WSSD, UNCED was the soul of generosity. The ability of governments to work together to find solutions for global problems seems to be deteriorating at an alarming rate, even as the need for them to work together increases with increased globalisation. (Sharma, Mahapatra and Polycarp, 2002)

[WSSD] put sustainable development at the centre of the international agenda. The world leaders representing governments, major groups, civil society and other stakeholders recommitted themselves to achieving the goal of sustainable development. Governments agreed to an impressive range of concrete commitments to action for promoting implementation of Agenda 21 and the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21. The Summit also generated a variety of other outcomes, including partnerships for sustainable

development. There is now a solid repertoire of commitments and ideas to turn the Rio vision into reality. (UN Secretary General, 2003)

In trying to make sense of the Johannesburg Summit, it is important first to acknowledge the diversity of activities and ways in which the significance of the event can be understood. Tariq Banuri has likened the 1992 Rio Summit experience to an evening at a multiplex cinema – you may have turned up at the same time as someone else and been in the same building, but seen very different films. And the Johannesburg multiplex was showing a lot more movies than its predecessor.

Assessing what came out of WSSD therefore depends critically on your understanding of what the Summit was about. If your focus is on the inter-governmental negotiations then it is relatively easy to gauge its impact. A cursory glance at the UN General Assembly terms of reference for WSSD from late 2000 and then at the Summit outcomes reveals the chasm between expectations and results, even from governments – and the gulf is still wider as far as many other commentators and activists are concerned. If your evaluation encompasses the diversity, dynamism, creativity, expertise and interaction of the broader web of activities listed above (as well, to be fair, as their occasional predictability, partiality and intransigence) then it is rather harder to reach a judgment.

This overlap is in itself significant. WSSD may well come to be seen as the last of the UN mega-Summits, where success is measured by the number of participating heads of state and the conference is preceded by years of negotiation to arrive at a consensus text which reflects the common purpose of the international community. As we will explore in more detail below, the opportunity costs of this approach are becoming unacceptably high while the returns from WSSD are overwhelmingly seen as unacceptably low. A further critical flaw of the Johannesburg process is that, while these exercises are intended to cement common purpose and set out the means for collaboration to achieve shared goals, two years of preparation merely served to emphasise the gaps between key countries and blocs and entrench their positions. And finally, the emphasis from governments and the UN on ‘implementation of existing commitments’ merely drew attention to the mismatch between the process behind a global Summit and the action required to make a difference.

At the same time, WSSD may increasingly be seen as the coming of age of new ways of addressing sustainable development at the global level. Governments meeting in negotiation mode may have difficulty getting to grips with the challenges of ‘implementation’ but the same is not true of many of the civil society organisations meeting elsewhere in Johannesburg. NGO activities at the Rio Summit in 1992 had focused predominantly on the official negotiations. While this was still true of many in the WSSD process, the locus seems to have shifted significantly towards a more decentralised understanding of where change comes from and the best use of such international gatherings.

Straddling this divide between the official process and concurrent civil society activities were the much-vaunted – and criticised – ‘Type 2’ partnerships, of which more below. Although contentious in the build-up to the Summit and (undoubtedly) controversial in

the aftermath, Johannesburg was almost like the eye of the storm – when attention moved to other, more immediately problematic issues.

In part this was because, although the notion of collaboration (potentially) involving the private sector in delivery of sustainable development raised the spectre of ‘greenwash’ by which multinationals could gain credibility while continuing their rapacious practices, in practice hardly any of the officially-recognised partnerships did involve businesses. It was in part because the atmosphere in Johannesburg was rather different to the hothouse climate of the preparatory meetings, and there were many more people present with a more pragmatic attitude towards alliances so long as they achieved desirable goals. And it was also in part because, in the positions taken by the US Government (and its few supporters, such as the Government of Australia) on the Summit agenda, most Summit participants found a ready rallying point which made their differences with others seem less significant. Greenpeace and the World Business Council for Sustainable Development made common cause in opposing US positions on climate change – which is a measure of the extent to which the US was beyond the pail for a large proportion of Summit participants. (Greenpeace / WBCSD, 2002)

What did governments sign up to in Johannesburg ?

H heads of State go from Summit to Summit, while many of their people go
from abyss to abyss
Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez

The main official outcomes of the Summit were a political statement and the WSSD Plan of Implementation. The former was prepared in President Mbeki’s office, and was released half-way through the Summit. It was not opened for negotiation, and was endorsed more out of courtesy to the hosts than because it contained significant text. Unlike the Rio Declaration, the Johannesburg Statement did not set out international principles which could be invoked in legal or political contexts, but served rather as a general philosophical contextualisation for the more detailed commitments in the Plan of Implementation.

The **Plan of Implementation** went through a tortuous process of negotiation, including near-collapse at the final preparatory meeting in Bali. It arrived at Johannesburg with many key issues still unresolved, and with a text well short of the initial intention to agree targets and timetables to help shape action to realise sustainable development. (UNGA, 2000) It would be churlish to imply that the Plan of Implementation is worthless, as some have done. Although not much progress has been made in most key areas there are significant new commitments which should be recognised. There are over 30 targets in the agreed text, though many of these are restatements of existing Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) or other previous agreements.

Significant **new targets and commitments** include:

- To halve the number of people without access to basic sanitation by 2015 (now incorporated in the system-wide UN range of activities on the MDGs);

- New measures to regulate toxic chemicals by 2008;
- A cautious commitment to restore fish stocks ‘where possible’ by 2015, together with new marine protected areas by 2012;
- An aim to achieve a ‘significant reduction’ in the current rate of species loss by 2010;
- Moves to improve developing country access to alternatives to ozone-depleting substances; and
- Some progress in establishing a stronger benefit-sharing regime under the Convention on Biological Diversity, which would give Southern countries stronger rights to a share of profits from ‘bioprospecting’ and biopatenting’.

While the time targets noted above are new, most of the goals stated are not. And the Johannesburg text says very little about how these aims will be realised or who will be responsible for their achievement. Without new funding commitments and clarity on responsibilities it is difficult to see how they will be acted upon effectively.

Corporate accountability: Many NGOs focused attention on the negative roles played by the private sector, and particularly by multinational companies. This included a broad coalition in support of what Friends of the Earth termed ‘a binding framework to secure the accountability of corporations to citizens and communities’. Elements of this campaign included ‘establishing effective international and national law on corporate accountability, liability and reporting’ and ‘effective sanctions and citizen and community rights to consultation, legal challenge and redress over environmentally and socially damaging corporate activities’. (FOEI, 2002)

Perhaps spurred by corporate scandals involving Arthur Andersen, WorldCom and Enron a broad coalition of governments from the EU and many G77 countries were willing to push for new mandatory standards for corporate accountability. The United States and others resisted this as far as possible, but the final text agreed does call for ‘active promotion’ of corporate accountability – although the US insisted that this should apply only to existing agreements rather than new ones, in an effort to limit its legal significance. Even so, this does represent a significant new basis on which to build stronger, binding standards for global companies.

It was evident at WSSD that the **social and economic aspects of sustainable development** are much better integrated with environmental goals than was the case at the Rio Summit – though this did not translate into significant new agreements. The eradication of poverty is now seen as an underlying theme in all work on sustainable development – this must in part be credited to the UN Commission on Sustainable Development which from 1998 to 2001 addressed ways in which this policy integration could be achieved. Although commitments to specific measures to tackle poverty were not agreed at Johannesburg, at least the groundwork has been done so that future global attention to sustainable development will have to address issues of poverty – and perhaps even lead to real change if the political circumstances are right.

The Johannesburg Summit also showed that **globalisation** has emerged as a priority in its own right, increasingly understood as distinct from the duties and aspirations of states. There were various indications that a consensus is emerging which will see countries collaborating to address problems of globalisation which require collective action and stepping up the regulation which could fetter global capitalism if democratically agreed and applied. Predictably, the US was out of step with these developments and (largely as a result) they are not clearly reflected in the agreed text. Two WSSD debates illustrate the divisions which exist on issues of global governance and globalisation:

Trade: It was hoped by many that WSSD would be able to agree a framework for sustainable development governance which would encompass global trade. Given the participation of all countries in the negotiations and the more equitable ways of working of the UN this might really come to influence the World Trade Organisation in the ongoing Doha negotiations. However, the US was persistent in arguing that multilateral environmental agreements should be in conformity with WTO rules. There was a real danger that the message coming from Johannesburg would be that environmental policy should be subservient to economic policy. Indeed, the EU was prepared to go along with this position and it was only avoided when an impromptu coalition of countries – notably Ethiopia, Norway and Switzerland – raised eleventh hour objections. Although this dramatic resistance was widely celebrated (not least by the relieved countries of the EU) the text did no more than maintain the existing lack of clarity on the issue, which was hardly a cause for major rejoicing.

The Precautionary Principle: Principle 15 of the Rio Declaration states that ‘Where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used as a reason for postponing cost-effective measures to prevent environmental degradation’. The principle has been invoked in a number of trade disputes, most notably over genetically modified organisms. In the WSSD process the US consistently argued for scientific certainty as one of the principal goals of sustainable development policy (at one point even citing the Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change as a positive example, despite the history of run-ins between the US government and the IPCC). The US and Japan wanted a weaker reference to ‘the precautionary approach’, while the European Union pushed for endorsement of the Rio terminology. Not surprisingly, the principle was not restated – although there was a more general reference to the continued relevance of the Rio Principles as a whole.

There were concerted efforts, notably by the European Union and others including Brazil, to agree targets for a proportional increase in the use of **renewable energy**, but the combined efforts of the US, Australia, Canada, Japan and the major oil producing countries of the G77 proved too much to overcome. The same opposition halted agreement on steps to phase out export credit and other subsidies for fossil fuels. The final text includes a vague reference to the need for ‘a sense of urgency’ on the issue of renewable energy. In response to this setback, Brazil and the countries of the EU announced creation of a ‘coalition of the willing’ involving over 30 countries interested in making progress on the renewables issues.

Division also flared up over issues of **human rights**, including the tension between universal commitments to gender equality and practices common in certain traditional societies. The final text, however, does represent a welcome restatement of the importance of universal rights in this context. In addition, attempts were made through the Summit process by a range of NGOs and some European countries to agree a stronger framework of procedural and substantive environmental rights (building on Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration). However, these were resisted by a number of governments which were not happy with the implications for domestic policy of these proposals.

One area in which WSSD really failed to grasp the nettle was **sustainable development governance**. Despite a two-year programme of work on international environmental governance initiated by the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) culminating in a Ministerial meeting in Colombia in February 2002, and negotiations through the three WSSD PrepComs of 2002 the final text agreed does not go very far in addressing the inadequacies of the current institutional framework. The Commission on Sustainable Development has had some impact over its ten years of existence, but where it has really fallen short is its inability to engage and call to account organisations responsible for economic policy and governance. It is now a truism of sustainable development that it requires shifts in established economic systems of incentives (economic subsidies, terms of trade etc) and penalties (tariff barriers, technology costs and so on) if we are to improve the contexts in which progress towards social and environmental can be made. The decisions taken in Johannesburg fail to give any significant new impetus to this objective – and put back the date when the international governance system recognises sustainable development as central to their collaborative efforts in all policy spheres. For the time being at least it remains subservient and peripheral.

Two frameworks for action in follow-up to WSSD were advanced during the Summit process:

- The **Millennium Development Goals** (MDGs) were endorsed as the overarching objectives which should guide efforts to implement existing commitment and (as noted above) were augmented with one notable new target for provision of sanitation and a number of subsidiary undertakings. The MDGs seem quickly to have become central to the approach of many donor agencies, along with the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper approach championed by the World Bank. However, misgivings about the value of global targets driving policy and practice at national levels was also evident in Johannesburg.
- The **WEHAB Agenda** (water, energy, health, agriculture, biodiversity) put forward shortly before the Summit by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan was widely seen as a useful way to concentrate on key policy areas in the final negotiations for Johannesburg. The degree to which WEHAB will survive after the Summit is less clear – the US has proposed that these issues be the basis for the annual programme of work of the CSD, but a number of G77 countries have reservations and have noted that this framework was never negotiated by governments and so is a pretty tenuous basis for future action.

All in all, even though there are some significant steps forward in the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, there is not enough evidence of real progress to add up to much – and certainly not enough to meet the criteria set out by the UN General Assembly when it agreed the Summit’s mandate. As Mark Halle of the International Institute for Sustainable Development puts it, ‘swirling the Plan of Implementation around in a shallow pan with the hope that some nuggets of gold will appear is an idle exercise. The few flakes of gold are largely offset by the mass of colourless mud.’ (Halle, 2002)

Stories from the Summit preparations

So how did we arrive at the fragmented, largely unsatisfactory pinnacle of the Summit? We can learn a good deal by going back through the preparatory process and identifying the development of critical themes which can help us to understand the Johannesburg outcomes better. Two stories in particular throw some light on the ideological and power-based conflicts evident in the WSSD process:

- The Global Deal
- ‘Type 2’ partnerships for sustainable development

WSSD terminology: a short guide

Type 1 outcomes: commitments and agreements negotiated by governments through the PrepCom process, resulting in the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation finalised at the Summit.

Type 2 outcomes: are ‘a series of implementation partnerships and commitments involving many stakeholders. ... These would help to translate the multilaterally negotiated and agreed outcomes into concrete actions by interested governments, international organisations and major groups’ (Opening Statement by the Chairman of the 3rd WSSD PrepCom). Over 220 partnerships (with US\$235 million in resources) were identified in advance of WSSD and about 60 partnerships were announced during the Summit by a variety of countries.

Global Deal: a set of commitments and responsibilities to implement sustainable development. Led by governments and endorsed by Heads of State, but incorporating activities involving business and civil society at all levels.

A. The Global Deal

At the outset it was agreed that the Summit should establish a ‘global partnership to achieve the objectives of sustainable development’ and ‘reinvigorate, at the highest political level, the global commitment to a North/South partnership and a higher level of international solidarity’. (UN General Assembly, 2000) There was never any strong support for negotiation of major new international agreements along the lines of the Rio

Conventions on Biodiversity and Climate Change. Rather, Johannesburg should achieve advances in two broad areas:

- recognising sustainable development as an overarching set of policy goals and principles which could unite countries and define the terms for their collaboration
- promoting action to implement existing commitments, through actions involving civil society, the business sector, government at different levels and so on – taking what was seen as a pragmatic approach to problem-solving and delivering change

A number of key individuals and countries, most notably former Danish Environment Minister Svend Auken, went further and began to sketch out elements of a ‘global deal’ between North and South, which would tackle the unfinished business from UNCED by spelling out common goals and commitments and recognising mutual responsibility for action between countries. At the UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) regional preparatory meeting for WSSD in September 2001 the EU stated that ‘[i]n a spirit of partnership and solidarity and through a participatory process, we will seek to achieve a “Global Deal” at the Summit containing commitments by governments, as well as other stakeholders, that will result in concrete action to improve the implementation of sustainable development policies’. (EU, 2001)

However, others at that UNECE meeting were less enthusiastic – the USA and Russia would not accept the term ‘global deal’, stating that they were not clear what it implied and reserving their judgment until its proponents could present a more detailed proposal. This scepticism (on the part of the US at least) had hardened further by the time the second global preparatory meeting for WSSD (PrepCom II) took place in New York in late January – early February 2002. Although the EU was joined by others supporting the ‘Global Deal’ approach, and adding their views on what might usefully be included in the balanced package of issues and interests, the head of the US delegation to PrepCom II Jonathan Margolis stated “there isn’t going to be a single global deal” in Johannesburg. “We’re not looking for these grand solutions that sound good from a rhetorical perspective but rather we’re looking for solutions that actually lead to concrete developments on the ground.” (Wakefield, 2001)

The effect the US line had on the WSSD process was to strip away any chance that the Summit might recognise sustainable development as the central set of policy goals for international collaboration on economic, social and environmental issues. And in turn there was now little chance that the UN could adopt this agenda as its mandate for a radical reappraisal of the purposes and functions of international institutions and elements of the Global Deal are wholly absent from the final WSSD Plan of Implementation. In its place is the piecemeal approach envisaged by the US, which implies that the fundamentals are sound and only minor adjustments are necessary.

EU Discussion Paper on the Global Deal (December 2001)

Outcome:

- The Global Deal is a balanced package taking into account the 3 pillars of sustainable development
- It should build on what already exists
- The actions foreseen have to be built on what already exists; these include a focused, concrete and pragmatic package of actions contributing to the accelerated implementation of Agenda 21 and the Millennium Declaration Goals/International Development Targets (MDGs/IDTs)

Follow-up:

- It should serve as a mechanism to ensure real follow-up by all involved partners to the results of the WSSD
- It needs to involve all major groups

Value added: It should not reopen Agenda 21

- Only actions where progress can be made should be included
- An excessively broad agenda could mean a lack of focus and progress

Further discussion is needed, within and between the different regions to ensure that the 'Global Deal' takes into account the priorities defined in the preparatory process, on the following elements:

- Should the 'Global Deal' be a single package, or might it encompass different types of subsidiary/regional/sectoral agreements (i.e. be an umbrella)?
- How would the 'Global Deal' include commitments by the business sector and civil society?
- How to create a platform that constructively engages civil society and business to both contribute and benefit from a 'Global Deal' (e.g. given that there is already a 'Global Compact')?
- What should be the role of the governments in the 'Global Deal' in establishing a framework for action?

EU Draft Discussion Paper 'Towards a "Global Deal": A first overview of views and opinions and some initial thoughts', 17 December 2001.

B. Type 2 Partnerships

In the absence of a strong inter-governmental framework for action, the 'concrete developments on the ground' advocated by Jonathan Margolis assumed a rather different significance. At PrepCom II and subsequently, the grounds for contention shifted – in place of a debate on whether or not major revisions to the institutional architecture for economics, society and environment should be agreed was argument over whether inter-governmental negotiations and commitments were important at all.

The US Government made it clear that the Summit should focus predominantly on identification of Type 2 partnerships and that agreement of a consensus text was not essential. An internal US position paper argued that ‘in focusing on negotiated text, the CSD [ie. the PrepCom] loses the opportunity to focus its efforts on operational sustainable development success stories’.

As a result of this tacit downgrading in expectations and the emerging US strategy, serious misgivings were expressed at the possibility that partnerships could come to replace government commitments and obligations. (SDIN, 2002) Most governments (notably the EU and South Africa) were careful to state that ‘type 2’ should not supplant ‘type 1’. Any proposed collaboration should enhance the implementation of priorities established in the text negotiated by governments – even if this text ended up being largely a repackaging of existing commitments because it would not be possible to drive through a new consensus. In order to clarify the concept, WSSD Bureau Vice Chairs Jan Kára and Diane Quarless issued an explanatory note which provided some general guidelines for Type 2 partnerships, proposing that they should:

- achieve further implementation of Agenda 21 and Millennium Declaration goals;
- complement globally agreed Type 1 outcomes and not substitute government commitment;
- be voluntary in nature and not be subject to negotiation within the PrepCom;
- be participatory, with ownership shared between partners;
- be new initiatives, or, in the case of ongoing initiatives, demonstrate added value in the context of the Summit;
- integrate economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development;
- be international (global, regional or subregional) in scope and reach;
- have clear objectives, and set specific targets and timeframes for their achievement;
- and
- have a system of accountability, including arrangements for monitoring progress. (WSSD Bureau, 2002)

These guidelines helped by providing a pragmatic yardstick which could help in assessing the value of particular initiatives and their validity as WSSD Type 2 partnerships. They did not really help to clarify the underlying ramifications of Type 2 for WSSD – and beyond that, for the UN system as a whole.

The problem for many with the Type 2 model did not derive from an innate antipathy towards partnerships involving civil society, the business sector and governments, although numerous cautionary examples were cited and reservations expressed about the broader implications of this approach. The central dilemma was whether official recognition of such partnerships strengthened inter-governmental commitments or marginalised them. Could a Summit where the main evidence of progress was a collection of initiatives which aimed to deliver elements of sustainable development be called a success? And if so, didn’t this let governments off the hook by shifting the focus from their responsibility to provide leadership and legitimacy to global commitments?

A number of developing country government delegates were also extremely suspicious about the implications of the Type 2 approach. One South American official likened the development to 'a whole new form of conditionality', through which donor governments would be able to oblige recipient countries to accept involvement of multinational companies in provision of basic utilities by linking funding to a Type 2 package. A coalition of Southern governments lobbied until the end of the Summit process against the adoption of partnerships as one of the official WSSD outcomes. Their misgivings were based on the fear that this development would reduce the pressure on donor countries to provide additional direct financial support for sustainable development in the South.

The UN Monterrey Conference on Financing for Development had already provided some substance to these concerns. The US Government and the EU pledged significant increases in Official Development Assistance; however, the EU did not move away from current practice in the tying of aid, placing questionable obligations on recipient countries, while the US took the opportunity to put forward a unilateral 'compact for development', which President Bush claimed would lead to 'greater accountability': 'We must tie our aid to political, legal and economic reform, and by insisting on reform we do the work of compassion', he said. 'Pouring money into a failed status quo does little to help the poor. Liberty and law and opportunity are the conditions for development.' (Bush, 2002) Although he uses the term accountability, this seems to go only one way – the US is not interested in accountability to internationally negotiated standards and commitments on sustainable development, as has been clear in the WSSD process.

In considering the outcomes of Johannesburg, one commentator suggested that 'the United States missed a real opportunity':

Despite widespread international criticism for its rejection of an apparent international consensus on many environmental issues, the United States brought to Johannesburg promising and much-needed new approaches – such as partnerships among government, industry and environmentalists – that could help address festering world problems. Unfortunately, by refusing to commit itself to targets and timetables, the United States failed to force other countries to take its ideas seriously, and to begin a transformation of the debate about sustainability. (Lempert, 2002)

Others would conclude that these two aspects of the position taken by the US in WSSD negotiations were entirely consistent, and that they reflect hostility towards multilateralism and continued belief in market-based solutions to social and environmental problems. This understanding made it very difficult for other advocates of the partnership approach to make a coherent case for a more balanced mix between commitments endorsed by governments (Type 1) and actions carried out by a mix of governments and other actors to achieve those goals (Type 2). If the US did not see this as a necessary objective then what likelihood was there that it would become the basis for agreement?

Discussion of Type 2 partnerships continues to be contentious for a number of reasons. First, the fear that this focus will marginalise inter-governmental decision-making on sustainable development and put in its place ‘coalitions of the willing’ which involve major companies and other organisations but are less accountable to the needs and wishes of the world’s poorest people. Secondly, the fear that global partnerships could favour major multinational companies in the provision of services such as water and energy and serve as a vehicle for market expansion at the expense of existing providers but with no clear long term benefits for the countries concerned. Thirdly, the fear that the term ‘partnership’ masks a whole range of power imbalances between the actors involved which will not be tackled without strong political leadership and commitment to the principles of transparency, accountability, equality and sustainability. (See for example SDIN, 2002)

For others this shift has been seen in a more positive light. The World Resources Institute wrote that ‘This Summit will be remembered not for the treaties, the commitments, or the declarations it produced, but for the first stirrings of a new way of governing the global commons – the beginnings of a shift from the stiff formal waltz of traditional diplomacy to the jazzier dance of improvisational solution-oriented partnerships that may include non-governmental organisations, willing governments and other stakeholders’. (WRI, 2002) Many of those involved in Type 2 partnerships are similarly positive, contrasting the difficulty of making progress through UN negotiations with the opportunities partnerships offer to make real progress towards existing commitments such as the Millennium Development Goals.

To a large extent this case remains unproven. It will be a critical litmus test for the UN Commission on Sustainable Development to increase the credibility of Type 2 partnerships – and by extension of the WSSD process as a whole – by demonstrating:

1. that they are really making a difference, increasing the amount of available resources rather than merely diverting funds from other sources;
2. that they are enhancing accountability, increasing the means by which civil society relevant levels of governance can influence actions which have impacts on their livelihoods; and
3. that they can be assessed independently and credibly – and criticised as ineffective, or as window-dressing, or even as counter-productive when necessary.

Parallel Events and Activities

Much has changed in 10 years. At the Rio Summit, the majority of international non-governmental participants were from Europe or North America. In Johannesburg, representation was much more diverse, with significant numbers from other African countries, South-East Asia and China, and the Arab countries, to name just a few. NGO participation at UNCED was predominantly from the environmental movement, while at WSSD there were events and organisations addressing issues of equity and human rights, land ownership, development, corporate accountability, social justice, and so on – and consequently less to suggest that the Summit was principally about environmental issues.

Partly as a result of this diversity it proved difficult to present consensus NGO positions along the lines of the Alternative Treaties negotiated by NGOs in Rio. It also highlighted the fact that, for many Summit participants the critical policy areas addressed at national and international levels were not really up for negotiation in Johannesburg. Many of the events and the position statements agreed during the Summit focus on economic issues and the work of the World Trade Organisation, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the EU's Common Agricultural Policy and so on – highlighting the challenges which were not addressed at WSSD in mainstreaming sustainable development.

There was also significant progress in civil society engagement with the negotiations: the Sustainable Development Issues Network (see <http://www.sdissues.net>) provided a much more democratic and effective focus for interaction with the Summit process than had existed at UNCED, which built on lessons learnt from global conferences in the years since 1992 and from annual sessions of the CSD. The large international environment and development NGOs collaborated well in the newly-created 'Eco-Equity Coalition', which produced daily newsletters and held joint press briefings from PrepCom 3 onwards. Issue coalitions such as the Indigenous Peoples caucus succeeded in having their priorities reflected in the final WSSD texts (in this instance through having the term 'indigenous peoples' included in the Political Declaration, where previously governments would not accept the autonomy implied by 'peoples'). IUCN (the World Conservation Union) ran a Summit-long programme of meetings, presentations, workshops and panels at their Environment Centre which often put the inter-governmental process to shame and provided a welcome respite for jaded officials.

From the local government, scientific and business communities there was a notable emphasis on using the Summit to stimulate real debate on the tricky aspects of sustainable development. The business programme did address the issues and problems to be confronted by those attempting to become better corporate citizens while blatant instances of corporate 'greenwash' were largely absent. The Science Forum broke new ground by bringing together researchers, policy makers and civil society to explore the role of scientific research in sustainable development – and the difficulties presented by current decision-making structures and knowledge gaps.

Whether these activities significantly compensate for the lack of progress in the official process is doubtful. But they do signal a welcome willingness to carry forward debate, commitments and action in the absence of inter-governmental leadership which has implications for the future.

UN Follow-up to WSSD

Our challenge is that a political process which has been good at defining policy frameworks and goals must now show itself as being effective, also, in maintaining the pressures for implementation. It is a new type of challenge, but it is very necessary that we respond to this. We cannot treat the processes of implementation as if they can be handled in an entirely non-political manner.

And it is very important that the CSD use its strength, which is its capacity to bring so many diverse actors together and the openness that it has to civil society, the way in which it has embraced the notion of partnerships, to really focus, not just on policy development, but on implementation. (Desai, 2003)

At its eleventh session in April-May 2003, the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) faced some complex tasks. Agreement had to be reached on a programme of work for the next decade which would allow governments and others to follow up the commitments made at WSSD. The ways in which the CSD works had to be reviewed in order to ensure that its structure effectively promotes action and engages key players. And the link between global policy debates and implementation of existing commitments at ground level had to be strengthened. In short, many of the unresolved issues from WSSD identified above were on the agenda.

The formal negotiations at the 2003 session dealt mainly with agreement of a work programme for the next 15 years, and with the ways in which sessions of the Commission would be conducted in future. The turnout was a little disappointing – the Ministers present were overwhelmingly from Environment Departments, and officials from development or planning ministries (particularly from European countries) seemed less engaged than during the Summit process or at previous CSD sessions. Civil society groups were also quite sparsely represented, and those present were largely from organisations with an environmental focus rather than from those prioritising economic, social or developmental issues.

Perhaps because the right people were not present, there was little discussion on some of the broad policy contexts which are shaping multilateral collaboration. Conflict and militarisation were not addressed, despite the situation in the Middle East; the implications of the Millennium Development Goals and objectives increasingly being used to shape international co-operation, despite the absence of any strong environmental focus in the targets being used; the growing significance of World Bank-led Poverty Reduction Strategies in shaping donor relations with least developed countries was not really considered, although these are seen by many development agencies as much more important than country strategies for sustainable development.

These gaps can largely be explained because this was essentially an organisational session, and so there was little opportunity for substantive discussion on broader issues. A number of Ministerial interventions did take a wider perspective, though the CSD offered little opportunity for serious debate. It remains to be seen whether in its future work the Commission can prove to be a serious forum for political debate and pragmatic information-sharing which could enable it to contribute to these higher-profile policy processes.

In Johannesburg we entered into a solemn pact with future unborn generations not to destroy our beloved planet Earth. We also entered into a deal with the poor and hungry to ensure social and economic development. Now, the poor watch and wait to see whether hunger, disease and global warming will be tackled with the same vigour displayed by some on the military front. (Valli Moosa, 2003)

Key Outcomes from CSD11

- A 2-year work cycle, to include an ‘implementation’ session and a ‘policy’ session – governments will only negotiate text in the second year
- Thematic clusters of issues for future years:
 - Water, sanitation and human settlements (2004-5)
 - Energy, industrial development, air pollution and climate change (2006-7)
 - Agriculture, rural development, land, drought, desertification and Africa (2008-9)
 - Transport, chemicals, waste management, mining, ten-year programme on sustainable consumption and production patterns (2010-11)
 - Forests, biodiversity, biotechnology, tourism, mountains (2012-3)
 - Oceans and seas, marine resources, small island developing states, disaster management and vulnerability (2014-5)
 - Overall appraisal of implementation of Agenda 21 and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation – JPOI (2016-7)
- Cross-cutting issues to be considered in each work cycle – using the section headings from the JPOI (poverty eradication, changing unsustainable patterns of consumption and production, protecting and managing the natural resource base etc.)
- A voluntary system of reporting for Type 2 Partnerships
- A greater emphasis on regional activities – particularly through new ‘regional implementation fora’
- New organisational approaches, including the learning centre and partnerships fair, as ways to share experience and good practice
- Election of a new chair for 2003-4: Norwegian Environment Minister Borge Brende

However, there were also areas CSD11 did not really tackle:

- UN system coherence on sustainable development issues (could be taken up by ECOSOC)
- Trade and SD – particularly relations with the WTO and its ongoing work
- Corporate accountability – not incorporated in the CSD’s future agenda, despite its prominence in WSSD
- Strengthening the national reporting process to allow voluntary ‘peer review’ to develop between interested countries (opposed by the US and G77)

In many ways, a global forum for politicians, civil servants and representatives from civil society organisations is one of the worst contexts in which to get to grips with the challenges of putting the Johannesburg agenda into action at national or local level.

The strength of the CSD to date has been its function as a political forum, bringing together government Ministers to discuss and (sometimes) reach agreement on issues of global significance. Left to market mechanisms, or the accountability of unelected

organisations, there is no means by which the interests of individuals and communities – let alone of future generations – can be represented in these global deliberations. It is not sufficient for the UN to conduct technocratic or bureaucratic assessments of the challenges to be confronted, it has to find means by which to strengthen the accountability of those with power to those who are affected by their decisions.

Sustainable development is also about equity – finding ways in which limited resources as well as costs and burdens can be more fairly distributed, as the title of this book ‘Equity for a Small Planet’ suggests. This also presents problems which require political solutions at all levels of governance, and present a significant role for the CSD as the only international political forum focusing on sustainable development.

A third aspect of the CSD’s work also depends upon significant political engagement. The bringing together of social, environmental and economic discourses which sustainable development entails requires engagement of a diverse range of actors and creation of innovative ways of working which go beyond the confines of inter-governmental agreement. This shift is evident in the new activities agreed for the CSD. But the legitimacy of these activities still derives most clearly from the endorsement and support of governments, and from the extent to which politicians as well as other influential actors are prepared to demonstrate leadership in using the space created at the international level in effective ways in order to create the contexts in which real improvement is possible at national and sub-national levels.

And finally, political engagement is essential if sustainable development is to be seen as a central focus for multilateral co-operation in the decades to come. The problems to be confronted in realising this goal are enormous; the impacts of that other global ‘coalition of the willing’ based on what Jan Pronk terms the ‘security paradigm’ have yet to be fully realised; the messages emerging from Johannesburg are often muddled and incoherent – and yet sustainable development remains the only rational basis for consensus between different countries, peoples, and interest groups that is fair and far-sighted. Let’s hope this potential doesn’t wither on the vine in the years after WSSD.

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