

# Partnerships

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A COMMONWEALTH SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT BRIEF

## WSSD Partnerships for Sustainable Development

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### 1. Introduction

The announcement of new international partnerships for sustainable development was one of the most innovative and controversial outcomes from the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD). Often referred to as ‘Type II partnerships’, or ‘Type II outcomes (to distinguish them from the ‘first’ type of outcome from the Summit – the politically negotiated texts and agreements), these partnerships are bringing together new groupings of stakeholders to develop shared strategies for implementing many of the commitments made by governments in Johannesburg. They have the potential to become one of the most significant delivery mechanisms for the *WSSD Plan of Implementation*.

The eleventh session of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD 11) (New York, April 28 – May 9, 2003) will consider how WSSD partnerships will be followed-up by the UN system. Discussions will be based on the UN Secretary General’s report on WSSD follow-up<sup>1</sup>. Issues include:

- support that the UN should provide to WSSD partnerships;
- how individual partnerships should report on their work;
- how to monitor the progress achieved by the WSSD partnerships in aggregate; and
- arrangements for developing and registering new partnerships.

Many of the partnerships that have been registered with the CSD Secretariat are tackling issues that are high-priority concerns of Commonwealth developing countries. Governments have the opportunity to participate in these existing partnerships, and in so doing

will gain access to new sources of expertise and ideas on implementing sustainable development policies and initiatives. They may also be able to access new sources of funding. In addition to this, member states have the opportunity to develop their own partnerships to address national, regional or Commonwealth sustainable development priorities: it would be valuable to consider what role the Commonwealth Secretariat can play in supporting these efforts.

This paper briefly explains the criteria that have been developed for WSSD partnerships for sustainable development and outlines the political background of the debates on partnerships. It then sets out some of the main advantages of the partnership approach and examines how Commonwealth countries can best benefit from this new approach to implementing sustainable development.

### 2. What makes a WSSD partnership?

Partnerships currently listed on the WSSD partnership website<sup>2</sup> are extremely diverse in terms of the issues they are tackling, their geographic scope and the levels of funding and political commitment that they have attracted (see Box 1).

What they all have in common is that they all comply with the *Guiding Principles for Partnerships for Sustainable Development (‘type 2 outcomes’) to be Elaborated by Interested Parties in the Context of the World Summit on Sustainable Development*<sup>3</sup>. These principles were published by the CSD

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/csd/csd11/sgreport.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/partnerships/partnerships.htm>

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/partnerships/guiding\\_principles7june2002.pdf](http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/partnerships/guiding_principles7june2002.pdf)

Bureau in the run up to WSSD and reflect the outcomes of informal multistakeholder discussions that were held at the third and fourth Preparatory Committee meetings for the Summit. According to these guiding principles, WSSD partnerships are:

- voluntary and take into account the Rio Principles and the values expressed in the Millennium Declaration;
- linked to the formal outcomes from WSSD;
- integrated in their approach to sustainable development (i.e. address economic, social and environmental issues);
- consistent with sustainable development strategies and poverty reduction strategies of the countries, regions and communities where their implementation takes place;
- multi-stakeholder in nature, preferably including a range of significant actors involved in their given area of work (however any combination of partners can be involved, including governments, regional groups, local authorities, non-governmental actors, international institutions and private sector partners);
- genuinely participatory in approach, involving all partners from an early stage in their development, and remaining open to new partners as they evolve;
- developed and implemented in an open and transparent manner;
- self-reporting at regular intervals, specifying arrangements to monitor and review their performance against their objectives and targets, and;
- new, or if based on existing partnerships or projects, they significantly add value to previous activities.
- grounded at community level, but be international in scope.

WSSD partnerships also have:

- clear objectives to which all partners are committed and play a role in delivering; and
- access to funding.

### Process and Facilitation

It is notable that while some of these principles are simple criteria (e.g. the partnerships must be international and linked to the formal outcomes of WSSD), many of them give guidance on process design issues (e.g. partners should be involved from an early stage, all partners should make commitments to taking action, etc.). This reflects the important role that *good process design and*

*facilitation* can play developing successful partnerships, an issue that was highlighted by governments and other stakeholders during the WSSD PrepCom partnership discussions.

#### Box 1: Existing WSSD partnerships

The 255 partnerships that have already been registered with the UN cover many of the issues and sectors referred to in the WSSD Plan of Implementation, including the following:

##### *Cross-cutting issues:*

- Changing unsustainable patterns of production and consumption
- Health and sustainable development
- Local authorities and urbanisation
- Capacity-building
- Education
- Finance
- Information for decision-making
- Science
- Sustainable Development Law

##### *Sectoral Issues:*

- Agriculture/food security/rural development
- Biodiversity
- Climate Change/air pollution
- Desertification
- Early warning/disaster preparedness
- Energy
- Freshwater
- Forests
- Minerals and mining
- Mountains
- Oceans/coastal areas/fisheries
- Sustainable Tourism

##### *Regional:*

- Sustainable development initiatives for Africa
- Sustainable development of Small Island Developing States (SIDS)

It is notable that a significant proportion of the existing WSSD partnerships are aimed at tackling issues in Commonwealth developing countries. Twenty-five partnerships are listed under the heading sustainable development initiatives for Africa, and a further 21 under sustainable development initiatives for SIDS. In addition, many of the partnerships that are global in scope (and are therefore not listed under the Africa and SIDS headings) are likely to be addressing issues of interest to Commonwealth countries.

Existing WSSD partnerships are made up of a wide range of different groupings of stakeholders. Most involve a combination of governmental and non-governmental partners. Despite the extensive interest shown in WSSD

**Box 1 (continued)**

partnerships by the private sector, relatively few of the partnerships currently registered are led by private sector partners. This is because several businesses involved in developing partnerships for WSSD chose not to register them formally, as they were concerned about the lack of clarity over the status of the *Guiding Principles* (see below) and the reporting requirements that would be placed on the partnerships at the time of the Summit. It is important to note, however, that despite this reluctance to formally register partnership, many multinational companies are strong advocates of the partnership approach.

**Application of the Guiding Principles**

It should also be noted that, while the *Guiding Principles* were broadly agreed at the fourth Preparatory Committee meeting for the Summit, and were used as a basis for deciding which partnerships should be registered at WSSD, they have not been officially endorsed or adopted.

Despite this lack of official status, the *Guiding Principles* were used to evaluate all of the partnerships that were submitted to the CSD Secretariat for registration and inclusion on the partnership website in the run up to and after WSSD. Over 500 partnerships applied for registration, and approximately 250 were rejected because they failed to meet the requirements set out by the guidelines. Given that it is highly likely that the Guidelines will be used to evaluate new partnerships being submitted for registration in future, this should be kept in mind by countries with an interest in developing their own partnerships.

**3. Formal agreements and discussions on WSSD Partnerships to date**

Partnerships only get a limited mention in the *WSSD Plan of Implementation (POI<sup>4</sup>)*. The United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) is identified as ‘a focal point for the discussion of partnerships that promote sustainable development, including sharing lessons learned, progress made and best practices’ (Para 130 b), and the *POI* goes on to state that international institutions should:

‘Encourage partnership initiatives for implementation by all relevant actors to support the outcome of the World Summit on Sustainable Development. In this context, further development of partnerships and partnership follow-up should take note of the preparatory work for the Summit’ (Para 139 b).

The last sentence is an indirect reference to the *Guiding Principles for Partnerships for Sustainable Development* which otherwise has no formal status.

In his report on *Follow-up to Johannesburg and the Future Role of the CSD<sup>5</sup>* the UN Secretary General identifies partnerships as ‘one of the key innovations of the Summit’ and says that they ‘have opened new opportunities for co-operation and a more inclusive means for pursuing implementation’. However, the report stresses that ‘[p]artnerships are... not a substitute for government responsibilities and commitments to action’ (Para 10), an emphasis which reflects the controversial nature of the partnerships in the Summit process.

The UN Secretary-General proposes that the CSD should ‘clarify a number of issues relating to partnerships, such as the applicability of the Guiding Principles, reporting mechanisms, interaction with national level processes and funding issues, keeping in mind that a flexible approach is desirable in order to encourage further partnerships and to allow for creativity’ (Para 89).

The UN Secretary-General proposes the following objectives for the CSD partnership follow-up process:

- integrating partnerships as an important element of the overall follow-up to WSSD, in particular for achieving specific goals and targets agreed at the Summit;
- maintaining high-level interest in, and the momentum for, WSSD partnerships;
- monitoring the progress of WSSD partnerships through a *transparent and credible* process with simple, user-friendly guidelines for reporting which do not place excessive burden on voluntary arrangements;
- giving guidance and facilitating the progress of WSSD partnerships, including by identifying gaps in implementation, barriers to progress, and elements of best practice;
- promoting and facilitating new partnerships (Box P.19).

Beyond these objectives, the report of the UN Secretary-General does not make any detailed proposals as to how the partnership follow-up process should be run. He suggests that the reports produced by partnerships be fed in to regional implementation forums, as well as sectoral and other discussions by the CSD. It is likely that regional implementation forums will then be asked

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.johannesburgsummit.org/html/documents/summit\\_docs/2309\\_planfinal.htm](http://www.johannesburgsummit.org/html/documents/summit_docs/2309_planfinal.htm)

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/csd/csd11/sgreport.pdf>

to consider progress made by partnerships alongside other work in their overall assessment of progress made in their region in implementing WSSD commitments.

#### 4. Decisions on WSSD partnerships at CSD 11

##### *Formal decisions*

The formal decisions made at CSD 11 will be important both for highlighting the important role that partnerships have the potential to play in implementing the *WSSD Plan of Implementation*, and to ensure that the CSD Secretariat has a clear mandate to continue its work in supporting and monitoring partnerships. Ways in which CSD 11 could achieve this be through:

- recognition of the role that partnerships have to play in delivering WSSD commitments;
- agreement that the new CSD process should support the development of existing and new WSSD partnerships;
- agreement that a standardized reporting framework should be developed by the CSD Secretariat and that all partnerships should report according to this framework on a biannual basis. This would help to ensure effective assessments of what partnerships are delivering, and assist partnerships to review their own objectives, progress, and barriers to success;
- agreement that the process of developing and monitoring WSSD partnerships should be closely integrated with wider CSD and UN processes. This process is likely to require a system of assessing the progress made by all partnerships on a particular issue (e.g. energy) and then including this assessment in the CSD's overall analysis of progress made in implementing WSSD commitments.
- recognition that developing a successful partnership follow-up process will require new resources, both for individual partnerships, and for regional and global CSD processes.

##### *Partnership Fair*

The CSD is organizing a Partnership Fair throughout CSD 11, which will provide opportunities both for individual partnerships to discuss their work, and for general discussions about how best partnerships can be developed and how the partnership follow-up process should be run.

#### 5. The relationship between partnerships and policy

The issue of the relationship between WSSD partnerships and formally negotiated commitments was

#### **Box 2: Stakeholder concerns about WSSD partnerships**

Throughout the WSSD process, and since Johannesburg itself, some stakeholders have expressed concerns about the use of partnerships as a means of delivering WSSD commitments. These concerns have been most strongly expressed by representatives of some developing countries and NGOs. Issues raised have included the following:

- The risk that supporting an informal approach to implementation would undermine the formal WSSD negotiations, and might take the focus of the crucial role that governments have to play in implementing sustainable development;
- The risk that the private sector will use their participation in partnerships as a means of obtaining inappropriate levels of influence over sustainable development related policy;
- Potential problems with imbalances of power within partnerships, as some partners will inevitably have more power or resources than others and may therefore have a disproportionate and inappropriate influence over the partnerships' work;
- The risk that partnerships will be too donor-driven, and will therefore fail to reflect the needs and priorities of developing countries;
- The difficulties that developing countries are likely to have in establishing their own partnerships (due to relative lack of funding);
- The risk that the partnerships will lose momentum, commitment and funding, now that the WSSD process is over.

Many of these issues can and should be addressed by individual partnerships, who according to the *Guiding Principles* are responsible e.g. for ensuring that all stakeholders are included in partnership decision making processes and that the work of partnerships is closely co-ordinated with national policy and priorities. Some matters, for example the risk of partnerships losing momentum and commitment, should also be addressed by the overall CSD follow-up process for partnerships. The important issue of the relationship between partnerships and policy is discussed below.

hotly debated during the WSSD process. Many governments and stakeholders were concerned that the development of informal partnerships would reduce the pressure on governments to negotiate meaningful formal outcomes, while others argued that partnerships provided a useful way of reinforcing, delivering and even going further than the formal outcomes.

It was clear during the WSSD process that some governments *were* investing in partnerships as some kind of an alternative to reaching strong formal agreement.

A number of stakeholders who initiated partnerships in the run up to WSSD did so precisely because they assumed that getting meaningful formal agreement at the Summit would be difficult. These stakeholders wanted to ensure that the political momentum generated by the Summit would be channelled towards delivering action on the ground, not just formal text that would be left on the shelf to get dusty.

Moving forward from the Summit itself, the importance of partnerships as a delivery mechanism for WSSD commitments is becoming clearer. The breadth and diversity of the issues on which commitments have been made tends to mitigate against the use of formal delivery mechanisms. Lastly, where WSSD commitments are being delivered by existing or new non-partnership based processes (e.g. UN programmes), the partnership approach may help enhance or rationalise this work.

Another key aspect of the relationship between partnerships and policy is the role that partnerships can play in helping to develop new policies for sustainable development, both at the national and international levels. It is clear that many of the commitments made at Johannesburg will require national governments and intergovernmental bodies to introduce new policies. In many cases these policies will be difficult to design, and controversial to implement. By bringing together a wide range of stakeholders partnerships can help develop effective, efficient policies and address barriers to their implementation. The international nature of the WSSD partnerships also enables policy to be developed and implemented simultaneously in different countries, a process which will help build legislative capacity and reduce the competitive disadvantages that can be faced by governments implementing new policy unilaterally.

## **6. The benefits of the partnership approach**

Before looking at how best countries can benefit from the development of WSSD, it is worth considering the arguments for using them as a delivery mechanism for WSSD commitments. These include the following:

### **Inclusiveness**

The implementation of sustainable development is a complex process, and requires the involvement of a wide range of actors. Partnerships bring these actors together in a deliberate manner to develop holistic strategies for change.

### **Better analysis and policies**

By working together in partnerships, stakeholders develop a more comprehensive analysis of sustainable development challenges than they can individually, and

the strategies and/or policies they develop are more likely to be effective since they take into account a range of perspectives. Bringing together stakeholders with different skills and perspectives enables all stakeholders to see problems in new ways, and encourages innovation.

### **Effecting change at a systemic level**

By developing strategies that encompass policy change, private sector innovation and NGO action, partnerships are able to effect change at a systemic level. Their impact is therefore likely to be more far-reaching and durable than conventional project-based approaches to sustainable development. They can also play an important role in scaling-up or replicating successful small-scale projects and initiatives.

### **Enabling the private sector to take action**

Through taking action together in partnerships, groups of businesses that are committed to sustainable development can avoid competitive disadvantage. Working with governments and NGOs can also help remove barriers to business investment in sustainable development.

### **Co-ordinating governmental and intergovernmental activities**

Partnerships can play an important role in helping governmental and intergovernmental organisations to coordinate their work on specific issues. They also help civil society groups to act together in a more effective way. This process of coordination is likely to increase the impact and efficiency of all partner organizations.

### **Leveraging financial resources**

There is no doubt that meeting sustainable development commitments will require a massive increase of financial resources from both public and private sources. Developing a shared understanding of what resources are needed to achieve their objectives enables partnerships to act as strong advocates for additional funding. The detailed strategies and supportive policies that partnerships can deliver should also reduce the risk of investing in sustainable development related projects, products and services. Partnerships are also ideal forums for identifying how best public money can be used to leverage private investment.

### **Going beyond formal international agreements**

The WSSD process revealed how difficult it is to reach formal global agreement on sustainable development targets and implementation strategies. By bringing together coalitions of progressive actors that want to see change on a particular issue, partnerships are able to develop far more detailed operational programmes for

implementing sustainable development than can be agreed in formal negotiations.

## 7. Benefiting from WSSD Partnerships for Sustainable Development

### *Participating in existing partnerships*

One of the simplest ways for Commonwealth Member States to benefit from WSSD partnerships would be for governments to seek to participate in existing partnerships. The 250-plus partnerships that have already been registered with the CSD cover many of the issues in the *WSSD Plan of Implementation* and it is therefore likely that existing partnerships are addressing many of member states' priority sustainable development issues.

Detailed information sheets on each of the existing WSSD partnerships are posted on the CSD partnerships website<sup>6</sup>, under issue headings which roughly relate to the chapter headings in the *WSSD Plan of Implementation*. This information should enable member states to make an initial assessment about whether there are existing partnerships addressing their priority issues. Once this assessment has been made, governments can approach the lead contact for the partnerships that are of interest for more information (details of lead contacts for all the partnerships are listed in the information sheets on the partnership website).

In theory, all WSSD partnerships should be open to new participants, and governments should be particularly welcome. However, some existing partnerships may have made a decision to limit participation, for example to particular geographical areas. It should be recognised that the approaches being developed by existing partnerships may not fit with member states' own policy approaches to the issue in question. It is also important to remember that not all of the existing WSSD partnerships have high levels of momentum behind them: some may lack a clear vision of what they are trying to achieve; have failed to find sustainable sources of funding; or have very low levels of participation from key stakeholder groups. In considering their participating in existing partnerships, member states may wish to explore to what extent major donors, governments and intergovernmental bodies are involved in the partnership in question, since significant levels of governmental and/or UN participation is often a good indication that a partnership is a 'going concern'.

### *Developing new partnerships*

Commonwealth countries also have the option of developing their own partnerships. They may wish to

consider if new North-South or South-South partnerships on sustainable development issues could usefully be developed. If the decision to develop new partnerships is made, only those that comply with the *Guiding Principles* (see above) would be eligible for registration with the UN Commission on Sustainable Development as being WSSD Partnerships.

New partnerships should be developed carefully, with consideration given to design and facilitation of the partnership development process. One of the most important aspects is the process of identifying stakeholders who have the potential to make significant contributions to tackling the issues that the partnership is designed to address. These stakeholders may come from a wide range of stakeholder groups including other governments, the private sector, NGOs, community groups and the academic world.

*Facilitation and process design* can be crucial to the success of multistakeholder partnerships:

- Facilitators help provide a clear structure for meetings and for a partnership process as a whole, thereby enabling stakeholders to: understand how decisions are being made; understand the role that they are playing in the decision-making process; and come to constructive agreement.
- A facilitator's skills should help all stakeholders to feel fully engaged in the decision making process; help mediate between stakeholders with conflicting views; ensure that 'weaker' stakeholders are given space to talk; and lead to the development of clear, consensus based decisions.
- Because they come from a neutral position (i.e. they do not have a stake in the outcomes of the partnership) facilitators can generally act as 'honest brokers', trusted by all parties to recognise their needs and concerns.

A good facilitator should therefore be able to significantly increase stakeholders' sense of ownership of, and commitment to the outcomes of a partnership process. They should also be able to help ensure that these outcomes are as clear and workable as possible.

Useful guidance on partnership development is available on the internet<sup>7</sup>, and facilitation training and support

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/partnerships/partnerships.htm>

<sup>7</sup> See work done by Business Partners for Sustainable Development at [http://www.basd-action.net/initiatives/trisector\\_partnership.php](http://www.basd-action.net/initiatives/trisector_partnership.php) by Stakeholder Forum for Our Common Future at <http://www.earthsummit2002.org/msp/> and by the Royal Institute of International Affairs at <http://www.worldsummit2002.org/texts/RIIATypeIIOutcomeDiscussion.pdf>

may also be available at future CSD meetings and from initiatives specifically aimed at supporting the development of WSSD partnerships. Case studies of existing partnership-type initiatives are also available on the CSD website<sup>8</sup>. New partnerships should be registered using a form which is also available on the CSD website.<sup>9</sup>

## **8. Sources of funding available to WSSD partnerships**

While donor participation means that some partnerships have high levels of funding available to them, it should be recognized that participation in existing partnerships, or the development of new partnerships, will not automatically lead to countries being able to access new sources of financial support for the implementation of sustainable development.

At present there are no funding sources that are particularly targeted at funding WSSD partnership processes: this is a particular problem for developing countries, which are likely to find it more difficult to develop their own partnerships. The question of funding could be an issue for CSD 11, by exploring the potential for new or existing funding mechanisms to be geared towards supporting the development of partnerships and their start-up.

Despite the apparent lack of funding earmarked for WSSD partnerships at present, it is clear that the partnership model, with its ability to leverage additional financial and non-financial resources from the private sector and civil society groups, and its systemic approach to creating change, should be attractive to donors. It is reasonably likely that participation in successful WSSD Partnerships will lead countries to access to new and additional funding for sustainable development.

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<sup>8</sup> [http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/partnerships/case\\_studies.htm](http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/partnerships/case_studies.htm)

<sup>9</sup> [http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/partnerships/partnerships2\\_form.doc](http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/partnerships/partnerships2_form.doc)



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