

The World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in 2002 introduced roughly 280 international partnership initiatives. Partnerships hold the potential to become a viable mechanism to pursue sustainable development in a way that complements government action. They represent the beginnings of a shift from the stiff formal waltz of traditional diplomacy to the jazzier dance of improvisational solution-oriented cooperation between governments, international institutions, business and NGOs.

The Sustainable Development Agreements (SDAs) between Benin, Bhutan, Costa Rica and the Netherlands can be considered a partnership experience 'avant la lettre'. Signed in 1994, these agreements have a great deal in common with partnerships, because both strive for the involvement of societies at large and for the exploration of new governance models. The objective of this publication is to transfer these lessons to WSSD partnerships.

Linking the experience of the SDAs with the future of partnerships, three key challenges are identified. The first one refers to the external integration of voluntary partnerships with binding (inter)-governmental policies. Secondly, partnerships need a set of basic rules to ensure that power asymmetries are addressed and mutual trust, transparency, and accountability are promoted. These rules help to create an enabling environment for the implementation of partnerships. Thirdly it is important to put in place mechanisms for monitoring, evaluation and learning. This can be facilitated by the UN at a global scale, but also needs bottom-up initiatives and mechanisms.

**Herman Verhagen, Nim Dorji, Gauthier Biaou
and Lilliana Abarca**

Building partnerships for sustainable development

Lessons from The Netherlands, Benin, Bhutan and Costa Rica



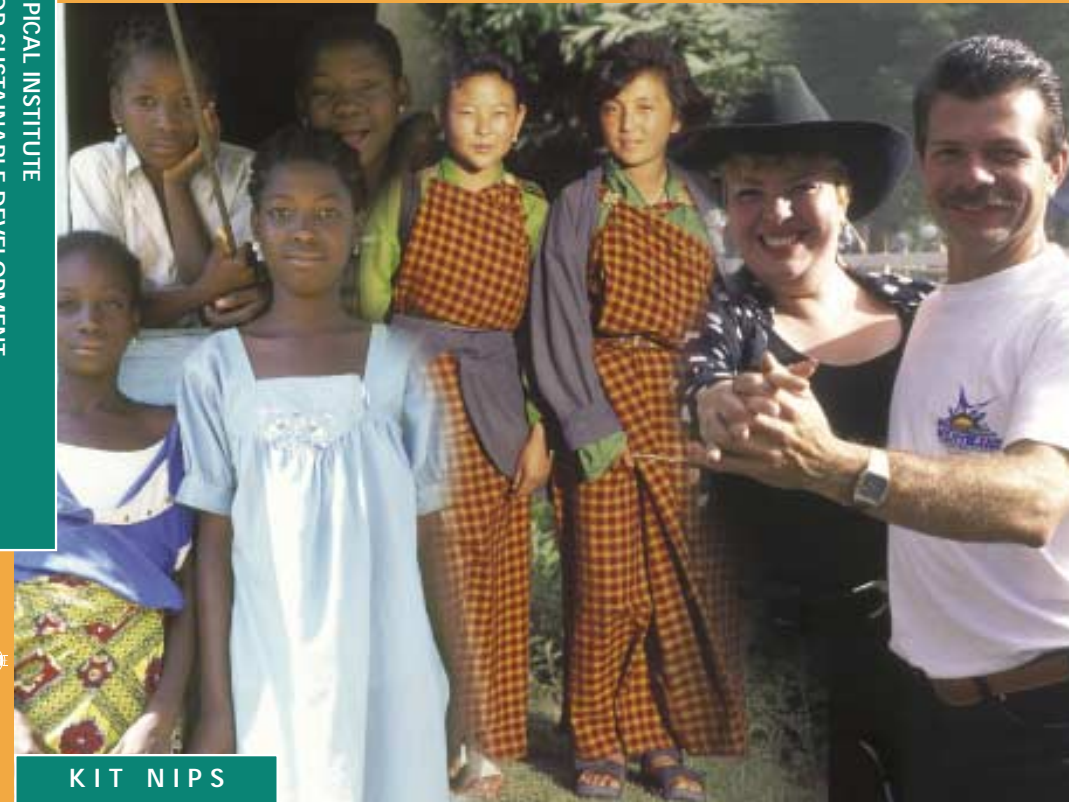
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BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT



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NIPS (The Netherlands), SDS (Bhutan), CBDD (Benin) and Fundecooperación (Costa Rica) are responsible for the coordination of the implementation of the Sustainable Development Agreements in their respective countries. These agreements between The Netherlands and Benin, Bhutan and Costa Rica were signed in 1994 and are based on reciprocity, equality and participation.

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List of abbreviations

SDA	Sustainable Development Agreement(s)
WSSD	World Summit on Sustainable Development
UNCED	United Nations Conference on Environment and Development
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NSSD	National Strategy for Sustainable Development
GEF	Global Environment Facility
CSD	UN Commission on Sustainable Development
ODA	Overseas Development Aid
NM	National Mechanism
WBCSD	World Business Council for Sustainable Development
G 77	Coalition of developing countries

Foreword

This publication was written by Herman Verhagen of the Netherlands International Partnership for Sustainability (NIPS), with contributions by Nim Dorji (Sustainable Development Secretariat; Bhutan), Gauthier Biauou (Centre Béninois pour le Développement Durable; Bénin) and Lilliana Abarca (Fundecooperación; Costa Rica).

We come from four different countries on four different continents. We share a common experience, which -we think- is worth sharing with people and organizations involved in building (public-private) partnerships for sustainable development.

In 1994, the governments of Benin (West-Africa), Bhutan (Southeast Asia), Costa Rica (Middle America) and the Netherlands (West Europe) signed the Sustainable Development Agreements (SDAs). They embarked upon a new journey to promote global sustainable development, which implied a departure from the traditional donor-recipient relationship. Nowadays, one would classify this experiment as a partnership for sustainable development. At the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg, these partnerships attracted a great deal of attention. Being relatively new, WSSD partnerships can benefit from ten years of experience from implementing the SDAs. With this in mind, we decided to write this book.

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1. Introduction

1.1. The new status of partnerships

The 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg introduced “the beginnings of a shift from the stiff formal waltz of traditional diplomacy to the jazzier dance of improvisational solution-oriented partnerships.”¹ Unlike its predecessor, the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro, binding intergovernmental commitments received less emphasis in Johannesburg and no major treaties were planned to be (re) negotiated. This was partly compensated by voluntary partnerships between NGOs, businesses, governments, local communities and international organizations. Some 280 of these partnerships were registered at the WSSD, committing more than \$200 million in new and additional resources.

Partnerships are not a new phenomenon and many of the WSSD partnerships are simply ‘repackaging’ existing initiatives. However, the WSSD placed them under a common denominator and this cluster of partnerships was presented as one of the major official outcomes of the WSSD. Recognized as part of the WSSD Plan of Implementation, they were formally included within the UN system as complementary to intergovernmental actions. As a consequence, partnerships acquired a political weight that was unknown before. Together with this new status came a debate about the strengths and weaknesses of the partnership approach.

Partnerships are criticized by some and supported by others. Governments of industrial countries and international institutions have welcomed the partnership approach as a necessary complement to binding agreements between countries. Businesses are also positive and emphasize that partnerships “help ensure that corporate goals converge with social obligations in the developing world” and lead to “better management of risk and stakeholders’ expectations (...)”² On the other hand, parts of the NGO community accuse governments of exploiting partnerships “to abdicate their responsibility to agree on further binding commitments” and as “a cheap plot by multinationals to ‘green wash’ their

¹ Quoted in: J.M.Witte, C.Streck, T.Benner (editors); Progress or Peril? – Partnerships and networks in global environmental governance – the post-Johannesburg agenda. Washington/Berlin; January 2003, page 2.

² Idem page 3.

operations”³. This has “effectively privatized the implementation of the Rio commitments set out by the participating countries ten years ago, and gives an ultimate seal-of-approval to corporate lobby groups and their ‘best practice’ projects.”⁴ Developing countries are also rather critical and fear that partnerships will take away pressure on the governments of industrial countries to spend additional funds for the promotion of sustainable development.

These viewpoints share with each other that they all predominantly refer to the external political context. Yet the extent to which partnerships either function as a new solution or as a new type of ‘green washing’ will largely depend on the internal implementation structure. This is not to deny the political context, but stresses the importance of translating this political context into design rules that can guide the practical implementation of partnerships.

1.2. SDAs and WSSD partnerships

Being a relatively new phenomenon, early experiences with partnerships in the field of sustainable development are of special significance. They allow to learn lessons, identify critical success factors, define guidelines and formulate ground rules that can improve the implementation of partnerships.

Against this background, the experience of the bilateral Sustainable Development Agreements (SDAs) between Benin, Bhutan, Costa Rica and the Netherlands is relevant. The SDAs were signed in 1994 as a follow-up to the UNCED conference held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. The SDA cooperation is based on equality, reciprocity and participation and aims to establish a new pattern of relationships between North and South. An evaluation team concluded in 2001 that this cooperation is “not about making development cooperation more effective, but about finding a new way for countries to tackle their common problems of unsustainable development”.⁵

Since partnerships have a voluntary nature, one would expect that binding intergovernmental agreements like the SDAs cannot set an example. Indeed treaties are a government responsibility and ratified and controlled by parliaments. Partnerships are not. Yet the similarities between the SDAs and public-private partnerships are more important. Both are directed towards the involvement of societies at large, instead of governments alone. Both bring together public, private and civic parties. Both aim to stimulate a new type of cooperation on a more equal footing. Both aim to contribute to the search for

³ Quoted in: J.M.Witte, C.Streck, T.Benner (editors); Progress or Peril? – Partnerships and networks in global environmental governance – the post-Johannesburg agenda. Washington/Berlin; January 2003, page 3.

⁴ Idem page 4.

⁵ Evaluation of the Sustainable Development Agreements – Netherlands country study report. ITAD, November 2000; page 8.

new global governance models that promote sustainable development. Because of these similarities, the SDAs can be seen as a learning experience 'avant la lettre' with partnerships. They are a model that can be used as a framework for partnerships and set an example in building an institutional structure for partnerships, creating operational procedures to put concepts like reciprocity, equality and participation into practice.

1.3. Contents

What challenges have to be addressed in partnerships? How can this be done? What factors will determine the success or failure of partnerships? The objective of this publication is to answer these questions regarding implementing partnerships on the basis of the lessons learned from the SDAs.

In Chapter 2, partnerships are explored as an expression of a broader shift from old to new global governance models. The chapter ends with a description of the three key challenges that must be met in the partnership implementation process. Chapters 3 and 4 discuss the main SDA ideas and provide an overview of the lessons learned from the SDAs. This paves the way for the formulation of critical success factors for WSSD partnerships in chapter 5.

2. Partnerships between old and new governance

2.1. Introduction

After the WSSD, it is safe to claim that intergovernmental action is no longer *the*, but a strategy to promote sustainable development. Partnerships are another -complementary- strategy, which is based on voluntary, decentralized and self-governing multi-stakeholder cooperation. Partnerships are not replacing, improving or competing with traditional governance, but create a new window of opportunities, aimed to improve the implementation of the sustainability agenda. The partnership concept is part of a broader search for new global governance models. Why does this search deserve the benefit of the doubt? What challenges must be addressed to reduce the doubt?

2.2. The difficulties of traditional governance

For many decades, governments and international institutions have dominated national and international policymaking. These traditional governance models face three difficulties:

- First of all, they are not capable (enough) of addressing urgent problems that need urgent solutions; instead they are characterized by delay. Although shared burdens and leadership are critically important, in many international negotiations the opposite happens and finger-pointing slows down the adoption and implementation of effective policies. Indeed traditional governance is often determined by conflict, different opinions and confrontation between (Northern and Southern) governments, which delay the process of sustainable development instead of speeding it up.
- Secondly traditional governance models are not well placed to take the sometimes radical measures that are needed, because they have a built-in mechanism that automatically enables them to find the lowest common denominator. This means that in international negotiations, governments that want the least force the others to reduce their demands as well, because decision-making is based on consensus.

These difficulties are reflected in the lack of progress with the implementation of global sustainable development. With the publication of 'Our Common Future' the issue was tabled on the political agenda in 1987 and created a sense of urgency. Subsequently, the 1992 UNCED conference in Rio de Janeiro was led by strong intentions formulated in Agenda 21 and the adoption of a set of new conventions such as the Framework Convention on Climate Change. UNCED has, however, proven to be weak with regard to implementation. The overall picture is one of too little, too late. More than ten years after Rio, the world has become less sustainable and time left to solve the issues has become shorter. According to the World Watch Institute, "depending on the degree of misery and biological impoverishment that we are prepared to accept, we have only one or perhaps two generations in which to reinvent ourselves. An eye blink of an eye blink."⁶

- The third difficulty with regard to traditional governance is related to globalization. In today's world, the economic power of multinational corporations has increased enormously as has their influence on the state of the planet's environment and on the lives of present and future generations. Restrictions of time and space are gradually disappearing and in the slipstream of this development, NGOs working together in international coalitions, networks and alliances address the negative consequences of globalization and call for corporate responsibility. "Those that are killing (the earth) have names and addresses," Naomi Klein has written⁷. The message is clear. The image of large corporations can be damaged by consumers and NGO campaigns and the danger of decreasing sales forces them to be more accountable for adverse environmental and social impacts. The resulting paradox can be summarized as follows: whereas companies have succeeded in creating a free global market, they become less free and more vulnerable at the same time. This is due to the fact that companies no longer deserve their 'license to operate' solely by complying with national and international laws, but must make an effort to obtain the support of the public at large. This is just one expression of how globalization erodes the nation state's dominant regulatory role. Governance is no longer restricted to governments and international organizations and has become an activity of the business and NGO community as well.

Out of these changes, new types of governance start to develop as a result of a new kind of interplay between governments, business and civil society. These multi-stakeholder dialogues exceed the frontiers of traditional governance in form, content and outcome. They are made up of varying instruments like codes of conduct, accountability systems and also partnerships.

⁶ Worldwatch Institute; State of the World 2003; page 5.

⁷ Naomi Klein; No Logo. London 2001; page 325.

Differences between 'traditional' and 'new' governance:

Traditional governance

Formal legalistic
State-centred hierarchy
Binding commitments
Centralistic
Low speed decision-making
Bureaucratic rules
Risk avoidance
Consensus oriented
Uniformity

New governance

Informal and flexible
Multi-sector networks
Voluntary basis
Directed towards *empowerment*
Quick decision-making
Less bureaucracy; less rules
Prepared to take risks
Solution-oriented
Diversity

2.3 A 'hard' and a 'soft' road to sustainable development

We believe that nowadays a 'hard' and a 'soft' road towards sustainable development can be distinguished. These roads co-exist and influence each other.

Whereas the 'hard' road is characterized by traditional confrontation (between states, between businesses and NGOs), the 'soft' road is based on new types of cooperation. Whereas the 'hard' road eventually leads to legislation and binding commitments, the 'soft' road creates a type of 'soft' law and civil regulation. Whereas the 'hard' road shows how business *as usual*, policymaking *as usual* and NGO-protest *as usual* delay the implementation of the sustainability agenda, the 'soft' road recognizes that in a world full of interdependencies cooperation (between rich and poor countries; between public, private and civil parties) is indispensable. Although each of the player categories has its own responsibilities, their combined power can lead to solutions and breakthroughs that they cannot achieve on their own. NGOs for example have been instrumental in helping companies enter a new future with new market chances. Markets for sustainable timber, organic cotton and organic food have been created under the influence of NGOs.

An interesting question is to what extent does the distinction between a 'hard' and 'soft' road to sustainable development overlap with a distinction between laggards and pioneers, between trend followers and trendsetters? In every process of innovation this distinction exists.

On the 'soft' road to sustainable development, confrontation is replaced by cooperation and traditional distinctions between business, governments and NGOs become less rigid and more fluid. It supposes that these actors step off the stage and prepare themselves for a different way of looking that takes them outside their traditional domain. The first to do this can be qualified as pioneers or early innovators. Those resisting such change can be referred to as laggards.

From this angle, partnerships are the expression of a shift in which the process of sustainable development changes from a struggle between business, NGOs and governments to a struggle between pioneers and laggards. Distinctions between pioneers and laggards run throughout the traditional player categories, i.e. corporations can be pioneers (for example, the Body Shop) or laggards (for example, Exxon). NGOs can –in spite of their progressive image- sometimes be rather conservative and resist change.

2.4. Partnership challenges

During the WSSD preparatory process, governments defined WSSD partnerships as “(...) specific commitments by various partners intended to contribute to and reinforce the implementation of outcomes of the intergovernmental negotiations of the WSSD and to help achieve the further implementation of Agenda 21 and the Millennium Development Goals.” This definition has been criticized as being too vague and reflecting an ‘anything goes’ policy.

In May 2003, the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) adopted a number of guidelines and criteria for partnerships in the context of the WSSD process (see box). They are of a very general nature and do not allow discrimination between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ practices. They are merely general characteristics and will not be instrumental in guiding the partnership implementation process.⁸ Looking at the UN-CSD list of officially registered WSSD partnerships, one sees indeed a mixture of ripe and green. In addition, a number of partnerships are not new but old and others seem to be empty boxes without much funding behind them.

WSSD partnership guidelines and criteria

- Partnerships are voluntary initiatives undertaken by governments and relevant stakeholders, e.g. major groups and institutional stakeholders;
- Partnerships should contribute to the implementation of Agenda 21, the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21 and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, and should not divert from commitments contained in those agreements;
- Partnerships are not intended to substitute commitments made by Governments but to supplement the implementation of Agenda 21, the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21 and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation;

⁸ At the High-Level Segment of the 11th Session of the Commission on Sustainable Development (28-30 April 2003), the guidelines “were endorsed in general, but the Commission may further define their parameters for action.” (Quoted from: Chairperson’s summary of the high-level segment of CSD-11).

- Partnerships should have concrete value addition to the implementation process and should be new - that is not merely reflect existing arrangements;
- Partnerships should bear in mind the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development in their design and implementation;
- Partnerships should bear in mind the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development in their design and implementation;
- Partnerships should be based on predictable and sustained resources for their implementation, include mobilising new resources and, where relevant, result in transfer of technology to, and capacity building in, developing countries;
- It is desirable that partnerships have a sectoral and geographical balance;
- Partnerships should be designed and implemented in a transparent and accountable manner. In this regard, they should exchange relevant information with Governments and other relevant stakeholders;
- Partnerships should be publicly announced with the intention of sharing the specific contribution that they make to the implementation of Agenda 21, the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21 and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation;
- Partnerships should be consistent with national laws, national strategies for the implementation of Agenda 21, the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21 and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, as well as the priorities of countries where their implementation takes place;
- The leading partner of a partnership initiative should inform the national focal point for sustainable development of the involved country/countries about the initiation and progress of the partnership, and all partners should bear in mind the guidance provided by Governments; and
- The involvement of international institutions and United Nations funds, programmes and agencies in partnerships should conform to the inter-governmentally agreed mandates and should not lead to the diversion to partnerships of resources otherwise allocated for their mandated programmes.

It is difficult to see how these official guidelines can guide partnership implementation. To develop better guidelines that strengthen the innovative character of partnerships, three challenges must be addressed:

External integration:

It has been emphasized that partnerships do not substitute but complement binding commitments between governments. This provides opportunities for formulating ambitions that go beyond the international agreements. The

complementary character of partnerships has two implications. The first is that partnerships must not be implemented in isolation as 'stand alone' projects. This means that monitoring and reporting are important. Secondly, mechanisms are needed to facilitate ways in which partnerships can complement each other and to guarantee they are tied in to the (inter)governmental agenda. In a best case scenario, partnerships should function as stepping stones to binding commitments.

- *Internal structure:*

The second challenge involves the internal structure of partnerships. Basic rules are needed to create an 'enabling environment' for partnerships. Some of the questions to be addressed in this context are: how to deal with power asymmetries between different stakeholders; how to enhance transparency and accountability? What rules are needed to promote mutual trust, mutual learning and the efficiency of partnerships?

- *Monitoring, evaluation and learning:*

Monitoring, evaluation and learning can be a powerful instrument in the partnership process. This is all the more important because partnerships are supposed to be innovative. In an innovation process, everybody in a sense starts from zero and building up experience and useful patterns is highly important. Additionally, partnerships should ideally penetrate the intergovernmental agenda (see 'external integration'), but this will depend on providing convincing evidence that they work. In other words, guidelines are needed to regulate monitoring, evaluation and learning.

3. Reciprocity, equality and participation in partnerships

3.1. Introduction

The Rio Declaration adopted at UNCED in 1992 called for “a new and equitable world partnership based on the creation of new forms of cooperation between states, important social organizations and individuals.” As a follow-up to this conference, Benin, Bhutan, Costa Rica and the Netherlands signed and implemented the SDAs, which translated the UNCED call into action. The SDAs are based on reciprocity, equality and participation. The lessons they have taught us are relevant to the partnership process.

The SDAs are official bilateral treaties between governments. This implies they are binding instead of voluntary agreements. The text of the treaties, however, does not prescribe what to do, let alone how to do it. It offers a general framework for action. The underlying motive was the Dutch government’s conviction that in order to successfully promote sustainable development, governments need to step back and create space for civil society at large. This expresses the desire to take participation serious, but the disadvantage of this view also became apparent in the course of the years. The ‘open’ character of the wording of the SDAs gave room to a range of expectations and interpretations and has sometimes confused the implementation process. Managing these different expectations has proven to be important. This is, without doubt, also relevant to WSSD partnerships, because they bring together different stakeholders from different backgrounds.

The basic intentions of the SDAs are formulated in Article 1, paragraph 1 of the text of the agreements, which introduces three leading principles:

*“The two governments hereby agree to establish long-term cooperation between their countries based on **equality** and **reciprocity** as well as consultation and mutual assistance in order to pursue effectively and efficiently all aspects of sustainable development, thereby promoting the **participation** of all interest groups in their respective countries.”*

These concepts express the ambition to establish a new pattern of relationships between developed and developing countries in order to promote global sustainable development. This chapter explores the background.

3.2. Partnerships between development aid and sustainable development

As such, the SDAs were an expression of a new outlook that emerged during (preparations for) UNCED and the word reciprocity is, without doubt, the most striking term in the wording of the agreements.

Reciprocity has not been widely discussed in the framework of WSSD partnerships. This might be a signal that partnerships are largely considered as a way to improve and renew the tradition of development cooperation. Are partnerships just a new layer of asphalt on the one-way road from donor to recipient? However, even if this is the case, reciprocity might be worth considering. The absence of any notion of reciprocity and mutuality creates a risk and “may be one reason for the widespread failure of donor-driven stipulations. So-called partnerships in the official aid system based on non-reciprocity are proving hollow and ineffective.”⁹

We must ask ourselves, however, whether it is right to treat partnerships as an improvement *within* the paradigm of development cooperation. This would imply that global sustainable development equals combating poverty in a sustainable way. This is clearly not the case, because sustainable development also addresses the large ecological footprints made by industrialized countries - or is supposed to do so-. Thus, whereas development cooperation is about ‘lifting the bottom’ only, global sustainable development combines this ‘lifting the bottom’, with strategies to ‘lower the top’.

Development can be considered as a racetrack without a finish line, in which countries with a high GNP function as a role model for those with a low GNP. Sustainable development, on the other hand, is based on the recognition of ecological limits, which are difficult to calculate exactly, but are nevertheless realistic. In this case, industrialized countries become a *failing* role model, because the lifestyle of the rich one-quarter of world population living in these countries cannot be copied to serve the needs of the whole world population. If, for instance, the present average per capita carbon dioxide emissions in the industrial world were extrapolated to every country in the world, we would need five planets earth and we only have one. As a consequence, distribution issues automatically deserve a central place in sustainable development and “justice will be more about changing the lifestyles of the rich than about changing those of the poor.”¹⁰ This is not a new insight: when India became independent more than fifty years ago, an English journalist asked Mahatma Gandhi whether India would strive for the same level of prosperity as its former colonizer. “How many earths you think that will need?” Gandhi answered.

⁹ Evaluation of the Sustainable Development Agreements – Netherlands country study report. ITAD Ltd, November 2000, page 12.

¹⁰ W.Sachs; Development – the rise and decline of an ideal. Wuppertal Papers Number 108; August 2000, page 25.

Although reciprocity seems to be an anomaly within the tradition of development cooperation, development cooperation essentially is a one-way road from donor to recipient. Sustainable development cannot be successful without reciprocity, because distribution issues are the heart of the global sustainability issue. Sustainable development thus defines the need to build a road for two-way traffic, for mutual learning and mutual obligations with regard to the global ecospace.

In 1996, representatives from the governments, NGOs and the science and business communities of Costa Rica, Bhutan, Benin and the Netherlands came together to discuss the concept of reciprocity and how it could be applied in international cooperation. The outcome was laid down in the so-called Rinpung Declaration¹¹, which stresses, amongst others:

“The principle of reciprocity recognizes that (stakeholders in a partnership)¹² can contribute to each other’s development process as opposed to the traditional notion of the donor-recipient relationship. It means that sustainable development cooperation is a two-way process, involving the mutual rights, obligations and commitments of the respective (stakeholders), recognizing that each has different interests, needs and aspirations and starting positions. The parties recognize that reciprocity is, amongst other things, characterized by trust, mutual respect, open dialogue, long-term commitment, patience, flexibility and complementary relationships.”

“Sustainability and reciprocity are both long-term processes. Therefore, small steps in this regard should be hailed as progress. The practice of equality and reciprocity between (Northern and Southern stakeholders) is a challenge that must not be underestimated; it is nothing short of changing the equation in the relationship between the two and learning from each other. Such far-reaching goals cannot be achieved immediately.”

3.3. Reciprocity

Reciprocity is a rather abstract principle and easily creates a variety of expectations. Strong & weak, contents & process-oriented and general & specific interpretations can be given. To manage such different expectations and to develop a common understanding, it is important to turn reciprocity into a practical tool. Reciprocity can be interpreted in at least three ways:

- *learning from each other (weak interpretation):*
Exchange programmes to promote mutual learning and sharing information between stakeholders from different countries are a relatively simple expression of reciprocity.

¹¹ Ministry of Planning – Royal government of Bhutan and Foundation Ecooperation; Rinpung Declaration on Reciprocity for Sustainable Development. 30 October – 3 November 1995.

¹² The original text refers to countries instead of stakeholders.

- *commenting on each other (stronger interpretation):*
Formal or informal participation in each other's policy discussions can be seen as a more sophisticated type of reciprocity. For instance in the SDA context, the Dutch Ministry for the Environment asked Benin to advise on a policy paper about the management of the Wadden Sea, the major wetland of the Netherlands.
- *signed contracts defining mutual obligations (strongest interpretation):*
In a strong interpretation of reciprocity, countries would be prepared to accept mutual policy obligations or to develop financial mechanisms linked to their ecological footprint.

An evaluation of Dutch international sustainable development projects concludes: "most projects (...) are focused on the delivery of goods, services or capacity to beneficiaries in developing countries. The Dutch initiator tends to have a strong missionary drive to reach the goal of the project and to show success. Generally speaking, they are less interested in establishing a reciprocal relationship that truly allows for mutual gain, i.e. the Netherlands gaining (learning) from counterpart countries or organizations. In the relationships between political parties, governments and NGOs in the participating countries, there was very limited willingness in the Netherlands to accept that the it would actually benefit from the relationship."¹³

If partnerships are to be based on reciprocity, the following issues need to be taken into account:

- If reciprocity is to be taken forward to something stronger than just the exchange of information, the choice of countries and stakeholders becomes more important and a preliminary analysis of the interface between countries and stakeholders in terms of shared problems, interests and responsibilities or joint characteristics is more urgent. In other words, the identification of interfaces between different partners from different countries is an important starting point to find common ground and opportunities for learning.
- Reciprocity starts with willingness to learn mutually, to respect and trust each other. In this sense, reciprocity refers to the attitude of stakeholders. Both sides have to adapt and adopt new roles. In the case of the SDAs, Costa Rica, Benin and Bhutan were challenged to comment on sustainable development in the Netherlands, which was something they were not accustomed to doing. In the same way, the Netherlands is not accustomed to receiving comments of this type.

¹³ Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment, the Netherlands; 'Multiplying successful projects – recommendations for successful replication of sustainable development projects'. ERM Nederland BV; April 2002, page 12.

- Reciprocity needs (special) funding arrangements. This issue cannot be underestimated. If partnerships are based on reciprocity, with the objective of finding a new way for countries and organizations to tackle their common problems of unsustainable development, they represent a different perspective. New perspectives rarely fit neatly into existing organizational 'boxes'. In other words, partnerships must not be managed in the same way as a development cooperation programme, because that would probably create imbalance and an inability to address sustainability issues in the donor country. This easily creates a funding problem.

3.4. Equality

The WSSD guiding principles emphasize the need for equity between partners which includes gender equality. In his report on the follow-up to the WSSD, the UN Secretary-General explains the partnership approach out of "a desire to move from a donor-defined framework to one in which those benefiting from a given project and other stakeholders could work together on a more equal footing (...)."¹⁴ In practice, however, all partnerships will face power asymmetries and neutralizing these asymmetries needs specific attention. Imagine a multi-billion dollar corporation and local representatives of a community in Africa sitting around a partnership table, discussing what to do about rural energy or water sanitation. What would happen? Whose agenda would be followed? Will the stakeholder delivering the funds dominate decision-making or listen to the needs of other stakeholders and agree with joint decision-making, giving all partners an equal voice?

To work on a more equal footing, tools and strategies are needed. Procedures for (more) equal decision-making are especially important, because a relationship between a donor with funds and a recipient without funds is unequal by definition. Indeed, the history of the SDAs has proven this point in a number of cases, for example, when the Dutch government -sometimes pushed by parliament- made unilateral decisions. On the other hand, the experience gained from the SDAs also shows, that it is possible to neutralize financial inequality in a number of ways, for instance, in the procedures for project decision-making.

Equality also refers to the formulation of objectives, the planning of activities, the organization of the partnership and all the other day-to-day aspects of a partnership. Equality of voice as an implicit value or aspiration needs to be reflected in the management of partnerships. It implies that the most powerful stakeholders do not determine what the partnership is about and that the weakest stakeholders have an equal voice in the formulation of the objectives and activities of the partnership. In this sense, equality, just as reciprocity,

¹⁴ UN Economic and Social Council ; Follow-up to the World Summit on sustainable development and the future role of the Commission on Sustainable Development: the implementation track. Report of the Secretary-General; page; page 25.

refers to the attitude of participants to look at each other as equal partners, showing mutual respect and confidence, willing to listen to each other and reward diversity of viewpoints. In other words, equality means something for the psychology of a relationship.

In a very practical sense, equality can be translated into a decision to organize policy dialogues not only in the developing country, but also in the developed country. This enables stakeholders to familiarize with each others situations and circumstances. Getting to know each other is a prerequisite for mutual learning.

3.5. Participation

Participation of different stakeholders is the cornerstone of partnerships. Participation is often defined as “people concerned by the outcome of a decision are involved in the making of that decision”¹⁵ and seems less controversial than reciprocity and equality.

However, being an umbrella concept, participation can hold different viewpoints and strong or weak meanings. There is, for example, a difference between participation as consultation and participation as involvement in decision-making. Participation may thus refer to the number and the diversity of stakeholders involved in a partnership, i.e. if the partnership is inclusive or exclusive, but it may also refer to the capacity of stakeholders to exert control over the agenda and actions of a partnership. Besides strong and weak meanings, participation also involves several levels ranging from the international level of a UN organization or a multinational involved in a partnership to national stakeholders and local communities. The combination of multiple meanings within multiple levels explains why participation is not that easy and why there is often a gap between rhetoric and reality. If partnerships adopt the principle of participation, the main question is: what ought to happen to guarantee participation in the way partnerships work?

In the context of the SDAs, “participation is understood as meaning involvement of a plurality of institutions (community, local, national, government, non-government and the commercial sector) in formulating the strategy, planning and execution of activities.”¹⁶ Participation has probably been the greatest positive element in the SDAs, especially in Costa Rica, but also in Benin and Bhutan, where the SDAs have strengthened the involvement of civil society in processes of sustainable development. Representation of NGOs in decision-making about SDA projects has had a resulting effect on the national level organization of NGOs.

¹⁵ Arne Musch; The small gods of participation. Enschede 2001, page2.

¹⁶ Evaluation of the Sustainable Development Agreements – Netherlands country study report. ITAD Ltd, November 2000, page 10.

4. From SDAs to WSSD partnerships

4.1. Introduction

The SDA experience and impact is different in each of the four participating countries. A general picture is difficult to sketch and what you see, at least partly depends on how you look. Successes co-exist with failures. Much of it is hard to measure and easy to either deny or overemphasize. Indeed the SDAs have produced expected and unexpected, desired and undesired effects.

Effects of SDA experiment	Desired effects	Undesired effects
Expected effects	*	**
Unexpected effects	**	***

(*) indicates level of learning potential

Being an experiment to establish a new pattern of relationships between Northern and Southern countries, the SDAs have above all produced a learning curve, which, if captured and shared, can add a new dimension to sustainable development cooperation. It is therefore worth asking what lessons the SDA implementation process delivers for the newly established WSSD partnerships.

4.2. SDA lessons with regard to external integration

- *When you want to discover new land, you cannot use an old map.*
Just like partnerships, the SDAs can be considered as a potential method for innovating international cooperation that explore the scope for new global governance models for promoting sustainable development. Such a new approach demands new rules that support the change in vision that needs to be adopted. The role of a strong leading coalition with enough critical mass is crucial here. Change needs leadership!

The SDAs were rooted in the paradigm of sustainable development. They were not a way of positioning against ODA, but for going around it. The ITAD evaluation concludes¹⁷: "Although the idea originated within development cooperation, the

¹⁷ Evaluation of the Sustainable Development Agreements – Netherlands country study report. ITAD Ltd; November 2000; page 8.

SDAs were not intended to be an alternative form of development cooperation. Their purpose was to forge new relationships between nations. The experiment was not about making development cooperation more effective, but about finding a new way for countries to tackle their common problems of unsustainable development". Their initial strength was to step out of the box. This strategy of avoidance instead of attack was the right thing to do, but has also proven to be difficult to implement.

Without doubt, the most important lesson learned from the SDAs is that solely intending to break with rules and define a new playing field is not a guarantee for successful practical implementation. The SDAs suffered especially from the application of old rules to a new approach. As a consequence, instead of building a new pattern of relationships between stakeholders to promote sustainable development, the SDAs have gradually been mainstreamed in the old paradigm of development cooperation.

- The Dutch ministry of ODA (responsible in a political and financial sense) and Ecooperation, the Dutch SDA implementation agency, were placed in an impossible juxtaposition. ODA officials typically blamed Ecooperation for not being professional, i.e. not working along the procedures, criteria and 'mental map' of ODA. Ecooperation officials typically blamed the ministry for overruling the mandate of the NM to promote sustainable development in the Netherlands.

Do partnerships face a similar risk? Although governments and international institutions may perform a range of positive roles in partnerships -enabler, facilitator, supporter, or active participant-, they may also influence partnerships in a negative sense, by imposing old funding rules, control mechanisms and procedures. The challenge is to prevent partnerships from being looked at or managed as a development cooperation programme.

- *To organize innovation, one also has to innovate organizations*
New perspectives rarely fit neatly into existing organizational 'boxes'. Neither the SDAs, nor the WSSD partnerships can expect to find a safe home in traditional institutions automatically, but at the same time, they politically need and financially depend on these institutions. The issue at stake is that innovative sustainable development needs new institutional arrangements. Sustainable development should ideally work against entrenchment and seeks to remove existing institutional barriers between the public, private and civil sectors; between domestic and foreign policies and between environmental and development issues. Paying attention to these barriers and trying to adapt institutional arrangements to partnership ambitions is just as important as trying to understand why people and institutions resist moves to break down these barriers.
- *Funding needs specific attention*
The official evaluation of the SDAs concludes:
"The problems that arrive from trying to implement new ideas with old rules have to be tackled. The most critical of these concern finance. The SDAs have

been managed as a development cooperation programme. However, they are in fact an international process to support national strategies for sustainable development”¹⁸ One of the key mistakes, “was a failure to match the SDA objectives with new rules and procedures. In the absence of new mechanisms, (the Dutch Ministry for Development Cooperation) applied funding and project cycle management as though the SDA were just another development programme.”¹⁹

In the case of the SDAs, 90% of total project funding was earmarked for ODA-projects in Benin, Bhutan and Costa Rica and less than 1% of total project funds were available for the promotion of sustainable development in the Netherlands. This does not mean the Dutch Ministry for Development Cooperation to blame, but it stresses the need to diversify funding. The lack of additional financial resources has proven to be an obstacle for finding the right balance between supporting sustainable development in Benin, Bhutan and Costa Rica and addressing sustainable development issues in the Netherlands as prescribed in the wording of the SDAs. As a consequence, the ambitions as formulated in the treaty text became unrealistic. Indeed the impact of the SDAs on promoting sustainable development in the Netherlands has been limited. The evaluation says: “this is simply due to the very small size of projects carried out in the Netherlands in comparison to development expenditure/activity.”²⁰

Looking at WSSD partnerships, a number of lessons can be learned:

- If partnerships really strive for cooperation on an equal footing, the challenge is to distinguish between the partners that make financial resources available and the partners that make the decisions regarding the use of the funds.
 - If funds are earmarked for specific projects, the partnership may need to invest in finding additional resources that allow all the needs and concerns of the partnership to be addressed;
 - If partnerships strive for cooperation based on reciprocity, the need to diversify funding becomes even more important, because in this situation ‘lifting the bottom’ and ‘lowering the top’ would have to be combined.
- *The more integration, the more impact*
The SDAs also teach us that the influence and impact of partnerships will correlate with the degree of integration in a wider (national or international) policy framework. The more linkages there are, the greater the influence on the institutional behaviour of governments.

¹⁸ Evaluation of the Sustainable Development Agreements – final report. ITAD Ltd; March 2001, page XIV

¹⁹ Idem.

²⁰ Evaluation of the Sustainable Development Agreements – Netherlands country study report. ITAD Ltd; November 2000; page 50.

In the Netherlands, the link between SDAs and sustainable development policies has hardly been established and the SDAs have not been able to influence institutional behaviour by Dutch government. In this sense, external integration failed to a large extent. It is remarkable that in another policy area - development cooperation- the SDAs have had an impact in the Netherlands in that they have opened the arena of international cooperation for non-traditional actors. This has had two effects. It facilitated these organizations to adopt new roles and adapt to processes of globalization. It also reduced the isolation of development cooperation vis-a-vis the outside world.

In Benin, Bhutan and Costa Rica, the SDAs play an important role in or even coordinate the respective National Strategies for Sustainable Development (NSSDs) and policies that promote sustainable development. In Costa Rica, for instance, the SDA implementation agency (Fundecooperación) has been appointed by the government as coordinator for the NSSD. In Bhutan, the Sustainable Development Secretariat (SDS) created for the implementation of the SDA manages a project fund which has proven to be extremely successful in catering to the needs of NGOs, community groups and other parties in implementing small-scale projects in rural areas that are innovative, improve rural incomes with community participation, ownership and sustainability. The SDA provided the opportunity to work directly with the community groups to promote sustainable development.

The agencies responsible for implementing the SDAs have gone through a sometimes difficult and time-consuming process of institution and capacity building. In the end, however, the agencies in Benin, Bhutan and Costa Rica have become key players in a wider area of national sustainable development policies that goes beyond the scope of the SDAs. It can thus be concluded that investing in capacity building pays back.

The Dance of Change

Theories about organizational change claim that the road to successful innovation runs along a more or less fixed pattern. Apparently one can formulate golden rules to create fundamental change. John P. Kotter, amongst others, has researched this subject and defines crucial hurdles to be taken and the pitfalls one might come across.²¹

Framework for analysis of partnerships as a change process

Steps	Pitfalls
1. establish sense of urgency	complacency and arrogance
2. create leading coalition	weak institutional governance
3. develop vision and strategy	bureaucracy dictates vision and strategy
4. communicate vision	defensive attitude instead of convincing
5. create broad support	isolation instead of penetration
6. generate short term success	focus on internal frustration
7. catalyze change	adapt vision to reality instead of the other way round
8. anchor change in the culture	reward tradition

- *New methods and expression forms of international cooperation add something to old methods*

The SDAs have explored new methods of international cooperation, some of which touch upon the partnership issue of external integration. Examples of these are:

- **Pre-consultations and Joint Statements:**
A specific expression of the SDA cooperation is related to UN conferences. Being used to cooperate in regional settings like the European Union or G-77, the four countries have gained experience in defining, presenting and publishing joint statements at -for instance- the Conference of Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity. Such statements are a new tool with the potential to help bridge the gap between the traditional negotiating blocks of North and South.
- **South-South Cooperation:**
On 31 August 2002 the governments of Benin, Bhutan and Costa Rica signed a Strategic Partnership for cooperation on sustainable development (officially recognized as a WSSD partnership). Whereas each of them entered into a bilateral SDA with the Dutch government in 1994, they now decided to intensify their mutual cooperation. The argument behind this South-South cooperation is quite strong: the three Southern countries have much more in common with each other, than each of them has in common with the Netherlands. Bhutan and Costa Rica, for instance, are both known as biodiversity 'hot spots' and both have a reputation for eco-tourism. This South-South cooperation adds a new element.
- **Commenting Dutch sustainability:**
The SDAs have built up experience with Southern journalists and researchers investigating and commenting on Dutch sustainable development (issues), both in a rather formal situation as well as in an informal setting. Benin was, for example, asked to participate in the trilateral Wadden Sea Consultation between Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands and to comment on a Dutch policy paper on the Wadden Sea. The SDAs have introduced a different way of looking at North-South relationships in the Netherlands. Being used to teach others, a role played by traditional donors, a process of mutual learning has been introduced. Reciprocity thus provides an interactive learning environment and gives access to new ways of working. Nowadays, it is considered (more) normal when experts from developing countries comment on Dutch sustainability and hold up a mirror, even if the Dutch find it difficult to look into that mirror.

²¹ John P. Kotter; *Leading Change*. Harvard Business School. Boston; 1996. Also note that Gary Hamel's 'Leading the Revolution' (2002) distinguishes a largely similar number of steps.

4.3. SDA lessons with regard to ground rules of WSSD partnerships

- *Combine multi-stakeholder dialogue with implementation activities on the ground*
The SDAs are implemented in two ways that mutually reinforce each other: multi-stakeholder dialogue (referred to as policy consultation in the framework of the SDAs) and projects.

Policy dialogue brings together stakeholders from each of the participating countries to:

- develop a common understanding;
- define priorities to be addressed in the cooperation and guarantee that these are translated into long-term programmes and short-term projects;
- monitor progress with regard to national processes of sustainable development in general and the implementation through projects of the SDAs.

Keys to successful dialogue:

- allow enough time for planning;
- be aware of and manage expectations;
- prioritize;
- start thinking about the longer-term engagement process early;
- be realistic and guarantee small wins early in the process;
- focus on the quality of the relationship between the partners and build mutual trust;
- be open and transparent about interests;
- acknowledge genuine differences, everyone should make an effort to share perspectives, listen and learn;
- aim to build joint ownership for actions towards change to be taken following the dialogue;
- be flexible and open to improvisation in the dialogue based on desires of participants.
- define diversity as a source of learning; do not strive for homogeneity.

The SDAs distinguish three types of projects:

- Projects implemented in Benin, Bhutan and Costa Rica and funded with Dutch ODA. They might be titled 'traditional' ODA-projects, but selection, decision-making about and management of these projects is in the hands of the coordinating agencies in these countries.
- Projects addressing sustainable development in the Netherlands. Decision-making about these projects was partly in Dutch hands, partly in the hands of the other countries' implementing agencies. At the moment, funding for this type of projects is not available.
- Projects implemented jointly in the Netherlands and one or more of the other countries and addressing sustainable development in both countries as well. Decisions are taken jointly by the implementing agencies of the four countries. These reciprocal projects add something new to the traditional ODA projects.

Keys to successful project implementation

- split funding and decision-making on how funds are spent;
- guarantee that projects and their results mutually reinforce each other;
- formulate programmes to guide project work;
- formulate project results to be achieved;
- create small wins that fit into the long-term perspective;
- build in communication about projects;
- monitor progress;
- evaluate projects and learn from them.

Combining these two channels (dialogue and projects) of implementation has proven to be a strength. In the same way, partnerships should escape from the danger of only implementing fragmented project activities and instead facilitate strategic reorientation. Strategic reorientation is easier to achieve, when partnership activities are discussed and evaluated in a broader framework by a larger group of representatives of the different stakeholders instead of just those responsible for implementation alone.

This also stresses the need for dialogue with the aim to formulate a partnership mission, a vision, a strategy and work plans, which place the activities to be implemented in a context and which enables these activities in the framework of the partnership's overall objectives to be evaluated.

- *Create an organizational structure that protects the interests of the partnership itself*

If a group of stakeholders joins hands in a partnership, they will all start with different expectations, aspirations, priorities, interests and perspectives. Especially in the first phase, it will be important to encourage dialogue between the different stakeholders and to develop a common understanding, formulate joint objectives, strategies and channels of implementation.

A facilitator and/or mediator between different stakeholders helps protect the interests of the partnership itself. An agency can therefore be made responsible for day-to-day management of the partnership. In the implementation of the SDAs such independent agencies (called National Mechanisms) were established in each of the four participating countries. They coordinate and enable implementation in four ways:

- facilitation of dialogue through the preparation of consultations between stakeholders;
- reinforcement of the national processes to promote sustainable development through the fostering of participation of different segments of society;
- guidance of the implementation of projects through support to the formulation and monitoring of projects;
- dissemination of results and learning experiences.

- *Guarantee well-defined plans with enough flexibility*
Since sustainable development addresses a wide variety of topics, it is important to avoid fragmentation and concentrate on a limited number of issues and themes. The WEHAB-themes help to choose priorities and should be based on analyses of the interface and linkages between the stakeholders involved. Subsequently, each priority, through multi-stakeholder dialogue, should be translated into a programme document, which defines the framework for projects in that thematic field. This type of programmatic approach allows the creation of coherence and synergy between different projects and provides a more pro-active working method.
- *Guarantee commitment of (high-ranking representatives of) all stakeholders*
In the organizational structure of the SDAs, political guidance is given by the so called Joint Committee that meets -on average- once every two years. The Joint Committee is essentially a meeting between ministers from the four SDA countries to decide on all major future developments that take place in the SDA context.

In the case of WSSD partnerships, the group of stakeholders involved could create a high-level committee, which could guide the partnership from a distance, without being involved in day-to-day activities. In this way, multi-stakeholder dialogue enables increased commitment of and contacts between the stakeholders of civil society, business and government.

- *The importance of anchoring change in the culture of organizations*
The advantage of regular multi-stakeholder dialogue is to commit a wider range of people to the partnership, which can help improve the way in which the partnership is anchored in the participating organizations. Although a partnership should initially be handled by specific departments of the participating stakeholders and depend on mutual symbiosis between motivated individuals, “partnership survival may ultimately be threatened by this dependency”²², because it requires much more than individual commitment and institutionalization requirements. If the leadership or high-ranked representatives of the stakeholder organizations participate in dialogue on a regular basis, the stability and long-term commitment of these organizations to the partnership may increase.
- *Projects should reflect the priorities of (the weakest) stakeholders.*
Ideally, sustainable development programmes and projects do not reflect donor priorities and do not place recipients in a dependent position. They should strengthen the position of the ‘weakest’ stakeholder instead of reinforcing the financial power of the ‘strongest’ stakeholder. In the SDAs, participating organizations from North and South work together on a (more)

²² David F. Murphy and Gill Coleman; Thinking Partners: business, NGO's and the partnership concept. In: Jim Bendell (editor); Terms for Endearment – business, NGO's and sustainable development. Sheffield; 2000, page 213.

equal footing. The Dutch donor has transferred managerial responsibilities to Costa Rica, Benin and Bhutan and joint decision-making procedures for projects have been adopted.

The issue to be taken forward is:

- public-private partnerships should adopt joint decision-making procedures;
 - guarantee that the needs and preferences of the 'weakest' stakeholders are addressed.
- *Projects can be small (including their budgets), but the innovation component can nevertheless be remarkable.*
Partnerships, as well as the SDAs, will often face tension between the short-term time horizon of funding agencies and the need for a long-term time horizon to achieve tangible results. In such situation, it is important to achieve small wins (with small budgets) quickly and to guarantee that these are visible, undisputed and linked with the change process at large. These 'small diamonds' provide an opportunity to learn. If they are a success, they are ripe for scaling-up. If they are a failure, they are easy to kill.

4.4. SDA lessons with regard to monitoring, evaluation and learning

- *The importance of monitoring, evaluation and learning to an innovative approach like partnerships, can not be underestimated*
Can failures be a success? Yes, they can. Even if a project fails to achieve its targeted policy effects, it will probably still generate 'lessons to be learned'. The next project in the same policy environment can benefit from the failure, if monitoring, evaluation and learning are planned systematically. Learning from experience is part of any innovation process. Especially when a number of different stakeholders are involved, learning is the most powerful sustainability tool there is.

Innovation places special demands on monitoring, evaluation and learning. The difficulty of learning new perspectives is often preceded by the difficulty of 'un-learning' old ones. In the case of the SDAs, organizations are often asked or even forced to implement reciprocal projects. This assumes that they know how this abstract word can be changed into practical action. To facilitate this, it is important for them to be informed about the lessons learned in earlier projects. Constantly re-inventing the wheel is a waste of time. The need to build up an institutional memory cannot be underestimated!

5. Success factors for WSSD partnerships

5.1. Introduction

Partnerships are supported by some and criticized by others. It is too early to judge who is right. This can only be determined on the basis of experience with practical implementation and in a process of learning by doing. To structure implementation, however, the right framework has to be in place. The WSSD guidelines are too vague to fulfil this role and need further elaboration. They do not allow discrimination between 'good' and 'bad' practices and it is almost impossible to compare cases and to establish benchmarks for best practices. There is a need to establish more specific guidelines directed towards the practical implementation of partnerships.

Successful partnerships will have to address three challenges: external integration, internal ground rules as well as monitoring, evaluation and learning. The SDA experience, started in 1994, stresses the importance of and has given answers to these challenges. In this chapter, we will reformulate the challenges into conditions for success.

5.2. External integration

During the Johannesburg Summit, partnerships and official negotiation processes were almost entirely disconnected. "Many government delegates, in particular those from the developed world, emphasized the importance of partnership approaches, but failed to provide convincing answers for why this was true and why it would matter. Furthermore, on the one hand, governments emphasized the 'additionality' of partnerships, yet, on the other, failed to provide an overall global framework by setting meaningful global goals."²³

If partnerships do not replace but complement binding intergovernmental commitments, interaction between the two processes is important and mechanisms are needed to facilitate this synergy.

²³ J.M.Witte, C.Streck and T.Benner; The road from Johannesburg: what future for partnerships in global environmental governance. In: Progress or Peril? Partnerships and networks in Global Environmental Governance – the Post-Johannesburg Agenda. Edited by J.M. Witte, C.Steck, T.Benner; GPPI. January 2003; page 70.

The first condition for this to happen is that partnerships must avoid the risk of isolation and not be structured as 'stand-alone' projects. The overall objective should instead be to penetrate the mainstream of national and global sustainable development policies. Indeed, the ultimate success of a partnership depends on the extent to which the experience gained from it is considered ripe for replication, up-scaling and mainstreaming, because in this way it can influence sustainable development policies at large. In such case, partnerships can become a catalyst for change. To be able to penetrate mainstream policies, monitoring, evaluation and learning are indispensable. Before a partnership alliance can convince others and argue for replication, it has to have insight in its own successes, failures, lessons learned and 'best practices'. This issue will be dealt with in par. 5.4.

The second condition for external integration is related to (inter)national and intergovernmental institutions. To complement (instead of replace) binding commitments of (inter)governmental institutions, these institutions must be willing to look at the results produced by partnerships as potential stepping stones to binding commitments. "The success of partnerships depends to a large extent on the willingness of governments to set ambitious binding targets. Partnerships can be one means through which such targets can be attained."²⁴ In the first place, this requires governments and intergovernmental institutions to have an open attitude about the integration and participation of non-governmental groups in the UN system and national policymaking. Secondly, disseminating or up-scaling successful partnerships will often require intergovernmental and/or legal anchoring or the financial and organizational capacity of international and (inter)governmental institutions to create leverage.

The third condition for external integration is related to the need for 'translators', mediators and facilitators, who are able to build the bridge between decentralized local partnership experience and centralized global institutions. Some mechanisms for narrowing the gap are suggested in par. 5.4., but to use these mechanisms successfully, each partnership needs a strong leading coalition with enough critical mass. This refers to the shared commitment of powerful people – in terms of titles, reputations, relationships and functions.

A strong leading coalition also helps to anchor partnerships within the participating organizations and to create support within these organizations. This support should not be taken for granted. Today's battles are often also fought within stakeholder organizations ... as those who understand the strategic importance of sustainability partnerships struggle with those who are not convinced. Once again, the pitfall of isolation must be avoided.

5.3. Enabling environment

An enabling environment refers to the organizational circumstances in which partnerships are developed. Basic rules are needed for creating a facilitating environment, although rules alone will not be enough.

Partnerships often demand investments in the first place in a process leading towards cooperation and, in this respect, content and concrete results are secondary objectives. Partnerships bring together organizations that are often not used to working with each other. The relationship between corporate and non-corporate partners, for example, has long been characterized by antagonism ('them and us'). Bringing together poor and marginalized local community groups in the South with a multibillion global corporation appears to be at odds with the enormous power differentials and divergent interests inherent in such relationship. The former have often been considered as a target group instead of as a co-developer and partner. It is not simply a change of language, but a change of attitude that matters. To change mutual perceptions, the quality of relationships between stakeholders needs a great deal of attention. Good partnerships are based on mutual trust, flexibility, mutual understanding and the willingness to learn from each other. All stakeholders are challenged to adopt -and adapt to- new roles that are different to the ones they play in traditional donor-recipient relationships.

A second issue refers to finance and funding. Long-term commitment of funding agencies and participating organizations helps to guarantee the stability of partnerships. The issue needs specific attention, for two reasons:

- funding agencies tend to focus on short-term results, which may compromise the long-term benefits. Aiming for long-term objectives as opposed to a quick fix, means that one has to accept that partnerships need incubation time, even though, on the other hand, they have to generate interest in (and communicate about) short-term successes ('small wins') that are visible, indisputable and linked with the process at large, i.e. the long-term objectives.
- there is also a need to adapt 'old' funding mechanisms and rules, because these will not always fit into the 'new' partnership format. Sometimes, for instance, funding agencies either want to finance only overseas or only domestic activities, whereas a partnership might want to combine the two.

Thirdly, partnerships need a set of ground rules. Without proposing a 'one size fits all' approach which contradicts the diversity of partnerships – a number of issues have to be dealt with in all partnerships. The CSD is well positioned to facilitate a multi-stakeholder dialogue paving the way to more specific guidelines than the ones available at present. The adoption of a set of basic rules, however, is not a static event. As more experience is gained, more 'good practices' can be identified and used to improve the guidelines.

These guidelines must in any case address the following issues:

- **Transparency:** the first step for a partnership towards generating legitimacy and strengthening external support is that it has to be transparent. Transparency means providing all relevant information to the public at large, making it widely available in an understandable format and being open to the comments of outsiders. Critical comments can encourage the stakeholders to re-address issues throughout the partnership process.
- **Accountability:** transparency is closely related to accountability. The purpose of transparency is to permit others to hold partnerships accountable for their policies and performance. A pluralistic system of accountability is not limited to financial accountability and may include accountability towards the stakeholders, the public at large ('naming and shaming') and -when relevant- the market.
- **Equality:** partnerships will have to deal with asymmetric power relations and face the challenge to adopt a need-based, recipient-driven agenda that reflects the priorities of the weakest stakeholders. To neutralize inequality, strategies must be formulated with regard to decision-making procedures. 'Independent' staff can be appointed to oversee and enable cooperation on an equal footing and coordinate the partnership implementation process.
- **Capacity building and empowerment:** capacity building and empowerment involves all the stakeholders, since they all have to play a different role than the one they are traditionally used to and they all have to learn from experience. However, empowerment also refers to the opportunity for 'the powerless' to make their voices heard and to participate effectively.
- **Monitoring and evaluation:** mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation are needed to promote internal learning and to guarantee the transparency of partnerships towards the outer world. Evaluation and monitoring enable stakeholders to determine the potential as well as the limitations of a partnership and also allow stakeholders that do not comply with appointments and decisions to be criticized.

Dimensions of a partnership monitoring and evaluation strategy²⁵

Category and function of partnership: what kind of partnership is appropriate? Have the function and form of the partnership changed over time? Are they likely to change in the future?

²⁵ J.M.Witte, C.Streck and T.Benner; The road from Johannesburg: what future for partnerships in global environmental governance. In: Progress or Peril? Partnerships and networks in Global Environmental Governance - the Post-Johannesburg Agenda. Edited by J.M. Witte, C.Steck, T.Benner; GPPI. January 2003; page 79.

Equity: who participates? Is representation of stakeholder interests equitable? Who decides? Who makes the selection rules?

Procedural rules: how are decisions made in the partnership? What rules are applied to decision-making? Who makes up the rules?

Costs and benefits: who benefits from the partnership? What types of benefits have been distributed? Is distribution equitable? Who bears the costs? Who finances the partnership? Are there unintended costs?

Stability of partnerships: how stable is the partnership? What determines stability or instability? Who/what is instrumental in ensuring the stability of the partnership?

Degree of formalization: to what extent has the partnership been 'formalized' i.e. have partners agreed to sign a written contract, create a secretariat, etc?

Results: do partnerships define verifiable results? Do partnerships use milestones? How do partnerships monitor results?

5.4. Learning platforms:

If the experience gained in partnership initiatives is not evaluated or if the lessons learned are not made accessible to others, learning becomes a matter of coincidence. If, on the other hand, learning is organized systematically, it is a powerful sustainability tool. This is especially true if it is accepted that partnerships hold the promise of innovation. Innovation means being able to deviate from existing rules and therefore everybody involved in a partnership must in a sense unlearn the past and to start from scratch. In situations like this, it is of the utmost importance to develop useful patterns and discover what works and what doesn't. If this is not the case, the ultimate goal of innovation -to set new standards and to enable projects to be replicated and scaled up- cannot be achieved.

At the partnership level, learning does not depend on the number of courses followed or the extent to which training is provided. Much more important is the joint effort of all stakeholders in a partnership to learn from each other, to reward diversity and be flexible. To improve their learning curve, partnerships can organize consultations on a regular basis. This type of dialogue enables discussion, evaluation and lessons to be learned from activities implemented in the framework of the partnerships' vision and strategy, and helps to address and overcome barriers faced in the implementation of partnerships.

In an infrastructure for learning, individual partnerships represent one end of the spectrum, while the global CSD forum serves as a focal point for all partnerships and linked to the WSSD Plan of Implementation represents the opposite end. Whereas the CSD will have to design the mechanisms for monitoring, evaluation and learning, individual partnership will have to apply

these mechanisms. The gap between the practice of partnerships and the political language of globally agreed policies, however, is rather large. Partnerships are decentralized and fragmented by nature, whereas international organizations like the UN are centralized. Tying partnerships into the international sustainability agenda is not an easy task. Although an international organization like the CSD can act as a focal point for partnerships and provide a coordinating framework, this is in itself not a guarantee for making partnerships and binding commitments complementary. Therefore we suggest creating additional layers that mediate between individual local partnership experience and global UN coordination and 'language'. This can be done by creating learning platforms for specific partnership groupings linked to and feeding national as well as international policies. This leads to the following infrastructure:

- **global level:**

In the UN Secretary-General's report on the follow-up to the WSSD and the future role of the CSD, it is stressed that the CSD should become "a dynamic forum in which governments, international institutions, major groups and all other practitioners and stakeholders can share their knowledge, opinions and operational experience. Thus, in addition to negotiated decisions and policy recommendations, it will also be a source of information on good practices and lessons learned".²⁶ These intentions reflect a tendency towards a more participatory approach, integrating those acting outside the intergovernmental system.

In addition, the Secretary-General's report proposes clarifying a number of issues relating to partnerships, such as the applicability of the guiding principles, reporting mechanisms, interaction with processes and funding issues at a national level. Although emphasizing the role of CSD as a global partnership facilitator, the report is less clear about how partnership outcomes are to be tied into the intergovernmental sustainability agenda. Maybe this is because the issue of linkage between voluntary partnerships and binding commitments needs to be addressed in other UN forums or at a national level. This is one of the reasons to suggest the creation of intermediate layers between individual partnerships and the CSD. These can bring together partnerships clustered around themes; clustered on a national basis or clustered on the level of a limited number of countries.

- **thematic level**

The WSSD has identified five key areas for action -water and sanitation, energy, health, agriculture, and biodiversity and ecosystem management- referred to as the WEHAB initiative. Many partnerships focus on one of these WEHAB-themes. Strong arguments exist to combine partnerships dealing with the same issue and to institutionally link such group of partnerships with the (inter)governmental and/or international institutions dealing with these issues.

²⁶ UN Economic and Social Council; Follow-up to the World Summit on Sustainable Development and the future role of the Commission on Sustainable Development: the implementation track. Report of the Secretary-General. February 2003; page 11.

The outcomes of partnerships dealing with biodiversity, for example, would then be tied in to the agenda of the Conference of Parties (CoP) of the Convention on Biological Diversity. These partnerships could have a regular exchange of viewpoints and experiences that could be organized as an official part of the Conference of Parties and they could also be given the opportunity to present a joint statement at the official conference, linking their experience with the issues at stake at that CoP. The SDA instrument of pre-consultations sets an example of how this can be done.

Creating cross-references like this at a thematic level could be the first step towards the “global issues networks” as proposed by Rischar. Global issue networks have a mixed composition of stakeholders that work under the auspices of UN bodies and guarantee that each important issue is assigned its own solution-oriented institution. According to Rischar such networks have the advantage of working more quickly towards the objective of formulating norms and standards that can be used to influence the reputations of companies or countries both positively and negatively ('name and shame').²⁷

• **national level:**

Partnerships are supposed to contribute to sustainable development. The direct and/or indirect contribution will -to a large extent- depend on the relevance of partnerships to national level policies or planning for sustainable development. Thus a partnership could help implement specific policy targets (for instance the introduction of renewable energy in rural areas), influence policies or influence the understanding of sustainable development amongst the public and policy-makers.

With an increasing number and diversity of partnerships being implemented, one might consider establishing national focal points. This type of 'clearinghouse' could:

- monitor progress, organize consultations, learn lessons and identify best practices from different partnerships implemented by stakeholders from the respective country.
- organize dialogue between these stakeholders and policymakers on a regular basis.

A 'clearinghouse' will enable learning to be more systematically and could (gradually) become an official and integral part of Action Programmes to implement NSSDs. This would contribute to the status and acknowledgement of partnerships and put them in a wider national policy framework. Furthermore, the clearinghouse can act as a mediator by informing and updating the CSD about the work in progress.

²⁷ J.F.Rischar; High Noon – twenty global problems, twenty years to solve them. 2002; page 179 (Dutch edition).

- **The level of a small group of countries:**

After the Johannesburg Summit, one might ask what 180 National Strategies for Sustainable Development formulated by 180 countries can contribute to international policy with regard to sustainable development. “What matters now”, according to the Dutch Scientific Council for Government Policy (WRR), “is to transform the problem of decision-making in a large group -which may lead to free-riding and parasitic behaviour- to a collection of smaller groups, in which countries can exert sufficient social control on each other to enforce real steps forward. One might think about concrete agreements between countries to cooperate, monitor each other’s progress, and so on. ‘Jumelages’ (for example, four countries from different continents) or twinnings (for example, a developed and a developing country) can be composed on the basis of a common predominant problem, interest or joint characteristic. Under such circumstances, countries have ‘something to tell to each other’ and there is a greater chance of generating mutual learning possessions.”²⁸ This idea, which has a number of similarities to the SDAs and re-introduces an element of reciprocity, can also be linked with the partnership approach.

²⁸ (Dutch) Scientific Council for Government Policy (WRR); Duurzame Ontwikkeling – bestuurlijke voorwaarden voor een mobiliserend beleid. The Hague; 2002, page 55/56.

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