



Sustainable Development

ROUND TABLE ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Responding to the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation

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This document is a background paper for the Round Table on Sustainable Development meeting which has as its theme "International Governance for Sustainable Development". The meeting will take place at OECD Headquarters, 2, rue André Pascal, 75016 Paris on 27th March 2002, starting at 9.30.

The views expressed in this paper do not necessarily represent those of the OECD or any of its Member countries.

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Introduction¹

At the outset it is necessary to make two points about the purpose of this brief paper.

In the first place, *it is designed to stimulate discussion* on how the commitments and goals adopted at the Johannesburg World Summit might be implemented. It carries no burden of official status and makes no claim to being a comprehensive discussion of the extraordinarily wide array of issues canvassed in the *Plan of Implementation*. It deliberately avoids a polite or ‘diplomatic’ presentation of the terrain. It is nothing more than a frank, personal assessment prepared in the hope that equally frank – and no doubt contrasting – views will be brought to the Round Table on March 26th and 27th.

Secondly, *it is largely directed towards the role of governments*. That is not because governments are the only – or even the pre-eminent – players in the aftermath of the World Summit. Rather, it is because in the eyes of many it was inter-governmental negotiations that were the least satisfactory part of the Summit. Johannesburg was in effect two huge events.

One was a large, vibrant assembly of very different players who – through their dialogues, seminars, information exchanges and partnership building – provided living evidence of the hugely creative forces unleashed over the decade since the Rio Summit. The active engagement of businesses, local communities, NGOs and others in elements of the Rio agenda was clear to everyone and the momentum that had been built up appeared unstoppable. If sustainable development has an assured future as an ethic for action, it will be because so many people are thinking creatively about development and environmental protection.

Also on display, but rather less reassuring, was the round of inter-governmental negotiation that led to the *Plan of Implementation*. That such a massive text spanning such a wide array of subjects was concluded is a tribute to the dedication of the officials and ministers who laboured to produce it. But whether it is regarded – outside of governmental circles – as the road map forwards that its authors intended it to be is a moot point. Where negotiators may have felt relief in reaching closure on forms of words, many observers could not help setting those words against the partial or non-performance of pre-existing commitments. Crucially, many question whether this approach to catalysing action by governments has not run its course.

This paper surveys briefly the circumstances in which post-Summit implementation takes place, the credibility of the commitments that have been made and some of the ways in which focus and momentum might be given to tackling the many issues that remain outstanding.

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What changed between Rio and Johannesburg?

The orderly sequence of meetings that international processes set up can give a misleading sense of continuity to global affairs. The decade between Rio and Johannesburg, viewed through the lens of formal engagements is a case in point. The Commission on Sustainable Development, set up at Rio to monitor progress, met annually.¹ A significant stock-taking was undertaken at the half-way point – Rio+5 – and renewed focus provided by the decadal summit in Johannesburg.² Realising that a restatement of declarations would fall short of expectations, Johannesburg was cast as an implementation summit.

Added to the rhythm of the CSD's work were a series of other global initiatives that intersected with the sustainable development agenda: the Millennium Assembly with its Millennium Development Goals, the launch of a new trade round at Doha and the Conference on Financing for Development. Each of these was able to be presented as providing additional momentum to the sorts of ambitions outlined at Rio a decade earlier. If one looked solely at the level and scope of diplomatic activity, the verdict would be one of a deepening agenda and growing engagement.

The assessment of many of those who have been involved in the debates of the last decade is much more mixed. Whatever the progress that has been made on many fronts, there is a widespread view that if the rate of progress over the next 10 years matches that of the last 10, then the political declarations of both summits will have been seen to be either unrealistic or insincere – or, worse, both. To ensure that we commence the next decade on a realistic basis, it may be useful to sketch the ways in which the world we inhabit today is rather different from that of ten years ago.

The Rio Conference was held at an extraordinarily optimistic juncture. Notwithstanding the environmental concerns that commanded popular concern at the time, it coincided with a brief period of euphoria that followed the end of the Cold War, the disintegration of the apartheid regime and many other once-in-a-generation shifts in international and regional alignments. The removal of a series of geo-political divisions together with the enhanced financial integration of the global economy and the prospect (subsequently realised in 1994) of a conclusion to the Uruguay Trade Round gave substance to the idea that from here on globalisation would increasingly demand global solutions.

The successfully multi-lateral response to the invasion of Kuwait raised the possibility of a different approach to global security. The end of east-west hostility offered the prospect of significant fiscal peace dividends coupled with disarmament. Environmentally, the success of the treaty on ozone depleting substances emboldened much more ambitious treaty-based efforts in respect of greenhouse gases, biodiversity and over-fishing. Public opinion seemed largely ready to embrace the advocacy of NGOs uncritically. There was a sense that this was a brave new world – or as the former Brazilian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Celso Laffer, described it, a 'Kantian moment'.

On the other hand, the development imperatives voiced at Rio – in large part by poorer countries reacting to the environmental agendas of rich northern countries – were only uneasily bolted onto the sustainable development agenda. Common but differentiated responsibilities and unfettered rights to development may have provided a verbal bridge between North and South but very different perspectives and priorities remained. That said, the Rio Conference was entitled the UN Conference on Environment and Development and, as such, had an ambitious but coherent focus on the biosphere, the human sphere and the relationship between them. (The subsequent elaboration of a 'three pillars' approach to sustainable development - economic, social and environmental – has not necessarily added clarity to the essential elements of the agenda identified at the 1992 summit).

Rio was also, in large part, a conference dominated by governments urged on by NGOs. The serious engagement of the business community was only in its infancy. A decade later, through the activity of a number of business coalitions like the World Business Council on Sustainable Development, the expansion of emerging fields of commercial activity such as ethical investment funds and embryonic emissions trading markets, the business profile at Johannesburg was much higher. In some respects, businesses have found it easier to give practical shape to elements of the sustainable development agenda (especially in social and cultural fields) than governments, though the extent to which this is a change of image as distinct from a fundamental change of philosophy is still being debated.

Notwithstanding this, where consumer demand has been unambiguous, commercial responsiveness has led to the establishment of some powerful initiatives to favour sustainable production regimes. The Marine Stewardship Council, for instance, has developed a labelling programme for sustainable fisheries. Consumers concerned about over-fishing and its environmental and social consequences will increasingly be able to choose seafood products which have been independently assessed against the MSC Standard and labelled to prove it.³

On the other hand, such activities tend to be focussed on very large, well-resourced global companies while most business activity is in the hands of small to medium scale enterprises and, particularly in developing countries, state-owned enterprises. Thus, the high profile of some of these initiatives, showcased at Johannesburg, is not proportionate to their global impact. In addition, the attitude of even leading companies to government intervention is often ambiguous. While stressing the need for good global governance, businesses are, perhaps understandably, reluctant to endorse new regulations even if they would force their competitors to compete on a level playing field.

Inevitably, the euphoria of Rio was not sustained when it came to the arduous business of completing many of the negotiations commenced there. The slew of new treaties which Rio ushered in proved to be much more difficult to operationalise in the face of starkly opposed national interests. In some cases (such as the Kyoto Protocol) comprehensive engagement remains in doubt and the prospect of further elaboration limited. In other cases such as the Biosafety Protocol, agreement has only been reached through resort to solutions that divided parties interpret very differently. In other cases still (such as the FAO Compliance Agreement), the finalisation of negotiated texts has not led on to subsequent ratification and operationalisation.

As debate over a number of environmental treaties during the 1990s showed, most notably the Kyoto Protocol, significant hostility to many of Rio's goals remained alive. Indeed, one of the significant trends of the 1990s was an increasingly lively and sceptical debate about the relative seriousness of many environmental risks. A decade on from Rio, decision-makers found themselves, paradoxically, infinitely better informed from a scientific point of view but also much more acutely aware of the gaps in our knowledge of many natural (and social) phenomena.

On the economic front, the intervening decade also demolished some of the more millennial hopes held for a world order underpinned by effortlessly expanding prosperity. A strong economic upswing on the back of declining energy prices yielded much healthier fiscal balances for many OECD governments. But neither this stimulus, nor the peace dividends that were taken, flowed into the sort of development assistance that Rio had envisaged. Indeed, the Zedillo Report on Financing for Development, which prepared the ground for the 2002 Monterrey Conference on Financing for Development, concluded that the 1969 Pearson target for ODA (0.7 percent of gross national income) is one on which the 22 OECD DAC members have essentially reneged for nearly 30 years.⁴ It is hard to disagree. Only five of the DAC membership actually achieved the Pearson target in 2001.⁵

Counterbalancing this was a rapid growth in foreign direct investment following in the wake of widespread liberalisation policies.⁶ But the destination of private investment flows followed a completely different pattern from the official flows mandated during the Cold War era. The result was dynamic economic growth in some regions (notably Asia and parts of Latin America) alongside the near collapse of others (notably in Africa and in some states formerly belonging to the Soviet Union).⁷ This is explained by the fact that while the overall FDI figures are large, a small number of developing countries are attracting the lion's share of investment. Seventy-five percent of all global FDI flows go to developed countries, the remaining 25 percent is unevenly spread, with relatively little trickling down to the least developed economies. Ten middle-income developing countries, for instance, accounted for nearly 80 percent of all FDI received by developing countries in the past decade. China alone has swallowed up US\$321 billion or 45 percent of all of the investment flowing to the Asian region since 1990. The entire African continent, on the other hand, receives barely 1 percent of global flows.⁸

The decade ended with a more genuinely globalised world economy but one in which confidence in developing and developed countries has been significantly eroded by:

- The human impact and costs of HIV/AIDS, particularly in Africa;
- The catastrophic consequences of financial instability experienced by a number of developing countries and countries in transition;
- A loss of confidence in corporate probity globally as a result of fraud and inadequate supervision leading to the collapse of some major global scale companies;
- A loss of momentum on trade liberalisation caused in part by the on-going contradictory resort to protection and subsidies by developed countries. While it is true that the Trade Round launched at Doha broached some of the key sustainability issues in the context of fresh liberalisation, many hurdles stand in the way of a successful conclusion. Grave divisions remain, for instance, on issues like public health and the treatment of agriculture.

The more sombre economic outlook was matched by a more sober appraisal of the significant risks posed by:

- Dysfunctional states as a home to terrorism with a global reach;
- The risk to stability posed by on-going, unresolved conflict in places like Palestine and Chechnya.

In summary then the Johannesburg World Summit was held, not surprisingly, in a much less euphoric climate. Very simply, the scope and rationale for multi-lateral action on many elements of the sustainable development agenda had changed. And where they had not changed (on issues such as climate change) the negotiating difficulties made progress seem a much more tenuous thing to expect. For that reason, it would be a grave mistake to assume that the road beyond Johannesburg involves business as usual under a familiar agenda when the reasons governments might be persuaded to intervene (along with the preoccupations of their populations) have altered significantly.

The Present State of Engagement

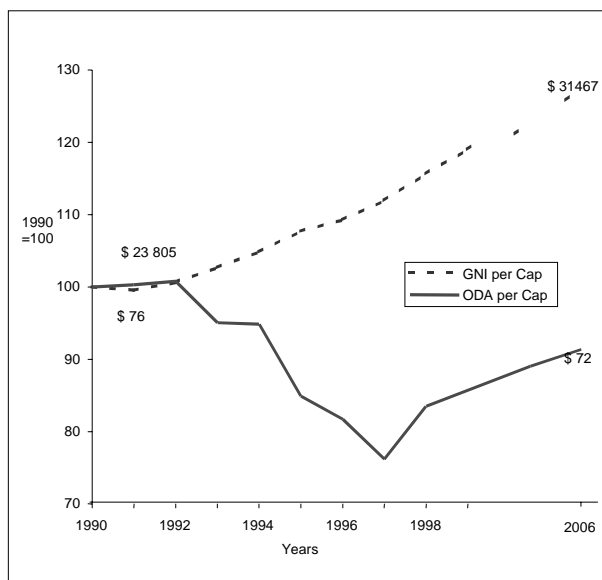
The signals for the sustainable development agenda in this very different environment are thus mixed. Two discrete issues are worth commenting on at slightly greater length: the outlook for development assistance, and the outlook for sustaining the global environment.

The outlook for development assistance

On the one hand, an appreciation of the costs that failing states can impose has seen the decline in official development assistance halted and real increases foreshadowed. Figure 1 below shows the gradual upturn in ODA flows, but notes the continued gap between the growth of per capita incomes and overall ODA flows.

This tentative upturn is consistent with the significant shift in emphasis apparent at Johannesburg from the environmental to the development pole of the debate. Nevertheless, if the insistence by developing countries that development was a necessary pre-condition for their engagement on many environmental issues failed to make much impression on developed country attitudes, the costs of economic and social failure have clearly registered.

Figure 1 Relationship between OECD Member per capita Income and per capita ODA Outflows Projected to 2006⁹



Notwithstanding a strongly self-interested strand to the reawakening of donor commitment, it is noteworthy that the worst practices of Cold War chequebook diplomacy have not been perpetuated. The continuing ‘untying’ of aid and an increasing concern with the quality of governance and outcomes mean that the promotion of sustainable development through official assistance takes place in a more promising climate than previously.

To this can be added some potentially useful initiatives by developing countries to reform their own institutions and focus on monitoring and peer-group appraisal as a means of attracting donor country support and maximising the value of assistance grants. The NEPAD initiative is a case in point, although it is still too early to judge its likely effectiveness.

The global environment

Rio was dominated by new environmental treaties. There were no proposals for new treaties at Johannesburg. This was in part a reflection of the fact that a large number of existing treaties remain either incomplete, not in force or poorly subscribed to. It was also a reflection of the fact that environmental concerns have a lower profile in an uncertain economic and security climate. But it also underlines a significant shift in the focus of activity since Rio.

It has become increasingly clear that large-scale, multi-lateral engagements – in the absence of an immediately perceived threat such as that posed by the thinning of the ozone layer - are slow and often disappointing ways of making progress. Not surprisingly, the decade since Rio has seen a proliferation in so-called ‘soft law’ as a way of trying to raise standards and improve practices without resort to regulatory means and so-called ‘type two’ initiatives embracing a wide variety of public private partnerships. Examples of ‘soft law’ include the various voluntary action plans that now exist, such as the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (1995),¹⁰ the Memorandum of Understanding on the Conservation and Management of Marine Turtles and Their Habitats of the Indian Ocean and South-East Asia (2000),¹¹ the Cartagena Protocol on Biodiversity (2000),¹² the International Undertaking on Plant Genetic Resources (2001),¹³ and so on.

‘Type two’ initiatives¹⁴ cover a huge range of activity from projects like the Network of People and their Representatives for Action on Atmospheric Issues¹⁵, the Bicycle Refurbishing Initiative¹⁶, the Cement Sustainability Initiative¹⁷ through to full scale development projects like the Chagas Disease Vector Control Initiative¹⁸ and the International AIDS Education and Training Program.¹⁹

At one level, these initiatives represent a refreshing decision to substitute action for negotiation. There is frequently a sense that the partners believe that learning by doing will yield as much if not more than trying to build new rules and institutions. At another level, however, they are a tacit admission that the international community has failed to agree on many boundary conditions that would give sustainability a definitive content against which trends can be measured.

There are two limitations on the potential for such initiatives to benefit the global environment. First, while significant improvements in eco-efficiency can result from a wide range of partnership activities, there is nothing to stop the absolute growth of a variety of emissions from imposing increasingly heavy environmental burdens. Secondly, while the positive demonstration effects of many voluntary initiatives undoubtedly influence attitudes (and indirectly support the work of regulators), non-participants remain free to undercut these activities.

In short, non-rule based environmental protection provides no guarantee that overall environmental burdens will be limited or that environmentally damaging practices will not be simply displaced (possibly across national borders) and/or allowed to undercut good practices.

How Credible Is The Johannesburg Implementation Plan?

The *Plan of Implementation* negotiated at Johannesburg does not exist in isolation. It has, inevitably, to be read alongside pre-existing commitments made by governments and the extent to which they have been honoured. It is a fair question to ask whether this plan represents an improvement on previous efforts, whether it stands a better chance of being implemented and whether it provides a clear way forward. There are at least three problems with it.

In the first place, the *Plan* devotes much of its length to reiterating previously elaborated goals and urging the ratification and implementation of previously negotiated treaties. The reader is left wondering what has been added to an already extensive agenda that still falls short of successful implementation. The point may be illustrated by way of reference to the paragraphs that relate to the oceans and fishing (paragraphs 29 – 34). Here is an issue that unambiguously calls for global action given the extent to which many areas of ocean management lie beyond the jurisdiction of a single country. The *Plan* promotes, *inter alia*, the following:

- Ratification and implementation of UNCLOS
- Implementation of chapter 17 of Agenda 21
- Establishment of an inter-agency co-ordination mechanism on oceans and coastal issues within the UN
- Ratification and implementation of regional fisheries agreements and in particular the Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks Agreement and the 1993 Compliance Agreement
- Implementation of the 1995 Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries
- Implementation of the FAO International Plans of Action on managing fishing capacity and on illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing.
- Implementation of the work programme arising from the Jakarta Mandate on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine and Coastal Diversity of the CBD
- Implementation of the RAMSAR Convention and the programme of action called for by the International Coral Reef Initiative
- Implementation of the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities
- Implementation of the Montreal Declaration on the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-Based Activities
- Ratification and implementation of relevant IMO conventions and protocols relating to the protection of the marine environment
- Finalisation of an IMO Convention on the Control and Management of Ships' Ballast Water and Sediments

This (by no means exhaustive) list of formal inter-governmental encounters on oceans issues is supplemented by an even larger list of suggestions for improving human capacity, scientific knowledge, co-operation and co-ordination. Extremely general recommendations such as that calling for the support of “the sustainable development of aquaculture” or the development of “national, regional and international programmes for halting the loss of marine biodiversity” give the impression that there was a desire to leave nothing out. A similar approach pervades many parts of the *Plan*. It can fairly be asked whether Ministers have actually secured an implementation plan at all.

This leads to the second problem – a distinct lack of evidence that there is demonstrated political will, based on hard analysis, to deliver the (relatively) small number of new time-bound, quantified targets that the *Plan* actually contains. The goal that probably achieved the greatest media prominence (on account of its sheer ambition) was the call to “[h]alve, by the year 2015, the proportion of the world’s people whose income is less than \$1 a day and the proportion of people who suffer from hunger and, by the same date, to halve the proportion of people without access to safe drinking water.”

The *Plan* does not go much beyond calling for “concerted and concrete measures at all levels” in describing how this will be achieved. The realities have, understandably, been left to other forums to elaborate. But the wisdom of goals like this one, particularly when they are set alongside others that are almost as ambitious, must be questioned when the Chairman of the World Panel on Financing Water Infrastructure is reported as saying, simply in respect of the water and sanitation pledge: “It is extremely ambitious. The numbers were not in the minds of many people at Johannesburg. Even if you worked

every day, seven days a week, for 13 years, you would still need to bring sanitation to over 400,000 people a day”.²⁰

There is nothing in principle wrong with ambitious or ‘aspirational’ targets. But if they continue to be added in the absence of indications that the resources and will to achieve them will be forthcoming they can induce a sense of weariness and cynicism, especially when (as in the case of *all* WSSD goals) they are non-binding. In the end words are cheap as developing countries know only too well given the history of ODA targets since the Pearson Commission Report in 1969 called on industrialised countries to provide development assistance at a level matching 0.7% of their GNI. That goal remains further from implementation today than it was in the year of the Rio Summit. In 1992, ODA amounted to \$60.8 billion or 0.31% of GNI.²¹ Nearly a decade later in 2001 the same figure (in adjusted dollars) had fallen to US\$52.3 billion or 0.22% of GNI.²² Nevertheless, the Pearson target was solemnly reaffirmed at Johannesburg.

There is an ominous gap between promise and prospective performance, then, when the Panel on Financing Water Infrastructure calls for a doubling of aid for water investment and the Director General of UNESCO identifies political inertia as one reason for inadequate investment.²³ At least there are some grounds for confidence that the Panel will have the expertise to quantify the nature of the challenge and expose the international agencies and donor governments to the consequences of their words. Other goals have less obvious champions. The fisheries goal of maintaining or restoring depleted fish stocks to levels that can produce the maximum sustainable yield by no later than 2015 has the undoubted support of the FAO. But the sheer scale of this goal in a world where stock assessment science is often far from robust, subsidies for commercial fishing persist and enforcement of many existing treaties is often non-existent raise again the wisdom of promoting as progress a non-binding goal whose practical consequences are poorly understood.

This brings us to the third problem – the lack of priorities spelt out in the *Plan*. The section on fisheries detailed above is mirrored across the breadth of the document encompassing as it does everything from climate, agriculture, mountain ecosystems, biodiversity, and forests to health, small island states and energy consumption. The *Plan* consciously seeks to cover the full gamut of issues raised under the sustainable development umbrella. This is, in part, a natural outcome of *Agenda 21* and indeed the whole ethic of sustainable development which seeks to be an *integrative* analytical framework. This has undoubtedly been sustainable development’s big success over the last decade, causing all manner of parties to consider issues in the round and break down policy silos that have in the past pursued narrowly sectoral outcomes without regard for impacts further afield.

But this can also be an Achilles’ heel if, in the absence of a rigorous sense of priorities and trade-offs, it leads to the advocacy of everything on the basis that nothing can be set to one side. If implementation is the goal, trade-offs do have to be made and priorities established. This is what is lacking in the *Implementation Plan*. Its problem lies not in its comprehensiveness, which is admirable. Rather it lies in its failure to give a clear sense of priorities against which progress – or lack of it – can be measured.

While there must be literally scores of recommendations calling for enhanced co-operation and co-ordination, there is frequently no sense of how this is to be achieved. The word ‘integration’ achieves the status of a *leitmotif* almost as if saying the word will achieve the goal. But at the end of day, those charged with making sense of the *Implementation Plan* will, at whatever level, have to choose. They will have to assign priorities and to do so they will need a much clearer idea of where the critical points of leverage lie.

This is important not just in terms of technical implementation but in terms of popular support for many of the vital issues at stake. Ministers need a clear sense of the priorities if they are to make the case for determined actions. And the public at large needs to be able to understand the key priorities if they are to

support those actions and sustain political will for their implementation. Without this sort of focus, the post-Johannesburg process risks being a muddled business in which countries choose to expend scarce resources opportunistically.

Preparations for Johannesburg forced many governments to think about the cross-cutting nature of many of the issues on the sustainable development agenda. But whether even that will be sustained must be questioned. Significantly, in 17 of the 21 OECD countries who responded to a survey conducted by the Round Table, ministerial responsibility for follow-up and implementation of WSSD has been handed back to the Environment Minister.²⁴ Given the huge economic, fiscal, foreign policy and developmental issues at stake, one would have to question whether this augurs well for mobilising resources on the scale that is implicit (if not explicit) in the *Plan*.

In summary, the *Implementation Plan* does justice to the wide range of issues on the international sustainable development agenda. But it fails to spell out priorities, specify the points of maximum leverage and give a sense of why the many actions urged are practically conceived and likely to be delivered. The balance of this paper discusses how the necessary political will and popular support needed to breathe new urgency into the sustainable development agenda over the decade beyond Johannesburg might be generated.

Coalitions of the Willing in Support of Multilateralism

The post-Johannesburg goal should be to re-ignite *political will* and *popular support* for policies and actions that support a more sustainable approach to development. Since political commitment will always be most durable if it can draw on popular support, the way in which future action is conceived and explained is truly important – not just a mere presentational issue. Three requirements suggest themselves:

Priorities

From the mass of proposed actions across the wide range of topics covered in the *Plan of Implementation* there is a need to distil clear and compelling priorities. This should not be so difficult – and it certainly does not have to be the subject of interminable negotiation. The existing Millennium Goals, which the Plan of Implementation re-affirmed, provide as good a guide to the development priorities facing the world as we are likely to get. To these it should not be difficult to graft some of the priorities that, while still impinging on development issues, raise more environmentally-related concerns about biophysical sustainability. A short list of issues of truly global reach (and which are incapable of progress without genuinely multi-lateral engagement) would cover climate and other atmospheric issues, the oceans and fishing, and biodiversity. An equally important, though different type of issue to add might focus on the evolving approach to governance of the global commons.

Leading from the front

There is a need for leadership which is prepared to endorse the best solutions that the most committed players believe to be achievable rather than the solutions that the least engaged players will sign up to. For those committed to solid multi-lateral engagement this may be disquieting. But there is no reason why countries prepared to take a lead should not do so in a way that can demonstrate a way forward that can win wider acceptance and support broader multi-lateral initiatives. One of the reasons many members of the public are disillusioned with governmental initiatives is that they seem to be so cumbersome and so lacking in urgency. There is something to be said for seeking concrete, binding commitments from a partnership that is prepared to attempt to solve a part of the problem than relying only on non-binding expressions of support for sweeping outcomes that stand little practical chance of implementation.

Political leadership

There is no substitute for the active engagement of political leaders. Both national and international bureaucracies are obviously essential for implementing policies over time. But without clear political leadership, they lack the legitimacy that is essential to sustain public support. There is a real need to demonstrate that multi-lateral attempts at problem solving are not processes run by an auto-pilot that is ultimately beyond the control of anyone. Too often, political leaders are tempted to avoid responsibility for the disappointments of multi-lateral efforts by pointing to unsatisfactory processes that, in the end, were always designed to leave open the possibility of inaction.

How then to galvanise real leadership behind achievable initiatives that respond to the widely understood priorities on the sustainable development agenda? One of the answers may lie in the report of the Secretary-General of the United Nations entitled *Follow-up to Johannesburg and the Future Role of the CSD – The Implementation Track*.

The Secretary-General's report usefully elaborates on the ways in which the CSD can transform itself into "a dynamic forum where governments, international institutions, major groups and all other practitioners and stakeholders can share their knowledge, opinions and operational experience". The report, following the Johannesburg *Plan of Implementation*, proposes to supplement the 'negotiating' role of the CSD with a more investigative 'review' cycle every other year. In support of this, the Secretary-General noted:

"During the WSSD process, a number of proposals were made regarding the creation of issue-bound time-bound Sub-Commissions or Task Forces involving a limited number of representatives of countries, international institutions and major groups to provide inputs to the CSD. Such Sub-Commissions or Task Forces, if initiated and funded by interested parties, could make valuable inputs to the work of the Commission and raise the profile of sustainable development issues in the public eye."²⁵

In common with the sentiments expressed in this paper, the Secretary-General stresses the crucial importance of ministerial engagement. In support of this thrust he states:

"To improve policy coherence, consistency and integration, countries could encourage and facilitate national consultations among Ministers on international aspects of sustainable development under debate in the various intergovernmental and treaty bodies dealing with specific dimensions of sustainable development, including CSD. Another possibility could be for interested governments to organize inter-sessional meetings or processes involving relevant Ministers from other interested countries together with leaders of international organizations and major groups, to generate innovative ideas or policy approaches to address specific issues on the CSD agenda."²⁶

The thrust of these suggestions is potentially well aligned with the three requirements of prioritisation, policy leadership and political leadership proposed above.²⁷ To work, such Task Forces would have to be highly focussed on an issue that is agreed to touch on a pressing priority. It would also have to be set up in such a way that it avoided any risk of being a talk-shop that led nowhere. The only defensible activity at this stage is going to be one that leads, on account of the commitment of the participants, to action at the conclusion.

It might reasonably be asked what would stop such Task Forces simply traversing ground that has already been covered many times? In responding, it is important to understand that underlying many of the key issues apparently agreed at Johannesburg, there often remain profound differences that have, for the sake of a negotiated consensus, been set aside. These are hidden beneath conditionally framed undertakings –

“...where appropriate...make every effort...encourage ... invite...” – that enable any country to claim that it has honoured its commitments whilst leaving room for a wide variety of responses. The reality is that the desire to reach agreement often allows form to triumph over substance when in truth, different countries share, for good reasons, quite different priorities.

It may be more realistic for ‘coalitions of the willing’ to explore issues in a way that can lead them to build partnerships for action that can in turn win new adherents by example. This need not compete with, or worse undermine, multi-lateral processes such as the CSD if, as the Secretary-General has proposed, Task Forces explicitly agree to use the CSD as a forum to test conclusions and comment on their implementation strategies.

How might such coalitions be established and what would they look like? To be credible there would need to be several such groupings that clearly took responsibility for opening up some of the hard issues identified in the Johannesburg *Plan of Implementation* that are not already the subject of coherent international action. There could be several Task Forces working at the same time. They would need the following ingredients to be effective and keep faith with the *Plan of Implementation*:

- A direct and explicit link to an objective, preferably a target, contained in the Plan of Implementation;
- A group of Ministers representing a range of portfolios from both developed and developing countries with current and active engagement on the issue at stake;
- Representatives at the most senior level from relevant intergovernmental organisations, businesses and NGOs;
- A small, highly competent, technical secretariat retained for a limited period (say 18 months to 2 years) and charged with fashioning a coherent, readable set of conclusions that would aim to be *the* international point of reference for the immediate future;
- Funding from as many interested parties as possible to minimise the risks of ‘capture’;
- A determination on the part of Ministers to be champions/advocates for the resulting analysis.

In a world of electronic communication there is no reason why Ministerial (and other) engagement should not be at least in part achieved by means of video-conferencing. Significant effort should, however, be put into seeking the widest possible input from all stakeholders with the knowledge and experience to add real insight wherever they may live. So the Task Forces would need to be mobile. The strictly time-limited nature of their mandates would be a powerful incentive to focus on the most important issues and remove the temptation to build new, permanent institutions.

Care taken to assemble very high quality teams on carefully chosen subjects could lead to the formation of some partnerships between governments and others that become, in effect, coalitions for action with a sense of political ‘ownership’ and real claims to legitimacy. The advantage of such an approach is that the policy outcomes of the Task Force reports will be tested at a political level but with technical and civil society input. Most significantly perhaps, by securing a group of politicians prepared to act as a “Coalition of the Willing” type group, the Task Force would have an in-built support network at the highest political level. This could generate political momentum behind, and commitment to, the Task Force’s recommendations. The Ministers involved could, for instance, help steer the recommendations through the UNCSO, ECOSOC, other inter-governmental institutions and international meetings relevant to the issue being examined. In this way the prospects for meaningful implementation may be enhanced.

And there is an added benefit. If the wider public were able to see some of their leaders directly involved in tackling some of the difficult, high-priority issues on the Johannesburg agenda, they might be more inclined to provide the sustained support that will be necessary to find the resources and commitment to achieve a break-through.

The question is not one of trying to invent a whole new process or to compete with existing arrangements. Rather, it is about finding a way of moving forward on several fronts in a way which supports the multilateral process. Such approaches should leave no stone un-turned in the search for generating more momentum and enthusiasm for an agenda which, notwithstanding its ambitions, has proved much harder to implement than to describe. The Round Table you are about to attend will be an opportunity to reflect on what each of us can do to better mobilise new and existing resources behind development that is both humanly and bio-physically sustainable.

END NOTES

¹ Agenda 21 and the Rio Declaration are available at: <http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/agenda21.htm> and <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/conf151/aconf15126-1annex1.htm>. The Plan of Implementation agreed at WSSD is at: http://www.johannesburgsummit.org/html/documents/summit_docs/2309_planfinal.htm

² The full reports of the CSD and the Rio outcomes can be accessed via <http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/csdpast.htm>

³ More information about the MSC is available at <http://www.msc.org/> Other examples include the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) (<http://www.fscoax.org/>), the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM) (<http://www.ifoam.org/>) and the International Social and Environmental Accreditation and Labelling (ISEAL) Alliance (<http://www.isealalliance.org/>).

⁴ High Level Panel on Financing for Development (2001) *High Level Panel Report on Financing for Development*, United Nations, New York, June.

⁵ Denmark, Luxembourg, Norway, the Netherlands and Sweden were the only countries to meet the 0.7 percent target in 2001

⁶ See for instance, UNCTAD (1999) *Foreign Direct Investment and the Challenge of Development*, United Nations, New York and the seminal analysis by Barro, R.J. and X., Sala-i-Martin (1995) *Economic Growth*, New York, McGraw Hill.

⁷ World Bank (2000) *Global Development Finance*, World Bank, Washington and UNCTAD (ibid)

⁸ UNCTAD (ibid).

⁹ This graph taken from SG/SD (2002)3/ANN1 has been substantively updated by the author to take into account the announcements in Monterey, the latest DAC Statistics (2001) and projections of world economy growth described in IMF (2002) *World Economic Outlook*, IMF, Washington (and available at <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2002/01/index.htm>).

¹⁰ The FAO Code of Conduct can be accessed at: <http://www.fao.org/fi/agreem/codecond/ficonde.asp>

¹¹ More information about this Memorandum of Understanding is at: <http://eelink.net/~asilwildlife/MOUIndian.PDF>

¹² The text of the Cartagena Protocol is available at <http://www.biodiv.org/biosafety/background.asp>

¹³ The text of this Undertaking is at <ftp://ext-ftp.fao.org/ag/cgrfa/it/ITPGRRe.pdf>. More information about this instance of 'soft law' is available at: <http://www.fao.org/ag/cgrfa/itpgr.htm#text>

¹⁴ A full list of the 'type two' initiatives and details about the guiding principles for these is available at: http://www.johannesburgsummit.org/html/sustainable_dev/partnership_initiatives.html

¹⁵ This project is a partnership between UNEP, the Consumer Unity & Trust Society (CUTS) and the South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics and Environment (SAWTEE), Katmandu. It aims, among other things to "increase awareness of legislators on relationship of production and consumption patterns with atmospheric problems". More information about the project is available at http://www.johannesburgsummit.org/html/sustainable_dev/p2_consumption/3009_network_people.pdf

¹⁶ This 'type two' initiative involves groups like Velomondial and Afribike, companies like Shimano, the national governments of the US, UK, Ireland, South Africa and the Netherlands, a number of local governments, as well as UNEP and the European Commission. The project seeks to develop a working model of bicycle refurbishment as a way of contributing to lowered CO2 emissions, improved health; better road safety and so on. More information

about this partnership is available at the following link http://www.johannesburgsummit.org/html/sustainable_dev/p2_consumption/afribikesubm1507.pdf

¹⁷ The Cement Sustainability Initiative is a partnership between the Government of Portugal, the World Business Council for Sustainable Development, WWF, the UN University and others. It aims to raise awareness among cement manufacturers about sustainability of production processes. More information about the Initiative is available at: http://www.johannesburgsummit.org/html/sustainable_dev/p2_managing_resources/1110_cement_sustainability.pdf

¹⁸ The Chagas Disease Control Initiative is a partnership between Japan, Guatemala and other Central American countries, as well as WHO. It aims to reduce the infection rate of Chagas disease. More details are available at: http://www.johannesburgsummit.org/html/sustainable_dev/p2_health/2508_chagasdisease.pdf

¹⁹ The International AIDS Education and Training Program is a partnership between the US Government, and a range of African and South East Asian countries the University of Washington, the University of California in San Francisco and numerous regional groups. The project is designed to raise awareness about AIDS and, in particular to provide training to HIV/AIDS care providers. More information is available at: http://www.johannesburgsummit.org/html/sustainable_dev/p2_health/1608_intl_aids__educ.pdf

²⁰ The Financial Times (2003) 6 March.

²¹ OECD (2003) *The DAC Journal: Development Co-operation 2002 Report*, OECD, Paris (forthcoming). See in particular OECD (2003) 2002 Development Cooperation Report, Part II: Donor Efforts (DCD/DAC(2003)10/PART2)

²² Idem.

²³ The Financial Times (ibid)

²⁴ On 30 January 2003, the Round Table asked all Delegations represented at the OECD the following question: “which Minister in your country has overall responsibility for sustainable development and, in particular, for the follow-up to WSSD?” Twenty-one responses (of a possible thirty) were received, with varying levels of detail.

²⁵ United Nations Secretary-General (2003) *Follow-up to Johannesburg and the Future Role of the CSD – The Implementation Track*, United Nations, New York, mimeograph, paragraph 45.

²⁶ Idem, paragraph 57 refers.

²⁷ It is worth specifically noting that the idea of time-bound, issue-oriented Task Forces is among a number of creative proposals advanced by the Stakeholder Forum in November 2002 (See in particular the paper by Felix Dodds, Rosalie Gardiner, David Hales, Minu Hemmati and Gary Lawrence (2002) *Post Johannesburg: The Future of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development*, WHAT Governance Programme (also available through the Stakeholder Forum website by following the ‘governance’ link through <http://www.stakeholderforum.org/>)). The same idea was floated in a background paper presented to the July 2002 Round Table on Sustainable Development meeting (paper available at: <http://www.oecd.org/pdf/M00032000/M00032103.pdf>)