

Background

The WSSD was the successor of United Nations Conference of Environment and Development (UNCED), popularly known as the Rio Earth Summit, held in 1992 in Brazil. UNCED was one of the most significant global environmental gatherings as world leaders recognised that co-operative global action is essential to halt environmental destruction and inequality. This conference acknowledged that economic and social progress depends on the states natural resources and therefore effective measures needed to be instituted to prevent environmental degradation. Rio produced a number of documents to chart the course of sustainable development. The Rio Earth Summit outcomes included the Rio Declaration, which contained a set of principles designed to commit governments to ensure environmental protection and responsible development, and Agenda 21, which was considered the “blueprint” of sustainable development strategies and multilateral environment agreements on biodiversity, desertification and climate change. Furthermore, developed countries committed 0.7% of their gross national product for official development assistance. Despite this altruistic agenda, achieving the commitments agreed in Rio came up against major global challenges. The basic weakness

of UNCED includes the lack of commitment to resolve structural problems, particularly in poorer countries, UNCEDs weak regulation and inability to discipline the behaviour of multinationals and the lack of commitment on sustainable consumption patterns (Khor, 1993). Equitable international relations and institutions and balanced ways of combining environment and economics in national policies were not agreed upon (Khor, 1993).

The Rio-plus-five summit, held in 1997 in New York revealed poor progress by governments in the implementation of Agenda. Five years later the WSSD took place to review countries’ achievements regarding the implementation of Agenda 21, and to reaffirm their commitment.

The WSSD Outcomes

The Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (JPOI) was intended to guide the implementation of the targets, goals and actions agreed upon. The JPOI contains over 37 targets, including the Millennium Development Goals. Additional targets mainly deal with water resource management, fisheries, marine environment, chemicals, ozone depleting substances and biodiversity. The JPOI reaffirmed the implementation of the Rio Principles and agreements such as Agenda 21, those of the

Monterrey Conference on Finance for Development and the Doha Declaration of the World Trade Organisation. The JPOI places emphasis on poverty eradication, on the amelioration of the negatives impacts of globalisation and on an integrated approach to economic, social and environmental aspects of sustainable development. Furthermore, it recognises the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) as the sustainable development plan for Africa.

The Johannesburg Sustainable Development Declaration was the second negotiated outcome of the WSSD. This declaration by world leaders affirmed their commitment to implementation of the JPOI objectives. World leaders expressed support for the UN as the lead body in promoting sustainable development.

The most contentious outcomes of the WSSD were the Type II Partnerships, which involved collaboration between business, government and NGOs. At the Summit, most governments argued that the Type II partnerships should not supplement the negotiated Type I¹ outcomes. Many governments from developing countries and a number of NGOs were concerned that finances allocated to developmental initiatives by

donor countries would be reallocated to Type II partnerships. Guidelines for these partnerships were developed at the Fourth Preparatory Committee Meeting (Prep Comm 4) in Bali in June 2002. The "Bali Guidelines" outlined that the partnerships should be of a voluntary nature, they should not substitute government commitments, they should have clear objectives and timeframes and a system for accountability and monitoring progress. More than 400 partnerships, representing \$10 billion in resources, were identified during the Summit process, and many more were announced outside of the formal Summit proceedings (DEAT, 2002).

Criticism of the WSSD outcomes points to the JPOI being a weak implementation plan based on the "implementation of existing commitments" (Khor 2002). Some questioned whether the process will make a difference to achieving the agreed on goals and targets (Bigg 2003). Khor points out the most contentious issues debated in the plan were finance, trade and governance; two Rio principles (common but differentiated responsibilities and the precautionary principle); and the acceptance of time-bound targets on energy and sanitation and questions. He questions why principles already agreed to in Rio were debated. It was hoped by many that the

¹ Type 1 outcomes were the negotiated outcomes agreed by governments and type II outcomes non-negotiated outcomes in the form of partnerships.

WSSD would be able to agree on a framework for sustainable development governance that would include global trade (Bigg 2003). Instead there was a real danger that the WSSD processes would lead to global environmental policy being made subservient to economic policy. Only when Ethiopia, Norway and Switzerland raised their objections during the negotiations did the text reflect that the multilateral trading system and multilateral environment agreements should be mutually supportive. Another point of criticism was the process of formulating the political declaration. Critics said that the declaration was produced late in the process (on the last day) and on an almost “take-it-or-leave-it” basis, which was not in line with UN procedures where important documents usually go through months of negotiations (Khor 2002). On the last day of the summit non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and civil society organisations (CSOs) held protests and circulated stickers, saying “No more shameful summits”. There was a sombre feeling among many members of NGOs, CSOs and some governments that the summit outcomes did not amount to anything that would make a difference to poverty eradication and global equity. Khor (2002) was led to remark that: “With such small results for such a heavy expense in personnel, time and

resources, it will be quite a long time before a convincing case is made for another world summit of this type”, while Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez stated that while “Heads of State go from Summit to Summit...many...people go from abyss to abyss” (Khor 2002, Bigg 2003).

South Africa as the custodian of the WSSD

Immediately following the WSSD, the South African cabinet charged government departments with a number of follow-up actions. The Departments of Environmental Affairs and Tourism (DEAT) and Foreign Affairs (DFA) were given the responsibility to oversee the WSSD follow-up actions, comprising of:

- the implications of South Africa’s enhanced international status having chaired the WSSD;
- South Africa’s role in linking the WSSD to the next round of World Trade Organisation (WTO) negotiations and the Financing for Development conference outcomes;
- the role of South Africa as WSSD custodian in the international community tasked with promoting the summit’s goals and targets at international forums;

- the need to respond actively to JPOI and set national targets and milestones in all sectors and asserting leadership for sustainable development;
- the compilation of South Africa's national strategy for sustainable development (NSSD) as an important mechanism for integration of various government policies programmes and plans;
- the implications for NEPAD as an integral part of departmental plans;
- an international marketing campaign, further branding South Africa and trade and investment promotion; and
- engaging with civil society in terms of building local capacity to participate in sustainable development governance; and

Cabinet set an extensive directive for DEAT and DFA. The mobilisation of human and financial resources at both domestic and international levels proved to be a challenge to the implementation of the WSSD decisions. However, some achievements were made in the last three years. On the international front, South Africa chaired the Eleventh Session of the UN Commission of Sustainable Development (CSD), which produced the work programme for the

CSD on the implementation of the WSSD outcomes. At national level achievements included the development of the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation Response Strategy, publishing the commemoration book of "Ten Days in Johannesburg" and hosting two anniversaries of the WSSD in Johannesburg. However, while there have been a number of ad hoc responses to the WSSD from government, industry and civil society, concrete results are difficult to find and to the ordinary South African, particularly the poor, the impact of hosting the WSSD and its implications must seem inconsequential. Significant institutional change will be required to meet the targets of the WSSD.

South Africa's WSSD follow-up

Strengths

A positive aspect of the WSSD follow-up was the widening ambit of the concept 'sustainable development'. Prior to the WSSD, sustainable development was largely associated with environmental sustainability in South Africa. At an institutional level, the WSSD improved interaction among the three tiers of government and also highlighted the limitations in the present institutional arrangement in dealing with some of the challenges of sustainable development coordination. A government WSSD task team was established with representation from national and

provincial government departments (mostly environment) and local government through the South African Local Government Association (SALGA). The priorities of the Task Team comprised of: an analysis of the targets and departmental priorities, a gap analysis of current institutional arrangements and, if necessary, proposals for new instruments, the development of a response strategy (national sustainable development strategy) with indicators and a monitoring mechanism, a stakeholder engagement strategy and preparation for the UN Commission for Sustainable Development meetings. The Task Team is coordinated by DEAT and reports to the International Relations Peace and Security (IRPS) cabinet cluster through the Economic Development and Cooperation (EDC) sub-committee, since the WSSD outcomes fall under international agreements.

The JPOI response strategy developed by DEAT aims to provide a platform for facilitating the integration and the development of a long-term perspective for sustainable development in South Africa (DEAT 2003). It is envisaged that the JPOI response strategy becomes the launching pad of South Africa's national strategy for sustainable development (NSSD). The JPOI response strategy proposes a review of the JPOI targets in terms of the implications for South

Africa and suggests analysis of current policies and programmes against the implementation targets to determine gaps and opportunities. It also describes strategic challenges to implement a sustainable development agenda and proposes key actions that are needed to set South Africa on the path towards sustainable development through a renewed policy framework and programme. Most importantly, it highlights the need to strengthen institutional arrangements and a governance framework to support sustainable development implementation in terms of administrative, financial, technological and transformation management.

Weaknesses

While the IRPS cabinet cluster is a means to report on the progress of the WSSD, most of the targets and actions are more relevant to the priorities in the Social and Economic cabinet clusters; so reporting procedures need to cut across the relevant cabinet clusters. In the absence of a clear and common vision for sustainable development in South Africa, it is difficult to measure policy development and implementation based on sustainable development principles even though many departments have identified targets and actions relevant to their mandates. Studies have shown that strategies often incorporate social, economic and

environment dimensions but the pragmatic linkages between these dimensions are typically weak (Swanson *et al* 2004).

The absence of the finance departments in the process has significant implications for implementation and financing sustainable development strategies. Studies have highlighted that many national sustainable development strategies are largely the responsibility of the Ministry of Environment, either directly or indirectly through a co-ordinating committee (Swanson *et al* 2004). Furthermore, sustainable development strategies suffer from the lack of revenue for implementation of policy initiatives and the strategy process itself. This implies that finance departments need to play a central role in the sustainable development strategy process to ensure fiscal priority setting, national expenditure planning and revenue generation.

Opportunities

In South Africa elements of sustainable development are encompassed in a number of policies, strategies and legal frameworks. The Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) include aspects of Agenda 21 within the context of addressing the inequalities of apartheid. Other crosscutting strategies include the Anti-Poverty Strategy, Integrated Rural Development

Strategy, Urban Development Strategy and Human Resource Development Strategy (DEAT 2003). The National Environmental Management Act (NEMA) incorporates sustainable development principles and defines sustainable development in a manner that promotes environmental sustainability and integrates economic, social and environmental dimensions. These and a number of other national initiatives to address poverty reduction, job creation and economic development provide innovative opportunities to catalyse and co-ordinate sustainable development efforts. Moreover, the provincial development growth strategies (PDGSs) and local government's integrated development plan (IDPs) provide opportunities for sustainable development planning at the provincial and local level.

Threats

A lack of political will, combined with a piece-meal approach to sustainable development makes, the implementation and measuring of the WSSD targets remain ad hoc and vague. Therefore, "developing an underlying vision through consensual, effective and iterative process; and going on to set objectives" should be the foundation of a sustainable development strategy (Swanson *et al* 2004). DEAT as the institutional driver for facilitation potentially threatens the legitimacy of a

meaningful process because it could be seen as a relatively 'small' department with a bias towards the environment. A government institution that has a cross-cutting function and deals with economic, social and environment dimensions and is politically more influential, such as the Presidency or Treasury, is more appropriate to champion sustainable development in South Africa.

Given that "the extent of participation in a strategy defines the ownership of the strategy" (Swanson et al 2004), an ad hoc approach to stakeholder participation could prove to be a serious threat to stakeholder buy-in and ownership of the process. Institutional mechanisms for stakeholder participation are a crucial part of developing the strategy. Building trust amongst all stakeholders is fundamental to the participatory process and recognising that negotiation and conflict management are an integral part of the sustainable development process. (Swanson *et al* 2004).

Conclusion

The South African government continues to play an important role in advocating multilateral reform on many levels to promote global equity. As custodian of the WSSD, South Africa supports integrated follow-up within the

UN and strongly advocates for the reform of the international trading system and the international financial architecture in order to reduce global poverty and meet the MDGs and the WSSD targets. Advocating the reform of the multi-lateral institutions would be strengthened by assertive national and regional policies and positions.

Therefore, developing a national sustainable development policy framework and a formal cooperative governance structure, including institutionalised stakeholder participation at the national level, is vital to meet the WSSD targets. Intensive stakeholder participation is necessary in the process to identify priorities relevant to the developmental needs of the country as well as indicators, targets and timeframes. The strategy would need to consider specific activities, tools and policy measures necessary for policy reform towards sustainable development. Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are an integral part of a sustainable development strategy. In conclusion, a focus on policy reform at national level is as important as advocating global policy reform.

Policy Considerations

- *Leadership and political will:*
Sustainable development can only be achieved on the basis of

a common understanding and a national vision. Sustainable development has to become the foundation for policy formulation and be based on the principles of equitable human well-being, development within the limits of our natural resources, on values and the transformation needed in society.

- *Learning by doing and adapting:* Rather than focus on predetermined outcomes, the development of the NSSD should consider Mintzberg's point that strategies should be allowed to evolve, rather than doggedly follow formalised planning procedures (in Swanson *et al* 2004). The author's central argument is the recognition of the continuum between the "stifling nature of formal policy planning and informal incrementalism of the learning school," implying that the process will inevitably search for an effective balance of formal and informal approaches and tools for on ongoing learning and adaptation.
- *Meaningful linkages between social, economic and environmental dimensions:* A consideration when developing

the strategy is to establish crosscutting objectives rather than a discrete focus on sector specific objectives. Crosscutting objectives could include an improved quality of life, decreasing the loss of biodiversity, promotion of renewable energy, social cohesion, corporate social responsibility, food security, etc.. Then measures need to be taken to achieve these broad qualitative objectives (Swanson *et al* 2004). In this way connectivity between the social, economic and environmental dimensions is initially established.

- *Mainstreaming sustainable development principles and strategy objectives:* Many national sustainable development strategies have been developed as separate static documents. The challenge is to ensure that general sustainable development principles and the strategy objectives are mainstreamed into specific policies, plans and projects on an ongoing basis.
- *"Think globally, act locally and think locally, act globally":* As global inequality and

undemocratic global structures significantly contribute to disparities between rich and poor, deepening poverty and natural resource degradation, attention needs to be paid to local developmental needs in order to influence global reform.

Suggested Readings

1. Darron A. Swanson, László Pintér, François Bregha, Alex Volkery and Klaus Jacob (2004), *National Strategies for Sustainable Development: Challenges, Approaches and Innovations*, International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) and the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ),
<http://www.iisd.org/measure/capacity/sdsip.asp>
2. Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism (2003), *South Africa's Response Strategy to the World Summit on Sustainable Development's Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (JPOI)*.
3. Martin Khor (1993), *Refusing to regulate TNC's: UNCED's biggest failure and Democritising global*

economic relations is the key to resolving the environment crisis in Third World Network Earth Summit Briefings, Third World Network

4. Martin Khor (2002), *A disappointing Summit*, Third World Network,
<http://www.twinside.org.sg/title/twr145a.htm>
5. Tom Bigg, (2003), *Was the WSSD Worth it?* International Institute for Environment and Development
6. United Nations Development Programme South Africa (2004), *South Africa Human Development Report 2003: The Challenge for Sustainable Development in South Africa: Unlocking People's Creativity*, Oxford Press University

Michelle Pressend is a senior researcher at the Institute for Global Dialogue