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# Franchising Global Governance:

## Making Sense of the Johannesburg Type II Partnerships

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### Introduction

As preparations for the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) were underway early in 2002, its architects launched an effort to promote the creation of multi-stakeholder partnerships that would implement specific goals associated with sustainable development. The focus on these partnerships grew in part out of despair that conventional intergovernmental diplomacy was unlikely to bear fruit in Johannesburg and that some alternative outcome was necessary to provide the summit with a positive result. But it also grew out of a deeper strategic understanding, shared not only by key summit organizers but also by a broader network of actors involved in implementing sustainable development goals. This strategic understanding of the importance of partnerships was based on a set of realizations that had emerged over recent years.

In this article we offer an initial critical assessment of the partnership strategy, based largely on an examination of the partnerships that emerged from the WSSD. The analysis starts with an overview of theoretical conjectures on the role of partnerships in global governance. It then proceeds to evaluate empirically the patterns of WSSD partnership structure and country participation and the implications for effective governance. Our primary conclusions can be summarized as follows:

- The rationale for partnerships, in particular their comparative advantage, is underspecified, and the strategy is unlikely to be effective over time unless a more coherent understanding is developed.
- The benefits of using the WSSD as a device to promote partnerships was very poorly articulated, and opportunities for more effective leadership were lost.
- On balance the partnerships that emerged at the WSSD are supply driven rather than demand driven—they reflect ongoing implementation efforts more than new ideas for bridging core implementation gaps. The promise of relying on partnerships to support a transition to ‘outcome-based’ decision making will fall flat unless a mechanism can be found to steer the partnership activity in a more demand-driven direction.

- Participation in the WSSD partnerships is uneven and mirrors rather than challenges prevailing patterns. Disparities in power and priorities that have dominated intergovernmental discourse over the past decade are quite visible in these partnerships.
- The question of how best to follow up on partnerships deserves much more critical thought than was possible leading up to Johannesburg. Effective follow-up will be constrained by divergent preferences among major stakeholders.

### The Partnership Movement

Academic interest in transnational networks and their influence in international affairs and environmental policy is not new. Networks of transnational actors such as multinational corporations, advocacy organizations, epistemic communities, and bureaucrats are identified as important agents of interdependence and globalization.<sup>1</sup> More recently, networks came to be understood not simply as a form of transnational interest organization, but also as a new form of governance. The multi-stakeholder partnerships advanced at the WSSD exemplify a broader phenomenon of transnational governance networks captured also by such rubrics as ‘global public policy networks’, ‘transnational issue networks’, or ‘transnational codes of conduct’ that bring together public, private, and societal actors in an effort to agree on and institutionalize a set of ideas, practices, and norms.<sup>2</sup>

Despite the increasing volume of case studies that examine transnational partnerships, however, the rationale and comparative advantage of such governance networks in relation to other institutions remain underspecified. Most accounts explain multi-stakeholder networks in functionalist terms, motivated by demand for more effective governance in the context of globalization and the failure of states and international organizations to address an increasing number of complex issues and transnational spillover effects.<sup>3</sup> Partnerships thus emerge to fill a range of governance functions. They enable information diffusion and social learning. They can serve as effective implementation mechanisms by involving

directly affected actors. They facilitate the provision of global public goods via standard setting, norm creation, and even market creation. And finally, networks are said to address the 'participation gap' in global governance by providing direct access for stakeholders to decision-making. Case studies of multi-stakeholder networks illustrate these governance functions in a range of areas from providing micro-credit for development to management of dams, to the implementation of the portfolio of the Global Environmental Facility.<sup>4</sup>

Functionalist accounts of partnerships do not specify, however, why or under what conditions partnerships are likely to respond to global governance gaps more effectively than other institutional forms such as states and intergovernmental regimes. In fact, some of the very functions attributed to partnerships—supply of information, transparency, and reducing the transaction cost of standard setting and market creation—are also identified as functions of intergovernmental regimes.<sup>5</sup> Under what conditions would networks succeed where other institutions have failed?

One area where networked structures may have a clear advantage over hierarchical organizations is in the diffusion of knowledge and learning, particularly when such diffusion needs to tap into multiple levels of expertise.<sup>6</sup> The voluntary and often informal character of networks implies that incentives for strategic manipulations of information may be smaller than in the context of international bargaining, and there may be greater opportunities to parcel out knowledge about complex global systems as it relates to particular groups and localities. Thus, the greater the complexity and contestation of information and the greater the need to tap into local or specialized knowledge, the larger will be the comparative advantage of transnational networks over hierarchical institutions.

It is less clear, however, what might be the comparative advantage of partnerships in international standard setting and implementation. So far, governments and intergovernmental institutions have maintained a clear advantage in setting and implementing binding rules. Partnerships seem to find a 'niche' in setting non-binding norms and unlocking market mechanisms within governance areas deadlocked by competing state interests. By segmentation of the regulatory political economy, involving only a subset of actors, and by allowing for flexible adjustment of norms, partnerships permit more heterogeneous signals to actors and decrease the cost of collective action. Partnerships geared towards implementation are more likely to have a comparative advantage not just in any governance context, but where they compensate for weak institutions or institutional deficits across levels of governance.

Finally, partnerships are applauded for closing the 'participation gap' in global politics. While by definition multi-

stakeholder partnerships involve a diverse set of political actors, it remains unclear whether they are always more representative of all sectors in society than traditional forms of representation such as parties, interests groups, parliaments, and local and national governments. To determine the effectiveness of networks in responding to the participation gap, therefore, it is necessary to determine whether they broaden participation to traditionally marginalized groups or whether they perpetuate existing patterns of power and influence.

In sum, if the leading functionalist assumption is that partnerships emerge in response to demands for more effective governance where other institutions have failed, we should expect to see empirical patterns in their structure that reflect their comparative advantage: an emphasis on narrowly defined and implementable issues, a higher concentration in deadlocked areas of co-operation, higher participation by traditionally marginalized actors, and an ability to draw knowledge from across levels of governance. Evidence along these lines would support the thesis that networks are demand-driven, emerging out of shared concern for improved governance, and would reveal valuable information about their likely effectiveness.

A second aspect of the emergence and role of multi-stakeholder networks that is not well specified in the current literature is the question of the political incentives to supply such networks. What interests are likely to initiate, participate in, and dominate such networks?

Paradoxically, the very international organizations that are under attack for failing to respond effectively to globalization pressures may be most strongly motivated to reinvent their missions and support partnerships. The traditional channels of governance are becoming increasingly frustrating for international secretariats because of the growing unwillingness of donor countries to provide financial support, a history of failures in implementing assistance through central government institutions, pressures by transnational actors for direct inclusion, and legitimacy assaults by the anti-globalization movement. Thus, contrary to the conventional functionalist wisdom of partnerships as a radically new form of governance, there is reason to expect many of them to appear as a reinvention of existing institutions.

Transnational advocacy organizations are also likely to jump eagerly on the partnership bandwagon. The mismatch between the growing transnational resources of such organizations and the limited opportunities for direct policy involvement at the intergovernmental level provide a strong incentive to push for alternative venues such as multi-stakeholder networks, where multinational advocacy groups have a real opportunity not only to participate in, but also to set, the governance agenda. While advocacy organizations have demonstrated their strong comparative advantage in

effecting sustainable development through partnership-like transnational networks,<sup>7</sup> their position on WSSD type II outcomes has not been unidirectional. On one hand, NGOs have cautioned against using the concept of type II outcomes to deflect attention from progress on type I intergovernmental agreements (particularly in the case of the USA). NGOs also warned against the 'recycling' of existing aid programmes under the partnership category and avoiding new commitments, against lack of accountability and linkage to specific sustainable development goals and agreements, and against the 'privatization' of sustainable development governance by giving a free hand to business through partnership-like structures.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, large transnational NGOs have not in any way boycotted or even shied away from participation and leadership in type II outcomes, because on balance taking a proactive position gives them a clear comparative advantage in the transnational governance process, enhances their resources, and provides a greater ability to influence the agenda and structure of partnership institutions.

National governments, in turn, will have fewer incentives to support transnational partnerships if they are perceived as infringing on the authority of the state. At the same time, however, certain government units, such as aid and development agencies in industrialized countries, may have special interests to support partnerships as a way to increase their resources, to diversify their portfolios, to increase control over the implementation of aid programmes, and to channel some of the benefits back to industry or societal groups in donor countries. Partnerships, it has been argued, can also be used by industrialized states strategically to deflect pressure for increased assistance.

Finally, for industrial actors the incentives to lead or even join partnerships are likely to be limited to transnational companies which are under greatest scrutiny by advocacy and consumer organizations, and those that operate in developing areas where domestic governance failures increase the risk of investment. Moreover, leaders in corporate responsibility practices are likely to have special incentives in diffusing their standards to level the playing field and reap the benefits of improved reputation. Industry participation can also be motivated by the opportunity for public subsidization of innovative products or services which would otherwise be uncompetitive in the short run, such as renewable energy technology or the development and distribution of AIDS vaccines in poor regions of the world.

The anticipation of supply-side incentives to set up multi-stakeholder networks implies some hypotheses about the pattern of partnerships likely to emerge. Partnerships are more likely to be led and dominated by traditionally powerful actors such as intergovernmental agencies, donor governments, and transnational NGOs, rather than South-

ern governments, NGOs, and local communities. They are likely to reflect the priorities of traditionally powerful entities. Moreover, if international agencies see partnerships as an opportunity to improve their implementation record and strengthen their legitimacy, they will seek to maximize the likelihood for success by targeting partnerships in countries with relatively high institutional capacity rather than weaker states, which may have the greatest functional need for innovative governance solutions. Industry participation is likely to be limited to large transnational companies, leaders in voluntary practices, and firms active in issue areas where the opportunity for public subsidization is greatest.

The demand and supply rationales for partnerships can thus have very different implications for the structure, geographic distribution, levels of participation, and issue orientation of partnerships. They furthermore imply a need for systematic empirical research to determine what incentives dominate the current partnership movement and what existing patterns imply for the effectiveness and future development of the partnership movement. These questions seem particularly important in the context of the WSSD partnerships, which were promoted heavily as initiatives that would help fill the functional gap between rising demands for meaningful progress on sustainable development and declining confidence in intergovernmental mechanisms.

### **Partnerships in the WSSD Context**

The idea that the WSSD should contribute to the development of additional partnerships, and help improve the effectiveness of existing ones, was advanced on the basis of two core rationales. One of these rationales could be called strategic. The WSSD Bureau, and the Secretary-General himself, consistently articulated a strategic vision in which the WSSD would contribute to partnership development in order to advance more effective results-oriented implementation of the summit's agenda. Partnerships would help fill critical implementation gaps that had emerged in the Earth Summit follow-up. This strategic rationale was not strongly contested. Such ideas had increasingly been in the air, and groups such as the Stakeholder Forum for our Common Future had been shaping a coherent agenda linking partnerships to sustainable development action. There was a solid consensus across a range of observers and participants that, for the WSSD to succeed, it would need to find a way to harness the potential of multi-stakeholder partnerships on behalf of the summit's goals.

There was also a second rationale that could be called tactical. As it became increasingly clear in early 2002 that the WSSD was unlikely to break any major new ground

on the intergovernmental front, the Bureau advanced proposals to elevate the partnership idea within the WSSD process to ever greater levels. At the second preparatory committee, held between 28 January and 8 February 2002, governments endorsed a proposal to make the creation of partnerships a major outcome of the summit, and these quickly acquired the label 'type II partnerships'. The WSSD Bureau actively encouraged creation of type II partnerships, and significant space was made on the agenda for discussing them at the third and fourth preparatory committee meetings. Many participants endorsed this idea, though there was scepticism about the tactical manoeuvre of treating partnerships and intergovernmental diplomacy as close to functional equivalents. But in the end nobody wanted the WSSD to fail, and although there were early voices of concern about how meaningful the type II partnerships would be, nobody had any reason to oppose them.

More critical debate about the type II partnerships might have been helpful, though, because in retrospect it is now clear that the strategic rationale for partnerships that had been crafted over the past several years and the tactical manoeuvres that were put in place in the months leading up to the WSSD, had relatively little to do with each other. Two prominent lost opportunities had to do with what kinds of partnerships the WSSD encouraged and with how follow-up would be pursued.

The primary guidance as to what type of partnerships the WSSD would promote came in the form of a series of brief communications from the Bureau, none of which provided specific substantive guidelines. Instead of linking the partnerships firmly to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), articulated in the September 2000 Millennium Declaration, these documents referred more consistently to Agenda 21, a far broader and more unwieldy framework for action. The MDGs were meant to serve as a more effective alternative to Agenda 21, whose track record over the previous decade had been lacklustre. Whereas Agenda 21 was an expansive catch-all document full of procedural and symbolic recommendations, the MDGs constituted a more focused set of eight goals articulated in terms of 18 quantitative targets. In many ways the creation of the MDGs reflected a recognition that Agenda 21 had failed to serve as a useful guide to action on the part of the international community. Although the partnership guidance documents did refer to the MDGs, they did so side by side with Agenda 21, which was *de facto* licence for the proposed partnerships to focus on virtually anything they wanted to.<sup>9</sup>

The guidelines were also unclear about the procedural basis for declaring an activity a type II partnership. The most explicit guidance came in the form of a three-page note from the WSSD co-chairs, circulated at the third preparatory committee meeting, which was vague on all the important questions.<sup>10</sup> Ongoing activities (as opposed to new activities) could be considered to constitute a WSSD partnership if there was 'a clearly demonstrated added value to these initiatives in the context of the Summit'; partnerships needed to be internationally relevant and they needed to have arrangements to monitor implementation. Yet how added value was to be demonstrated, how relevance was to be determined, and how monitoring mechanisms were to be judged were never spelled out.

The question of what would happen with the partnerships after the WSSD received almost no explicit attention during the preparatory process. Instead the subject was postponed for the summit itself, where it also received almost no attention. The Stakeholder Forum for our Common Future, which had pioneered a number of well-regarded multi-stakeholder dialogues and was a leading advocate of partnerships, criticized the process as overly vague and issued a number of specific recommendations that were all ignored.<sup>11</sup> The lack of clarity on post-summit partnership mechanisms contributed to a sense that the partnership process may not be heading anywhere at all. Some high-profile initiatives that seemed to reflect the spirit of the partnership idea bypassed the process in Johannesburg out of a sense that it was irrelevant. The Megadiversity Initiative, which is a voluntary mechanism on the part of the 15 most biodiverse countries, is one such example.

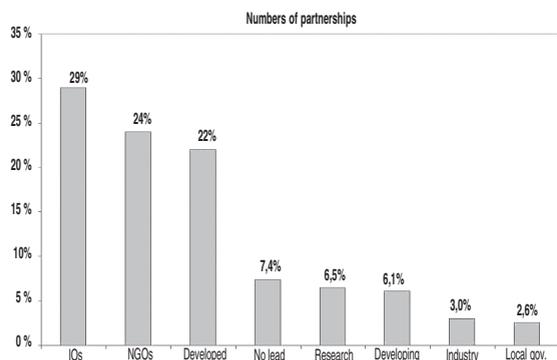
At the eleventh meeting of the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD-11), between 28 April and 9 May 2003, the subject of how to follow up on the WSSD partnership process occupied a prominent role on the agenda and received significant attention. However, there were very few advocates for greater clarity or more precise mechanisms, and in the end the CSD endorsed what amounted to a continuation of the status quo. Reporting on the part of partnerships was to be encouraged but voluntary.<sup>12</sup>

Given the disconnection between the WSSD strategic objective of result-oriented implementation through partnerships and the loose guidelines set for partnership initiatives and follow-up, it becomes important to examine the patterns of partnerships and partnership participation that actually emerged and how likely they are to break new ground in implementing sustainable development objectives.

## Nature of the Johannesburg Type II Partnerships

One virtue of the WSSD process is that it identifies a large number of discrete transnational partnerships that can be studied using the kinds of quantitative techniques not normally practical in the transnational network and partnership literature. Using documents available at the WSSD website, we constructed a simple relational database in order to characterize broad patterns of partnership structure and national participation in the WSSD partnerships. We downloaded each of the summary documents that were available as of 12 February 2003, and were able to process information systematically on 231 partnerships. The database includes information on whether national governments, NGOs, industry, or international organizations were involved and which category of stakeholder was the lead partner. We added research institutes and local governments to the lead partner category because a number of partnerships were led by such entities. Subject categories were assigned to the partnerships by relying on the 28 classifications used on the WSSD partnership website, as available on 28 March 2003. We harmonized country names and then merged country data from sources such as the World Development Indicators<sup>13</sup> and the Environmental Sustainability Index.<sup>14</sup> By relating information on partnerships, subject categories, and national partners, the database permits systematic exploration across these three levels of analysis.<sup>15</sup>

When looking at partnerships as the unit of analysis, we observe a pattern that appears largely supply-driven (by what powerful actors have to offer) rather than demand-driven (by what is needed to fill key implementation gaps). The supply-driven nature of most WSSD partnerships is evidenced most directly by the characteristics of lead actors. As Figure 1 shows, the larger share of initiatives (a total of 75 per cent) is led by international organizations, by OECD and other upper income governments, and by non-governmental organizations.



**Figure 1:**  
Lead partners in WSSD type II outcome partnership

International organizations lead close to one-third of the partnerships, an observation consistent with the hypothesis that secretariats of international institutions will be among the most eager suppliers of partnership in an effort to reinvent their mission and legitimacy. A closer look at the 55 NGO-led initiatives also reveals that most of the leading NGOs are large transnational organizations such as the IUCN – The World Conservation Union and the Nature Conservancy, and considerably fewer are led by national and local groups. The most proactive actors within governments tend to be development ministries and aid agencies in OECD countries. The WSSD partnership movement appears to be led and dominated largely by transnational policy entrepreneurs from international secretariats, OECD governments, and transnational NGOs, reflecting rather than challenging existing realities of power and influence.

While partnerships are expected to have a comparative advantage in broadening the centres of influence and empowering weaker or non-traditional stakeholders in the international arena, the empirical record shows that the partnership enthusiasm and leadership of such groups remain limited. Only a small share of partnerships is led by lower- and middle-income governments (6.1 per cent), by industry (3.0 per cent), or by local governments (2.6 per cent).

That partnerships registered at the WSSD emerge as predominantly supply-driven is not very surprising. As already discussed, there have been great pressures and organizational incentives for actors such as donor governments and international organizations to reinvent their role in sustainable development, particularly under the critical light of the Johannesburg summit. Moreover, traditionally powerful actors are precisely those who have the resources to support sustainable development partnerships, and without their substantive financial involvement the practical results of such initiatives are likely to be insignificant. The critical question, however, is whether the preponderance of such actors is indeed accompanied by significant new commitments of assistance, something that so far is extremely difficult to judge from the sparse information available on the partnerships.

The leadership and dominance of traditionally powerful actors in the sample we considered may also reflect the early stage in which the partnership movement finds itself, particularly within the context of the WSSD. The hurried endorsement and development of type II initiatives as official outcomes of the Johannesburg summit, coupled with relatively broadly specified guidelines, most likely limited involvement to those most capable of putting together a proposal within a relatively short period of time. It is worth pointing out that a number of the partnerships in the

WSSD sample indicated an intention to involve certain categories of actors such as 'local NGOs', 'local governments', and 'developing countries', but had not yet identified specific partners, although the coding reflected only partners and objectives identified with some specificity. Further comparisons between the structural characteristics of the WSSD partnerships and the level of participation, leadership, and issue orientation of longer-standing partnership-type initiatives and networks developed outside of or in parallel to the Johannesburg type II outcomes would be useful in illuminating broader patterns that have emerged. As WSSD partnerships evolve they still may provide new channels to involve non-traditional stakeholders and demands more effectively. Whether this will be the case, however, depends in large part on the seriousness of the follow-up process, and requires systematic data collection for its detection.

Another important question is whether partnerships may fail to achieve some of the functional roles and effects commonly attributed to them, due to the predominance of supply-side incentives.

One of the widely touted advantages of partnership networks over intergovernmental mechanisms of international governance is the ability of networks to stimulate consensus building and agreement through flexible and direct involvement of a diverse set of actors located at different levels of governance. Hence, the emphasis at the WSSD was that partnerships are 'multi-stakeholder' initiatives. A careful review of the universe of WSSD partnerships, however, reveals that only a small portion of the registered partnerships involve all significant stakeholders. Only 14 of the 231 (6 per cent) partnerships examined in this study consist of all of the major categories—rich and poor countries, international organizations, NGOs, and

**Table 1. WSSD type II partnerships involving all major stakeholders (developing and developed countries, NGOs, industry, and international organizations)**

Partnership	Lead partner	Number of wealthy countries	Number of developing countries
Bicycle Refurbishing Initiative	Velo Mondial / Afribike Nederland	4	1
Cleaner Fuels and Vehicles Partnership	UNEP	5	4
Energy and Environment Partnership with Central America	Finland	1	7
Forest Management and Conservation in the Congo Basin	South Africa	6	6
Global Alliance for Building Sustainability	RICS Foundation	2	1
Global Health & Development Chart	Karolinska Institutet (a medical university), Stockholm, Sweden	1	4
Global Master Plan for Cycling	Velo Mondial	3	2
Global Partnership for Capacity Building to Implement the Globally Harmonized System for Chemical Classification and Labelling (GHS)	UNITAR	7	6
Global Partnership on Clean Fuels and Vehicles	USA	2	2
Good Governance in Sustainable Development	Indonesia	7	1
International Coral Reef Action Network (ICRAN)/ International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI)	International Coral Reef Action Network (ICRAN)	2	1
Mandatory Disclosure of Automotive Emissions	Indonesia	2	8
Partnership Initiative: Energy for Poverty Eradication and Sustainable Development	European Commission	15	11
The Andean BIOTRADE Programme	UNCTAD	1	5

industry (see list in Table 1).<sup>16</sup> If we examine the partnerships that cross a more modest threshold—they simply include both rich and poor countries—we find that only 82 partnerships (36 per cent) meet this criterion.

Table 1 presents the list of WSSD partnerships that involve all major stakeholder groups. These initiatives are predominantly led by developed countries and international institutions—only one is led by industry and two by upper-middle income countries (South Africa and Indonesia). However, these partnerships have succeeded in involving an equal or greater number of developing states—the total count of developing states participating in the 15 initiatives is 59, while the total count of developed states participating is 58. By engaging well-identified industry groups, non-governmental organizations, and government bodies, the 14 truly multi-stakeholder partnerships have succeeded in targeting fairly well-specified sustainable development objectives. Three of these partnerships, for example, aim at improved monitoring and reduction of automotive emissions and another two address local air quality and transportation via the promotion of bicycles in developing regions. These are cases where partnerships have indeed demonstrated a comparative advantage in engaging interests across levels of governance and stimulating transnational co-operation on a problem of critical local importance, but for which no global governance framework exists.

A more comprehensive review of the target issue area of all partnerships reveals, however, that less than half of them (120 out of 231) are designed to address a substantive environmental management problem such as food security, biodiversity, climate change, desertification, disaster preparedness, energy, forests, fresh water, minerals and mining, coastal management, and mountain development. A substantial part of the partnerships (102 out of 231) seek to develop broadly defined ‘means of implementation’ such as capacity building, education, science, and information for decision making, as well as the development of financial and trade mechanisms for sustainable development. These numbers imply that partnership networks remain predominantly venues conducive to information and knowledge sharing, but the majority of WSSD partnerships fail to provide concrete responses to expectations for more targeted and outcome-oriented management of environmental resources. This is not to say that capacity-enhancing functions are less important for sustainable development than targeting specific sustainable development outcomes. In fact, it may be that meaningful capacity building and information diffusion that empowers non-state actors and sub-national governance institutions, and creates local capability to achieve global objectives, is precisely one of the strong comparative advantages

of partnership initiatives that cannot be fulfilled as effectively by hierarchical intergovernmental structures. Even if this is the case, however, the fact that this rationale has not been made explicitly, that the desired connections between this capacity-building role and the results-oriented agenda of WEHAB (water, energy, health, agriculture, and biodiversity) and the Millennium Declaration have not been articulated, and that within the context of capacity building no effort to encourage clear, measurable targets has been undertaken, all highlight the lack of fit between the partnership process and the overall movement towards more results-oriented collective management.

It is of course possible to identify examples of WSSD partnerships that have managed to translate global sustainable development goals into very clearly identified national and local objectives. Box 1 showcases three such initiatives: the Access Initiative’s Partnership for Principle 10, which promotes specific commitments related to the implementation of the access to information principle of the Rio Declaration; the UN Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR)’s Partnership for Capacity Building to Implement the Globally Harmonized System for Chemical Classification and Labelling, and the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)’s Andean Biotrade Programme, which promotes the principles of biodiversity conservation and sustainable development through the development of markets for biodiversity and services. These partnerships unite diverse stakeholders, set specific measurable targets, and spell out clear monitoring mechanisms. However, they are the exception rather than the rule.

**Box 1. Examples of type II partnerships containing ingredients for success**

**The Andean Biotrade Programme** is an initiative led by three international institutions, the Andean Community, the Andean Development Corporations, and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. It links in a regional network the governments of the five Andean countries, donor states and organizations, exporters’ organizations, research institutions, and local communities to promote sustainable management of biodiversity through the development of markets for biodiversity products and services. The initiative exemplifies the role of partnerships in stimulating local and regional action in an area of governance among a set of interested actors that have been deadlocked at the intergovernmental level by competing interests and power inequalities. The programme targets a range of specific

objectives from the implementation of a Regional Biodiversity Strategy of the Andean Community, to support of national biotrade programmes, technological development for conservation and use of biodiversity, and providing financing for bio-business.

**The Partnership for Principle 10** of the Access Initiative seeks to promote the practical implementation of the principle of access to information, participation, and justice in environmental governance. While this principle was adopted by the Rio declaration of the 1992 Earth Summit, there is no global treaty to advance its implementation. The only intergovernmental framework that exists on the issue is the 1997 Århus Convention, adopted by the Conference of European Ministers and influenced greatly by a pan-European network of societal organizations, international agencies, and government bureaucracies. The Partnership for Principle 10 aims to extend the practical implementation of norms on access to information and justice in Europe and beyond by engaging interested governments, non-governmental groups, and donor organizations and by setting specific objectives for capacity building, diffusion of information, and institutional and legislative changes.

**The Global Partnership for Capacity Building to Implement the Globally Harmonized System for Chemical Classification and Labelling** is led by UNITAR in collaboration with other international organizations. It is tied to a very well defined international framework for managing dangerous chemicals—the Globally Harmonized System for Chemical Classification and Labelling (GHS) of the UN Economic and Social Council Subcommittee of Experts. Initiated shortly before the official endorsement of the GHS, the partnership harnesses the resources of donors, UN organizations, and industry and advocacy organizations to strengthen the capacity for GHS implementation in developing and transitional countries.

In search of further evidence of the extent to which partnerships are driven by demand for more effective and targeted environmental management, we also examined the correlations between countries' levels of participation in type II partnerships by subject area and countries' environmental performance scores assigned by the Yale/Columbia Environment Sustainability Index (ESI).<sup>17</sup> If the process is primarily demand driven, we would expect poor ESI scores in the system and stress areas to be correlated with high levels of participation in the partnership subjects that deal with specific sustainability

problems. As Table 2 demonstrates, however, we do not find a consistent and strong negative correlation between ESI scores and levels of participation in partnerships by subject areas. By contrast the ESI measure of 'Social and institutional capacity' had a strong positive correlation across most subject areas. And when partial correlations are calculated, controlling for social and institutional capacity, only one correlation remains significant in the entire table—a negative correlation 'Reducing air pollution' and energy partnerships. This suggests that countries participate when they can, not when they need to (with energy partnerships being the exception).

In sum, a systematic examination of the type II partnerships initiated as one of the major outcomes of the WSSD reveals that they are predominantly driven by strong supply-side incentives on the part of traditionally powerful transnational entrepreneurs rather than by demand for specific sustainable development improvements. While the leadership by the rich and the powerful may be understandable if we take into account the need to secure resources for the realization of these initiatives, it indicates that partnerships so far have failed to present a significant challenge to traditional patterns of influence, a conclusion also supported if we examine countries as a unit and analyse their patterns of partnership participation.

### Patterns of National Participation

National patterns are worth exploring because there is a wealth of information already available about countries (as compared to the paucity of information about NGOs, for example), because the UN system is organized around the nation-state, and because we can readily compare national patterns in these partnerships with what we know about other patterns of national participation in other venues. We recognize that the partnerships span multiple stakeholders and that there are therefore other types of patterns worth exploring, and we hope that future work will permit such investigations.

The average country participated in 4.4 partnerships; France had the highest number with 33, and 168 countries participated in at least one partnership. Thirty-seven countries did not participate at all. Far fewer countries were designated lead partners: of these Italy, Japan, and France were the most active, accounting for half the 64 country-led partnerships.

The list of most active countries is relatively heterogeneous, and is representative of the world at large in terms of per-capita income. However, there are some persistent patterns that emerge through multiple regression analysis. Countries that participate in more partnerships tend to give or receive large amounts of foreign aid (ODA),

**Table 2. Correlations between countries' partnership participation by issue area and countries' ESI environmental performance scores**

	Health and sustainable development	Agriculture; Food security; Rural	Biodiversity	Climate change; Air pollution	Desertification	Early warning disaster preparedness	Energy	Forests	Fresh-water	Minerals and mining	Moun-tains	Oceans; Coastal areas; Fisheries
Air quality				+			++					
Water quantity								+	-			
Water quality	+	+	+	+	+		++	+	-			
Biodiversity				—			-					—
Land						—	-					
Reducing air pollution	—	-		-			—	—				
Reducing water stress												
Reducing ecosystem stress						—	-					
Reducing waste and consumption pressure	-			—	-			-		+		
Reducing population growth	+			++	+		++					
Providing for human sustenance	+			++	+		++	+		-	+	
Protecting human health				++	+		++					
Social and institutional capacity		++	++	+	++	+	++	++	++		++	

+ = significant positive correlation at .05 level or better  
 ++ = significant positive correlation at .01 level or better  
 - = significant negative correlation at .05 level or better  
 — = significant negative correlation at .01 level or better

**Table 3. National participation in WSSD partnerships: most active countries**

Country	Number of partnerships
France	33
South Africa	30
USA	29
Japan	26
Indonesia	25
Italy	22
Philippines	20
Thailand	20
Australia	18
China	18
United Kingdom	17
Canada	14
Tanzania	13
Vietnam	13
Germany	12
Kenya	12
Malaysia	12
Morocco	12
Netherlands	11
Brazil	10

**Table 4. Results of multiple regression analysis**

Independent variable	Standardized coefficient	T	Significance
Foreign aid (receipts and donations)	.386	5.86	.000
Host of Prepcom IV or WSSD	.316	6.21	.000
Number of NGOs that are members of IUCN	.237	3.49	.001
Large population (>23 million)	.189	3.33	.001
Number of national environmental plans	.128	2.42	.017

Dependent variable = Number of partnerships  
 Adjusted r-square = 0.682  
 N = 193

Sources: World Development Indicators (aid, population); Environmental Sustainability Index (IUCN members, national environmental plans).

have large numbers of NGOs, have large populations, and have more extensive national environmental planning infrastructures (Table 4). Indonesia and South Africa both participated in a disproportionate number of partnerships, which probably reflects the heightened attention that the process received as a result of the host role played by those countries.

These results indicate that much of the national participation in the WSSD partnerships is reflective of existing patterns of international engagement (as measured through foreign aid flows) and through existing levels of domestic mobilization and capacity (as measured through national environmental plans and NGOs). Countries with larger populations are probably both more able to participate and more sought after by other partners. On balance this picture suggests a pattern consistent with a supply-driven rather than a demand-driven process of partnership formation. If partnerships are meant to fill implementation gaps, then one would want to see them emerge among countries that are marginalized from the current international system. Yet we observe the opposite, suggesting that the countries that most embraced the partnership movement were not the ones that needed it the most, but rather the ones that had already acquired an advanced capacity for international engagement. Haiti and Somalia, for example, are not participating in any of the 231 partnerships, whereas Thailand and the Philippines are in 20 each.

Although smaller countries join fewer partnerships, as evidenced by the presence of the population variable in the

regression analysis as well as by two variables that are directly correlated with population (foreign aid totals and number of NGOs), the partnership process has not ignored the smallest countries. A number of partnerships deliberately targeted problems of small island states, for example. An examination of the 36 countries that did not join any type II partnership suggests that being very small does put a country at risk of exclusion, but not overwhelmingly so. The group includes a handful of very small countries such as Comoros and Cape Verde, but there are also a number of politically marginalized states, such as North Korea and Libya, and some countries experiencing domestic instability such as Somalia and Lebanon, which limits their ability to participate in transnational networking. Even among these risk factors there are exceptions that prove the flexibility of the partnership process. Taiwan managed to find a partnership it could join in spite of the usual obstacles it faces in the international system. Sierra Leone was able to participate in spite of a civil war. And the very smallest countries, with populations under 500,000, participated in an average of 1.75 partnerships each.

However, the presence of the smallest countries in the WSSD partnerships is attributable almost entirely to the activities of the international organizations, and therefore there is reason to be concerned about the ability of the partnership movement at large to engage these countries. The countries with fewer than 500,000 people (36 countries in our database) were left out of every single industry-led and research institute-led partnership. The partnerships they joined were overwhelmingly led by international

**Table 5. Partnership participation by income group and lead partner type**

Income group	Lead partner type						
	International organizations	Industry	National governments	Local governments	NGOs	Research institutes	No lead designated
Low income (n = 56)	44.1%	1.1%	41.4%	1.9%	5.8%	2.3%	2.3%
Lower middle income (n = 47)	45.9%	0.4%	33.8%	9.5%	2.5%	2.9%	4.8%
Upper middle income (n = 23)	48.7%	1.2%	25.7%	1.0%	17.4%	4.4%	1.6%
High income OECD (n = 22)	44.4%	4.2%	26.4%	1.2%	13.8%	7.0%	2.2%
Other high income (n = 7)	38.1%	1.6%	44.4%	14.3%	1.6%	0.0%	0.0%
All groups (n = 155)	45.1%	1.35%	34.8%	4.5%	7.5%	3.3%	2.8%

Note: Columns do not add up to 100 per cent due to rounding.

organizations, with a much smaller number led by governments and an even smaller number led by NGOs. Therefore, below the surface appearance of broad engagement in these new governance mechanisms lies a reflection of existing patterns in which the weakest countries rely on the most traditional international organizations to give them a voice.

Across income groups as well, countries show different preferences for partnerships led by different types of stakeholders. The largest difference is a mirror-image preference on the part of the richest and poorest, for partnerships led by NGOs and governments, respectively. Table 5 summarizes the differences. If one thinks of partnerships as forming a portfolio, the OECD countries allocated 13.8 per cent of their portfolio to partnerships led by NGOs, whereas the low-income countries allocated only 5.8 per cent of their total to that group. The low-income countries allocated a comparatively far larger percentage of their participation effort to government-led initiatives (41.4 per cent), whereas OECD countries allocated only 26.4 per cent to this group. The OECD countries also reveal a comparatively higher preference for partnerships led by industry and research institutes. None of this should be surprising. It shows that countries prefer to participate in venues where they exercise more control.<sup>18</sup> Within the intergovernmental system, the poorest countries have an institutionalized voice that is absent in the transnational networks of industry, NGOs, and research institutes. Likewise the wealthy countries, because they are in the minority among governments but dominate transnational networks, find such venues more amenable to their interests.

Another way in which national patterns of participation in the partnerships mirror existing dominant patterns can be seen by examining the types of partnerships in which countries choose to participate. The theory behind the partnerships is that they encourage problem-focused, results-oriented modes of action that bypass the entrenched ideological divisions still found in many global organizations. The WSSD partnerships, however, reflect rather than counter existing ideological divides and differences of opinion about what matters most. The OECD countries, for example, gravitate most to those partnerships dealing with science, information, and energy, whereas the poorest countries gravitate more to partnerships dealing with trade and technology transfer. While there are useful exceptions, the rich countries reveal a preference for partnerships that reinforce areas in which they are dominant, and the poor countries reveal a preference for partnerships aimed at altering the rules of the game in which they are least powerful.

Taken altogether, these broad patterns of national participation in the WSSD partnerships suggest that, in the

absence of effective leadership, the process is heading for a future that will replicate as opposed to changing the world order in which they operate. But the exceptions are just as interesting as the overall tendencies, and they provide a foundation for progress. The fact that two Arab countries (the United Arab Emirates and Egypt) are among the 18 nations that are leading partnerships, when the Arab countries have not historically been active leaders in sustainable development diplomacy,<sup>19</sup> shows that the partnership process is capable of eliciting and encouraging new patterns of engagement.

## Conclusions

The partnership process launched in Johannesburg has a mixed heritage. In one sense it was guided by a thoughtful theory of results-oriented global public policy that articulated a clear role for transnational partnerships, but in another sense it was driven by tactical manoeuvring and a desperate search for procedural results. Among the resulting partnerships are some efforts that reflect genuine hard work aimed at filling critical implementation gaps, but also initiatives that appear to be nothing more than opportunistic window dressing (including the 14 partnerships that were not able to designate any partners!). Progress will therefore be difficult. If the opportunistic tendencies are not subjected to disciplining leadership, transparency, and oversight, the seeds of innovation currently present will be choked out and the process will become a mockery.

Except on the purely tactical notion that partnerships should be promoted, leadership was markedly absent in the preparations for Johannesburg. Realistically there probably wasn't time to exercise substantive leadership effectively without alienating critical constituents and jeopardizing the summit's procedural goals. Because of the scepticism shown concerning the partnerships, it may have been necessary to keep the substance vague in order to retain everyone on board. But that need has now passed, and critical choices need to be made that will influence the future of the partnership process. Among the key questions that can be settled only with vibrant leadership are the following.

What forms of partnership composition are most central to filling the key implementation gaps? In the current mix a large number (65) have no national government participation at all, in spite of the rhetoric about the central role of governments. Is it best to encourage or discourage these kinds of partnerships? Should they be included in the WSSD follow-up process or allowed to go their own separate ways? Only a very small number bring together all the key stakeholders—is that appropriate or would more be better? Research institutes, based in uni-

versities and think-tanks, emerged as a vibrant source of action on the partnership front, though they were not explicitly targeted for engagement. Should the partnership process encourage more involvement on the part of such actors?<sup>20</sup>

What should these partnerships do? In the lead up to Johannesburg only the most vague guidance was given. Saying that they should help implement Agenda 21 is so broad that it is practically equivalent to saying that it doesn't matter what they do. One of the clearest lessons from the past decade is that Agenda 21, in its entirety, covers too much terrain to be susceptible to international oversight, planning, and prioritization, and that the initial efforts to do so were resounding failures.<sup>21</sup> The Johannesburg partnerships may be doomed to the same fate, but they will become more focused only with sharp guidance and leadership.

How should the partnership process be institutionalized internationally? Currently there is nothing more than a thin shell of organizational infrastructure. There are no mechanisms to track progress towards implementing partnership goals, no procedures to track patterns of membership and participation, no process to relate partnership activity to consensus goals such as the Plan of Implementation and the Millennium Development Goals.<sup>22</sup> If this situation persists, the partnerships will collectively have little chance of succeeding.

These questions pertain not only to the case of the WSSD type II outcomes but also more broadly to the future role of all partnership-like institutions within the UN system of governance. As already implied, high-profile multi-stakeholder initiatives supported by UN organizations, such as Kofi Annan's Global Compact or the implementation of the GEF mandate through partnership projects, are already easily identified by both scholars and practitioners as new forms of international governance that have emerged to fill some of the functional gaps and failures of the UN system.<sup>23</sup> The transnational partnership movement, however, has emerged and remains in parallel to intergovernmental structures, and so far neither the literature nor policy makers have tackled the more challenging questions of the comparative advantages of each type of institution, their interaction, and their combined effectiveness. This examination of WSSD partnerships suggests that transnational partnerships and networks endorsed by the UN system are likely to benefit from a greater level of institutionalization, a better definition of their objectives, and an ability to establish bridges with specific targets and agreements set by intergovernmental bodies. It also shows, however, that it is as yet unclear whether there is sufficient interest by governments—the actors that still, for the most part, dominate international governance systems—to bind more closely intergovernmen-

tal and multi-stakeholder types of outcomes.

Reaching consensus on these choices will be difficult because of divergent preferences. The UN bureaucracy probably has little to gain from staking out a forward position on the partnership issue and may, by and large, be content to let the process fade into obscurity, having already delivered its function of providing a procedural outcome of note at Johannesburg. Wealthy governments, although they proved quite willing to enter the partnership process in the lead-up to Johannesburg, have little incentive to subject their partnerships to oversight, transparency, and accountability at the international level. Poor governments are concerned that deeper institutionalization will be translated into forms of conditionality.<sup>24</sup> NGOs are enthusiastic supporters of deeper institutionalization because they think it will tie the hands of national governments, but they have a limited ability to influence the deliberations over how to institutionalize the partnership process.<sup>25</sup> One tangible sign of how inhospitable the constellation of interests may be can be observed by looking at the large number of industry-led initiatives that opted not to associate with the formal WSSD process at all. Under the auspices of the Business Action for Sustainable Development, 95 partnership initiatives were announced in the lead up to the WSSD.<sup>26</sup> But almost none of these partnerships chose to register with the WSSD partnership process, instead creating a parallel registry that will pose barriers to monitoring and priority setting across partnerships.

One possible future of the partnership process, therefore, is that it will quickly revert to where it was before Johannesburg. New innovative partnerships will continue to emerge in response to particular, fortuitous marriages of supply and demand; norms and lessons about how to manage such partnerships will diffuse as experience accrues; but there will be little overarching co-ordination across these mechanisms. They will resemble what Oran Young in a different context called 'spontaneous regimes'.<sup>27</sup>

The other possible future is that the Johannesburg partnerships will form the nucleus of a co-ordinated approach to transnational governance, with institutionalization evolving in response to periodic windows of opportunity and effective leadership. The report prepared by the Secretary-General as input to the eleventh meeting of the Commission on Sustainable Development is an instructive example. Although it says very little explicitly about partnerships, it recommends a matrix approach to follow-up centred around geographic regions and topical themes in which partnerships could potentially play a useful role. This approach was broadly endorsed at CSD-11.<sup>28</sup> Whether partnerships are able to play such a role in prac-

tice will depend on the development of a demand for institutionalization that is greater than what can currently be observed.

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