

The Road from Johannesburg: What Future for Partnerships in Global Environmental Governance?

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Introduction

After the protracted preparatory process, most delegates to the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) had few illusions as to the eventual outcomes. Yet even these modest expectations went unfulfilled.

Simply decrying the failure of formal summit diplomacy to advance state commitments to sustainable development, however, misses the new and remarkable element of the Johannesburg process. The transition from pure intergovernmental conference diplomacy to a broader notion of “environmental governance,” involving not only governments and international organizations, but also businesses and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), for the first time took the world stage. As one observer aptly remarked: “This Summit will be remembered not for the treaties, the commitments, or the declarations it produced, but for the first stirrings of a new way of governing the global commons – the beginnings of a shift from the stiff formal waltz of traditional diplomacy to the jazzier dance of improvisational solution-oriented partnerships that may include non-government organizations, willing governments and other stakeholders” (WRI 2002).

Few would deny that the debate on the greater role for public-private partnerships¹ (or, in UN jargon, “Type-II” outcomes²) has been the most striking and novel element of the Summit held in

¹ In this context, the term partnership does not refer to any general or limited partnerships as defined by law.

² As opposed to “Type-I” outcomes, that refer to intergovernmental agreements and declarations, such as the Johannesburg Political Declaration and the Johannesburg Implementation Plan of Action (WSSD 2002a and 2002b). Accessible at <http://www.johannesburgsummit.org/html/sustainable_dev/partnership_initiatives.html>, (accessed 7 November 2002).

Johannesburg in September 2002. Yet, there is broad disagreement on whether this new development is positive. Many find fault with the risks associated with the “jazzier dance” of partnerships and multi-sectoral governance. Critical NGOs regard the new partnership lingo as a shrewd effort by governments to abdicate responsibility to promote sustainable development through new binding commitments. They argue that the partnership approach may undermine formal intergovernmental processes through a “privatization” of the United Nations. Others perceive the push for partnerships as a simple strategy to help multinational companies gloss over their often tarnished environmental or human rights records. Critics opine that much of what may be perceived as corporate environmentalism is merely “greenwash” – an attempt to achieve the appearance of a social and environmental conscience without corresponding substance. They believe such greenwashing is being used to manipulate the public perception of corporations and diffuse public pressure to impose binding regulations. Thus, many NGOs characterize efforts to formally integrate the private sector in deliberations on sustainable development during the WSSD process as the privatization of global environmental governance that “gives an ultimate seal-of-approval to corporate lobby groups and their ‘best practice’ projects. The bias towards “Type-II” commitments also reflects the lack of political will to negotiate effective and legally binding solutions to the world’s most pressing social and environment problems” (Corporate Europe Observatory 2002).

The partnership agenda was not only opposed by large parts of the NGO community. In addition, a coalition of developing countries lobbied until the very end against the adoption of partnerships as an official outcome of the Summit. Their mistrust was based on the fear that the introduction of partnerships would take pressure off industrialized countries to provide additional resources for sustainable development.

These criticisms do point to important shortcomings and outright failings in the current practice of public-private partnerships and multi-sectoral alliances. Despite these problems, however, it seems premature to throw the baby out with the bathwater and to discard any potential contribution these new

elements of the system of “global environmental governance” have to offer.

The shift to the notion of a broader understanding of “global environmental governance” (in contrast to pure intergovernmental cooperation) is no accident, but instead reflects the changing realities facing governments and international organizations, as well as businesses and civil society organizations. Environmental governance is no longer understood as a function exclusively performed by governments. Instead, it is recognized that in order to be effective, efficient, and legitimate, governments and international organizations need to work with partners from all other sectors – business as well as civil society – at a variety of levels – local, national, regional and global. The exclusive understanding of governance as a formal, legalistic process dominated by the public sector has given way to a new conception that emphasizes a less formal, more collaborative, and integrated approach. The WSSD debate on the role of voluntary partnerships in promoting sustainable development should be analyzed and evaluated with this reasoning in mind.

A serious shortcoming of the WSSD debate, however, was its failure to clearly define the partnership concept. No comprehensive understanding was developed of what to expect from partnerships and what role various actors should play. On a broader level, it also remained unclear how “Type-II” outcomes were to relate to the official intergovernmental process and the negotiation of binding commitments during the Summit. The result was that the two processes co-existed but without substantial interaction or an exploration of their complementarities.

Simply embracing or completely discarding these new forms of networked governance out of hand appears shortsighted. Instead, we need a forward-looking and critical assessment of the potential role, as well as the limitations, of collaborative partnerships in promoting sustainable development. This chapter seeks to contribute to a clearer understanding of how to effectively use partnerships by:

- Laying out a conceptual framework for analyzing partnerships, building on the global public policy approach;
- Analyzing the potential drawbacks of partnerships through a

look at management challenges and a number of critical design and process features that demand attention and serious commitment, in particular from governments and international organizations;

- Outlining conclusions for further research and practice that will form the basis for policy recommendations.

We argue that, if correctly employed and managed, multi-sectoral cooperation in partnerships can make an important contribution to addressing the implementation crisis in global environmental policy-making. In short, our answer to the question “Should partnerships play a role in global environmental governance?” is yes, but conditionally. In what follows, we suggest a framework in which to categorize these new forms of governance and provide a set of principles that networks and partnerships should adopt in order to be effective and accountable.

Conceptual Framework: How to Analyze and Categorize Partnerships

The Johannesburg debate on “Type-II” outcomes and the role of partnerships in implementing sustainable development projects suffered from a lack of conceptual clarity. The largest problem was the absence of a common definition for partnerships and a unified strategy for evaluating and categorizing them. During the preparatory process for the Summit, government delegates agreed on a preliminary and vague definition of partnerships, stating that they are “(. . .) specific commitments by various partners intended to contribute to and reinforce the implementation of outcomes of the intergovernmental negotiations of the WSSD and to help achieve the further implementation of Agenda 21 and the Millennium Development Goals” (Kara and Quarless 2002). They also produced a long list of recommendations for how partnerships should be organized and how they should be operating. Irrespective of these preparations, the approach taken by the delegates was so broad and unfocused that it resulted in an “anything goes” policy for partnerships in the WSSD context. The 228 “partnerships” listed to this date on the WSSD website³

³ Accessible at <http://www.johannesburgsummit.org/html/sustainable_dev/partnership_initiatives.html> (accessed 7 November 2002).

feature a broad range of organizational forms, procedural rules, and objectives, making it almost impossible to compare across cases and to establish benchmarks for best practice.

At this early stage in the development of environmental governance, a case can be made for a proliferation of different types and forms of partnerships, or for “letting a thousand flowers bloom.” At the same time, wanton creation of partnerships without concern for accountability, ethical behavior, or effectiveness might result in “worse than nothing” outcomes. Thus, there is an urgent need for a better conceptual understanding of partnerships in order to assess their potential as well as their limitations and to initiate a framework to guide partnership formation in a direction that is both effective and ethical.

Various observers have suggested that partnerships are part of a phenomenon that has attracted growing attention in recent years among researchers and policymakers, called “global public policy networks” (Reinicke and Deng et al. 2000). Indeed, the global public policy framework can bring much needed clarity and helpful guidance to the debate on partnerships. In fact, we believe that taking this framework as a basis for further discussions on the future of “Type-II” outcomes in the WSSD is critical to moving the debate to the next stage – and to arriving at a balanced assessment of the potential as well as limits of partnerships as a part of the overall system of global environmental governance.

Key Properties of Global Public Policy Networks

Global public policy networks have emerged over the past two decades, in response to the growing pressures to find practical solutions to complex global problems that cannot be effectively addressed by individual governments alone. The absence of a centralized governmental and rule-making structure and attendant bureaucratic procedures has provided space for innovation and experimentation. In many cases, multi-sectoral networks have developed in response to the failure of traditional state-centered governance solutions to complex problems with international dimensions.

Networks bring together actors from various sectors. Spanning socioeconomic, political and cultural gaps, networks manage relationships that otherwise degenerate into counterproductive

confrontation. Networks use the driving forces of globalization – technological change, and economic and political liberalization – to develop and promote a specific agenda. They are a form of “governance without world government,” but not “governance without governments.”

We suggest that the “Type-II” outcomes of the WSSD process should be analyzed and interpreted in the same conceptual framework as global public policy networks. Both are complex and demanding “political animals.” Similar to the problems they were developed to tackle, networks as well as partnerships require commitment by all participants, monitoring, and assessment in order to be effective. While there are important differences in the scope and scale of political commitment and involvement in partnerships and networks, they all require substantive and sustained investment in management and process on the part of all participants.

The naive idea that partnerships are simple technocratic “production mechanisms” suitable for addressing the implementation crisis in global environmental governance is misguided. Both implementation of solutions and development of solutions through partnerships require sustained involvement and monitoring by all parties. We should trade the “mechanistic” understanding for a political conception of partnerships. Not only would this allow us to understand the significance of the partnership phenomenon in the broader context of global environmental governance, but a political conception also highlights critical issues such as democratic control and power-sharing that so far have not received adequate attention.

Although networks tend to come in as many flavors as the problems they address, there is a set of overarching characteristics that they share. Some ideal-type characteristics have been developed for global public policy networks, which are a specific form of multi-sectoral network operating in global issue areas, that clearly differentiate these institutional innovations from traditional, hierarchical organizations. These ideal-type characteristics are also applicable to partnerships and are detailed below.

Interdependence. Cooperation in networks is based on the premise that, individually, no single group can address and solve

the issue at stake. Multi-sectoral networks, however, are able to build bridges that transcend national boundaries between each of the sectors—the public and private sectors and civil society. Multi-sectoral networks are able to reflect the changing roles and relative importance of each of the actors involved in combining their resources to solve a particular problem. The network structure is an explicit recognition that the ability of any single actor to achieve its agenda is dependent on the action and support of all other actors.

Flexibility and Learning Capability. Networks come in various forms and organizational types that can also evolve through the process of cooperation, particularly as there are few binding constraints as to the role of each participant. Networks structures are able to update and evolve in response to input from successes and failures. Furthermore, their evolutionary character and flexible structure allows for openness – accommodating new players during the process and tying them into the network, and letting go of partners whose tasks are completed. In the evolution of the network, old links break and new links form as required.

Complementarity. Networks profit and are sustained by the diversity of their constituency. Through their “strength of weak ties,” networks are able to handle this diversity of actors precisely because of the productive tensions on which they rest (Granovetter 1973). As a result, networks facilitate the discussion of controversial issues and provide a favorable framework for political deliberation, which is often not possible in the sometimes highly charged aggressive diplomatic negotiations among states. At the same time, they also create the conditions for the combination and coordination of complementary resources. Governance through global public policy networks provides mechanisms that facilitate the transfer and application of knowledge and other resources among various actors in the network and eventually benefit outside actors as well.

Different Types of Networks

Networks come in a wide range of forms and perform a multitude of functions, and so do partnerships. So far, no clear-cut typology of networks has been developed. Yet, preliminary empirical

Table: Ideal-Type Forms of Networks			
Network Type	Negotiation Networks	Coordination Networks	Implementation Networks
Goal	Negotiating global norms and standards	Facilitating joint action strategies	Facilitating implementation of intergovernmental agreements
Building on existing environmental treaties	Not necessarily	Not necessarily	Yes
Equal representation of stakeholders	Important	Less important	Potentially important
Number of actors included in network	Limited	Unlimited	Limited
Transparency	Important	Less important	Important
Balancing power asymmetries	Important	Less important	Potentially important
Equal financing	Important	Less important	Less important
Example	World Commission on Dams	Roll Back Malaria Initiative	Clean Development Mechanism

research suggests three ideal-types, summarized in the table above. These types should not be seen as mutually exclusive – some networks encompass more than one type or may have characteristics that overlap between two types. These ideal types should be viewed as a loose type of categorization for understanding the potential roles and types of networks.

Various networks have fulfilled more than one function during their existence. Most networks begin by playing an instrumental role in placing issues on the global agenda and thereby create new consciousness and the political capital necessary for pushing stalled problems forward. Later they may evolve into coordination or implementation networks.

There is a broad continuum of different constellations in networks – states and international organizations often play a prominent role but do not necessarily have to at every stage of the

process. Some highly successful networks are mainly based on the cooperation of NGOs and companies with no or very little public sector involvement.⁴

The types in the table emphasize one crucial point: different types of networks have different implications for concerns about legitimacy, accountability, transparency and power asymmetries. There is no one-size-fits-all solution for a rules-based framework for partnerships, nor are there generic answers to the concerns outlined above. The issue area and the scope (national versus transnational) of the network dictate the *modus operandi*.

For example, the most difficult and contentious function a network can fulfill is facilitating the setting of global norms and standards. Global negotiation networks have developed in complex issue areas such as transnational money laundering and global water management.⁵ In those instances, questions of legitimacy (who is allowed to sit at the table?), accountability (who is accountable to whom?), and the distribution of power (financial power) are of the utmost importance.

In contrast, simple coordination networks, where actors from all sectors come together to coordinate action strategies in order to pool their resources, do not demand the same degree of inclusiveness. Driven by new information technologies, coordination networks facilitate broad-based knowledge exchanges between governments, international organizations, NGOs and the private sector, and thereby help to identify common goals and the development of coordinated action strategies. As a result, coordination networks help to improve the allocation of scarce resources and avoid duplication. Such networks function according to the principle of comparative advantage and are usually open to any group willing to contribute resources to solve a specific problem. Examples include the Roll Back Malaria Initiative (RBM), the Global Water Partnership (GWP), and the Medicines for Malaria Venture (MMV).

Networks have developed in a number of areas as a new, if peculiar, form of knowledge management. The more conflicting

⁴ It is important to mention, however, that less public sector involvement should not amount to self-regulation, or pure private governance.

⁵ For a thorough treatment of all cases mentioned in this chapter, see Reinicke, Deng et al. (2000) as well as our institute's web site at <www.globalpublicpolicy.net>.

the knowledge, the greater the need to resolve opposing interests, and the more contentious the redistribution of resources, the more important are issues such as inclusiveness, equal representation, and transparency. Conversely, the more commonly accepted problem definitions are, and the more agreement there is on ways and means to tackle a certain issue, the less important it is to focus on such politically contentious design features.

The example of knowledge management provides an insight into the role of implementation networks that are of special relevance in the context of the WSSD negotiations. Implementation networks are hybrids – multi-sectoral alliances that come together to promote international environmental treaties negotiated by governments. In some cases, they build on consensual knowledge and simply help to address the implementation challenge. In other cases, an implementation network may also take on different parallel functions – renegotiating some of the underlying standards for implementation, or building coalitions for a revision of existing treaty norms. What differentiates an implementation network from a coordination network is the fact that the latter usually leads to a close integration of companies as well as NGOs in decision-making processes of international organizations, whereas the former simply involves the sharing and synchronization of resource use.

Improving Coherence, Accountability, Evaluation, and Learning: Critical Management Challenges for Partnerships

The ideal-types of networks, as well as some of their key properties discussed above, enhance our understanding of the nature and potential contribution of partnerships in promoting sustainable development. Analyzing partnerships through the global public policy lens brings tremendously important new perspectives to the current debate on how to move forward. First and foremost, the discussion above highlights the need for a set of basic rules for the practice of partnerships to enhance their efficiency and accountability.

These “rules of engagement” are key in order to make partnerships more accountable and effective by addressing the

criticisms voiced during the Summit by concerned NGOs and governments. The actual diversity of partnerships emphasizes the fact that there are no one-size-fits-all solutions to successful partnership management. Critical issues such as ensuring the transparency and accountability of a partnership, providing capacity-building for those who are in need of it, and engaging in systematic monitoring and evaluation of partnership processes and outcomes cannot be achieved with a single recipe. Most importantly, attempts to devise basic rules for partnerships require balanced debate and must take account of the various forms and functions of partnerships and networks, thereby overcoming the often mechanistic and politically naïve ideal of partnerships that informs much of the current thinking about partnerships.

Overall, the position of governments toward partnership rules can be described as strikingly lax – and stands in contrast to the high profile media treatment partnerships received during the Johannesburg Summit. The rules of engagement discussed in this article go well beyond the “Guiding Principles” developed for “Type-II” outcomes during the WSSD process (Kara and Quarless 2002). (See also the discussion in Maria Ivanova’s contribution to this volume.) Governments and international organizations need to act on three fronts to avoid a sustained popular backlash against partnerships and to create adequate structures and rules to take opportunity of the potential of partnerships. First, they have to create a systematic global framework to integrate partnerships into the overall system of global environmental governance. Second, governments need to ensure that there are commonly accepted ground rules for partnerships to which all actors adhere. And third, governments and international organizations need to put in place a mechanism for monitoring, evaluation, and learning. This mechanism would evaluate and determine best practices, facilitate learning from success stories as well as failures, and, most importantly, would make sure there is compliance with the basic rules of the game.

Promoting Coherence: Linking “Type I” and “Type II” Outcomes

During the Johannesburg Summit, the “Type-I” and “Type-II” processes appeared to be almost entirely disconnected. While national delegations negotiated the details of the political declaration and the implementation plan, a great number of partnerships were presented in neighboring conference rooms. This disconnect produced a lot of confusion. It remained unclear what type of roles governments envisioned for partnerships in the overall context of global environmental governance. Many government delegates, in particular those from the developed world, emphasized the importance of partnership approaches, but failed to provide convincing answers for why this was true and why it would matter. Furthermore, on the one hand, governments emphasized the “additionality” of partnerships, yet, on the other, failed to provide an overall global framework by setting meaningful global goals. The U.S. government delegation in particular was vehemently criticized by many NGOs for highlighting (some might argue overstating) the importance of partnerships while at the same time blocking intergovernmental negotiations on new commitments to promote sustainable development. As one observer noted: “The United States missed a real opportunity at last month’s World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg. Despite widespread international criticism for its rejection of an apparent international consensus on many environmental issues, the United States brought to Johannesburg promising and much-needed new approaches – such as partnerships among government, industry and environmentalists – that could help address festering world problems. Unfortunately, by refusing to commit itself to targets and timetables, the United States failed to force other countries to take its ideas seriously, and to begin a transformation of the debate about sustainability” (Lempert 2002).

Governments have to recognize and emphasize the symbiotic relationship between “Type-I” and “Type-II” outcomes. Partnership approaches to governance on their own will never substitute for binding international commitments by governments. Nor would that be desirable. The success of partnerships depends to a large degree on the willingness of governments to set

ambitious binding targets. Partnerships can be one means through which such targets can be effectuated. But partnerships will not develop outside of such a nurturing context precisely because they have no legitimacy in their own right; they draw their mandate from the participation of national governments or international organizations. For the private sector and civil society to play a more responsible role in global environmental governance, governments have to demonstrate their willingness to commit resources and to play an instrumental role.

Furthermore, it is important to link partnership efforts more directly to the official intergovernmental agenda. At this point, for example, it is unclear what contribution the 228 partnerships posted on the web site of the Johannesburg Summit will make to the official global environmental agenda. Governments and international organizations must ensure that partnerships are created around existing multilateral environmental agreements for overall policy coherence. Although this is not necessarily meant to exclude sensible partnership projects that might not be associated with a single international treaty, it should promote overall policy coherence so that initiatives and resources are not sidetracked into non-priority issues. For overall consistency, in terms of prioritizing issues, and in order to avoid the development of parallel efforts, it is crucial that an overarching systematic framework instrumental for a better coordination of global partnership efforts is put in place. At the same time, this is not to suggest that a centralized mechanism should exist to coordinate partnerships. The decentralized nature of partnerships is part of their strength, but there should be an overall framework specified, by possibly the UN, on the areas in which partnerships would be useful in order to channel efforts in the right direction. If governments and international organizations do not succeed in providing such an overall framework, it will be difficult, if not impossible, to ever assess the real contributions these new forms of governance make to the promotion of sustainable development.

Developing an overall guiding framework should not be interpreted as a call for the creation of an inevitably heavy-handed global institutional structure for the administration and regulation of partnership initiatives. But *laissez-faire* is also not an appropriate response. The development of a guiding framework requires the

strengthening of institutional capacity within those parts of the UN system directly responsible. In the same way that we recognize the need for accountability in corporate financial reporting or banking regulation, there should be a reliable and effective framework for partnerships. This framework would allow diversity and ingenuity to flourish within its boundaries so that resources and energy are directed and coordinated to effective ends.

Setting Ground Rules for Partnerships: Accountability, Capacity Building, and Evaluation

Participation in partnerships is voluntary in nature. But, as in any other type of mutual arrangement, this does not mean that they should function without basic agreed-upon rules. In fact, as has been amply demonstrated by various empirical studies, the success or failure of partnerships is contingent, to a large degree, on the existence of trust among partners, the level of transparency, and the way partnership initiatives deal with power asymmetries – all of which depend on the effective application of a minimum set of rules (See Reinicke, Deng et al. 2000; Nelson and Zadek 1999; Nelson 2001 for case studies).

Governments and international organizations are not the only players that have to respond to this pressing agenda. Business and civil society organizations are equally challenged to work with the public sector to apply basic rules to their activities and to monitor and enforce good behavior. Yet, governments and international organizations have a particular responsibility vis-à-vis their citizens, who rightly demand not only effective, but also transparent, accountable, and legitimate instruments of global environmental governance. An overall value framework for partnerships, developed in a multi-sectoral negotiation process, combined with a powerful and innovative incentive mechanism monitored and enforced by international organizations, are important steps into the right direction.

A value framework for partnerships should reflect the concerns and opinions of all stakeholders, and set out the basic rules for partnerships in the field of global environmental governance while accounting for the fact that partnerships come in different forms and fulfill varying functions. The process through which such a value framework should be developed could be modeled on

the experience of the World Commission on Dams (WCD). The WCD was created as a multi-sectoral negotiation network in the late 1990's in an effort to develop commonly accepted rules for large dam construction. Through an inclusive and transparent process, the WCD managed to transcend highly volatile and politically sensitive conflicts and to channel that social conflict into a productive multi-sectoral dialogue with concrete results. Through extensive consultation and parallel research projects, the Commission managed to link the global deliberation process to regional as well as local levels, thereby including the directly affected citizens in its deliberations. A balanced approach in the financing of the Commission's work with equal contributions from foundations, companies and the public sector, has ensured the impartiality and legitimacy of the WCD to this day (WCD 2000; Dubash et al. 2001). The UN, as the most universal international organization, could be the convener for such a multi-sectoral process.

Many observers have called for an intergovernmental treaty to set out the basic rules for partnerships, as well as a binding framework for overall corporate behavior in the global marketplace.⁶ For example, during the WSSD preparatory meeting in New York in January 2002, NGOs, and trade unions made a strong call for the United Nations to develop binding global laws to govern the behavior of multi-national corporations. However, these binding rules would be exceedingly difficult to negotiate, given that such negotiations, even on a national level, are difficult and rare. In addition, it is not clear this would be the best means to achieve ethical and environmentally sound corporate behavior, as binding rules would be inflexible and hard to adapt to changing conditions. In addition, as described above, the partnerships corporations are involved in come in diverse shapes and formats, and it is not clear what kind of regulatory

⁶ See for example the discussions on a binding international framework for corporate social responsibility in the European Union (document collection accessible at <http://forum.europa.eu.int/irc/empl/csr_eu_multi_stakeholder_forum/info/data/en/csr%20ems%20forum.htm>, accessed 6 November 2002). See also the "Resolution: People's action for corporate responsibility," signed by more than 100 NGOs during the "Corporate Accountability Week" held in Sandton, South Africa, in August 2002 on the eve of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (accessible at <<http://www.globalpolicy.org/reform/business/2002/2002action.htm>>, accessed 6 November 2002). See also Friends of the Earth (2002).

approach would be suitable in the future. Furthermore, an overly strict regulatory approach may have suffocating effects. It seems quite possible that in the long run, an accepted, broad-based consensus on corporate social accountability and rules for partnerships may well be codified into an international treaty. It is critical at this point therefore to initiate a dialogue that brings together all stakeholders to develop a set of ground rules acceptable to all, rather than to initiate preemptive mandatory regulation that would be difficult to negotiate, troublesome to implement, and almost impossible to monitor or enforce.

Despite the necessity to maintain flexibility and openness as to the types of rules, at this point there can be no doubt that three sets of issues figure prominently on the agenda: accountability (as one instrument to address concerns over legitimacy), capacity-building (as a mechanism to overcome power asymmetries), and monitoring and evaluation (as a mechanism to foster compliance). All three are intrinsically related, although for the purpose of exposition we will discuss each separately.

Accountability

As emphasized above, partnerships are meant to complement national policymaking and intergovernmental cooperation. They can facilitate the negotiation of global norms and standards, coordinate resource use, and help to close the “implementation gap” – but they do not legislate. Therefore, it is evident that elections or direct hierarchical accountability structures are not suitable for these decentralized processes.

Further, the lack of a mechanism for political oversight of partnerships should not be taken as an excuse to ignore the implications of new networked forms of governance for democratic legitimacy. If they do become a constant and significant feature of the overall system of global environmental governance, citizens around the world should have the right and the opportunity to review partnership participants, processes, and results. Proper accountability mechanisms need to be put in place. But given the lack of any single clear principal or any one electorate, to whom should partnerships be accountable?

In the absence of a global political structure that could facilitate democratic controls and institute checks and balances for global

environmental governance, national governments and international organizations should advocate a pluralistic system of accountability. The basis of this system would be the natural checks and balances provided by the participation of diverse actors and incentive mechanisms designed to generate compliance with a broad set of rules. Mechanisms of accountability should include:

Professional/Peer Accountability: Partnership actors from a similar sector (e.g., experts, NGOs, business, governments) should be subject to peer accountability by other NGOs, experts, or members of the business community. For example, they could be asked to adhere to professional “codes of conduct” wherever they exist.

Public Reputational Accountability: “Naming and shaming” is important in this context – actors in partnerships are accountable to the public for their actions and face reputational costs.

Market Accountability: Participants in partnerships who are also market participants might be rewarded/punished by other market participants/consumers for their actions.

Fiscal/Financial Accountability: Partnerships and their participants have to account for the use of funds in the partnership according to a widely recognized set of accounting standards.

None of these mechanisms alone will be sufficient in ensuring the accountability of partnerships. Rather, the individual components work together in a self-reinforcing way. As a result, there is no single straightforward strategy to foster the accountability and legitimacy of partnerships. Instead, governments and international organizations should ensure that all of the elements of a pluralistic system of accountability are nurtured and strengthened (Benner, Witte, and Reinicke 2002).

Rules, Sharing of Resources, and Capacity Building

There can be no doubt that partnerships are characterized by strong power asymmetries. However, as already indicated by the

above depiction of partnerships as a diverse rather than uniform phenomenon, the scale as well as the significance of power asymmetries vary across cases. As one observer notes, “partnerships are ‘nested’ within local, national, and international policy frameworks that either enable equitable conditions for partnerships, or exacerbate power asymmetries” (Weitzner 2002). Again, there will be no single formula that applies to all cases.

There are two basic strategies to address power asymmetries in partnerships. First, actors can be empowered to participate effectively and to make their voices heard. This could be accomplished through capacity-building and resource endowment. Second, rules can be set to ensure that those who do not have access to financial or other resources are not disadvantaged in the partnership process. On both ends, governments and international organizations can make important first steps.

Without doubt, the task of empowerment can only succeed as part of a decentralized strategy for capacity building. There is no global institution that would have the resources – financial or otherwise – to function as a central capacity-building institution. In fact, the only candidate for such a role – the United Nations – is most likely in need of capacity-building itself. National governments and international organizations, however, can make a start in providing funding and other resources for capacity-building. For example, partnership management training (as offered by Cambridge University in collaboration with the International Business Leaders Forum and the Copenhagen Centre), as well as small grant programs to enable NGOs to participate in partnership processes, provide a good start. Furthermore, governments and international organizations could also promote capacity building through the creation of a partnership resource network. There are numerous public and private players, in both developing and developed countries, that can make a useful contribution to capacity-building. For small NGOs, it is often simply lack of information that is a barrier to identifying potential resources bases. The new Partnership Office that will be created as part of the UN Secretary-General’s reform agenda could play an important role in this respect (United Nations 2002: 26).

It is important to emphasize at this point that capacity-building is not only crucial for NGOs and other actors that do not have access to sufficient financial or other resources. Companies as well as governments and international organizations are equally in need of capacity-building. Working successfully with and through partnerships is not simply a function of existing resource endowment. It also crucially depends on the ability of actors to adapt to partnership environments; to know how to work with partners from very different social and political backgrounds; and to learn from experience. These abilities cannot be presumed, but instead require organizational and cultural adaptation on the part of all those involved.

Capacity-building and the establishment of a global resource network are important in the medium to long term, whereas setting out the rules governing partnerships is more important for addressing power asymmetries immediately. Various measures are needed to counteract the domination that differential resource endowments have on partnership outcomes. For example, tough transparency rules for partnerships might make a reckless exercise of financial superiority by companies more difficult. Correspondingly, it would make it easier to “name and shame” those who abuse their power. Increased transparency would not only help to ensure greater accountability and thereby legitimacy overall – it would also help to address power imbalances by giving the weaker partners or members a larger voice for their concerns, thereby allowing them greater exercise of their moral authority in influencing partnership processes and outcomes. Another approach to tackling power asymmetries is to mandate clear cross-sectoral staffing of any partnership bodies or institutions entrusted with facilitating the partnership process or with implementing results. In this way, individuals from all sectors would be equally integrated into formal partnership structures, regardless of their financial resources. Such multi-sectoral staffing may help weaker partners maintain some control over the process and allow them to have direct access to all critical information. However, as suggested above, the development of rules for partnerships itself should be a multi-stakeholder process rather than mandated in a top-down exclusive manner by a government agency.

Monitoring and Evaluating Partnerships

Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms need to be put in place to endow the legally non-binding rules framework with sufficient strength to accomplish its mandate. In the absence of top-down sanctioning mechanisms, effective monitoring and evaluation are key factors for ensuring compliance. It is here that governments and international organizations will have to make their greatest effort to ensure the viability of the partnership approach to sustainable development. Merely voicing the words and signing deals does not accomplish the goals of true multi-stakeholder processes.

Evaluation and monitoring are critical for a number of reasons. Both, if properly managed, facilitate learning from experience – a crucial precondition for future improvements of partnership processes and outcomes. Evaluation, in particular, is a crucial device for analyzing the costs and benefits of partnerships and for determining whether they are accomplishing their objectives. Many observers have questioned directing crucial resources, such as time, money, and personnel, toward process-heavy governance mechanisms that do not promise hard and fast results. Proper evaluation is needed to assess whether a partnership is the correct as well as necessary governance mechanism, and when it simply contributes to waste. Monitoring and evaluation also help to improve the transparency of partnership proceedings, and are therefore the most important – if not the only – instrument whereby outsiders can arrive at informed judgments on the legitimacy, effectiveness or efficiency of a given partnership. Finally, monitoring and evaluation help to identify “free-rider” and “rent-seeking” behavior within partnerships. The fact that partners sign a partnership agreement does not automatically imply that they will live up to their commitments. Moreover, it is critical to set out what those commitments entail. Merely signing an agreement is not sufficient to being a participant.

So far, monitoring and evaluation of partnerships have not been very prominent items on the WSSD agenda. This needs to change. To start with, as already argued above, in order to construct a meaningful strategy for monitoring and evaluation, there must be a useful and commonly accepted definition of the term

partnership. The concept has been elusive to this point. Building on a definition such as that outlined above – or better, a conceptual framework – governments and international organizations then have to devise standards and mechanisms for the monitoring and evaluation of partnerships in the framework of the WSSD process. If there are any rules that should be mandated for the proper functioning of partnerships, it should be rules for monitoring and evaluation. While surely no panacea for all the challenges that stakeholders face in the partnership domain, making partnership proceedings public, facilitating learning from experience, and enabling stakeholders and outside observers to arrive at informed judgments are powerful instruments that help stakeholders to understand the potential as well as limits of partnership approaches to the promotion of sustainable development.

In particular, the following dimensions of partnerships should be part of an overall monitoring and evaluation strategy:

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

Equity: Who participates? Is representation of stakeholder interests equitable? Who decides who may sit at the table? Who has made the selection rules?

Procedural Rules: How are decisions being made in the partnership? What type of decision-making rules are employed? Who has set the rules?

Costs and Benefits: Who benefits from the partnership? What kind of benefits are distributed? Is distribution equitable? Who bears the costs? Who finances the partnership? Are there unintended costs?

Stability of Partnerships: How stable is the partnership? What determines stability, instability? Who/what is instrumental in ensuring the stability of the partnership?

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

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

What might seem like a laundry list to some simply reflects the fact that we are only beginning to fully understand all the various dimensions of the partnership phenomenon. Proper evaluation and monitoring first of all require a sound understanding of the partnership at hand. Also, despite the fact that we can build on a wealth of experience in the evaluation discipline,⁷ thorough assessments of partnerships have only recently come on the agenda.⁸

Governments and international organizations need to pursue this agenda. Proper monitoring and evaluation should be mandatory for partnerships that become part of the official WSSD process. Of course, such activities will require the dedication of substantial resources. It is difficult to see that we could make any significant progress in addressing partnership challenges without monitoring and evaluation mechanisms in place. It is unfortunate in this context that the UN Secretary-General’s new reform agenda emphasizes the greater role and significance of partnerships for the organization’s work, but fails to recognize this important dimension (United Nations 2002). The UN and its various specialized agencies are in dire need of putting proper evaluation practices in place to ensure the accountability and effectiveness of their involvement with partnerships.

⁷ Various organizations provide substantial expertise and offer high-quality services in evaluation. See for example the World Bank’s Operation Evaluation Department (OED, accessible at <<http://www.worldbank.org/oed/>>) or UNDP’s Evaluation Office (EO, accessible at <<http://www.undp.org/eo/>>). In addition, there are numerous national evaluation societies that provide a wealth of information.

⁸ See for example the papers presented at last year’s World Bank “Conference on Evaluation and Development: The Partnership Dimension,” (Washington, D.C., 23-24 July 2001), accessible at <<http://www.worldbank.org/html/oed/partnershipconference/>>, (accessed 7 November 2002).

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated both the potential and the limits of partnerships as mechanisms for global environmental governance. Partnerships promote change and innovation through introducing new actors, new settings, and new modes of interaction into global environmental governance. If governments provide the necessary framework condition, and if partnerships get the process right, the interplay between the different sectors, between different levels (local/national/regional/global) and actors from both North and South holds a high potential for policy implementation and policy learning.

Engaging in partnerships can have beneficial feedback effects on the way states, international organizations, businesses, and civil society actors conduct their business. But fruitful collaboration in partnerships can only work if all actors are willing to question formerly unquestioned routines and beliefs. This is hard to accept, in particular for powerful actors who are used to not having to learn. Also, learning to operate in a highly dynamic environment, and coping with the many pressures it generates, is a tremendously complex task. For public institutions especially, both on the national and multilateral level, learning processes often seem to proceed only at a painstakingly slow pace.

The UN and the World Bank have declared that partnerships and “coalitions for change” are a central part of their strategic orientation for the future (United Nations 1999 and 2002; Wolfensohn 1999). Nevertheless, as all the contributions to this volume demonstrate, involvement of international organizations in partnerships remains scattered, and public institutions generally lack a coherent strategy for how to mainstream engaging in partnerships in their “normal” way of doing business. There are no processes for selecting and prioritizing, no rigorous mechanisms for determining their appropriate role in various partnerships and the kind of internal restructuring and adjustment this change in strategy would require.

It goes without saying that increased involvement of multilateral institutions, and especially the UN and its specialized agencies in partnerships, will require bold steps in changing the organizational structures and cultures of these institutions.

Equally, if not more important, it requires a fundamental change on the part of the stakeholders in these organizations, the member states.

Partnerships are by definition volatile constructs that require much attention and careful management. That is why they do not offer an easy ride. But the difficulties are well worth the risk, given the daunting challenges of a complex world with an ever-expanding multiplicity of actors, interests, and issues that need to be resolved. They represent a promising medium through which states and their international organizations can achieve their mission, maintain their competence in a changing global environment, and serve their citizens in a more effective and legitimate way.

Despite the fact that this chapter has primarily focused on the role and future tasks of governments and international organizations in the partnership domain, it should be clear that civil society organizations as well as companies face an equally demanding agenda if the partnership agenda is to succeed in the future. They will also have to adapt to the new global environment, and they will have to learn to play by the new rules for partnerships. For business, partnerships are an important opportunity to demonstrate real commitment to operationalizing the “corporate social responsibility” agenda. For NGOs, partnerships are a tool to make a difference at the operational level in addition to the critical advocacy roles. This presupposes a substantial degree of professionalization and transparency on their side. Therefore a “partnership learning network” needs to include all parties involved – be they governments, international organizations, NGOs, or businesses. The following chapter will lay out a more comprehensive action agenda, including a call for the establishment of such a learning network.

In his Millennium Report, Kofi Annan stated: “If we are to get the best out of globalization and avoid the worst, we must learn to govern better, and how to govern better together. That does not mean world government or the eclipse of nation states. On the contrary, states need to be strengthened. And they can draw strength from each other, by acting together within common institutions based on shared rules and values. These institutions must reflect the realities of the time, including the distribution of

power. And they must serve as an arena for states to co-operate with non-state actors, including global companies. In many cases they need to be complemented by less formal policy networks, which can respond more quickly to the changing global agenda.” By establishing partnerships as mechanisms for global environmental governance, the Johannesburg Summit was surely another step toward successfully harnessing the power of civil society and business in the pursuit of a common global agenda. Yet we stand at a critical juncture. Idealism and nice words need to be complemented by a realistic assessment of the potential and limits of partnerships and – most of all – practical action to make them work.

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