

## Secretariat's Note:

### Highlights from the Interactive Discussion Sessions

#### Overview

In keeping with the goal of fostering interactivity and open dialogue during CSD-12, six Interactive Discussion sessions were organized within the CSD-12 Partnerships Fair. Two of these sessions were moderated discussions on the contribution of partnerships to the implementation of international commitments on water and sanitation, and on human settlements. The other four sessions were focused on practical issues related to partnerships and included brief introductory presentations followed by moderated discussions. The following is a compilation of key issues that emerged from these discussions.\*

#### General Observations

Throughout the sessions, many participants referred to partnerships for sustainable development as a new paradigm for interaction in the sustainable development arena. At the same time, it was stressed that it is difficult to identify one specific model for partnerships, as there are a multitude of partnership types, each varying widely in composition and function. It was frequently recognized that partnerships do not replace the crucial role of governments in implementation. While the voluntary nature of partnerships was noted, the need for transparency and accountability was also emphasized.

There was discussion on how partnerships for sustainable development in the context of World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) were different and truly "new". Participants pointed out that, while partnerships between various stakeholders existed well before the Summit in September 2002, WSSD was the first time there was official recognition that such partnerships could complement the work of governments in meeting the goals outlined in the international sustainable development agreements. Some participants expressed the view that the "new element" was the strong involvement of civil society organizations in partnerships. The wider range of actors involved in partnerships for sustainable development was seen as a positive indication of the greater range of expertise and capability being tapped by these multi-stakeholder initiatives.

While concerns were expressed that the partnership model had simply become a "fashionable" label, it was stressed that many partnership initiatives are more than a collection of logos. It was pointed out that, while many partnerships are translating broad goals and commitments into action, some of the expected results of partnerships had a long-term time horizon. "Building partnerships takes time and patience" was a frequent observation.

The need for greater community involvement, especially from poor communities was emphasized. This was reiterated in the general call for more demand-led partnerships. Some highlighted the need for partner organizations to consult at the national and sub-national level. The need for greater private sector involvement was mentioned, but at the same time challenges associated with engaging the private sector were also highlighted. Partnerships were seen by some as bridging mechanisms, linking bottom-up initiatives with top-down policy-making.

Throughout the Interactive Discussions, participants identified several features of successful partnerships. For example, shared commitment by all stakeholders, participatory processes, common definition of tasks, professionalism, respect and equity were some of the desirable characteristics of partnership arrangements that

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\* For information on the individual partnership presentations at the Partnerships Fair, including several of the presenters' PowerPoint files, please visit the CSD-12 Partnerships Fair web page: [http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/csd/csd12/CSD12\\_partnerships\\_fair.htm](http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/csd/csd12/CSD12_partnerships_fair.htm).

were identified. The presence of an enabling environment coupled with political will and leadership was seen as a critical to success, as was a combination of political and financial level support. Access to existing networks and contacts was flagged as being a contributing factor in success of partnerships. This was supported by the observation that building new partnerships on the basis of existing relationships has enabled initiatives to maximize impact in a relatively short amount of time.

Certain factors were identified as pre-conditions for equitable and effective partnerships. Building capacity of partner organizations so they have the knowledge and training necessary for effective participation was stressed. The role of partnerships brokers who help partners build their capacity and facilitate the partnership process was mentioned in this regard.

The need for greater coordination and cooperation at the national level was noted. The role of governments in setting the stage, engaging national policy-makers, and designating national focal points for partnerships was emphasized. The potential role of national councils for sustainable development in engaging stakeholders and coordinating between various ministries was also mentioned. It was recognized that political will in the upper echelons of government, and availability of resources was necessary.

Finally, it was noted that partnerships should not be seen as activities occurring on the “fringes” of implementation of sustainable development, and that efforts should be made to bring the innovative and creative practices being developed in partnerships into the mainstream.

## **Goals and Structure**

The discussions elicited a range of views and lessons learned on the goals and structure of partnerships. Regarding goals, participants highlighted the importance of defining measurable, time-bound tasks. It was observed that partnerships can pursue many types of goals: they can be task oriented, policy oriented, spurred by innovation and/or by accountability. Some suggested that the most effective partnerships were those that were a mix of all four areas. It was frequently stressed that partners must have a common definition of the project or task at hand, even if their institutions do not share a common vision.

Regarding structure, the need for partners with different skills and positioning was noted, emphasizing that partner roles and responsibilities needed to be “tailor-made” for each particular partner. All participants identified the need for some sort of overarching structure for partnerships, but participants varied on how rigid such a structure should be. Because partnerships are often multi-sectoral, multi-level arrangements, many saw clearly defined structures as necessary. Several participants identified the need for a code of conduct, either formal or informal, as being important. Others highlighted a variety of coordinating bodies set up to facilitate the partnership and implement its goals. Some participants, however, observed that their partnerships function best as a loose affiliation with only minimal formal interaction among partners.

It was also stressed that there is a need to balance time spent on organizational issues with time spent on implementation. Some raised a concern that an overemphasis on management structures could drain energy and momentum from implementation efforts.

The need for procedural equity within partnerships was stressed repeatedly. Clarity and transparency in decision-making was seen as essential to effective and equitable partnerships. It was suggested that all partners could be considered “donors”, as each organization commits time and resources by participating in these initiatives. Some highlighted the difference between “equality” and “equitability”, suggesting that equality among partners is often difficult given the power dynamics among institutions (e.g., national government versus local NGOs).

Participants observed that individual partners have their own organizational motivations, and that there is often understated competition between partners. While many saw partnerships as being trust-based, some argued that this trust is frequently between individuals and not institutions. Many stressed the need for initiatives to be based on mutual respect of partner contributions.

### **Communication and Coordination within Partnerships**

Partnerships that are in the operational phase identified the need for clear and consistent internal communication and coordination as a key challenge.

A wide range of coordination mechanisms was discussed, including the use of Steering Committees, “Terms of Reference”; “Principles of Engagement” and other decision-making protocols. The use of neutral facilitating bodies in the form of secretariats was frequently mentioned. It was emphasized that partnerships can involve considerable “day-to-day” management, a function that was fulfilled in many cases by a secretariat body and/or designated focal points within partner organizations. As with the discussions on structure, it was noted that not all partnerships chose to formalize their coordination mechanisms.

Frequently used communication methods included email list servers, websites and teleconferences. Electronic media was frequently cited as a means of disseminating information to wide audience. The need for communication tools to be accessible to a range of partners was also stressed, noting that not all communities have ready access to internet-based communications.

Utilizing meetings such as the International Forum on Partnerships for Sustainable Development in Rome and the sessions of the Commission on Sustainable Development as a means and impetus to update partnerships information was mentioned.

### **Funding for Partnerships**

The discussions on funding addressed several issues and trends. While a majority of partnerships for sustainable development have succeeded in securing at least seed funding, most of them are still seeking additional resources to enable them to continue their work beyond the current funding cycle, and to allow for replication of their partnership beyond the pilot phase.

All agreed that partnerships vary widely in their approach to funding. One participant described two partnership types at opposite ends of a spectrum: at one end are partnerships which pool their funding. These partnerships usually spend significant time setting up a governance mechanism, a management structure and staff. Any funding received is disbursed to partners through this management structure. At the other end are looser arrangements – usually expressed in the form of a letter of intent or a memorandum of understanding – that have no co-mingling of funds.

Partnering was seen by some as a new business model, representing a departure from the traditional relationships between donor and implementer or donor and vendor. Some called for further mainstreaming of the partnerships model within funding institutions, while others outlined concrete steps that have already been taken by some government agencies in this regard.

Some participants pointed out that timing of fundraising can be critical, observing that it can be more difficult for partnerships to obtain donor support after the partnership is operational. They suggested that partners had much greater success when they engaged donors during the planning stage.

With regard to private sector involvement, it was pointed out that there is often a reticence on the part of NGOs and IGOs to work with the corporate partners. It was suggested that it is important to ask up front whether or not

non-corporate partners were willing to work with the private sector. It was also noted that getting private sector sponsorship was easier on smaller specific “projects”, and that it was much harder to “pitch” long-term development programs. Redefining the role of private sector partners beyond corporate philanthropy was also seen as essential to fostering further private-sector involvement in partnerships.

Two suggestions for those seeking funding for their partnerships were that partnerships should outline a clear business model that demonstrates the partnership’s feasibility and that partnerships should clearly define the goals and expected results of their partnership.

Moving beyond traditional grants was seen as a necessary step towards sustainable financing. Tapping into multiple streams of funding was another way suggested for ensuring longer term funding; however, some pointed out that this approach comes with its share of drawbacks in the form of additional paperwork and reporting requirements.

Obstacles identified included the need for reduced commercial risk; long term donor cycles; strategic grant-making priorities and leveraging co-financing. It was also emphasized that partners often underestimate the high transaction costs associated with building partnerships.

Finally, a key issue that was raised was that “it is not all about money”. Often a significant portion of resources invested in a partnership can be in the form of technology, contacts (“the rolodex”) and a partner’s convening authority.

### **Human Settlements Partnerships**

Partnerships in this area are working to strengthening the capacities of local authorities and their public, private and community partners to achieve more sustainable urban development, socially, economically and environmentally. The need to link efforts in sustainable human settlements with the MDGs was stressed.

Key elements of sustainable development of human settlements were identified as being clean water, waste management, clean energy, transportation, housing, capacity-building, urban planning, telecommunications, and building infrastructure. Poverty reduction and equitable use resources were over-arching issues in this regard.

Common mechanisms identified included utilizing networks of local authorities; technology transfer and capacity-building; the use of volunteers; and development of city sustainable development plans. Initiatives included a focus on participatory governance, community-based approaches, demand management and raising awareness through advocacy, information and education.

The key challenge identified in this area was the issue of up-scaling. Going from city-level cooperation to national level coordination was seen as necessary in ensuring replication of best practices from human settlements partnerships, but at the same time this was found to be difficult and time-consuming.

### **Water and Sanitation Partnerships**

Participants commented on the wide range of water and sanitation partnerships presented at CSD-12. Some are global initiatives while others are regional and others focus on few specific local communities. Partnerships presented had a wide range of planned outputs: for example, some are working on specific on-the-ground interventions, while others are building networking partnerships to cooperate and collaborate on transfer and adaptation of technology, and exchange of information and experience.

In addition, the partnerships focused on many different aspects of the water and sanitation agenda, including improved water supply and basic sanitation, effective management of local water resources, water quality at

point of use, gender issues, earth observation, environmental aspects of water management, information services, capacity-building, and many other water- and sanitation-related topics.

The key problem identified was the issue of scaling up innovative mechanisms developed through partnerships to a higher level. The magnitude of demand for water and sanitation services translates into a focus on delivery rather than methods. Innovative methods have to be replicable for them to have an impact. The need for more partnerships between neighboring countries was also emphasized, given the trans-boundary nature of watershed management.

### **Management of Partnerships Information**

Management of partnerships related information was seen as having both macro and micro dimensions. On a macro level - it was emphasized that there is a need to compile lessons learned from the multitude of partnership initiatives that have been launched since the WSSD. On a micro level, it was noted that there are individual partnerships that focus on pooling and sharing information as their primary function.

On both levels, there were certain common strategies observed: databases (online or otherwise); clearinghouses of information; meetings and conferences; etc. All of these tools and strategies are intended to gather information; disseminate success stories and lessons learned; facilitate dialogue and exchange of information; and ultimately facilitate the formation of new partnerships.

The CSD Partnerships Database was seen as an important first step in gathering practical lessons learned from partnership experiences. The need for analysis of implementation in partnerships was emphasized and determining strategies for success and identifying gaps was seen as being critical in this regard. Participants asked several questions about the database, including on the frequency of updates, tracking use and tailoring information for different users.

While concerns were raised that partnerships may choose to focus on the positive outcomes of their initiatives and might be reluctant to report any negative experiences, it was hoped that sharing information would foster transparency and accountability.

It was observed that initiatives are using information technology for internal communications and to convey the results of their work to a broad audience. At the same time, it was emphasized that tools for managing partnerships information would need to be complemented by activities that fostered direct exchange and dialogue.

Issues identified as potential next steps in the management of partnerships information included: developing a typology of partnerships; more specifically identifying targets; and measuring progress.

It was noted that greater access to information on the multitude of partnership initiatives would enable potential partners to better determine which initiatives they may wish to join and what role they might play. There was general agreement that there is a need to promote awareness of partnerships, to broaden the debate and engage people on a grass-roots level.

## **Appendix: List of Interactive Discussion Sessions at CSD-12 Partnerships Fair**

**Tuesday, 20 April -- 11:30-1:00**

**Interactive Discussion: Partnerships for Human Settlements**

Chair: Bolus Paul Zom Lolo, CSD-12 Vice-Chair

Moderator: Lars Reuterswärd, Director, Global Division, UN Habitat

**Tuesday, 20 April -- 4:30-6:00**

**Interactive Discussion: Tools for management of partnerships information**

Chair: Toru Shimizu, CSD-12 Vice-Chair

Moderator: Anne Kerr, Chief, Programme Coordination, Major Groups and Partnerships Branch, Division for Sustainable Development, UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs

**Wednesday, 21 April -- 11:30-1:00**

**Interactive Discussion: Practical issues of defining a partnership's goals and structure**

Chair: Eva Tomic, CSD-12 Vice-Chair

Moderator: Ken Caplan, Director, Building Partnerships for Development in Water and Sanitation

Panelists: Karin Krchnak, Senior Associate, Institutions and Governance Program, World Resources Institute and Director, The Access Initiative

Ayad Altaai, General Coordinator, Abu Dhabi Global Environmental Data Initiative (AGEDI)

**Thursday, 22 April – 11:30-1:00**

**Interactive Discussion: Practical issues of communication and coordination within partnerships**

Chair: Eva Tomic, CSD-12 Vice-Chair

Moderator: Diane Quarless, Chief, SIDS Unit, Division for Sustainable Development, UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs

Panelists: Ngurah Swajaya, Counselor, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Indonesia

Arthur Getz-Escudero, International Partners for Sustainable Agriculture

**Friday, 23 April – 11:30-1:00**

**Interactive Discussion: Partnerships for Water & Sanitation**

Chair: Eva Tomic, CSD-12 Vice-Chair

Moderator: Manuel Dengo, Chief, Water, Natural Resources & SIDS Branch, Division for Sustainable Development, UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs; Secretary UN-Water

**Tuesday, 27 April – 11:30-1:00**

**Interactive Discussion: Practical Issues of Funding for Partnerships**

Chair: Eva Tomic, CSD-12 Vice-Chair

Moderator: Gourisankar Ghosh, Executive Director, Water Supply & Sanitation Collaborative Council

Panelists: Holly Wise, Director, Global Development Alliance Secretariat, USAID

Will Kennedy, Programme Officer, UN Fund for International Partnerships