THE WORLD SUMMIT ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The World Summit on Sustainable Development

The Johannesburg Conference

Edited by

LUC HENS
Vrije Universiteit, Brussels, Belgium

and

BHASKAR NATH
European Centre for Pollution Research, London, UK

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PREFACE

The Johannesburg Earth Summit, which took place in the summer of 2002, confirmed the irreversible nature of the process that is founded upon the concept of Sustainable Development initially given form at Rio de Janeiro ten years earlier. This process is to be welcomed, while at the same time recognising the tremendous work that has taken place in converting this concept into a more concrete vision.

The Sustainable Development concept relates to every human activity, covering the social, economic and ecological dimensions, which are often in conflict.

Consequently, it is most important to include in research programmes some thought of the way people behave. In theory, the general elements of this inclusion are relatively easily defined. However, assessing the effects of one or another decision on all the interactions between the social, economic and ecological dimensions involves significant difficulties. All the more since we have to recognise, in all modesty, that humanity has not always excelled in the art of forward studies. In fact, the Precautionary Principle was introduced partly as a reaction to the sometimes blind confidence in technology and logic (even if it is sometimes invoked in an exaggerated manner).

Nevertheless, the duty to act for the sake of present and future generations is pressing. Throughout history mankind has had to adapt and to innovate. Now, at the beginning of the 21st century the urgent need for such adaptations is obvious. Indeed, we see that challenges and deadlines are increasing in the near term, at least compared with the duration of the history of mankind. Starting from today we must implement development management tools based on the universally recognized concept of Sustainable Development. It is up to each one of us, within the framework of our family or social obligations or within our working environment, to rebase our actions and our life style choices on a holistic approach. There is no unique or single solution but a group of solutions that work together to achieve the same aim.

Commitment to this individual holistic approach is the first step in trying to prevent Earth becoming uninhabitable for mankind.

However, alongside this commitment there is another essential element, namely the knowledge that arrives, as always, through study and reflection. This is all the more necessary, as I stressed previously, because of the necessity to take into consideration the extremely complex character of environmental issues. As UN Secretary General Kofi Annan stated last year: “In all these areas [of the Environment] there are things we can do now with the technologies already at our disposal, provided we give the right incentives. Science will bring us many more solutions if we make the right investment in research. Knowledge has always been the key to human development. It will also be the key to sustainability.”

Therefore, it is neither correct nor appropriate to set in opposition Science and Sustainable Development. Science, with the proviso that it is ethically driven, can be one of the possible ways to take into account and to tackle the challenges that we face.

Moreover, I think that it is essential, or even vital, to develop solidarity, not only between North and South as advocated in Agenda 21, but also between generations. In a world which, all too often, leads to individualism and selfishness, we must remember that Man is essentially a social being and nothing that happens in the world should leave him indifferent.

Laurent of Belgium
President of the IRGT
Royal Institute for the Sustainable Management of Natural Resources and the Promotion of Clean Technology

LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

K. BACHUS
Higher Institute for Labour Studies
Catholic University of Leuven
Kapucijnenvoer 33 Block H 4th floor
B-3000 Leuven
BELGIUM

J. BARBER
Integrative Strategies Forum
Rockville, MD
USA

A. BEGOSSI
Núcleo de Estudos e Pesquisas
Ambientais (NEPAM)
Universidade Estadual de Campinas
Campinas, SP, 13081-970
BRAZIL

C.J. CLEVELAND
Department of Geography
Center for Energy and
Environmental Studies
Fredrick S. Pardee Center for the
Study of the Longer-Range Future
152 Bay State Road
Boston University
Boston, MA 02215
USA

F. DIAS DE ÁVILA-PIRES
Instituto Oswaldo Cruz
Rio de Janeiro
BRAZIL

F. GHINA
International Coral Reef Action
Network (ICRAN)
c/o United Nations Environment
Programme-World Conservation
Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC)
219 Huntingdon Road
Cambridge, CB3 0DL
UNITED KINGDOM

L. HENS
Human Ecology Department
Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Human
Laarbeeklaan 103
B-1090 Brussels
BELGIUM

C.V. HOWARD
Developmental Toxic-Pathology
Research Group
Department of Human Anatomy and
Cell Biology
University of Liverpool
Liverpool L69 3GE
UNITED KINGDOM

I. LÁNG
Hungarian Academy of Sciences
Roosevelt tér 9
Budapest
HUNGARY

F. MESTRUM
Université Libre de Bruxelles
Av. F.D. Roosevelt 50
B-1050 Brussels
BELGIUM

D. MWANZA
Water Utility Partnership for
Capacity Building in Africa
Abidjan
IVORY COAST

A. NAJAM
Department of International
Relations
Center for Energy and
Environmental Studies
Fredrick S. Pardee Center for the
Study of the Longer-Range Future
152 Bay State Road
Boston University
Boston, MA 02215
USA

B. NATH
European Centre for Pollution
Research - Unit 2F
289 Cricklewood Broadway
London NW 2 6NX
UNITED KINGDOM

L.W. OLSON
Technology Center
Arizona State University
Mesa, 85212 Arizona
USA

M. PALLEMAERTS
Institute of European Studies
Pleinlaan 2
B-1050 Brussel
BELGIUM

H. PEETERS
Ethibel – Stock at Stake
Strategic Advice and Project
Development
Rue du Progrès 333/7
B-1030 Brussels
BELGIUM

A.G. STEWART
Cheshire and Merseyside Health
Protection Team
Microbiology Laboratory
Countess of Chester Health Park
Chester, CH2 1UL
UNITED KINGDOM

A.W. STRIGL
Austrian Institute for Sustainable
Development
University of Natural Resources and
Applied Life Sciences
Lindengasse 2/12
A-1070 Vienna
AUSTRIA

R. WHITFIELD
Envirostat
66, Weltje Road
London W6 9LT
UNITED KINGDOM

E. WILKINSON
Central Liverpool Primary Care
Trust
Liverpool L3 6AL
UNITED KINGDOM

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INTRODUCTION

By all accounts, the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, held in Stockholm in 1972, focused the international community's attention on environmental concerns as never before and provided the impetus for the ascent of those concerns to the top of the international agenda. Until that conference, and even after it for some time, environmental concerns had been almost the exclusive preserve of environmentalists, ecologists and conservationists who, according to many, took an idealistic if not somewhat romantic view of nature conservation and environmental protection. They were often regarded with disdain by the then political establishment that viewed them as an irritant and potential or manifest obstacle to unfettered pursuit of economic development mainly through environment-degrading industrial activities.

The next and a very important milestone in the international environmental calendar was the publication in 1987 of the Brundtland Commission Report, entitled *Our Common Future*, under the auspices of the World Commission on Environment and Development. It was a key document, not least because it firmly established the paradigm of sustainable development at the top of the international agenda as the only means by which both intergenerational and intragenerational equity (the core requirements of sustainable development) could be secured.

Sealed with this international imprimatur, environmentalism and concerns over environmental damage inflicted by human activities began to shed its hitherto romantic image as perceived by many. Even hard-headed international structures as well as economists and others began to take much interest in these and related issues and problems, and this resulted in a veritable avalanche of assorted publications.

However, *Our Common Future* is first and foremost a political document, and the definition of sustainable development it gives is political too. And so it is proving to be extremely difficult to translate that definition into a unique operational definition for the practical implementation of sustainable development.

The lack of a unique operational definition of sustainable development ushered an open season for all to indulge in do-it-yourself definitions mainly to suit their own circumstances and to serve their own purposes. Unfortunately, this state of affairs has been serving to corrupt the intended meaning of sustainable development and to devalue its currency – the intended meaning being how the present generation ought to behave *vis-à-vis* the environment, and precisely what it ought to do in practice, and how, in order to secure both intergenerational and intragenerational equity. Interestingly (some would say perversely), and due

probably to the hegemony over such matters which economists and politicians gained in the mid 1980s or thereabouts, sustainable development began to be defined in important documents not in terms of the sustainability of the natural environment or integrity of nature's life support systems, but in terms of economic sustainability. Typically, the following from Article 2 of the Treaty of the European Union (1992) illustrates this well: EC's environmental-policy objectives to include the goals of 'sustainable and non-inflationary (economic) growth respecting the environment'.

The UN Conference on Environment and Development, held in Rio de Janeiro in June 1992, was the next key milestone, and the document called Agenda 21 was probably the most important of its outputs. It drew up in considerable detail the blueprint for progressing towards global sustainable development. The Rio Conference was remarkable also for the hope, excitement and anticipation it generated world wide. Most concerned people everywhere actually believed that Agenda 21, ratified by most of the nation states, would usher a new developmental paradigm to protect and sustain the natural environment in the interests of both present and future generations. But it was not to be, as it turned out.

Indeed, most of the environmental problems have been exacerbating since Rio to make the global environment less sustainable today than it was ten years ago, and this constituted the background to the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), held in Johannesburg during 26 August and 4 September 2002. The reports of the Secretary General of the UN, presented to the first Prepcom of the WSSD in New York, painted a negative picture of the way the world had moved away from sustainable development since Rio.

At the global level today there is less concern over population growth than ten years ago, largely based on the scientifically uncertain prediction that world population would stabilise by 2080. The industrialised countries consider their stable economic growth and improved social conditions, which they have achieved while at the same time reducing environmental pressures in a number of areas, as their most important contribution to SD to date. During the last decade environmental policy and management regimes have been implemented in the developing countries. However, in many cases this institutional progress is yet to bear fruit in terms of improvements.

It is a matter of mounting concern that so far little, if any, progress has been made in addressing unsustainable patterns of production and consumption, and that poverty eradication is proving to be an apparently intractable challenge. Globalisation, and a credible and objective evaluation of its costs and benefits, is proving to be difficult too. While on the one hand the OECD countries continue to push forward ideas on how globalisation would benefit the global SD process by increasing world trade and investment and through trade liberalisation, on the other greater (often externalised) environmental costs of globalisation, and gross

social inequity it is predicted to bring, points to an unacceptably high and growing sustainability deficit.

There is also mounting concern over resources of water, energy, land and biodiversity – all under threat today as never before, especially in sub-Saharan Africa and in the vulnerable ecosystems of small island states.

In view of the above, the objective of the Johannesburg Summit was to seek ways and means for reinvigorating the Agenda 21 process and to promote its practical implementation world wide, rather than to generate yet more voluminous documents. As the WSSD is described in detail in the next article, we will not dwell on it here, except to say that one of its principal outputs, the *Johannesburg Plan of Implementation*, is both comprehensive and goal-oriented for the realisation of Agenda 21 objectives, albeit perhaps a little too ambitious when judged against current and evolving geo-political realities.

This book contains a number of articles on selected key issues discussed and agreed at the WSSD. Written by specialists, the purpose of these articles is to discuss one or more of the following as appropriate: evolution of specific environmental issues or concerns, scientific background, deliberations at Johannesburg, and where do we go from here?

In particular, the authors were invited to compare the status of current knowledge of the key issues with how Johannesburg, and its Plan of Implementation, dealt with that knowledge.

This exercise is useful in at least two ways: first, it allows one to compare how the state-of-the-art relates to the information which diplomats and policy-makers used in their deliberations in Johannesburg. Clearly, such a comparison exposes the divide between scientific evidence and information on one hand and how they are used by policy-makers to make policy on the other, especially in areas in which hard scientific information is scarce, incomplete or tentative such as globalisation and production and consumption patterns. And second, this exercise identifies, or defines more precisely, the gaps in scientific information which must be filled in order for policy-makers to formulate more effective policies for SD. Indeed, filling such information gaps is a major part of the research agenda for SD. Interestingly, to this end a new contract between science and society was proposed at the WSSD. This new post-WSSD contract, it was suggested, should be based on and inspired by both social and environmental considerations, unlike the post Second World War contract that was driven almost exclusively by scientific, technological and economic considerations. The key issues to be included in the new contract emerged as these:

– addressing problems of poverty, population and health;
– sustainable use of water, energy and biodiversity;
– sustainable agriculture and food security;
– strategies and planning for SD;

- measuring SD;
- scientific support for local-to-global action;
- environmental management and sustainability;
- economic and social policy instruments for SD;
- fact-based education for SD.

This book is based on articles that have already been published in the journal "Environment, Development and Sustainability" (2003) that devoted a special issue to the WSSD. These papers have been complemented with a set of chapters on management of chemicals, health, Africa, governance, and partnerships that are essential in the Johannesburg discussion but previously unpublished.

The international community decided on a follow-up programme of the WSSD. In the ten years to come, the different main themes of the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (JPoI) will be dealt with in more depth. Water and human settlements are the first themes the world will deal with. This book aims to provide essential background information for this decade to come.

The production of a book such as this is no mean task, involving as it does enormous scientific and administrative efforts. On the scientific side we are most grateful to the following colleagues who did such a splendid job of reviewing the papers published in this issue:

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- Prof. Dr. Karl Bruckmeier, Human Ecology Department, University of Göteborg, Sweden
- Prof. Dr. Emmanuel Boon, Human Ecology Department, Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Belgium
- Prof. Dr. Richard J. Borden, College of the Atlantic, Bar Harbor, Maine, USA
- Prof. Dr. Philippe Bourdeau, IGEAT, Université Libre de Bruxelles, Brussels, Belgium
- Dr. Mickel Christolis, Computational Fluid Dynamics Unit, National Technical University of Athens, Greece
- Dr. Donaat Cosaert, Flemish Institute for Scientific and Technological Aspects Research, Flemish Parliament, Brussels, Belgium
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– Prof. Dr. Charles Susanne, Laboratory of Anthropogenitics, Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Belgium
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Luc Hens and Bhaskar Nath

CHAPTER 1

THE JOHANNESBURG CONFERENCE

L. HENS[1*] and B. NATH[2]

[1]*Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Human Ecology Department, Laarbeeklaan 103, B-1090 Brussels, Belgium;* [2]*European Centre for Pollution Research, Unit 2F, 289 Cricklewood Broadway, London NW 2 6NX, UK*

*(*author for correspondence, e-mail: human.ecology@vub.ac.be; fax: +322 477 4964; tel.: +322 477 4281)*

Abstract. The World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), held in Johannesburg during 26 August and 4 September 2002, was the biggest event of its kind organised by the United Nations to date. A major objective of the WSSD was to set out strategies for greater and more effective implementation of Agenda 21, negotiated in Rio ten years ago, than hitherto. An overview of the WSSD is presented in this chapter, including a scrutiny of its major outcomes.

Discussion begins with a detailed account of major UN environmental conferences and related events, such as Doha and Monterrey conferences, that led to the WSSD, followed by a brief discussion of the deliberations that took place at the preparatory meetings (PrepComs) of the WSSD. A detailed account and scrutiny of the following, that are the main outcomes of the WSSD, is then given.

- The "Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development", which is a political declaration mirroring the will of the international community to move towards sustainable development.
- The "Johannesburg Plan of Implementation", which is the core document of the WSSD containing an impressive list of recommendations for accelerating the implementation of Agenda 21.
- "Type II partnerships", which are projects that allow civil society to contribute to the implementation of sustainable development.

The increasingly important post-Rio issue of globalisation, which has serious implications for a number of issues directly or indirectly impinging on global sustainability, was an important element in the contextual background to the WSSD. Reference is made to some of these implications.

Type II partnerships are an innovation of the WSSD. Although a good deal of confusion persists over their precise nature and *modus operandi*, they were nevertheless presented at the WSSD as powerful and more democratic instruments for the realisation of Agenda 21 objectives.

The analysis shows that the Summit contributed at defining sustainable development more precisely. The Plan of Implementation is most instrumental in showing how to make resource use and the generation of pollution less unsustainable. In this way implementing the recommendations of the Johannesburg Summit offers an important defeat, worldwide.

Key words: declaration, Johannesburg, plan of implementation, sustainable development, Type 2 partnerships, world summit.

Abbreviations: CITES – Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species; CSD – Commission for Sustainable Development; DESA – Department of Economic & Social Affairs (of the UN); EOLSS – Encyclopaedia of Life Support Systems (of UNESCO); EU – European Union, the; GDP – Gross Domestic Product; GEF – Global Environmental Facility; IPCC – Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change; IUCN – International Union for Conservation of Nature (and Natural Resources); JPI – Johannesburg Plan of Implementation; MDG – Millennium Development Goals, the; NEPAD – New Partnership in Africa's Development; NGO – Non-governmental Organisation; ODA – Overseas Development Aid; OECD –

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Organisation for Economic Cooperation & Development; R&D – Research & Development; SD – Sustainable Development; SIDS – Small Island Developing States; UN – United Nations, the; UNCED – United Nations Conference on Environment & Development (Rio de Janeiro, 1992); UNCTAD – United Nations Conference on Trade & Development; UNDP – United Nations Development Programme; UNEP – United Nations Environment Programme; UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific & Cultural Organisation; WCED – World Commission for Environment & Development; WEHAB – Water, Energy, Health, Agriculture & Biodiversity; WMO – World Meteorological Organisation; WSSD – World Summit on Sustainable Development (Johannesburg, 2002); WTO – World Trade Organisation, the; WWF – World Wild Fund for Nature (previously World Wildlife Fund).

1. Introduction

The World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), held in Johannesburg during 26 August and 4 September 2002, was attended by 9101 delegates from 191 governments and 8227 representatives of major groups who deliberated on how to implement sustainability in more effective ways than during the last ten years, as well as by 4012 media representatives who reported on it.

Most of the indicators confirm that both environmental quality and sustainability have further deteriorated since the Rio Summit of 1992, and the WSSD was primarily concerned with why so little progress had been made towards achieving the Rio goals of sustainable development (SD). It was generally agreed that while Rio's Agenda 21 was a reliable and high-quality document giving guidance for implementing SD, its practical implementation fell far short of what was needed and agreed in Rio ten years ago.

This huge conference – biggest of its kind organised by the UN to date – was remarkable both for the scope and complexity of its organisation. The context of the WSSD deliberations encompassed the outputs of the UN environmental conferences to date, the UNCED documents, the Millennium Declaration, the Doha and Monterrey conferences and the WSSD "Prepcoms" among others. Box 1 lists the environment and development milestones building up to the WSSD during a period of thirty years.

Box 1. Environment and development milestones during 1972 and 2002.

1972
- United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, Stockholm.
- UNESCO Convention on the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage.
- First report of the Club of Rome.

1973
- Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species and Flora and Fauna (CITES).

1976
- Convention on the Protection of the Mediterranean Sea Against Pollution.