



UNITED NATIONS

# JOHANNESBURG SUMMIT 2002



WORLD SUMMIT ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT | JOHANNESBURG, SOUTH AFRICA | 26 AUGUST–4 SEPTEMBER 2002

Backgrounder

## Partnerships: Turning Commitments into Results

In a major innovation, the outcomes of the World Summit on Sustainable Development will include not only a negotiated implementation plan but also partnership initiatives that will achieve direct results on the ground.

The partnership initiatives, all voluntary, represent an important advance based on the idea that governments alone cannot implement sustainable development. Resources and expertise from all quarters of society must play a part if the world is to seriously tackle problems arising from poverty, unsustainable consumption and development and the impact of human society on the environment. In a speech delivered shortly before the final session of the Preparatory Committee in Bali, United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan said, "At Johannesburg, governments will agree on a common plan of action. But the most creative agents of change may well be partnerships—among governments, private businesses, non-profit organizations, scholars and concerned citizens."

Many participants in the Johannesburg Summit process have endorsed the idea of partnership initiatives, and many are planning to launch such initiatives during the Summit. Countries have already agreed to devote the first three days of the Summit to a discussion of partnerships.

Yet a number of participants have expressed doubts about the process, contending that voluntary initiatives could offer governments an escape hatch to avoid making real commitments to sustainable development. Worse, some say the initiatives represent a sugarcoated attempt to privatize government functions in the name of sustainable development.

### Not a Substitute for Government Action

"Partnerships are not a substitute for government action or responsibilities," according to Summit Secretary-General Nitin Desai, "and they are not a subterfuge for governments to avoid making the necessary commitments to move the sustainable development agenda forward." Instead, Desai maintains that the partnership initiatives represent a truly innovative mechanism for expanding the scope and the size of implementation efforts, which he said have tended to be small and underfinanced.

"We have to start implementing sustainable development on a grander scale," Desai said. "We have to move beyond a fragmented, ad hoc and pilot-programme type of approach. We have to think big and go to scale, so that we can start to see the pay-off, in economic, social and environmental terms, that sustainable development can bring us."

Desai added, "Too often, international conferences end with just a document. Even when we have a strong document, we usually don't have a way to translate the words of the text into real action. The partnership initiatives provide us with an unprecedented opportunity to bring together the people who can bring clean water, electricity and health services to the communities that lack them in a sustainable manner. A document, by itself, will not do that."

Desai said he was puzzled by the idea circulating that the partnerships are primarily an avenue for corporations. "I don't know why people think that partnerships are just about corporations. They are not." In fact, he said, many of the partnership proposals that have been submitted to the Secretariat do not involve corporations at all, and one, for example, the Global Reporting Initiative, actually aims to set standards for corporate accountability and responsibility. The point that is often missed, Desai said, is that corporations can pursue their business interests without the Summit and without entering into partnerships. "The partnership initiatives present an opportunity to connect the activities of businesses with the commitments made by governments at the Summit."

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## Linking Commitments with Action

Many partners are preparing to launch initiatives in Johannesburg. They range from broad-based initiatives intended to attack a problem across a wide area, to others that have a narrower, more localized focus. A preliminary list of the partnerships submitted for the Summit can be found on the official website, [www.johannesburgsummit.org](http://www.johannesburgsummit.org).

What follows are examples of some initiatives being launched in key areas where governments have made commitments to act, such as water and sanitation, energy, health, agricultural productivity and biodiversity.

### ♦ **Water and sanitation**

The Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) for All initiative, which is being launched this year by the Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council, a public-private partnership, aims to provide universal access to safe water and sanitation by 2015. So far, it has garnered initial support and participation from 28 Governments and a wide range of UN agencies, NGOs and businesses – but much more is being sought. The European Community has also indicated that it will launch a major initiative on water and sanitation during the Summit.

### ♦ **Energy**

One initiative that has registered with the Summit in order to seek additional support and partners for expansion is a project launched in 1995 involving an African NGO, SUDERETA (Sustainable Development through Renewable Energy in Tanzania), and a German NGO, North South Initiative. Using a revolving fund scheme for financing, the project promotes small enterprises in rural areas for the production and sale of renewable energy systems utilizing solar, photovoltaic, wind and other power sources, in order to provide energy, generate income and prevent further cutting of forests for fuelwood.

### ♦ **Health**

An initiative to improve environmental health in the South Pacific over the period 2002-2005 is being launched at the Summit, involving 17 Governments, more than a dozen intergovernmental organizations and several major NGOs. The initiative, which aims to develop a regional environmental health strategy and national plans, will be supported by existing public health resources in the South Pacific Community, but seeks some \$420,000 in additional funding.

### ♦ **Agriculture**

An initiative to promote sustainable agriculture and rural development is being launched at Johannesburg, aiming to establish a global resource centre and small grant funding mechanism and to improve regulatory and policy frameworks. There are tentative commitments from some 14 Governments to assist with a multi-donor trust fund for an initial five-year phase, with involvement also planned by a number of international agencies and NGOs, coordinated by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).

### ♦ **Biodiversity**

One major initiative to be launched at Johannesburg is the Global Conservation Trust, a public-private partnership whose goal is to establish during 2002-2004 an endowment fund of \$260 million for the conservation of plant genetic resources around the world. Partners include the Governments of Brazil, Colombia, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States, private companies such as Syngenta and Glaxo, the United Nations Foundation and Rockefeller Foundation, and FAO and the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research.

Another major programme, the Equator Initiative, seeks to reduce poverty through the sustainable use of biodiversity, recognizing that the most biodiverse regions of the world are also those where human poverty is most severe. The programme promotes the many innovative and successful initiatives by indigenous groups and local communities, develops capacity through South-South learning exchanges, and contributes to knowledge-sharing for advocacy and policy impact. The initiative was created in support of the Johannesburg Summit by the UN Development Programme in partnership with BrasilConnects, the Government of Canada, the International Development Research Centre, IUCN – The World Conservation Union, Television Trust for the Environment, and the United Nations Foundation.