

CSD Secretariat's Note: Highlights From the "Partnerships in Practice" Interactive Discussion Sessions

Overview

In keeping with the goal of fostering interactivity and open dialogue during CSD-13, six "Partnerships in Practice" Interactive Discussion sessions were organized within the Partnerships Fair framework. The sessions focused on a variety of topics ranging from partnerships working in the areas of the thematic cluster of CSD-13: water, sanitation and human settlements, to practical issues relevant to all partnerships. These practical issues included mobilizing resources (both financial and non-financial) and communication and outreach. The Partnerships Fair also featured a session linking the CSD discussions on partnerships to the outcomes of the 2nd International Forum on Partnerships for Sustainable Development held in Marrakech, Morocco in March 2005, as well as other partnerships fora. The final session, 'the role of the private sector in partnerships for sustainable development' was organized in collaboration with the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD) and the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC). The following text is a compilation of key issues that emerged from these discussions.

General Observations

Participants reiterated that implementing sustainable development through partnerships was truly "new" and different from "business as usual". It was noted that while partnership mechanisms pre-date the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) held in Johannesburg in 2002, the WSSD was the first time when there was official recognition that such partnerships could complement the work of governments in meeting the goals outlined in the international sustainable development agreements.

Partnerships representatives stressed that working in partnerships is not simply "old wine in new bottles". Several distinguishing features were identified which included: the diverse range of stakeholders involved, including in particular the strong involvement of civil society organizations; involvement by all partners from the outset (rather than the traditional sub-contracting approach); and the partnering fundamentals of shared vision, common goals, and clear roles and responsibilities.

Throughout the discussions, participants agreed that partnerships for sustainable development vary greatly and that there is no single "blueprint for success". At the same time, it was noted that certain elements of successful partnerships could be identified. Building trust among partners was considered essential to the process of building effective partnerships. "Building trust takes time and patience" was a frequent observation. The need for regular communication, equitable decision-making structures, complementary skills, and partners who are open to risk and willing to accept different points of view was stressed in this regard.

Practitioners also shared lessons learned about partnerships that have been unable to get beyond the planning stage. The principal reason cited was the lack of sufficient resources to implement the partnership. Demonstrating the value added by the partnership was seen as a key determinant in resource mobilization. Another lesson learned was that partnerships were sometimes too ambitious in their goals and too ambiguous in their construct. It was suggested that partnership proposals should outline a clear business model that demonstrates the partnership's feasibility and clearly defines goals and expected outputs/outcomes.

Securing a sustainable resource base was seen as both a priority and a challenge. The importance of non-financial resources was also stressed. Partnerships reported that in-kind contributions from partner organizations constituted a significant portion of the initiative's resources.

The need to measure progress and demonstrate results was stressed; however, the discussions highlighted the difficulties in defining metrics for success. While there was general agreement that partnerships should have clear and realistic goals and targets in order to be able to show demonstrable results, it was also recognized that some partnership goals and targets, especially those related to capacity-building, education, information sharing and advocacy would require a more qualitative approach. A frequent observation was that given the diverse range of partnerships, a flexible approach to monitoring and measuring partnerships progress would be required.

Water and Sanitation Partnerships

Participants shared their experiences with several water and sanitation partnerships. Some were global initiatives while others were regional or local. The implementation mechanisms being utilized ranged from delivery of water and sanitation services, to capacity building initiatives which focused on disseminating information, raising awareness and promoting hygiene education.

In addition, various issues related to water and sanitation policy were discussed including linking partnership implementation to achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs); issues of legal entitlement to water and sanitation services especially in the case of slum dwellers; and the effectiveness of small-scale initiatives using micro-credit schemes to deliver basic water and sanitation services.

The importance of activities aimed at the local level was stressed, and engagement of local authorities was seen as key. The importance of developing "tailor-made" mechanisms for water and sanitation service delivery was reiterated, noting that hygiene behavior is closely linked to the socio-cultural context.

Human Settlements Partnerships

Human settlements were seen as an integral framework for a myriad of urban development issues ranging from service delivery of essential services, to housing and urban planning, to capacity-building and building infrastructure.

Participants discussed common mechanisms being utilized by human settlements partnerships, which included working with local authorities and schools on the city-level to develop educational tools promoting sustainable use of resources; working through Local Agenda 21 initiatives; and city-to-city cooperation mechanisms focused on mutual learning and capacity-building. The importance of community-based approaches that included elements of participatory governance, and awareness-raising activities, was also stressed.

The need to link efforts by human settlements partnerships with the MDGs was recognized, however partnership practitioners also cited difficulties in communicating the relevance of the MDGs to local level government representatives. Participants noted the changing dynamics of the city-to-city cooperation model moving from developed country cities partnering with developing country cities to greater interest evidenced by developing country cities to learn from the experiences of other developing country cities.

Mobilizing Resources

Participants reiterated that one of the key determinants in getting partnerships to their operational phases is mobilizing sufficient resources. It was observed that while many partnerships are able to secure seed funding, most of these partnerships still require additional resources to scale up from pilot projects and to ensure the

long-term sustainability of their initiatives. Securing “sustainable financing” and achieving the goal of “self-financing” were frequently cited as a major challenge. The need for realistic partnership goals in keeping with available resources was stressed by many partnerships.

Some partnerships noted the benefits of using a business model to demonstrate the partnership’s feasibility and to clearly define the goals and expected outputs of their partnership. The importance of demonstrable results or a “proven track record” was seen as being critical to mobilising resources.

The importance of scoping exercises was also stressed, as a means of ascertaining the level of donor interest and ensuring that activities are both demand-driven and create real value. In addition, the presence of an enabling environment coupled with political will and leadership was seen as being an important factor in attracting resources. Access to existing networks and building new partnerships on the basis of existing relationships were cited as ways of tapping existing resources.

Partnerships stressed that implementation takes more than just financial resources, and that it was important to acknowledge the resource contributions by all partners. Often a significant portion of resources invested in a partnership was in the form of training, technology, contacts or networks. Other non-financial resources mentioned ranged from institutional support in the form of office space, computers and staff, to the sharing of scientific knowledge and capacity-building.

Communication and Outreach

Clear and regular communication between partners was recognised as one of the key elements of building a partnership. A frequent observation was that building relationships between partners based on mutual respect and trust is a key to building partnerships. Communication geared towards external audiences and outreach activities, on the other hand, was seen as a way for a partnership to demonstrate its effectiveness and results, as well as to attract involvement from new partners and donors.

Partnerships discussed a variety of communication means, which varied depending on the target audiences, available technologies and resource constraints. Frequently mentioned communication media included electronic, print, video-conferencing, and face-to-face meetings. Participants noted that each communication tool has its pros and cons: the use of information technology while cost effective, raised concerns about digital divide and language barriers; print media was seen as having a wider reach but at the same time required greater resources; video-conferencing required appropriate technology; and lastly – while communicating in person was seen as the ideal medium – it was stressed that this was the most time and resource intensive of all the options available.

Most partnerships reported that they were using a combination of communication media for communication and outreach both internally and externally. Effective communication and outreach was seen as a way for partnerships to answer concerns raised over difficult issues like transparency, accountability, monitoring and measuring. In addition, participants noted that sharing information helped address concerns of duplication as it enabled improved co-ordination between various complementary initiatives.

Partnerships -related meetings

Participants discussed the outcomes of the 2nd International Forum on Partnerships for Sustainable Development held in Marrakech, Morocco in March 2005, which aimed to advance the implementation of sustainable development by strengthening and fostering water and energy-related partnerships. The Forum focused also on issues related to the partnering process including issues such as internal governance, resource mobilisation, communication & outreach, and evaluation and monitoring.

The Marrakech Forum discussions built upon the 1st International Forum on Partnerships for Sustainable Development, which took place in Rome in March 2004. Participants noted the relevance of meetings such as the Marrakech Forum and the Rome Forum in highlighting the concrete “on-the-ground” activities of partnerships, as well as providing a forum for open discussion on practical issues related to partnership implementation. The need for greater outreach in the preparations for future Forums was noted, to enable a wider audience and greater participation from the private sector.

Role of the Private Sector in Partnerships

The importance of private-sector participation in partnerships was stressed. In particular, private sector contributions of management expertise, a bottom-line approach, developing innovative strategies, sharing appropriate technologies, exchanging best practices, and building capacity and skills through training activities, were highlighted.

Other issues touched upon included the importance of engaging partners from small and medium enterprises in local level partnerships and the need for good governance. It was also noted that private-sector participation in multi-stakeholder partnerships was not about philanthropy, but was aimed at enhancing synergies between the goals and objectives of the various stakeholders.

Appendix: List of “Partnerships in Practice” Interactive Discussion Sessions at CSD-13 Partnerships Fair

Tuesday, 12 April -- 3:30 – 5:30 PM

Water and Sanitation Partnerships -- Raising awareness and delivering water and sanitation services

Chair: Husniyya Mammadova, CSD-13 Vice-Chair
Lead Discussants: Chris Tydeman, Chief Scientist, WWF-UK, Water and Sanitation for the Urban Poor (WSUP) partnership
Stephen Turner, Deputy Director, Wateraid, The Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council (WSSCC)

Wednesday, 13 April -- 3:30 – 5:30 PM

Human Settlements Partnerships --Developing local capacity for sustainable habitats

Chair: Husniyya Mammadova, CSD-13 Vice-Chair
Lead Discussants: Dinesh Mehta, Coordinator, Urban Management Programme, UN-Habitat
Han Verschure, Post-graduate Centre on Human Settlements, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Belgium
Alexandra Panehal, Director, Office of Urban Programs, USAID

Thursday, 14 April -- 3:30 – 5:30 PM

Mobilizing Resources -- Financial and Non-financial contributions to partnerships

Chair: Husniyya Mammadova, CSD-13 Vice-Chair
Lead Discussants: Meike van Ginneken, Water and Sanitation Specialist, The World Bank
Ruth McWilliams, USDA-Forest Service, White Water to Blue Water (WW2BW)
Jochen Jesinghaus, Development Directorate General, European Commission

Friday, 15 April -- 3:30 – 5:30 PM

Communication and Outreach -- Fostering creative exchange of partnership information

Chair: Anne Kerr, Chief, Programme Coordination, Major Groups and Partnerships Branch, Division for Sustainable Development, UNDESA
Lead Discussants: Eirah Gorre-Dale, Special Representative of Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council (WSSCC) to the UN, Water, Sanitation and Hygiene for all (WASH)
Doug McGuire, Coordinator, Mountain Partnership Secretariat

Monday, 18 April -- 3:30 – 5:30 PM

Partnerships -related meetings – Outcomes of the Marrakech Forum and other meetings

Chair: Anne Kerr, Chief, Programme Coordination, Major Groups and Partnerships Branch, Division for Sustainable Development, UNDESA
Lead Discussants: Taha Balafrej, Director, Directorate of Partnerships Communication and Cooperation, Ministry of Territorial Planning, Water and Environment, Morocco
Paolo Soprano, Director, Directorate for Sustainable Development, Ministry of Environment and Territory, Italy

Tuesday, 19 April -- 3:30 – 5:30 PM

The Role of the Private Sector in Partnerships for Sustainable development

Chair: Anne Kerr, Chief, Programme Coordination, Major Groups and Partnerships Branch, Division for Sustainable Development, UNDESA
Lead Discussants: Odd Gullberg, Chief Operating Officer, World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD)
Jacques Labre, Vice President, Relations with Institutions, Suez Environment
Richard Aylard, Head, Corporate Development and External Affairs, RWE Thames Water
Scott Johnson, Vice President, Global Environmental and Safety Actions, S.C. Johnson