

Johannesburg – an overview

John SCOWCROFT*

One European politician said that the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) "did not realise his hopes but did exceed his expectations". That is probably a fair assessment of the Summit. The much publicised absence of "targets and timetables" has led many commentators to assume that WSSD was a failure. This is to misunderstand what actually was achieved and, indeed, to misunderstand the objectives of the organisers who were seeking "actions not words".

The commitments agreed at the end of WSSD were broad:

- To halve the proportion of people without access to sanitation and to safe drinking water by 2015.
- To increase access to modern energy services, increase energy efficiency and the use of renewable energy.
- To phase out, where appropriate, energy subsidies.
- To support the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) objective of ensuring access to energy for at least 35% of the African population within 20 years.
- By 2020, chemicals should be used and produced in ways that do not harm human health and the environment.
- To reduce biodiversity loss by 2010.

- To restore fisheries to their maximum sustainable yields by 2015.

- To improve developing countries access to environmentally sound alternatives to ozone depleting chemicals by 2010.

From the Industry's point of view, the most significant development was the recognition that it was "part of the solution". This was emphasised by UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan who said, "The corporate sector need not wait for governments to take decisions. We realise that only by mobilising the corporate sector we can make significant progress". Much of the emphasis at Johannesburg was on "voluntary initiatives/partnerships". Indeed the concept plays an important supporting role to the formal agreements. The so-called "Type 2 Initiatives" are projects that involve governments, business groups and other stakeholders. It may be that Johannesburg's lasting legacy is the recognition that, in future, the way forward in achieving sustainable development and environmental objectives is through voluntary partnerships between Governments and stakeholders rather than through Protocols and Conventions. By embracing Industry and Civil Society in the decision making process, Governments might find not only "buy in" to their aspirations but also the commitment to achieve them.

* Head of Unit Environment & Sustainable Development, EURELECTRIC (Union of the Electricity Industry), 66, boulevard de l'Impératrice, 1000 Bruxelles.

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From the industry's point of view, the most significant development was the recognition that it was "part of the solution". This was emphasised by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan who said, "The corporate sector need not wait for governments to act decisively. We rather see only by increasing the corporate sector we can make significant progress". Much of the emphasis of Johannesburg was on "voluntary self-regulation", indeed the concept plays an important supporting role to the formal agreements. The so-called "Type 2 initiatives" are projects that involve governments, business groups and other stakeholders. It may be that Johannesburg's lasting legacy is the recognition that in future, the way forward is through sustainable development and environmental objectives is through voluntary partnerships between Governments and stakeholders rather than through Pressure and Compliance. By involving industry and Civil Society in the decision making process, Governments might find not only "buy in" to their aspirations but also the commitment to achieve them.

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