European Environment
Eur. Env. **16**, 290–306 (2006)
Published online in Wiley InterScience
(www.interscience.wiley.com) **DOI**: 10.1002/eet.425

Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships for Sustainable Development: Rethinking Legitimacy, Accountability and Effectiveness

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ABSTRACT
The role of transnational partnerships in contemporary global environmental discourse raises larger questions of the legitimacy, effectiveness and accountability of networked governance. This article advances a conceptual framework for evaluating the legitimacy of partnership networks. Furthermore, it examines, in particular, the multi-stakeholder partnerships for sustainable development announced at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg 2002. Partnership networks have been branded as a new form of global governance with the potential to bridge multilateral norms and local action by drawing on a diverse number of actors in civil society, government and business. Does the rise of global partnerships imply a relocation and diffusion of authority from government to public–private 'implementation networks'? Recent evaluations of the Johannesburg partnerships suggest that they can gain from a clearer linkage to existing institutions and multilateral agreements, measurable targets and timetables, more effective leadership, improved accountability, systematic review, reporting and monitoring mechanisms. Copyright © 2006 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd and ERP Environment.

Received 16 January 2006; revised 20 April 2006; accepted 4 May 2006
Keywords: networked governance; transnational legitimacy; accountability; effectiveness; global environmental governance; public–private partnerships; sustainable development; multi-stakeholder processes

Introduction

THE MULTI-STAKEHOLDER PARTNERSHIP INITIATIVE, WHICH CURRENTLY IS HARBORING MORE THAN 300 public–private partnerships under the UN auspices, was announced at the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg. Multi-sectoral partnerships can be conceived of as 'post-sovereign', 'networked' and 'hybrid' governance, concepts that

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increasingly are receiving attention in international relations. One high profile example of a newly registered partnership is the Asia Pacific Partnership on Clean Development (AP6) with Australia, China, India, Japan, South Korea and United States as members. AP6 is a voluntary agreement to reduce greenhouse gas emissions through technological innovation between states that together account for 50 percent of the global greenhouse emission. This technology-based partnership has received criticism for evading binding multilateral commitments to reduce greenhouse gases. However, its foremost champion – the United States – argues that the initiative is a complementary and flexible alternative to the Kyoto protocol that the Bush administration is reluctant to ratify. This is emblematic of the rise of networks in global environmental governance: the leading superpower initiates a global public–private partnership, which draws on significant business funding, as an alternative to the multilateral negotiation track to mitigate climate change.

Partnership networks have been branded as a new form of global governance with the potential to bridge multilateral norms and local action by drawing on a diverse number of actors in civil society, government and business. Does the rise of global partnerships imply a re-location and diffusion of authority from government to public–private 'implementation networks'? In the field of sustainable development the emergence of governance structures based on private authority, private regimes and a mix of public and private actors is particularly pronounced. Partnerships have been framed as innovative forms of governance that can effectively address the three 'deficits' of global environmental politics: the governance deficit, implementation deficit and participation deficit (Haas, 2004). Proponents argue that voluntary multi-sectoral networks, spanning the public–private domain, capture the essence of 'governance from below', counter the participation gap and effectively address the implementation gap in global environmental politics. However, the positive assessment of the Johannesburg partnerships has not gone unchallenged. Critics point to problems of representation and accountability of partnerships as they consolidate the privatization of governance and reinforce dominant neoliberal modes of globalization. Commentators have cautioned against seeing multi-stakeholder partnerships as a panacea for global governance (Dodds *et al.*, 2002, p. 2; Ivanova, 2003). Whatever the perspective adopted, the partnerships have emerged partly as a response to the limits of multilateralism, where intergovernmental diplomacy alone cannot grapple with the pressing problems and complex dimensions of sustainable development. The rise of partnerships prompts the question of whether there is transformation and shift of global governance from sovereign to private authority (Hall and Biersteker, 2002). Moreover, the rise of public–private partnerships, particularly in the field of sustainable development, has occurred under the auspices of international organizations. Conceptualizing IOs as autonomous bureaucracies with their own interests and agendas as well as ability to exercise power and make rules in world politics (Barnett and Finnemore, 2004) is a useful theoretical entry point to understand why environmental IOs have energized their mission through the partnership wave in the 1990s. This article argues that we need to rethink notions of accountability and legitimacy and make them congruent with the contemporary global governance structures consisting of overlapping and competing authorities – sovereign, private as well as 'hybrid'.

The role of transnational partnerships in contemporary global environmental discourse raises larger questions of the legitimacy, effectiveness and accountability of networked governance structures. This article advances a conceptual framework for evaluating the legitimacy of partnership networks. Furthermore, it examines, in particular, the multi-stakeholder partnerships for sustainable development. Legitimacy can be conceived of as the quality of the particular social and political order: the normative belief held by actors that the particular rule, institution or order ought to be obeyed (Hurd, 1999, p. 381; Risse, 2004b, p. 7). In this respect legitimacy is the 'acceptance and justification of shared rule by a community' (Bernstein, 2005, p. 142). A twofold interpretation of legitimacy is adopted, i.e. *input* and *output* legitimacy (Scharpf, 2001). Input legitimacy concerns whether the process conforms to procedural

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demands, such as representation of relevant stakeholders, transparency and accountability. Output legitimacy revolves around effectiveness or 'problem solving capacity' of the governance system. In the context of partnerships for sustainable development, legitimacy is captured in the following two questions. Do private–public partnerships 'perform' and 'deliver' the promised results-based environmental governance? Are partnerships open to public scrutiny and representative and inclusive of different stakeholders' interests?

The first section spells out the key assumptions and arguments. The second section conceptualizes partnerships as multi-sectoral networks and presents a framework for evaluating legitimacy, accountability and effectiveness of networked governance. In the third section, the context and rationale for the contested multi-stakeholder partnership initiative at the Johannesburg summit is outlined. The fourth section takes stock of the input legitimacy of the partnerships along two dimensions: representation and accountability. In the fifth section output legitimacy is examined in terms of institutional effectiveness: are partnerships linked to global norms; what are their degree of institutionalization and level of reporting and monitoring mechanisms? The concluding section highlights some theoretical implications of the WSSD partnerships, such as the transformation of authority relations and the scope for transnational democratic legitimacy.

Key Propositions and Arguments

The sustainable development partnerships are squarely placed at the nexus between multilateral and private governance. They thereby capture 'hybrid' governance, which are in focus rather than 'pure' forms of private governance such as civil society fora, rules of conduct, self-regulation and voluntary standards (Stripple, 2005). The effectiveness, and more recently the legitimacy, of intergovernmental treaty-making, international regimes and organizations are well established research fields in international relations. The influence, legitimacy and accountability of civil society in global governance have also received scholarly attention (Friedman *et al*., 2005; Keck and Sikkink, 1998; Scholte, 2002). However, the legitimacy of networked governance is a nascent research agenda, partly because networks escape traditional models of hierarchical accountability. The understanding of legitimacy and accountability advanced in this article can be applied to other public–private partnerships, such as the clean development mechanism (CDM) under the Kyoto Protocol and the World Commission on Dams (WCD) (Bäckstrand and Lövbrand, 2006; Dingwerth, 2005; Streck, 2004). However, the Johannesburg partnerships are particularly interesting to study since they tap into intergovernmental processes of sustainable development and thereby are a prime example public–private multilateralism. Other multi-sectoral networks and stakeholder processes, such as the World Commission of Dams and OECD panels on biotechnology, have a more separate existence or are institutions in their own right.

Second, issues of power, representation and voice are critical in the analysis of these new modes of networked governance. Partnerships can be conceived of as implementation networks with the potential to bridge global multilateral norms and local action in areas such as sustainable development, energy and climate change (Joyner, 2005; Streck, 2004, p. 298). In line with previous critical assessments of the WSSD partnership initiative (Andonova and Levy, 2003; Ivanova, 2003; Whitfield, 2005), I argue that legitimacy issues, such as public scrutiny, transparency and clear guidelines for monitoring effectiveness, are critical to the future success of the public–private partnerships. There are grounds for cautioned optimism as the multi-stakeholder partnerships, if properly designed with mechanisms to enhance accountability and monitoring performance, can potentially shape a more pluralistic governance order.

Third, it is problematic to use criteria stemming from ideal-type national democracy to evaluate the legitimacy and accountability of global governance structures lacking a supranational authority.

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Ideal-type models of democratic accountability and legitimacy are not even fully realized in liberal democracies. The cosmopolitan quest (Held, 1995, 2004) to transfer models of domestic democracy to the global level is utopian due to the lack of coherent electorate, a global parliament and a clear principle in the international sphere. Instead of exporting domestic models of democratic legitimacy and accountability to the global level, the concept of accountability should be redefined to fit the elusive character of networked and hybrid governance structures. Partnership networks prompt us to move beyond the conceptual trap of state-centric notions of democracy. Purposely, I use the notion of legitimacy rather than democracy as an entry point to analyse multi-sectoral networks. Broadly, partnerships and multi-stakeholder processes can be conceived as viable forms of deliberative democracy suitable for the global level, which is defined by a lack of supranational authority.

Legitimacy of Networked Governance

In this section a framework for thinking about output and input legitimacy in the context of networked governance is advanced. Scholarly work that develops alternative notions of accountability and legitimacy is interesting in this context (Benner *et al.*, 2004; Keohane and Nye, manuscript; Keohane and Nye, 2003; Risse, 2004a, 2004b). What does accountability mean in the context of global governance structures based on competing and overlapping authorities – state authority, private authority, moral authority? First, partnerships are conceptualized as multi-sectoral networks. Then a notion of legitimacy suitable for global governance is outlined. Finally, input and output legitimacy of networked governance are operationalized. Rather than devoting efforts to how to build new institutions, such as world federation or global parliament, we could ask how the existing institutional frameworks, networks and governance orders – exemplified with transnational partnerships – can be made more legitimate, transparent and accountable.

Partnerships as Multi-Sectoral Networks

Multi-sectoral networks represent a new species of governance emerging alongside traditional multilateral agreements. These can be defined as 'voluntary cooperative arrangements between actors from the public, business and civil society that display minimal degree of institutionalization, have common non-hierarchical decision-making structures and address public policy issues' (Steets, 2004, p. 25). The WSSD partnerships can be conceived of as institutionalized forms of global public policy networks or multisectoral networks, bringing together public and private actors. These networks capture the essence of post-sovereign governance entailing collaboration between market actors, governments, international organizations and NGOs on a range of issues from sustainable development, climate change, water, AIDS, malaria prevention and biodiversity protection (Benner *et al.*, 2004, pp. 191–192). Public-policy networks are voluntary, non-legislative and often geared towards implementation and joint problem solving. They represent soft and non-hierarchical steering, and consequently the logic of arguing and persuasion as rule-making (Risse, 2004a). Proponents of multi-sectoral networks argue that these promise more result-based governance due to their decentralized flexible structure and diverse expertise. Networks potentially close the implementation gap by connecting local practice and global rules in a flexible and decentralized manner. Partnership networks can also decrease the governance gap by complementing multilateral treaty-making with voluntary problem solving and self-regulation. Finally, partnership networks reduce the 'participation gap' in global governance by including a diverse set of stakeholders and intergovernmental actors. In sum, public–private partnerships are a response to functional demands for better governance, in issue areas where states and multilateral institutions fail

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(Andonova, 2005, p. 4). However, critics argue that multi-sectoral networks fail to live up to traditional accountability structures and monitoring mechanisms. In this view, how can networks between international organizations, transnational companies and non-governmental actors be accountable if the actors themselves are unaccountable? Instead, partnership networks lead to the privatization of global governance, give rise to corporate power, weaken and fragment the multilateral order and reinforce a neoliberal world order.

Normatively, global governance can be conceived as the process of creating a legitimate political order and rule compliance in the absence of supranational authority or world government. Three generic models for why actors obey rules have been posited, namely coercion, self-interest and legitimacy (Hurd, 1999). The realist premise is that actors obey norms because of fear of punishment while the liberal-institutionalist account assumes that rule compliance stems from pure self-interest of the actor, two predominant explanations. This article develops the third interpretation of an important source of rule compliance, namely legitimacy. A key here is the perception by the actor of the institution and norm. Actors perceive the norms as legitimate and therefore think they ought to be obeyed. Legitimacy refers to the overall quality of the social order – the institutions, norms and rules rather than the actors (Risse, 2004b, p. 7). The legitimacy stems both from a procedural logic (that rules are predictable and determined by legitimate actors) and a consequential logic (that rules and institutions lead to collective problem solving). Input legitimacy refers to the first dimension – the participatory quality of the decision-making process (transparency, representation and accountability). The second dimension – output legitimacy – relates to the problem-solving capacities of the institution or rule, i.e. whether governance is effective (Scharpf, 2001). While this twofold conception of legitimacy has been used for analysing supranational governance in the EU, it can arguably be applied to global governance structures without supranational rule and authority. In this perspective, high output legitimacy in terms of effective collective problem solving can compensate for low input legitimacy. Vice versa, lack of effective regulatory capacity prompts the need for greater input legitimacy in terms of transparent and accountable decision-making processes.

Input Legitimacy

Input legitimacy in multi-sectoral networks relates procedural demands such as balanced representation of different stakeholder groups, forum for collaboration and deliberation between government, market and civil society actors, transparency, access, information sharing and accountability and reporting mechanisms. I will focus on two aspects of input legitimacy, (1) balanced representation of various stakeholders in networks and (2) accountability and transparency mechanisms for monitoring effectiveness of partnership networks.

Representativeness concerns to what extent partnerships includes various stakeholders interests. To assess the representativeness of stakeholder participation in global multi-sectoral networks the following question could be asked: To what extent is an appropriately wide range of stakeholder groups participating formally in the network, as lead or participating partners? Throughout the 1990s, stakeholder participation has been the buzzword of multilateralism, and particularly pronounced in global environmental diplomacy. Since the 1992 Rio summit, 'multi-stakeholdership' has been launched to make multilateralism more inclusive and responsive to marginalized groups (such as women and indigenous people), and as a remedy to the 'participation gap' and disenfranchisement in global environmental governance (Elliot, 2004; Fisher and Green, 2004). Multilateral financial institutions, which have come under fierce criticism for suffering from a democratic deficit, have responded by establishing consultative arrangements with civil society (Mason, 2004). The assumption underpinning the 'governance from below' paradigm is pretty straightforward: more participation by affected groups will generate more

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effective collective problem solving. In other words, input legitimacy will increase output legitimacy through deliberative mechanisms for enhancing stakeholder consultation. Consequently, in the context of global problem solving the call for increased representation and participation has primarily an instrumental value. This has been most pronounced in the gender/sustainable development agenda, where paradoxically women are seen as victims of environmental destruction as well as the key to solving the environmental crisis.

Accountability refers to the relationships between actors (principal–agent, citizen–decision-maker etc.). In democratic systems, through mechanisms of representation, rulers are accountable to citizens. Citizens can participate in elections and vote decision-makers out of office if they do not live up to expectations. Decision-makers have to justify and explain their action *vis-à-vis* citizens. However, hierarchical and electoral accountability to enhance legitimacy are difficult in a global system of rule without coherent *demos*, an electorate, mechanisms of representation or a parliament. In networks legitimacy has to be enhanced through indirect accountability mechanisms. Networks 'are diffuse, complex weakly institutionalised collaborative systems that are neither directly accountable to an electoral base nor do they exhibit clear principal agent relationship' (Benner *et al.*, 2003, p. 3). In contrast to state-centred or IO models of accountability, in policy networks the challenges to accountability are that the sites of governance are multiple and power is diffused among different actors (Keohane and Nye, 2003, p. 401).

In this context it is helpful to distinguish between internal and external accountability (Keohane and Nye, manuscript). Internal accountability means that democratically elected governments are accountable to their citizens, companies to their shareholders, non-governmental organizations to their members and international organizations to their member states. Formal control mechanisms such as electoral and hierarchical accountability are employed. However, these mechanisms of formal accountability are not suitable for multi-stakeholding and partnerships where there is a lack of clear principal, electorate and coherent constituency. External accountability means that decision-makers have to justify their action *vis-à-vis* stakeholders that are affected by their decisions. Stakeholder dialogues in the World Commission on Dams (Dingwerth, 2005) and procedures to include NGOs and civil society in the World Trade Organization and Global Environmental Facility represent efforts to institutionalize external accountability (Mason, 2004; Payne and Samhat, 2004; Steffek, 2003).

A top-down accountability mechanism is less suitable for partnerships since this runs counter to the decentralized and flexible nature of the partnership endeavor. Research on accountability of partnership networks suggests that horizontal accountability mechanisms are more applicable (Steets, 2004). Partnerships in this vein would be accountable to a broad range of affected stakeholders, such as NGOs, the media, governments, donors and multilateral organizations. Accordingly, partnerships need pluralistic accountability structures, such as (1) professional peer accountability, (2) reputational accountability, (3) market accountability and (4) financial/fiscal accountability (Witte *et al.*, 2003, p. 75).

Output Legitimacy

In the context of multi-sectoral networks, output legitimacy can be formulated as effectiveness of partnership agreements. Effectiveness relates to the problem solving capacity: does the partnership attain its own goals and targets? Effectiveness in the field of sustainable development has two dimensions. First, to what extent does the agreement lead to desired environmental and developmental outcomes (quantitative goals of poverty eradication, access to freshwater biodiversity protection etc)? The second dimension is to what degree the partnership network has an adequate and effective institutional design and framework to reach desired outcomes. The latter – the 'institutional effectiveness' – leadership, clear goal formulation, policy coherence – is the main focus in this article. The 'outcome effectiveness' is hard to assess since the implementation of the sustainable development goals is a long-term process. In

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addition, as will be outlined in the sections below, many of the goals are not formulated as measurable targets and timetables, which makes the implementation record difficult to evaluate.

The question of effectiveness of international environmental agreements is a research agenda in itself that is beyond the scope of this article to review (Victor *et al.*, 1998, Weiss Brown and Jacobson, 2000; Young, 1999). How can theoretical and practical insights on the effectiveness of multilateral environmental treaties be extended to non-negotiated public–private partnership? Implementation, compliance and effectiveness can be distinguished (Weiss Brown and Jacobson, 2000). *Implementation* refers to measures by parties to incorporate international agreements into domestic law. Applying this state-centric notion of implementation to voluntary multi-stakeholder networks without legislative powers, this would be the effort of the partnership network to implement its own targets, timetables and goals. Public–private partnerships can be conceived as negotiation, coordination or implementation networks (Witte *et al.*, 2003, p. 68). In the latter case the network is a tool to promote and strengthen the implementation of intergovernmental treaties. *Compliance* moves beyond implementation and relates to whether parties adhere to the intergovernmental norms and rules as well as substantive and procedural obligations. In essence, do the parties comply with the spirit of the agreement? *Effectiveness* concerns the 'environmental outcome' of the agreement, i.e. whether the objectives are attained and whether the networked agreement is effective in addressing the problem it intended to solve. Does the agreement have problem-solving capacity and contribute to improvements in the state of the environment? The impact of the partnership agreement on the environment is a methodologically complex issue usually left unanswered by political science inquiry. Parties can comply with obligations in a multilateral agreement, for example in the Montreal Protocol on the ozone layer. However, this does not necessarily make the treaty effective in terms of reducing the problem of depletion of the stratospheric ozone layer. Compliance is thus a necessary but not sufficient precondition for effectiveness of an agreement.

Partnerships for Sustainable Development: the WSSD Context and Beyond

More than 200 partnerships for sustainable development (amounting to $235 million) were announced in conjunction with the Johannesburg summit in 2002. Currently, 319 partnerships in the fields of water, energy, health and biodiversity are registered in the Partnership Database, which has had its own website since February 2004.[1] This section briefly explains the nature, political context and rationale of the partnership initiative before and after the Johannesburg summit.

The much publicized partnership initiative can be conceived as the flagship of the second Earth summit, although it was both highly controversial and remains deeply contested. What is the nature of these multi-stakeholder partnerships, which were collectively branded as 'type II agreements'? In the preparatory process for the summit the distinction between type I and type II agreements or outcomes emerged. Type I outcomes refer to negotiated agreements between states, such as declarations, action plans and treaties. The Johannesburg Declaration and Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (JPOI) represent intergovernmental negotiated agreements on sustainable development (United Nations, 2002). In contrast, type II agreements such as the partnerships are multi-stakeholder initiatives linked to the implementation of commitments in Agenda 21 and the JPOI. The WSSD partnerships are voluntary, self-enforced and non-negotiated agreements between different constellations of governments, international organizations, NGOs and industry partners. While type I agreements refers to formally negotiated outcomes between member states, type II agreement do not require consensus and were not

[1]The partnership initiative can be found at http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/partnerships/partnerships.htm and the partnership database at http://webapps01.un.org/dsd/partnerships/public/browse.do [29 November 2005].

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negotiated within the summit process but rather represented 'coalitions of the willing' among non-state and state actors. The cornerstone is that the responsibility for implementing the complex and cross-sectoral issues in the sustainable development agenda cannot be limited to governments but has to be diffused into wider sectors of society.

This brings us to the overall political context for partnerships. The partnership rhetoric is arguably situated in a broader post-cold-war context, tapping into debates about a reconfiguration of global authority and governance beyond the state (Ivanova, 2003; Khaler and Lake, 2003). Since the end of the cold war, sustainable development has been squarely placed in a discourse of 'liberal environmentalism' (Bernstein, 2001). The 1992 Rio accords consolidated dominant norms of liberal environmentalism, in which environmental protection and sustainable development are viewed as compatible with capitalist markets and liberal trading order. Furthermore, in the post-UNCED agenda liberal democracy and 'good governance' are regarded as the most viable political institutional frameworks for tackling sustainable development challenges. The regulatory approach for partnerships encapsulates norms of liberal environmentalism or ecological modernization. In this policy paradigm, flexible, decentralized, voluntary market-oriented approaches to environmental problem solving have gained terrain as an important complement to top-down state-centric decision-making. Critics argue that the partnership wave reflects larger structural change in the global political economy toward commodification, accumulation and neo-liberal imperialism (Harvey, 1989). However, in the liberal-institutional account, the partnership rhetoric is not limited to neoliberal regulatory models of environmental governance. The normative implication is a broadened societal responsibility for the sustainable development agenda, captured by notions of corporate social responsibility. In this perspective, the responsibility of implementing multilateral commitments to sustainable development does not rest exclusively among governments, but should also include business and civil society in a larger collaborative endeavor.

What was then the rationale for launching type II partnerships at the Johannesburg summit? In a critical analysis of the WSSD partnerships Andonova and Levy (2003) argue that there was an official strategic agenda and an unofficial tactical maneuvering. The official rationale was that the multi-stakeholder partnerships were suitable due to the strong implementation focus of the summit. The Johannesburg summit was a review of the implementation of the sustainable development agenda since UNCED 1992. The UNEP Executive Director described the WSSD as a summit for 'implementation, accountability and partnership'. Hence, the rationale of the partnerships was to translate multilateral commitments on sustainable development into concrete action. The overarching idea was that the 'implementation gap' in sustainable development could be reduced by 'results-based' and 'outcome-oriented' partnerships. In the pre-summit guidelines from the WSSD Bureau partnerships were to 'reinforce the implementation of the outcomes of the intergovernmental negotiations of the WSSD and to help the further implementation of Agenda 21 and the Millennium Development Goals'. However, partnerships should complement globally agreed type I agreements and not substitute for governmental action. Moreover, partnerships should be participatory; they should entail new initiatives with added value, have clear objectives and contain specific targets and deadlines. The backdrop of the Johannesburg partnerships was the growing recognition of the limits of traditional state-centric multilateralism in implementing Agenda 21.

The more skeptical interpretation was that partnerships represented a rescue mission for the predicted failure of the Johannesburg summit (Andonova and Levy, 2003). Many commentators on the outcome of the WSSD have reservations about the promise of type II agreements to put the lofty and broad visions of Agenda 21 into practice (Bigg, 2003; Pallemarts, 2003). Partnerships were launched to energize the last months of preparations to save the Earth summit, which had low priority in the post-9/11 era as resources were devoted to combat global terrorism. However, the choice of partnerships to vitalize the Johannesburg summit in the late 2001 was not followed up by clear and substantive

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guidelines on the relationship between type I negotiated agreements and type II partnerships. The function, goals and monitoring mechanisms of partnerships were therefore vague, underspecified and uncertain. The partnership outcomes were launched to strengthen the implementation process, yet there was a growing disconnect between the WSSD negotiation process and the type II partnership initiative. This generated confusion in both the WSSD summit and follow-ups after the conference. As will be argued in the following sections, this can be attributed to lack of leadership from the WSSD secretariat and the Commission on Sustainable Development.

There is a deep disagreement about the merits and dangers of WSSD partnerships. Proponents point to the potential benefits of partnerships that pool assets, expertise and creativity of the diverse sectors. Furthermore, multi-stakeholder partnership can connect local practices and global norms through their flexible and decentralized character. The business sectors and parts of the NGO community embraced the partnership idea, as did many industrialized countries subscribing to its liberal environmental tenets. However, skeptics continue to challenge the partnerships for paving the way to privatization of governance and the UN. While the NGO community was divided (some prominent NGOs are lead parties of partnerships), some of the fiercest critique comes from civil society. Partnerships in their perspective are viewed as corporate environmentalism. The partnerships represented an opportunity for transnational business to 'greenwash', i.e. to put a green profile on their activities without much of substance and real commitment for environmental improvements. Moreover, partnerships signify the abdication of governments' responsibility to implement multilateral commitments on sustainable development. The 'retreat of the state' was looming in the summit and follow-up and could lead to fragmentation creating a '[m]ultilateralism a la carte in a global "multi-stakeholder bazaar"' (Pallemarts, 2003, p. 286). Developing countries were skeptical of partnerships, although some were beneficiaries (for example of those partnerships aimed at eradicating poverty and improving health and sanitation). Many developing countries feared that the partnerships would be an excuse for industrialized countries to scale down additional resources and international development assistance for financing sustainable development. Hence, the demand for 'new and additional' resources surfaced in the contested debate about the merits and dangers of partnerships.

The Johannesburg partnership can be seen as a subset of multi-stakeholder processes. Multi-stakeholder processes have been launched to operationalize the principles of inclusion and to increase legitimacy in terms of 'broad ownership' of decisions in international collaborative problem-solving (Ferenz, 2002; Küpçü, 2005, p. 93). These are processes of interaction between state and non-state actors with different purposes and functions, such as information-sharing, dialogue, consensus-building, joint problem-solving, decision-making, implementation and monitoring (Süsskind *et al.*, 2003). The multi-stakeholder dialogues, which were arranged by the UN Commission for Sustainable Development (CSD) before, at and after the Johannesburg summit, enabled interaction between the nine formal UN major groups[2] and government delegates. Both dialogues and partnerships bring together civil society, government and business. They have similarities in terms of their hybrid character, which enables an interaction between government and private actors. Both represent 'interactive governance' that builds on multi-stakeholder collaboration through dialogue, consensus-building and even joint problem-solving. Moreover, partnerships and stakeholder dialogues are multi-stakeholder endeavors, but they have different purposes and degrees of formality. CSD sponsored stakeholder dialogues on sustainable development themes primarily have the overarching function to inform intergovernmental decision-making, while the purpose of the WSSD multi-stakeholder partnerships is to support the implementation of

[2]The UN major groups are stakeholders identified in the Agenda 21: business, farmers, indigenous people, local government, non-governmental organizations, the science and technology community, trade unions, women and youth. The list of major groups and their networks can be found on the website http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/mgroups/mgroups.htm.

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Agenda 21 and JPOI. In addition, stakeholder processes have a more formal structure as well as clear and open criteria for selecting and representing stakeholder interests. Partnerships, on the other hand, have a more spontaneous and decentralized character as they represent a 'coalition of willing' stakeholders.

Voice, Accountability and Transparency of the WSSD Partnerships

Can the WSSD partnerships speed up the implementation of sustainable development as well as increasing stakeholder participation and legitimacy? In other, words are the partnerships for sustainable development effective and are they accountable? Do they include a wide base of stakeholder interests corresponding to the nine formal UN major groups? These issues will be discussed in the sections below.

Representation

What is the level of representativeness in the partnership initiative? Which stakeholder groups are included or are leaders of partnerships? Critical assessments of partnerships argue that resourceful and powerful actors dominate the WSSD type II agreements.[3] Few partnerships are multi-stakeholder endeavors in terms of involving disenfranchised groups. Only six percent of the partnerships (i.e. fewer than 20) include stakeholders from all major categories, developed and developing countries, intergovernmental organizations and the nine major groups (Andonova and Levy, 2003, pp. 23–24). The broad picture is that the partnerships are North driven, sponsored primarily by international organizations and a handful of industrialized countries. There is both a lack of grassroot and local participation from the South as well as private sector involvement. The private sector leads only two percent, and is involved in only 20 percent, of partnerships (Hale and Mauzerall, 2004, pp. 230–231). It is noteworthy that the business sector is quite marginal in the partnership enterprise given the recurrent argument that partnerships pave the way for the privatization of environmental governance. The lead partners are primarily intergovernmental organizations (35 percent), western-based international NGOs (35 percent) and governments from OECD countries (33 percent). International organizations lead almost a third of the partnerships, which indicates that partnerships are an opportunity for multilateral institutions to reinvent their mission and reassert their programs. In partnerships led by governments six states (Australia, France, Indonesia, US, Italy and Japan) are represented in 70 percent of the partnerships (Hale and Mauzerall, 2004, p. 231). Local actors, low-income countries, small NGOs and grassroots are less represented. For example, only six percent of the partnerships are led by low- and middle-income countries.

This supports the argument that partnerships are 'supply driven' rather than 'demand driven', i.e. that the actors with the most advanced capacity are engaged rather than those with the largest functional needs (Andonova and Levy, 2003). Partnerships mirror rather than transform existing relations of power between North and South, governmental and private authority and global professionals and local grassroots, which is not surprising given their voluntary and self-governing nature. Partnership networks represent 'coalitions of the willing': they can, but do not have to, be collaborative endeavors between stakeholders from government, business and civil society. They have more narrow stakeholder representation compared with the formalized multi-stakeholder processes under the UN auspices as discussed earlier.

[3] This section is based on evaluations of the Johannesburg partnerships such as those by Andonova and Levy (2003), Hale and Mauzerall (2004), Ivanova (2003), Benner *et al.* (2003) and Whitfield (2005), as well as United Nations reports on the Johannesburg partnership initiative such as United Nations (2004b, 2005, 2006).

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Accountability and Transparency

The WSSD partnerships have repeatedly been criticized for lack of accountability and transparency. Critics argue that the promising rhetoric of partnership is not matched with progress and results on the ground. In this perspective, partnership networks need to be accountable to the various stakeholders affected, for example NGOs, indigenous people, business, governments and multilateral financial institutions. The need for systematic monitoring progress of partnerships has been emphasized at the annual meetings of the Commission on Sustainable Development (United Nations, 2003, 2004a, 2004b, 2006). As discussed in the previous sections, WSSD partnerships are amenable to horizontal accountability (market, reputational and peer accountability). This fits the flexible and decentralized features of partnerships rather than top-down forms of accountability (such as a centralized agency overseeing and sanctioning partnerships).

The absence of any single principle in multi-sectoral networks raises the question of to whom partnerships should be accountable? One answer could be the multiple stakeholders, which represent diverse constituencies. In order to match these many principals have proposed a pluralistic system of accountability for partnerships (Witte *et al.*, 2003, p. 75). Reputational accountability, i.e. naming and shaming, can be effective, since public credibility and images are critical for many actors in partnerships. Market or financial accountability can be important instruments for consumers and donors to reward and punish lead actors in the partnership. However, it is too early to judge whether these accountability mechanisms have been put into practice in the Johannesburg partnership initiative. No instance of a partnership that has been removed from the registry for insufficient accountability to stakeholders is known to the author. Instead, transparency-based accountability mechanisms have been emphasized in the partnership initiative. Transparency and accountability are closely linked, as accountability hinges on access to information on the performance and progress of partnerships. Three indicators can capture the transparency of the Johannesburg partnership initiative: a web site, a reporting system and a monitoring mechanism (Hale and Mauzerall, 2004, p. 227). A website for public information sharing, a reporting system to share information about the progress of the partnership and a monitoring mechanism to define standards (indicators and measures) of goal attainment of partnerships are all key components of transparency. What is the transparency scorecard for the WSSD partnership networks? Analysis in spring 2003 indicates that less than a third of the partnerships have the threefold aspect of transparency, i.e. a website and reporting and monitoring mechanisms. Less than fifty percent of the partnerships have a mechanism for monitoring effectiveness and progress of partnerships (Hale and Mauzerall, 2004, p. 228).

The relatively weak transparency mechanism of partnerships stems from unclear guidelines and lack of mandatory reporting requirements of the Johannesburg partnerships. Pre-summit guidelines for the procedural basis of the partnerships were unspecified and vague. First, in the follow-up of the summit, at the 11th meeting of the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD 11), reporting guidelines were established (for example biennial report and exchange of information to stakeholders). However, while reporting was encouraged it is still voluntary (Andonova and Levy, 2003, p. 22). 'Partnership fairs' with showcases of Johannesburg partnerships have been a new practice at the annual CSD sessions as a way of information sharing. As of today a systematic mechanism for monitoring effectiveness of partnerships is lacking. Of the 311 registered partnerships, only 59 (i.e. 20 percent) have submitted updates on progress (United Nations, 2005). These progress reports concern organizational activities, coordination activities and implementation activities. However, only one percent of the partnerships reported that they met their stated goal.

To conclude, the partnerships reflect rather transform relations of power in global environmental governance. Partnerships represent 'coalitions of willing' partners rather than actors with the greatest need

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for resources and the lowest capacity building for sustainable development. While some partnerships have a true multi-stakeholder character with wide representation of governments and major stakeholder groups, these are an exception rather than a rule. Most partnerships have unbalanced representation and are led by Northern governments, international organizations and predominantly Washington-based NGOs (Küpçü, 2005, p. 96). No systematic mechanism to track progress of implementation record of partnerships is yet in place.

The Effectiveness of the WSSD Partnerships

This section takes stock of the output legitimacy in terms of effectiveness of the WSSD partnerships. Do the Johannesburg partnerships deliver results-based environmental governance? Do they encourage problem-focused, result-oriented forms of environmental policy-making? Do partnerships fulfill the obligations in multilateral agreements such as the JPOI and the Agenda 21? Do they close the 'implementation gap' in sustainable development? In order to answer these questions about the effectiveness and implementation track of partnerships, clear goals for what to implement are required. The sustainable development agenda, however, is defined by diffuse goals, conflicting agendas and norms, competing ideologies and trade-offs. This is inevitable given the contested and politicized nature of the evasive concept of sustainable development.

Hence, the 'outcome' effectiveness and problem-solving capacity of WSSD partnerships is difficult to evaluate. Moreover, a review of effectiveness is too early: the existing 316 partnerships became operational first after the Johannesburg summit and on average have a time span of more than four years. However, almost a third of the partnerships were open ended (United Nations, 2006, p. 8). Consequently, institutional rather than environmental effectiveness will be considered in this section. Two preconditions for effectiveness will be highlighted: (1) the institutionalization of partnerships, i.e. their linkage to goals and targets in multilateral agreements, such as the JPOI; (2) additionality, i.e. to what the degree partnerships generate new multi-sectoral funding for sustainable development activities.

Linkage between Partnerships and Multilateral Agreements

The purpose of the WSSD partnerships was to reinforce the implementation of agreed targets, goals and commitments found in the JPOI and Agenda 21. The connection between partnerships and multilateral targets and goals is a precondition for assessing the effectiveness of partnerships. As discussed in previous sections, the problem to assess effectiveness stems from the unclear relationship between type I agreements and type II partnerships that emerged from the WSSD preparatory meetings. Furthermore, summit guidelines lacked clarity about the mandate of partnerships. Partnerships should link to Agenda 21, they should have 'added value' and 'relevance' for the WSSD and they should have 'monitoring mechanisms', but these factors remained underspecified and diffuse (Andonova and Levy, 2003, p. 22). As a result, the Johannesburg partnerships and the WSSD agreements evolved rather separate, rather than being the integrated and mutually supported outcomes that were intended from the beginning.

When reviewing the profile of partnerships, they clearly converge with themes in Agenda 21. As illustrated in Figure 1, partnerships for sustainable development cover fields such as poverty eradication, biodiversity, gender equality, education, health and sustainable development etc. However, Agenda 21 is a very broad action plan without concrete timetables and targets. The WSSD linked partnerships to Agenda 21 rather to the more concrete Millennium Development Goals. The vague Agenda 21 commitments make it difficult to subject partnerships to implementation review. The JPOI contains targets and

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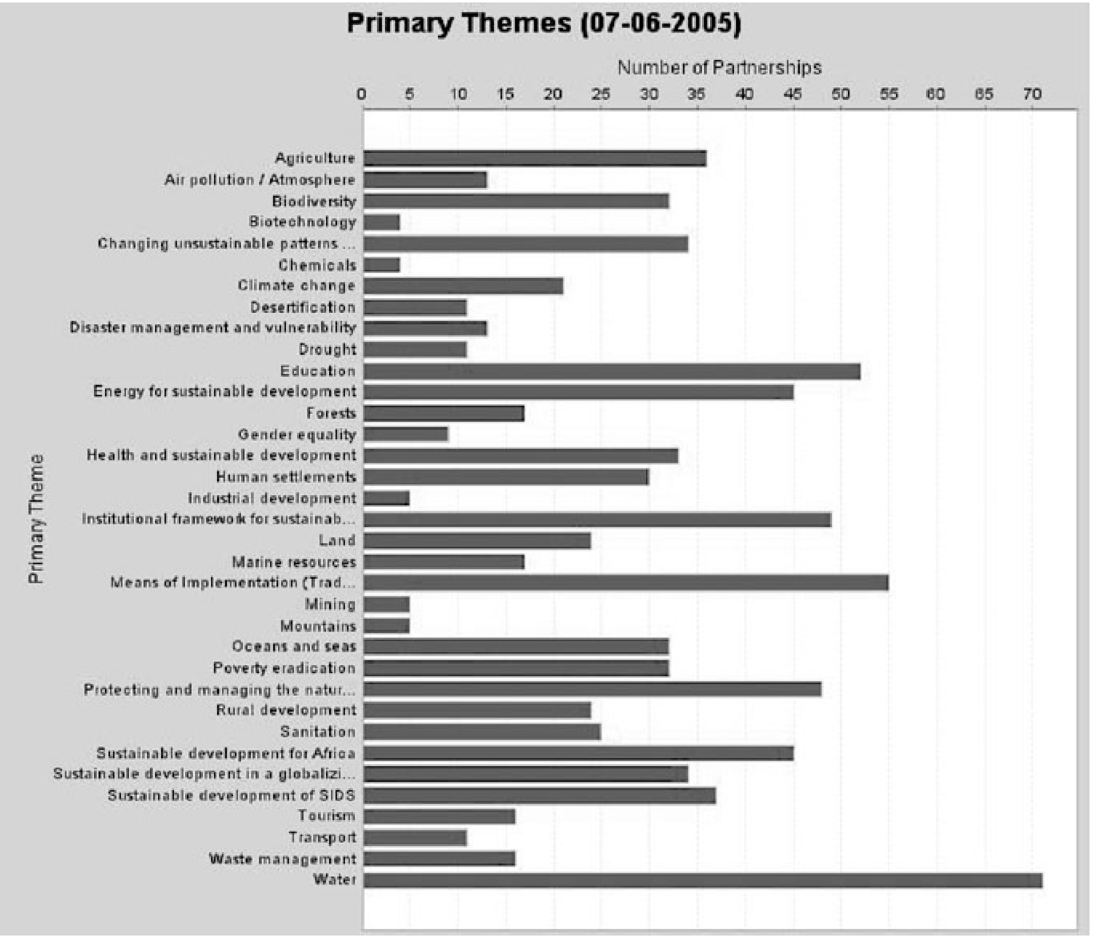

Figure 1. Primary themes of WSSD partnerships (source: United Nations, Partnerships for Sustainable Development. http://webapps01.un.org/dsd/partnerships/public/statisticsResults.do [29 November 2005]).

timetables, but most of these were reiterated from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) agreed at the Millennium Summit in 2000. The lack of concrete and quantitative targets, timetables and goals was precisely the reason why the WSSD was subject to massive criticism and even ruled out as a failure. Many of the 30 targets in JPOI were repetitions of existing goals in the Millennium Declaration and other agreements (Bigg, 2003). This included, for example, halving the proportion of those living in extreme poverty and people without safe drinking water by the year 2015.

Apart from the weak institutionalization, another barrier for assessing effectiveness of the type II partnerships is that the majority of partnerships fail to provide concrete (and quantifiable) environmental and developmental targets. Around half of the partnerships address substantial issues of environmental management (such as climate change, desertification, energy, forests, freshwater etc.) but the other half fall within 'means of implementation', i.e. capacity building, education and information for decision-making. These partnerships concern procedural aspects such as information and knowledge sharing but provide no concrete environmental targets, which makes review of partnership performance difficult.

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New and Additional Funding

Do the partnerships provide new and fresh funding for sustainable development activities? Mobilizing new resources is critical in the implementation of Agenda 21 and to meet objectives of poverty eradication, sanitation and health protection in the JPOI and in the Millennium Development Goals. After the Johannesburg summit the funding for partnerships was almost USD 250 million. As of June 2004 the partnership funding had increased fourfold to USD 1.02 billion (Hale and Mauzerall, 2004, p. 235; United Nations, 2004b). However, close analysis suggests that funding of multi-sectoral partnerships is 'repackaged' funds. Large intergovernmental programs have been redirected to, and reclassified as, type II partnerships. More than 80 percent of the funding comes from multilateral institutions, mostly from current programs in the UNEP, the UNDP and the World Bank. Consequently, funding from new sources is limited and a strikingly small portion (less than one percent) stems from the private sector. This indicates that the partnership initiative has not yet paved the way for new and multi-sectoral funding for sustainable development initiatives. This transformation of existing intergovernmental initiatives on sustainable development to type II partnerships suggests that international organizations are trying to reinvent their mission and reassert their agendas and ongoing intergovernmental programs. The business has remained cautious of the Johannesburg partnerships, partly because of the fear of over-regulation and the establishment of centralized administrative arrangements to regulate and monitor partnerships (Benner *et al.*, 2003, p. 7). A reflection of this was that the World Business for Sustainable Development announced 95 partnerships prior to the Johannesburg summit and in a separate registry.

To sum up, the Johannesburg partnerships largely escape implementation review, partly because they, at their inception, were decoupled from global agreements on environment and development, such as the JPOI and Millennium Development Goals. A better definition of the substantial objectives of partnerships is needed as well as clearer linkage to targets and norms set by the intergovernmental agenda (Andonova and Levy, 2003, p. 30). Fewer than half of the partnerships cover substantial goals of environmental protection or poverty alleviation, while the rest focused on procedural questions such as 'Means of implementation'. This makes an implementation review even more difficult.

Conclusion

The final scorecard on the input and output legitimacy of the Johannesburg partnerships is that there is considerable room for improvement. The effectiveness and accountability of these networked forms of governance need to be enhanced. Recent evaluations of the partnerships suggest that they can gain from a clearer linkage to existing institutions and multilateral agreements, measurable targets and timetables, more effective leadership, improved accountability mechanisms, more systematic review, reporting and monitoring. However, the baby should not be thrown out with the bathwater. Partnerships are innovative forms of governance that can pool together diverse expertise and resources from civil society, government and business sectors. With their decentralized, flexible and informal features, partnerships can potentially link local practice with global environmental and developmental norms across different sectors. In essence, partnerships can potentially operationalize lofty principles of sustainable development and match them with realities on the ground. Plural forms of accountability are needed to match the plural and amorphous features of global multi-sectoral partnerships.

The recurrent argument that partnerships consolidate the privatization of global governance can be challenged in the light of the empirical evidence of the current profile of the partnerships for sustainable development. Clearly, international organizations use the 'partnership wave' to re-invent their mission. Accordingly, international organizations are autonomous bureaucracies in their own right.

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They exercise power, shape interests and assert moral and expert authority (Barnett and Finnemore, 2004, p. 15). The private sector is still marginal in both leading and funding multi-sectoral partnerships. The business sector remains largely unconvinced and has instead pursued separate partnership networks outside the UN framework. Instead, multilateral organizations are the most common lead partners, together with a handful of governments in the industrialized world. This suggests that the WSSD partnership is an arena for reasserting governmental authority rather than re-locating authority to private actors (Bull *et al.*, 2004).

The Johannesburg partnership initiative is a reminder that voice, power and contestation are questions that remain at the core of global environmental governance. The partnerships for sustainable development not only reinforce and mirror dominant norms of liberal environmentalism and privilege powerful actors in global environmental governance; they to some extent reinforce governmental authority. The jury is still out on the question posed at the beginning of the paper, namely whether partnerships pave the way for relocation of authority from governmental authority to private (or hybrid) authority. Partnerships may also further strengthen multilateralism, where international organizations emerge as a forum for initiating, negotiating and brokering partnerships. Type II outcomes have been interpreted as the abdication of governments with regard to financing and implementing multilateral commitments to sustainable development. For example, the US resisted multilateral commitments at the Johannesburg summit but channeled its engagement to the partnership arena in terms of being one of the largest sponsors of the public–private partnerships.

An argument in this article is that transnational public–private networks and hierarchical institutions require different yardsticks for democratic accountability. The legitimacy of partnerships taps into debates about the legitimacy crisis and democratic deficit of international institutions and global governance, which have gained prominence in international relations. The scope for transnational democracy underpins these issues (Anderson, 2002; McGrew, 2002). However, one of the models of democratic governance beyond the state – the cosmopolitan quest to transfer national democratic institutions and mechanisms to a world polity (with a global parliament, world federation etc.) – is utopian, unrealistic and further consolidates state-centric notions of democratic legitimacy. Stakeholding practices and group-based deliberation in networks are more compatible with deliberative accounts of transnational democracy. This starts from the premise that democracy is more about deliberation, reasoned argument and public reflection among affected stakeholders than voting and aggregation (Meadowcroft, 2004; Smith, 2003). Legitimacy in this context is generated through an open and public process of deliberation among a variety of societal actors: government delegates, business and NGOs. The key is to encourage vital transnational public spheres rather than large-scale institutional reform or a democratic constitution of the world order (Dryzek, 2000; Nanz and Steffek, 2004). Proponents of deliberative democracy argue that deliberation and reasoned argument can increase both input and output legitimacy of governance (Risse, 2004b). This represents a pragmatic route to democratize the global order in which public–private partnership networks will remain important governance structures.

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DOI: 10.1002/eet