

# The World Summit for Sustainable Development

## The Rio+10 Summit on environment & development

### The Johannesburg Summit

#### The Earth Summit

##### WSSD

### Introduction

On my return from the Rio Earth Summit in Brazil in 1992 I wrote, “Many people expected a dramatic result and a shift in world politics. Did this occur? The answer is clearly **no**.” (Brown 1993, Roan News Spring: 22-24).

When asking the same question about the World Summit for Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg 10 years later, my answer would be the same – there was little direct progress.

If you were to ask me then, was anything achieved and was the summit worthwhile, I would say “Yes” – not through the formal negotiations at the time of the summit, but in the bigger scheme of things. Let me explain.

### The Rio Earth Summit of 1992

The main objective of Rio was to demonstrate how sustainable development issues could be integrated into planning and implementation. To do this, and help guide countries in the process, a 40 chapter 800 page Agenda 21 document was developed and adopted. This is a non-binding document, which showing how sustainable approaches can be built into all facets of life, all sectors of society, at all levels, for all habitats and ecosystems and be part of all current and important issues and challenges. It essentially called for a paradigm shift – a new way of approaching and managing things, one in which money issues, people issues and ecological issues are all carefully considered with their mutual long-term best interests in mind.

Commitment to this approach was obtained from over 100 heads of state, who attended and committed their countries to this new pathway of development. In addition, many other countries then and subsequently, made a commitment to Sustainable Development so that, today, the vast majority of countries are talking the same general language.

There are a number of challenges facing the implementation of Agenda 21. The first is one of *scale*. Sustainable development implies “acting locally” as well as “acting globally”. Creating the enabling environment for local initiatives involves a real commitment to devolution – not just decentralisation, in which bureaucracy is created at each level (and as a result, progress is grid-locked), but actually handing over authority, responsibility and accountability to appropriate local levels. Fortunately, Namibia has a good framework for this approach in its “conservancy” model – but there is still a way to go before this model has achieved its full potential. One of the greatest constraints is that middle-level government officials don’t understand devolution and think that they, sitting in their offices in Windhoek, can manage resources and other issues better than can people immediately on the ground.

Then there are the local authorities, consisting of city, towns and villages. The Local Agenda 21 process is well under way in Namibia, with Walvis Bay and Windhoek having started programmes to address their issues of sustainable urban development. In essence, conservancies are nothing more than rural Agenda 21 programmes or, alternatively, Local Agenda 21 initiatives are nothing more than urban conservancies. Some of the issues might be a bit different, but the principles are the same. The next levels are those of Region and Nation. At this stage, the working arrangements between these different levels are not adequately established, and so we tend to suffer from conflicting authorities, excess bureaucracy, and lack of efficiency. This is not a situation peculiar to Namibia – virtually all countries are grappling with this challenge. The principles are easy: the smallest appropriate level on the ground is empowered to manage and, where appropriate, this level allows authority to flow up to higher levels depending on the management issues and resources. The higher levels exercise accountability, which flows downwards.

Similar challenges of scale face nations and the global community, with bilateral arrangements, sub-regional blocks (e.g. SADC), continents (e.g. Africa), power blocks (e.g. G77 & China) and then the entire UN membership. There are so many different interest groupings, and so few countries really prepared to put global interests ahead of their own, that real progress is very difficult and slow.

The second challenge is that of *how to do sustainable development*. There was no roadmap provided with Agenda 21, there were no targets. There were no indicators to help people, organisations and countries evaluate whether they are being successful or not. As a result, some people and organisations (and even countries) did nothing. Fortunately, others were more motivated and original, and a host of different ideas and approaches were initiated in different parts of the world.

#### **Namibia's performance since Rio**

Namibia was amongst those countries that embarked on a vigorous and original programme of action to move towards a sustainable development approach. And arguably, Namibia is one of the more successful countries in this regard. A review of Namibia's National Assessment report to the WSSD (GRN/UNDP/Capacity 21, 2002) highlights the many areas of progress, a few of which are listed below:

- Establishment of institutions – DEA and Ministry of Environment & Tourism;
- Development of new policies and legislation, as well as a common vision for the environmental sector;
- Planning and implementation of a rich portfolio of relevant environmental programmes;
- Devolution of authority, rights and responsibilities to local level;
- Building of partnerships between sectors and institutions;
- Raising awareness, building capacity and democratising environmental issues;
- Mainstreaming sustainable development into national planning and long-term visioning.

These bullet points cover a huge investment in time and funds to set Namibia on the pathway to sustainable development, and we are only now really starting the journey. The important point, however, is that Namibia took the initiative created by Rio to plan and implement its own action programmes. We used

the momentum and the awareness created by Rio to move a national process forward.

In the final analysis, international fora cannot of themselves implement action plans, they can simply help create the right operational environment – an awareness and a conducive set of frame conditions – to assist countries, organisations and individuals to implement appropriate projects and programmes. It is far easier to promote local and national change and introduce new ideas within the framework of a global movement than it is if working in isolation. Therein lies the greatest value of environmental mega-conferences. After that, it is up to individuals, organisations and countries to get things going.

#### **The World Summit for Sustainable Development**

The objectives of the WSSD were (a) to share experiences between individuals, institutions, countries and regions on what works and what does not. In a sense, to look at a whole series of roadmaps that have been tested in different areas and under different circumstances, and to see which ones are effective; and (b) to set some targets on real priority issues such as poverty, biodiversity, water supply, fisheries, climate change, etc. and to work as a global community to try and reach these targets.

How well did this work? Well, for the first objective it worked very well. There was a range of different venues (in addition to the main government negotiations taking place at Sandton City), which included the following:

- water and wetland issues at the Water Dome,
- national and institution stands at Ubuntu Village and at the IUCN Conference Centre,
- individual and institution stands at the Nasrec Conference Centre
- business and private sector forum in Sandton
- and a plethora of other smaller venues and events.

In addition, at all of these venues there were full programmes of parallel meetings, panel discussions, workshops, presentations, theatre, debates, demonstrations, etc. each addressing some aspect of sustainable development – new ideas, new innovative technologies, different projects and programmes, new information, monitoring, educating, awareness-raising, etc. In essence, lots of new thinking, new ideas and new approaches to feed into the design of a roadmap for sustainable development.



*The Water Dome at the WSSD*

The second objective, of setting some vital targets, worked less well. For example:

Issue	What's been agreed
<i>Energy</i>	Gave up demands for targets and timetable on increased use of renewable energy.
<i>Biodiversity</i>	To 'significantly reduce' the loss of species by 2015. No specifics could be agreed.
<i>Poverty</i>	A solidarity fund to wipe out poverty – no amount, no timetable.
<i>Climate change</i>	Urges ratification of Kyoto protocol – no targets, nothing new.
<i>Trade</i>	Reaffirms phasing out of subsidies, though not to end those important to the US & EU!
<i>Good governance</i>	Wording stressed the need to fight corruption, boost democracy and the rule of law, but not as a condition to aid.



*Namibia's national stand at the Ubuntu Village*

Targets were set in two important areas. For **water and sanitation** it was agreed that the number of people without clean water and sanitation (currently

two billion worldwide) would be halved by 2015. This is an ambitious target, because in 15 years, the world population will have almost doubled. In Namibia, the implications of achieving these targets are set out below.

Urban, rural & total populations	1990	2000	2015	No. people per year
Urban populatn %	27	35	48	
Urban: water %	93	98	99.5	38,420
Urban: sanitation %	85	93	98	39,470
Rural populatn %	73	65	52	
Rural: water %	<50	70	86.5	20,330
Rural: sanitation %	10	21	64.5	39,480
Total populatn x10 <sup>6</sup>	1.4	1.8	2.5	

In 2000 Namibia's urban population was about 35% of the total population of 1.8 million – thus the urban population was some 630,000 people. By 2015, the urban population will be about 48% of the total population estimated to be 2.5 million – thus some 1.2 million people, an increase in the urban population of just over 90% in 15 years! By contrast, the rural population will grow by about 11% over 15 years. To halve the number of people without access to clean water and sanitation involves halving the current people in this category plus **all the future people**. Namibia will have to provide clean water to about 38,420 additional urban people and 20,330 additional rural people **per year**, and sanitation to 39,470 additional urban people and 39,480 additional rural people **per year**. Assuming that there are on average six people per household, Namibia would need to supply about 9,800 additional households with clean water each year (about 65% of them in urban areas), and about 13,160 additional households with sanitation each year (split equally between urban and rural areas), to meet the WSSD targets.

Are these targets achievable? Do the Ministries, Municipalities and Local Authorities responsible for their implementation even know about them?

The second target area was that of **fisheries** in which it was agreed to restore depleted fish stocks by 2015. This is an extremely ambitious target for most of the world's fisheries, and one which, I am prepared to bet good money, has not a hope of being achieved in most areas. In the case of Namibia, however, where our marine fish resources are in considerably better shape than most, there is a fairly optimistic scenario that fish stocks could recover (through careful quota setting, monitoring and good management) to levels

that support maximum sustained yields by 2016. On the basis of this scenario, the fisheries sector could grow at 6-9% per year. The situation in Namibia is as follows:

Fishery	Species	Current state	Comments
Pelagic	Pilchard	Severely overexploited	No fishing until stock recovers
	Anchovy	Low abundance	Adverse environmental conditions – low quotas
Midwater	Horse mackerel	Abundant	Favourable conditions
Demersal	Hake	Improving	Recovering from over fishing
	Monkfish	Uncertain – but good recruitment	Status will improve with TAC and management
	Kingklip	Stock growing	Not a directed catch
	Sole	Unknown	Mostly in shallows protected by 200 m trawler restriction
Deep sea	Orange roughy	Decrease in availability – cause uncertain	Long lived, low production. VERY conservative quotas needed
	Red crab	Stable	Co-managed with Angola
Line fishing	Snoek	Seems to be on increase	
	Kob	Overexploited	Restrictions on angling needed
	Steenbras	Overexploited	Restrictions on angling needed
	Barbel	Healthy	
	Blacktail	Precarious	More restricted bag limit

lobster populations, and not to deplete those of orange roughy and a number of line-fish species.

Unfortunately, the situation is not as simple as restricting quotas, because environmental factors play a large role in determining the population dynamics of different fish species. In the case of Namibia, with good environmental luck and continued good management, the fisheries target agreed at WSSD could be achieved.



*Dr Chris Brown leading a session at the IUCN centre in Sandton on principles & practices of sustainable use.*

### Where to from here?

While these United Nations environmental mega-conferences tend to give disappointing results when rated against the expectations that are raised, mainly by poorly informed components of civil society and hyped up by the media, their real potential lies in how they are used **after** the event – locally, nationally and globally.

Setting targets for all nations of the world, and getting agreement on these targets, has always been difficult. Many nations place their own national interests (often fairly insignificant interests at that) firmly ahead of global interests. It is also pertinent to observe that many of the most prosperous nations are least prepared to make real concessions in relative terms to effectively address global issues, global equity and global development. It is clear that humanitarian and environmental issues are simply not really important to some industrialised nations.

Despite the fact that few targets were agreed at the WSSD, there is no good reason why countries should not go ahead and set themselves challenging targets



*Namibia Nature Foundation stand at the Nasrec Conference Centre*

As can be seen from the above table, the main challenge is to restore pilchard, anchovy and rock

for sustainable development. Also, there is no good reason why progressive and like-minded countries in should not come together and work in partnership to achieve these targets. The worst and most pathetic thing that we could do would be to say that, because a few countries undermined a good idea and a global process, that we should thus do nothing. Nonsense, we can do a lot! As we did after Rio, with no roadmap provided, we developed our own. After WSSD, with no targets provided, we should develop our own. Then we should make sure that we implement programmes to achieve these targets.

Namibia is not starting from scratch on this. Indeed, we have an excellent foundation. We have our Constitution and Green Plan, and 10 years of pertinent experience. More recently, we have our second National Development Plan (NDP<sub>2</sub>) and an emerging long-term vision in the form of Namibia's Vision 2030 process and documents. We have priorities, we have targets, and we have strategies. The challenge for us is to reduce these to a few manageable interventions. Essentially, we need to focus down on the 10% or fewer strategic interventions that will make 90% or more of the impact and the on-the-ground difference. Then we need to implement. Implement for **real results**, not just to show how busy we are. To implement for results we need to understand what those results are. We need to set the **right targets** and measure our progress against those targets. How many planning meetings were held is the **wrong** target. How much additional money coming into a household is the **right** target if the income is sustainable. A tangible and measurable improvement to the resource base is another **right** target.

We need to reduce bureaucracy and other obstacles to sustainable development. We need to form flexible,

responsive and dynamic partnerships – what the President calls **smart partnerships** - and we need to pull in all sectors of society – individuals, community groups, non-governmental organisations, the private sector, parastatals, academic institutes and government – wherever there are dynamic and interested people. But we must no longer allow middle-level bureaucrats and technocrats – in both the civil service and in NGOs - to slow us down, either because they are not sufficiently dynamic, interested, competent or secure in their ability or position. We need to efficiently work around people and institutions that cause good initiatives to stagnate.

Am I being too forthright for you? Are you feeling uncomfortable or offended? If you are, then the chances are good that you are probably part of the problem and you need to change your thinking and approach. You need to adopt a new mindset and a new “can-do” paradigm and become part of the solution.

We need to use the momentum created by the WSSD to identify our priority issues, to set our targets and to aggressively achieve those targets. It is our country and our future. No one else will do it for us.

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