

GLOBAL ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT: AN EXPLORATION OF THE WORLD SUMMIT ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Phia Steyn¹

1. INTRODUCTION

"In this particular part of the globe we have subdued the land, fenced in its creatures and harnessed its wild rivers. It was a massive task at first - foolhardy almost - but now we have emerged totally victorious. And it might be our trouble: our victory was too total. In places nature has capitulated leaving behind poisoned, lifeless streams; exhausted infertile soil; and each spring becomes more silent."

- John Jordi²

Thirty-one years ago on 10 March 1971, the editor of *The Star*, John Jordi, launched his newspaper's *Cleaner Air, Rivers and Environment* campaign in South Africa with the above quotation. For Jordi and many of his contemporaries, the world at large in the early 1970s faced a real environmental crisis that had to be addressed urgently and constructively if humankind and the environment were to survive into the next millennium and beyond.

Thirty-one years and numerous environmental disasters later, humankind could boast of safely making into the twenty-first century. The environment, however, is an entirely different matter. What Jordi and his contemporaries perceived as an environmental crisis back in 1971, from a 2002 perspective looks like an ideal state for the environment to be in, and one which few people believe will ever be attainable even if humankind does radically alter its current patterns of indiscriminate development and resource use. The fact is that in 2002 the natural and human environment is in its worse state ever. Widespread environmental problems such as high levels of air pollution, the loss of biodiversity, deforestation and desertifica-

¹ Department of History, University of the Free State.

² *The Star*, 10 March 1971, p. 22.

tion occur around the world, which not only threaten the natural environment, but also humankind that depends on the bounties and riches of the natural environment for its very survival. The negative impact of human misuse of the natural resource base on humankind itself further manifests itself in numerous ways, such as the annual 3 million and 2,2 million human deaths caused by air pollution and contaminated water respectively, and global climate changes due to global warming that wreak havoc on agricultural activities and water availability at regional and national levels. Not to mention the very real threat that rising sea levels have on a global level for human habitation and activities along the world's coastlines.³

It is against this background of looming environmental and social disasters that the world met at Johannesburg from 26 August to 4 September 2002 for the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), to re-assess humankind's impact on the environment and to devise programmes and actions aimed at addressing these adverse impacts in order to ensure the survival of both humankind and the environment. This article aims at exploring the WSSD by focusing on three aspects, namely the history of United Nations-led global environmental management, the WSSD preparatory process, and the WSSD itself.

2. AN OVERVIEW OF UNITED NATIONS-LED GLOBAL ENVIRONMENTAL GOVERNANCE

When compared with the estimated age of the earth and the long history of humankind, the history of global environmental management is remarkably short, dating back only thirty years to the 1972 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment (UNCHE, Stockholm, 5-16 June 1972). UNCHE was convened against the background of the perceived environmental crisis and the corresponding environmental revolution of the 1960s and early 1970s, which prompted politicians to start paying political attention to environmental issues on both national and international levels.⁴ During the UNCHE preparatory process, the now-famous North-South division in environmental and development issues emerged for the first time with the developing world fearing that the developed world would use UNCHE as an excuse to prevent industrial growth in the South, thereby keeping the latter under control of the developed world.⁵

³ *Mail & Guardian* (World Summit 2002 special), 23-29 August 2002, p. 6.

⁴ For more details see for example P Steyn and A Wessels, "Environmental non-governmental contributions to the global environmental movement, 1962-1992" in *Journal for Contemporary History* 24(2), December 1999, pp. 97-102.

⁵ For more details see for example P Stone, *Did we save the earth at Stockholm?* (London, 1973), pp. 100-21; W Rowland, *The plot to save the world: the life and times of the Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment* (Vancouver, 1973), pp. 47-9.

UNCHE reflected the main environmental perspective of the time, namely that humans are part of the environment and should therefore take care of the natural environment on which all human activities depend. Representatives from 114 countries⁶ and 19 accredited and 400 other intergovernmental and non-governmental organisations, attended the deliberations which produced a Declaration of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, and an Action Plan for the Human Environment.⁷ UNCHE firmly established environmental concerns as international social, economic and political issues. It further legitimised environmental policy as a universal concern amongst nations, and so created a place for environmental issues on many national political agendas where they had been previously neglected.⁸ In addition, it also resulted directly in the establishment of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in 1972 as a crosscutting programme to co-ordinate environmental policy and activities.⁹

Political enthusiasm for environmental issues generated by UNCHE was short-lived. The 1973 Oil Crisis, caused by the decision of the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries to unilaterally increase the posted price of crude oil and the Arab oil embargo on oil sales to the United States (US) and other "unfriendly" countries, pushed environmental concerns into the background while the world struggled to cope with the corresponding economic recession. Global environmental management, as a result, was relegated to the periphery, with the most notable environment-related successes achieved through environmental conventions such as the 1973 Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora.¹⁰

International environmental initiatives were revived again in the 1980s with the publication of the **World Conservation Strategy** in 1980 by UNEP, the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) and the World Wildlife Fund (WWF).¹¹ This was followed between 1983 and 1987 by the so-called Brundtland process in which the UN World Commission on Environment and Development (headed by the Norwegian Gro Harlem Brundtland) explored the relationship between environment and development in order to formu-

⁶ An interesting absentee was the USA Ambassador to the UN, George Bush. M Mowry and T Redmond, **Not in our backyard: the people and events that shaped America's modern environmental movement** (New York, 1993), p. 83.

⁷ For more details see McCormick, pp. 88-124; United Nations, **Report of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, Stockholm, 5-16 June 1972** (New York, 1973).

⁸ RJ Dalton, **The green rainbow: environmental groups in Western Europe** (New Haven, 1994), pp. 37-8.

⁹ McCormick, p. 106.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 114-6; J Rees, **Natural resources: allocation, economics and policy** (2nd edition, London, 1990), p. 175.

¹¹ For more details see IUCN, UNEP and WWF, **World Conservation Strategy: living resource conservation for sustainable development** (Gland, 1980).

late a global agenda for change. Its report, **Our common future**, published in 1987, focused attention on the inseparable link between environment and development.¹² It was an important departure from UNCHE's main preoccupation with the role and impact of humans on the environment, as was the promotion of the concept of sustainable development as *the* answer to both environmental and development problems. The Commission defined sustainable development as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs".¹³

The UN played a key role in the promotion of sustainable development as *the* development, environment and economic blueprint for human survival by conveying the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED, also known as the Earth Summit) held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, from 3 to 14 June 1992. Delegates from 178 countries and 110 heads of state, along with thousands of representatives from intergovernmental and non-governmental organisations, attended the Earth Summit, turning it into the biggest and most complex conference ever held in history.¹⁴ The Earth Summit produced three non-binding documents (the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, Agenda 21 and a Statement of Principles on Forests) and two legally binding conventions (Convention on Climate Change and the Convention on Biodiversity).¹⁵ The centrepiece of the Earth Summit was Agenda 21, a non-binding, detailed action plan to guide countries in their efforts to obtain sustainable development. It concentrated on four main aspects, namely social and economic dimensions, conservation and management of resources, strengthening the role of major groups, and the means of implementation.¹⁶

In the course of the 1990s the UN devoted much time in helping member states set up sustainable development programmes within governmental infrastructures and in promoting the incorporation of the environment into mainstream economic and social policy. Despite these attempts, sustainable development proved to be neither

¹² For more details see World Commission on Environment and Development, **Our common future** (Oxford, 1987).

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

¹⁴ D Korten, "The Earth Summit, Brazil 1992" in *Indicator South Africa* 9(2), Autumn 1992, p. 10; R Elmer-Dewitt, "Rich vs. poor", *Time* 139(22), 1 June 1992, p. 26; *Vrye Weekblad*, 2 October 1992; D Lovejoy, "What happened at Rio?", *The Planner* 78(15), 7 August 1992; T Princen and M Finger, *Environmental NGOs in world politics: linking the local and the global* (London, 1994), pp. 192-7. Interestingly enough, the idea of an international political conference on the environment once again did not interest George Bush. In his capacity as President of the USA, he initially refused to attend the Earth Summit until public opinion turned against him on this issue and he hastily departed for Rio to attend the last few days of the Summit. CP Alexander, "On the defensive", *Time* 139(24), 15 June 1992, p. 50.

¹⁵ For more details see J Quarry (ed.), **Earth Summit 1992** (London, 1992).

¹⁶ See "Agenda 21" in Quarry (ed.), pp. 46-240 for an abridged version of Agenda 21.

a quick fix nor as easily implementable as was expected in 1992. Important complications affecting the proper implementation of Agenda 21 also emerged in the forms of globalisation and unprecedented economic growth in some countries in the course of the decade, that in essence made the poor poorer and the rich more wealthy. The inequality of economic growth in the course of the 1990s and its adverse impact on too many people around the globe, brought with it a greater realisation that sustainable development rests on three inseparable pillars, namely its economic, social and environmental aspects and that initiatives had to focus on all three these pillars if they were to be successful.¹⁷

Despite laudable attempts by the UN, intergovernmental and non-governmental organisations to implement sustainable development on local, national and international levels, environmental debates in the 1990s were dominated by the climate change issue and the unwillingness of the USA to sign the 1997 Kyoto Protocol that set targets for the gradual reduction of CO₂ emissions to 1990 levels. For most of the decade the USA refused to acknowledge that a crisis existed, and that global climate change was the result of CO₂ emissions, citing alternative scientific data as proof. It was therefore deemed unnecessary for the world's largest CO₂ emitter, with a 25% share of global greenhouse gas emissions, to cut back on its air pollution. In the mean time, the hole in the Antarctic ozone layer gradually increased, as a result of the increase of global CO₂ emissions in the 1990s, to its current size of being larger than the North American continent.¹⁸

The global economic and social changes of the 1990s impacted greatly on sustainable development planning and created a greater awareness for the need to address poverty reduction within the framework of sustainable societies.¹⁹ Mindful of the growing poverty rate, the adverse environmental and social impacts of foreign debt on developing countries, and the alarming decrease in both the quality and quantity of the natural resource base in most countries around the globe, the UN affirmed its support for poverty reduction and environmental protection in

¹⁷ B Stigson, "Outside the fence line: the new business connection", *Earthyear* 25(2), 2002, pp. 32-5; RL Rosenburg, "Trade and the environment: economic development versus sustainable development", *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 29(1), Spring 1994, pp. 129-56; DF Bryceson and L Bank, "End of an era: Africa's development policy parallax", *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 19(1), 2001, pp. 5-23.

¹⁸ For more details see United Nations, "The Convention and Kyoto Protocol", <<http://unfccc.int/resource/convkp.html>>, s.a. In an interesting new development the USA finally acknowledged in 2002 that CO₂ emissions do lead to global warming which in turn negatively impacts on the global climate, following the publication of a report by the US Environmental Protection Agency. However, this report states that it is too late to counter global climate change and that a reduction in CO₂ emissions is therefore unnecessary. Their position is that countries should simply learn to live with and adapt to the changed climate and its impact on human activities. For more details see US Environmental Protection Agency, "Global warming: climate", <<http://www.epa.gov/globalwarming/climate/>>, 2002.

¹⁹ Y Kakabadse, "Welcome to a decade of doing", *Earthyear* 25(2), 2002, p. 1.

2000 with the adoption of the United Nations Millennium Declaration. In this Declaration the UN resolved inter alia by 2015 to halve the number of people who live on less than \$1 a day, to halve the number of people who suffer from hunger and those who are unable to reach or afford safe drinking water, and to reduce maternal mortality by three quarters and under-five mortality by two thirds of the 2000 rates. In terms of environmental protection, the UN Millennium Declaration resolved to ensure the entry into force of the Kyoto Protocol, to intensify efforts to ensure the sustainable management of forests and water resources, to press for full implementation of the conventions on biological diversity and desertification, and to intensify co-operation to reduce the number and effects of natural and man-made disasters.²⁰ Two months later, in December 2000, the UN acted upon its commitments to reduce poverty and to protect the environment when the General Assembly approved a proposal to convene the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002.

3. THE WORLD SUMMIT ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The proposal to convene the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) was approved on 20 December 2000 when the UN General Assembly adopted Resolution 55/199. In contrast to the five-year review of progress since the Earth Summit, held in New York in June 1997, the General Assembly opted to organise the ten-year progress review in the form of an international summit in order "to reinvigorate the global commitment to sustainable development". The stated aims of the proposed WSSD were to focus on the accomplishments in the implementation of Agenda 21, the identification of areas that are in need of further efforts, and the adoption of action-oriented decisions to address new challenges and opportunities which had to result in renewed political commitment and support for sustainable development. Resolution 55/199 transformed the Commission on Sustainable Development into the WSSD Preparatory Committee which, inter alia, was tasked with ensuring that the WSSD preparatory process was open, participatory and fully transparent.²¹

The preparatory process consisted of four official sessions along with regional sessions to provide regional assessments of the implementation of Agenda 21 and to outline issues and priorities within a regional context. In an important departure from the Earth Summit preparatory process, the UN set out from the start to incorporate not only governmental representatives, but also intergovernmental and

²⁰ United Nations General Assembly, Resolution 55/2: United Nations Millennium Declaration (A/RES/55/2), 8 September 2000.

²¹ United Nations General Assembly, Resolution 55/199: Ten-year review of progress achieved in the implementation of the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (A/RES/55/199), 20 December 2000.

non-governmental organisations into the preparations for the WSSD.²² The first preparatory session was held in New York from 30 April to 2 May 2001 and dealt only with organisational issues such as determining both the dates and agendas of subsequent preparatory meetings, and adopting the rules of procedure for the WSSD.²³

Regional meetings, organised by the UN, followed the first session, and were held between September and November 2001. The reports of the regional preparatory committees strongly reflected the development level, general wealth and geography of the states in the region. The European regional preparatory committee (Geneva, 24-25 September 2001), for example, urged the WSSD to promote better integration between policies for poverty eradication, environmental protection and economic development. They further committed their region to integrate the poorest countries into the global economy by removing trade barriers, providing duty and quota-free access to markets, and encouraging investments in least developed countries. The African regional preparatory committee (Nairobi, 15-18 October 2001), on the other hand, laid the blame for the continent's lack of proper implementation of Agenda 21 on globalisation and the lack of financial resources, which they believed should be provided by the North. Their main concerns focused on international trade barriers; affordable energy; the promotion of microfinance; access to better health care; the problems and challenges of HIV/Aids; sustainable rural and agricultural development; access to safe water and sanitation; reducing environmental disaster vulnerability; debt relief, and improved access to education. The Alliance of Small Island States, in contrast, focused on the isolation and vulnerability of small island states; their geographical dispersion; natural disasters; climate change; ecological vulnerability; exposure to economic shocks; small internal markets, and limited resources.²⁴

The regional reports were submitted to the second session of the Preparatory Committee held in New York from 28 January to 8 February 2002. The main purpose of this session was to undertake a comprehensive review and assessment of the progress made since the Earth Summit to implement Agenda 21 on local,

²² MS Steyn, "Environmentalism in South Africa, 1972-1992: an historical perspective", MA dissertation, University of the Free State, 1998, p. 48.

²³ For more details see United Nations, **Report of the Commission on Sustainable Development acting as the Preparatory Committee for the World Summit on Sustainable Development: organisational session (30 April-2 May 2001)** (Report No. A/56/19, New York, 2001).

²⁴ The other regional preparatory committee meetings include the West Asia/Arab regional meeting (Cairo, 24-25 October 2001), the Latin American and the Caribbean regional meeting (Rio de Janeiro, 23-24 October 2001), and the Asia and Pacific regional meeting (Phnom Penh, 27-29 November 2001). No regional meeting was held for the USA and Canada. United Nations, **Report of the Commission on Sustainable Development acting as the Preparatory Committee for the World Summit on Sustainable Development: second session (28 January-8 February 2002)** (Report No. A/CONF.199/PC/2, New York, 2002), pp. 8-10.

national, regional and international levels. Debates focused on all aspects of sustainable development, paying particular attention to the importance of common but differentiated responsibilities of states to ensure the successful implementation of Agenda 21.²⁵ The second session was followed by the third session of the Preparatory Committee, which was also held in New York between 25 March and 5 April 2002. The third session was tasked with preparing a draft plan of action and a draft agenda for the WSSD. At this session the real negotiations between the various role-players in global environmental management commenced to devise effective global mechanisms for the implementation of sustainable development policies on a global level.²⁶

The fourth and final session of the Preparatory Committee, held in Bali, Indonesia, from 27 May to 7 June 2002, was the most important final step towards producing the documents that would be negotiated at the WSSD. As a result, this session was held at ministerial level with ministers from 118 countries attending the meeting to negotiate the content of the key documents and type 2 partnerships for the WSSD.²⁷ Due to the importance of the ministerial discussions, more than 4 500 representatives from intergovernmental and non-governmental organisations, and the business world, attended the Bali session to lobby government delegations for either stronger or softer agreements.²⁸ Amongst the pro-environment lobby it was expected that the Bali session would result in an "inspiring plan of action" that was goal-oriented and set targets and timeframes for implementation on all the major issues. Bali, however, did not fulfil these expectations, with the final Bali draft of the Johannesburg Plan of Action failing to include major issues such as the setting of target dates, references to the implementation of the Kyoto Protocol, alternative energy sources and the means of implementation. Areas of agreement focused mainly on poverty reduction, the need to meet the 2015 Millennium Development Goal of halving the number of people living in poverty and those without access to sanitation. The Bali session further failed to adopt the political declaration, with the USA in particular strongly opposing the inclusion of the "common but differentiated responsibility" principle which was adopted at the second preparatory session. It

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 10-33.

²⁶ United Nations Report No. A/56/19, p. 29; N. Desai, "Opening remarks to the third Preparatory Committee for the World Summit on Sustainable Development", New York, 25 March 2002.

²⁷ Type 1 partnerships refer to those fully negotiated and agreed to by all governments. Type 2 partnerships, on the other hand, are only agreed to by those directly involved in specific initiatives to implement some aspects of Agenda 21. For more details see Johannesburg Summit Secretariat, "Type 2' partnership initiatives", <http://www.johannesburgsummit.org/html/sustainable_dev/typepart.html>, 2002.

²⁸ United Nations, "High-level push in Bali to firm up sustainable development agenda", <http://www.johannesburgsummit.org/html/whats_new/otherstories_bali/highlevel.htm>, 2002.

also failed to achieve consensus on trade and finance, and international sustainable development governance.²⁹

The World Summit on Sustainable Development convened in Johannesburg from 26 August to 4 September 2002 under the leadership of Nitin Desai as Secretary-General of the Summit and Thabo Mbeki as the elected President of the Summit. Representatives from 190 countries, including 109 heads of state, as well as about 30 000 representatives of governmental, intergovernmental and non-governmental organisations, and business interests, attended both the official and the more than 500 parallel events of the World Summit. The main event of the WSSD was the United Nations Summit, which was open to UN-accredited heads of state, governmental delegates, the media, UN specialised agencies, and non-governmental and intergovernmental organisations, was held in the Sandton Convention Centre. The Civil Society Forum, the main platform for the non-governmental sector, was held about 40 km away from the main deliberations at Nasrec, thereby continuing the UN tradition of separating governmental and non-governmental deliberations not only officially but also geographically. The Business Action for Sustainable Development Forum and the Local Government Session were much more fortunate than the civil society sector, and were hosted in close proximity to the official deliberations at the Hilton Hotel and the Crown Plaza in Sandton, respectively.³⁰

The official deliberations comprised a series of partnership plenaries in which the attention was directed at five thematic areas, namely water, energy, health, agricultural productivity and biodiversity, four round-table events, and the official negotiations for the political declaration and the plan of action. In the debates the divergent agendas for the WSSD of the developing and developed countries emerged strongly. Developing countries expected that the WSSD would deliver concrete implementable plans with clear targets, timeframes and funding arrangements for priority areas such as water, energy, health provision and food. They further believed that trade and financial issues had to be attended to, in particular the opening of markets to developing countries and the removal of subsidies in developed countries in key sectors such as agriculture. Developed countries, on the other hand, strongly opposed specific commitments, arguing rather for just the identification of strategic priorities, and resisted placing trade and

²⁹ United Nations, "PrepCom chair issues new action-oriented draft for negotiations on Johannesburg Summit implementation programme", <http://www.johannesburgsummit.org/html/whats_new/otherstories_prepchair_090502.html>, 9 May 2002; V Moosa, "Minister Valli Moosa describes what World Summit 2002 is about", *Earthyear* 25(2), 2002, pp. 8-9; S Fakir, "The unbearable lightness of being at Bali", *Earthyear* 25(2), 2002, pp. 18-9.

³⁰ "World Summit on Sustainable Development: state of readiness general information" in *Earthyear* 25(2), 2002, pp. 10-1; *Mail & Guardian* (World Summit 2002 special), 23-29 August 2002, p. 12; *Mail & Guardian*, 6-12 September 2002, p. 6; United Nations, "Daily highlights: Tuesday 27 August", <<http://www.un.org/events/wssd/highlights/020827hilit.htm>>, 27 August 2002.

financial issues on the agenda, preferring to address these separately in the Doha trade round and the follow-up meeting of the Monterrey Conference on Financing for Development. These differences between the developed and the developing world ensured that negotiations for a plan of action and a political declaration continued until the last day of the Summit.³¹

Despite the different agendas of states, the UN and the non-governmental sector, the WSSD did produce its share of pro-environment surprises. In a radical change of policy the World Bank departed from its much-criticised demands for austerity measures as a condition for its loans and its advocacy of private sector-driven growth. Instead, the World Bank announced that its new policy for the future would include advocating direct state participation in certain sectors of national economies, the removal of trade barriers in developed countries, and a reduction in state subsidies in the developed world in order to promote equity on a global level. It further departed from its traditional measuring of poverty only in terms of income levels by broadening its approach to poverty and poverty reduction to include related issues such as lack of opportunities, security and access to decision-making processes.³² The WSSD also led to a temporary truce between big business and the most vocal international environmental non-governmental organisations (ENGOs), who opted to shelve their differences for the duration of the Summit in order to send a clear signal to governments that the time has come for a framework with timetables to resolve the global climate change deadlock.³³

As was the case with the Earth Summit, America's lack of commitment to global environmental initiatives was strongly criticised at the WSSD. The refusal of George W Bush to attend the Summit along with the US refusal to sign the Kyoto Protocol, came under strong attack from most of the Summit delegates and most of the country's key partners in its war on terrorism. By the end of the Summit, the USA had lost most of its anti-Kyoto allies with Canada, Japan and Russia having announced their intention to ratify the treaty. The Russian announcement, made on the second last day of the WSSD, gave the Protocol the minimum number of signatures needed for it to enter into force. This step leaves the USA and Australia as the only major polluters still refusing to join international steps to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.³⁴

³¹ Moosa, p. 9; United Nations, "World Summit on Sustainable Development: plenary, first and second meetings, 26 August 2002" (Summary No. ENV/DEV/J/2), <<http://www.un.org/events/wssd/summaries/envdevj2.htm>>, 26 August 2002; *The Sunday Independent (Business Report)*, 25 August 2002, p. 2; *The Sunday Independent*, 25 August 2002, p. 3; *Sunday Times*, 1 September 2002, pp. 1, 17; *The Sunday Independent*, 1 September 2002, p. 1; *Volksblad*, 2 September 2002, p. 1.

³² *Sunday Times*, 1 September 2002, p. 15.

³³ *The Sunday Independent (Sunday Business Report)*, 1 September 2002, p. 3.

³⁴ *Volksblad*, 30 August 2002, p. 2; *The Star*, 4 September 2002, p. 3.

Perhaps *the* major achievement of the WSSD was the concluding of various type 2 partnerships in which the focus falls on real commitments between governments, business and civil society interests to jointly address pressing environmental and poverty related issues on local and national levels. The European Union focused on water and energy in its type 2 partnerships, while the USA opted to channel its aid to water, energy, reforestation, health and food production initiatives. The United Nations Development Programme, on the other hand, launched partnerships aimed at improving water, energy, agriculture and biodiversity at community level, while Eskom launched an African Energy initiative in co-operation with several financing institutions to expand energy services to South Africa's neighbouring countries. In a surprise step, Jordan and Israel temporarily set aside their water-related conflicts and announced a \$1 billion joint project to save the Dead Sea from further shrinkage by piping water to it from the Red Sea.³⁵

After ten days of negotiations and conflicts, the WSSD did produce the much-anticipated political declaration and plan of action. In the Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development the heads of state reaffirmed their commitment to Agenda 21, acknowledging that globalisation created new opportunities but that its benefits and costs were unevenly distributed; that the global environment continues to deteriorate, and that special attention should be paid to eradicating poverty and to changing consumption and production patterns. They further recognised that the "deep fault line" (also referred to as global apartheid) between rich and poor poses a major threat to global prosperity and stability, and that the world at large needs to act in a timely and constructive manner in order to bring about fundamental changes to the lives of the poor people.³⁶

The 65-page Implementation Plan does contain concrete actions and measures for some environmental issues. The Plan, voicing the Millennium Development Goals of the UN, for example calls for halving, by 2015, the proportion of the world's population who live on less than \$1 a day and who live without access to safe drinking water and/or basic sanitation, and for reducing the mortality rates for infants and children under five by two thirds and maternal mortality by three

³⁵ United Nations, "Daily highlights: Thursday 29 August", <<http://www.un.org/events/wssd/highlights/020829hililit.htm>>, 29 August 2002; United Nations, "World Summit on Sustainable Development: additional partnership initiatives announced in Johannesburg", <<http://www.un.org/events/wssd/summaries/envdevj18.htm>>, 31 August 2002; "Jordan and Israel announce project to save Dead Sea", <http://www.johannesburgsummit.org/html/whats_new/feature_story33.htm>, 1 September 2002. See also Johannesburg Summit Secretariat, "Type 2' partnership initiatives"; Eskom, "The 'African energy fund'", *Earthyear* 25(2), 2002, pp. 96-9.

³⁶ United Nations, "World Summit on Sustainable Development: summary of the seventeenth plenary meeting and round-up", <<http://www.un.org/events/wssd/summaries/envdevj35.htm>>, 4 September 2002.

quarters, by the same year. The Plan further proposes to develop integrated water resource management and water efficiency plans by 2005; to encourage countries to implement a new global system for the classification and labelling of chemicals by 2008; to promote the application of an ecosystem approach to the sustainable development of oceans by 2010; to halt the loss of biodiversity by 2010, and to replenish depleted fish stocks by 2015 through the implementation of sustainable fishery initiatives. In the energy field, the Plan fails to incorporate definite target dates for the introduction of alternative energy sources that most countries lobbied for, but which were strongly resisted by both the USA and oil-exporting countries. As a result energy became the big trade-off area of the WSSD and energy targets were dropped in favour of the USA's backing of implementing sanitation targets by 2015.³⁷

4. CONCLUSION

At its conclusion on 4 September 2002, the World Summit on Sustainable Development was hailed as both a success and a dismal failure by the various role-players in global environmental management. The UN and governments in general viewed the Summit as a success and the Implementation Plan workable and realistic. Desai, the Secretary-General of the WSSD, went as far as to suggest that the Summit had the potential to become the "Summit of Action" when looked back upon at Johannesburg +15 in 2017.³⁸

Civil society, in particular ENGOs, on the other hand, was deeply disappointed and angered at the outcomes of the WSSD. They criticised the Summit for its lack of attention to health, HIV/Aids, reversing the privatisation of water and sanitation services, America's refusal to discuss industrial air pollution, and the inability of the Summit to set real targets for reducing the dependence of the energy sector on fossil fuels. The lack of commitment of political leaders to contribute financially to ensure the implementation of sustainable development on a global level, and the influence of big business in determining the environmental policies of countries, were also problematic for civil society representatives at the WSSD.³⁹

³⁷ *Ibid.*; *The Star*, 4 September 2002, p. 1; *Volksblad*, 4 September 2002, p. 1.

³⁸ United Nations, "World Summit on Sustainable Development: summary of the seventeenth plenary meeting and round-up"; *Mail & Guardian*, 6-12 September 2002, p. 9.

³⁹ *Volksblad*, 5 September 2002, p. 2.

Whether or not the decisions taken at the World Summit on Sustainable Development will result in real and fundamental changes in poverty levels around the world and in humankind's management of the global environment remains to be seen. Given the track record of UN-led global environmental management, the real challenge will be to prove the President of Venezuela, Hugo Chavez, wrong when he remarked at the end of the Summit that "some people go from summit to summit. Our people go from abyss to abyss".⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Mail & Guardian, 6-12 September 2002, p. 9.