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Introduction

Business as usual, government as usual, and perhaps even protest as usual are not giving us the progress needed to achieve sustainable development. Let's see if we can't work together to find better paths forward
(Hohnen, 2001)

This book is about how people and organizations from very different backgrounds can work together in an increasingly complex political, social and economic environment.

The Earth Summit in Rio in 1992 alerted the world to a large number of pressing environmental and developmental problems and put sustainable development firmly on the agenda of the international community, many national and local governments and stakeholders. Many individuals, organizations and institutions have been responding to the challenge of sustainable development. Yet many still seem reluctant to take the need for change seriously, and even more have not even learned how they can get involved and contribute.

We have a long and difficult way to go if we want to live up to the values and principles of sustainable development and make them a reality. Taking one step beyond the stalemates which we face in many areas, we will need to learn how to listen to each other, to integrate our views and interests and to come to practical solutions which respect our diversity.

'Traditional processes of coordination need to be supplemented by a series of practical arrangements which provide for more active, cooperative management . . . both within the United Nations system and extending to other involved intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations' (Annan, 2000a). This holds true not only at the international level and not only in relation to official (inter)governmental

decision-making and practice, but also at regional, national and local levels, and between the various 'players', forces and powers.

This book puts forward a framework for designing multi-stakeholder processes (MSPs), aiming to contribute to the advancement of such mechanisms as will produce practical solutions. MSPs seem a promising path, both around (inter)governmental processes and independent of them. We are witnessing a beginning of and a search for new partnerships. We need to become more clear about the nature of such processes, what principles should govern them and how to design and manage them effectively. We need common yet flexible guidelines and to learn from experience.

BOX 1.1 STAKEHOLDERS

Stakeholders are those who have an interest in a particular decision, either as individuals or representatives of a group. This includes people who influence a decision, or can influence it, as well as those affected by it.[1]

The term multi-stakeholder processes describes *processes which aim to bring together all major stakeholders* in a new form of communication, decision-finding (and possibly decision-making) on a particular issue. They are also based on recognition of the importance of achieving equity and accountability in communication between stakeholders, involving equitable representation of three or more stakeholder groups and their views. They are based on democratic principles of transparency and participation, and aim to develop partnerships and strengthened networks among stakeholders. MSPs cover a wide spectrum of structures and levels of engagement. They can comprise dialogues on policy or grow to include consensus-building, decision-making and implementation of practical solutions. The exact nature of any such process will depend on the issues, its objectives, participants, scope and time lines, among other factors.

Hence, MSPs come in many shapes. Each situation, issue or problem prompts the need for participants to design a process specifically suited to their abilities, circumstances and needs. However, there are a number of common aspects: values and ideologies underlying the concept of MSPs, questions and issues which need to be addressed when designing an MSP and the stages of such a process. Our suggestions form a *common yet flexible framework* which we offer for consideration to those who design, monitor and evaluate MSPs.

MSPs are not a universal tool or a panacea for all kinds of issues, problems and situations. They are akin to a new species in the eco-

system of decision-finding and governance structures and processes. They are suitable for those situations where dialogue is possible and where listening, reconciling interests and integrating views into joint solution strategies seems appropriate and within reach.

MSPs have emerged because there is a perceived need for a more inclusive, effective method for addressing the urgent sustainability issues of our time. A lack of inclusiveness has resulted in many good decisions for which there is no broad constituency, thus making implementation difficult. Because MSPs are new, they are still evolving. Because they are people-centred, people need to take ownership and responsibility for them, using and refining them to serve their own purposes and the larger purposes of the global community of which they are apart.

BOX 1.2 SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Develop: bring to maturity; elaborate; improve value or change use of; evolve; bring forth, bring out; grow to a more mature state
Development: stage of growth or advancement
Sustain: keep, hold up; endure; keep alive; confirm; nourish; encourage; stand
Sustainable development '. . . is development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs' (The World Commission on Environment and Development, *Our Common Future*, 1987)
'The right to development must be fulfilled so as to equitably meet developmental and environmental needs of present and future generations' (United Nations, *Rio Declaration on Environment and Development*, 1992)

Among the key aspects of Agenda 21 are those chapters dealing with the role of Major Groups (women, youth, Indigenous Peoples, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), business and industry, workers and trade unions, the science and technology industry, farmers and local authorities).[2] Agenda 21 is the first United Nations (UN) document to address extensively the role of different stakeholders in the implementation of a global agreement. In each of its chapters Agenda 21 refers to the roles that stakeholder groups have to take in order to put the blueprint into practice. Stakeholder involvement is being described as absolutely crucial for sustainable development.

Reflecting upon the practical implications, there are numerous ways to design stakeholder involvement. These range from governments consulting stakeholders to creating multi-stakeholder dialogues and partnerships as part of official decision-making and implementation.

WHERE WE ARE

One of the major achievements of the UN system both at Rio and beyond has been the integration of global partnership principles into the international policy process. (Murphy and Coleman, 2000, p210)

Internationally, the most advanced multi-stakeholder discussions have been taking place at the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) where there are well-prepared multi-stakeholder dialogues each year on different topics. They have also initiated ongoing MSPs. Although the approach at the CSD is still evolving, it has become a model of multi-stakeholder engagement within the UN system on sustainable development issues. For the process towards Earth Summit 2002, the UN General Assembly has decided to conduct stakeholder dialogues, panels and round-tables at all preparatory meetings, both regional and international, and at the Summit itself.

MSPs have also generated considerable interest in other fora, around intergovernmental bodies and at national and local levels. For example, in 1996, the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI, 1997) counted 1812 Local Agenda 21 initiatives in 64 countries.[3] The World Commission on Dams, in November 2000, launched its report after two years of research, hearings, debate and dialogue. With the Global Compact initiative, the UN Secretary-General has embarked on developing a new approach to partnerships between the UN and stakeholders, and discussions about this process have been as prominent as they have been controversial. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) as well as individual companies have undertaken activities and organized events providing platforms for multi-stakeholder dialogues on contentious issues in the area of biotechnology and healthcare. Debates on stakeholder involvement around the UN, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the World Bank (WB), the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Trade Organization (WTO), among others abound in recent years, also as part of efforts towards institutional reform. For example, Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) are becoming increasingly important at the national level for debt relief initiatives and concessionary lending by the WB and the IMF, while PRSP stakeholder participation mechanisms are being critically debated.

Studies such as the ones conducted by Wolfgang Reinicke and Francis Deng et al (Reinicke and Deng, 2000) on Global Public Policy partnerships (GPPs) have made a significant contribution to the analysis of the role and potential of multi-sectoral networks, identifying them as 'institutional innovation in global governance' (Reinicke, 2000). They

have also highlighted many of the key challenges and organizational implications.

So far, however, it looks as if stakeholder dialogues, ways of feeding them into decision-making and concrete follow-up are mostly being organized and prepared on a rather ad hoc basis. There is vast experience with participation at community levels and increasing experience at national and global levels. Yet studying and comparing the different approaches and distilling some common but flexible guidelines from a stakeholder perspective is lagging behind. Governments and inter-governmental bodies, industry, NGOs, local governments and other stakeholders are trying out various approaches. Thus many different set-ups come under the same flag. Furthermore, the relationship between stakeholder participation and decision-making remains unclear in many cases.

The UN-Secretary General asserts this view:

> *Major Group's participation in sustainable development continues to face numerous challenges. Among them are geographical imbalances in participation, particularly at the international level, growing dependence on mainstream major groups as intermediaries, the need for further work on setting accountable and transparent participation mechanisms, lack of meaningful participation in decision-making processes, and lack of reliable funding for major groups.*

And:

> *One of the many challenges ... is to find ways of enhancing meaningful and practical involvement of major groups in sustainable development governance structures at various levels, both national and international. Another is generating new participatory mechanisms aimed at implementation of national, regional and international programmes of action.*
> (UN Secretary-General's Report, 14 March 2001, paras 19 and 29)

However, it is not only the lack of funding for NGOs, or the unwillingness or inability of governments to develop a consistent approach to stakeholder involvement that is making progress difficult. We want to highlight two more reasons.

First, there is an unwillingness to engage on the part of many people and organizations and on all sides, albeit for different reasons. Many businesses simply don't see why stakeholders, and not only

shareholders, should have a say in their policies. They claim that while operating within government regulations, those 'outside' their companies should not be able to tell them what to do or not to do. And some simply don't want to have to interact with NGOs, grassroots organizations or women's groups. Governments and intergovernmental bodies may feel threatened by the growing influence of stakeholders, viewed as unelected powers with insufficient transparency and undeterminable legitimacy. Among NGOs, there is a widening split between those who seek to engage with other stakeholders and those who define their role outside the conference rooms. The latter question the seriousness of governments and, in particular, industry who are seen to engage in stakeholder dialogues solely for the purpose of 'greenwash'. Protests in Seattle, Prague, London, Cologne and elsewhere have articulated these concerns, with an underlying criticism of the free market system and the enormous increase of corporate power. Naomi Klein (2000) in her best-selling book *No Logo* has collected and analysed these concerns and the movement in which they are expressed by a large and diverse number of people around the globe.[4] In a similar vein, Noreena Heertz (2001) describes the 'silent takeover' of power by corporations. She asserts that her book shows that 'protest by the consumer public is fast becoming the only way of effecting policy and controlling the excesses of corporate activity' (p3).

Second, many of us live in what Deborah Tannen (1998) has so eloquently described as *'the argument culture'.* Scrutinizing public political and mass media discourse, Tannen unfolds the widespread automatic tendency towards adversarial forms of communication, confrontational exchange, use of military metaphors, aggressively pitching one side against the other and forever thinking in dualisms: 'There are always two sides to a coin.' The author unfolds the roots of these patterns as based in the Western, Anglo-Saxon culture, and diagnoses an increasing spread of the argument culture via its global expression in Western-dominated media. Outlining the enormous impact of language and ritualized forms of interaction, she voices concerns about the consequences for democracy, quoting the philosopher John Dewey: 'Democracy begins with conversation' (p27).

ONE STEP BEYOND

Many issues today cannot be addressed or resolved by a single set of governmental or other decision-makers but require cooperation between many different actors and stakeholders. Such issues will be incapable of successful resolution unless all parties are fully involved

*in working out the solutions, their implementation and
the monitoring of results.* (Rukato and Osborn, 2001, p1)

In other words, where possible and appropriate, we should aim to take
one step beyond our current practice of communication, policy-making
and implementation.

Tannen (1998) suggests a move from debate to dialogue – because
'smashing heads does not open minds' (p28).[5] Dialogue – as opposed
to fighting, debate and discussion – is an essential part of MSPs, if not
the most crucial one, and most of the suggestions we offer on how to
design such processes aim to create a situation where dialogue can
take place in a group of people of diverse backgrounds, expertise,
interests, views, needs and concerns. Learning to engage in dialogue
means to move from hearing to listening. It means taking one step
beyond fighting, beyond adversarial, conflictual interaction.

Dialogue is the foundation for finding consensus solutions which
integrate diverse views and generate the necessary commitment to
implementation. It can form the basis to take us one step beyond talking
towards common action.

That does not mean that MSPs will be all calm, quiet and orderly.
Kader Asmal (2000), who chaired the World Commission on Dams,
has summed up his experiences with this extraordinary process:

> *A parting warning: doing so* [conducting an MSP] *is
> never a neat, organized, tidy concerto. More often, the
> process becomes a messy, loose-knit, exasperating,
> sprawling cacophony. Like pluralist democracy, it is the
> absolute worst form of consensus-building except for
> all the others.*

The multi-stakeholder approach takes one step beyond traditional
concepts and hierarchies of power (money and enforcement). It asserts
that influence and the right to be heard should be based on the value
of each stakeholder's unique perspective and expertise.

MSPs also take one step beyond the current democratic paradigm.
They are a logical development to where elections (every few years)
and traditional lobbying (giving unfair and unhelpful advantage to those
well resourced) will not generate the best solutions or practical
implementation of policies.

AN ECLECTIC APPROACH

Sustainable development is a mixed concept, comprising values (such
as environmental protection and equity) and strategies (such as healthy

economic growth, stakeholder involvement and global perspective). We can address it within different frameworks or discourses. For example, we can argue on the basis of a value-based approach, pointing to the ethical and/or moral need for equity, justice, self-determination and democracy. This discourse will lead to suggesting mechanisms to improve transparency, to enable meaningful participation and to create equal access to information, fair communication and consensus-building, on the grounds that such political realities would further the realization of said values.

Many people assert that a set of shared values is indispensable for human survival, and this has been reflected by the international community on many occasions.[6] A number of existing international agreements, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights or the Rio Principles represent a shared set of values.

But we can also use a more pragmatic approach.[7] Based on scientific and empirical analysis, we can look at what has been proven to work to address certain problems and/or how we can combine various tools in an effective manner. This discourse will lead to suggesting strategies for bringing a multitude of perspectives into decision-making; listening to each other; and facilitating meetings. Arguing for a multi-stakeholder approach in this manner will lead to suggesting strategies which increase creative thinking, commitment to implementation and multiplying effects in order to address problems such as resource depletion and human and environmental security.

Including various discourses appeals to different kinds of people and is therefore strategically important. Some people want to relate to shared values and a common normative vision; others need statistics that prove that one approach will yield success with greater likelihood than another. But that is not the main reason for trying to do that. The main reason is rather that behaviour – and behavioural changes – are grounded in many factors such as: our beliefs, attitudes and emotions; the information we have; positive rewards (monetary or social); behavioural options; and social pressures. In other words, if we want to achieve sustainable development we need to identify the appropriate values and ideological concepts as much as to increase our knowledge on behaviour, interaction, and factors and relationships in the economic, social and political context. Hence, proposing tools for sustainable development, such as MSPs, should be based on considering basic values and ideologies (as a set of criteria) as much as practical experiences and empirical knowledge of how such processes can work in various contexts.[8] We hope that the way we have looked at MSPs in this book – be it called 'eclectic' or 'holistic' – will help to move the multi-stakeholder approach forward.

It is interesting to see how much the different discourses converge in terms of practical recommendations. The appeal of multi-stakeholder

approaches seems to be that practising strategies that are designed to fulfil certain values are very much the same as those emerging as conclusions from scientific research on group diversity and effectiveness. For example, normative calls that we should 'respect our fellow human beings as much as ourselves' actually converge with scientific findings that active listening and equal speaking time help to create fair interaction; they lead to very much the same suggestions on how to design MSPs.

Nothing New?

Many of our suggestions for designing MSPs are not new, and neither is the MSP approach. What we are trying to do is to ground them in values, experience and science, and to generate a more conscious and comprehensive dialogue about them. Even if most of our suggestions were indeed common sense, it seems that we have a problem practising common sense.

Problems do not go away just because we look away. Necessities don't disappear just because we become cynical. Haven't love (for each other and for our environment) and justice been preached for ages? Don't we know how painful war, poverty, disease, injustice and oppression are and how they destroy us and our societies? Don't we know that we need to listen to each other rather than fight in order to come to lasting, sustainable solutions? Haven't we learned that without pooling our resources of expertise and power we will not be able to tackle the complex and urgent problems we are facing?

Well – yes. But life is a journey of learning and unlearning. What we understand in our minds, we won't necessarily put into practice. Have we really proven that we cannot do better? Whether humankind can indeed learn and change as a collective remains an open question. It will help if we try to do so together and consciously.

The Book

In Part I, we present a number of building-blocks as a basis for the suggested framework and guide. As outlined above, we have tapped into various discourses to develop our suggestions on designing MSPs: faith/belief systems, traditional and cultural values, philosophical, theoretical and empirical-scientific and pragmatic approaches.

In the past few years, terms such as '(multi-)stakeholder dialogue', 'stakeholder forum', 'stakeholder consultation', 'discussion' and 'process' have been used by various actors. Meanings of these terms overlap

and refer to a variety of settings and modes of stakeholder communi-
cation. Chapter 2 clarifies the various terms that refer to MSPs and
outlines the definitions that we use. It also addresses different kinds of
MSPs, varying with regard to the issues they address, their objectives,
scope and their time lines. They range from informing processes to
monitoring mechanisms and implementation processes, which include
consensus-building, decision-making and joint action. MSPs can be
conducted at local, national or international levels, with some processes
involving activities at several levels. They can involve different numbers
of stakeholder groups and thus vary in diversity, with increased diversity
posing specific challenges as well as opportunities. Finally, there are
those which are linked to official decision-making and those which
operate independently.

MSPs are an important tool for sustainable development. Their
objectives are to promote better decisions by means of wider input; to
integrate diverse viewpoints; to bring together the principal actors; to
create trust through honouring each participant for contributing a
necessary component of the bigger picture; to create mutual benefits
(win–win rather than win–lose situations); to develop shared power
with a partnership approach; to reduce the waste of time and other
scare resources that are associated with processes that generate recom-
mendations lacking broad support; to create commitment through
participants identifying with the outcome and thus increasing the
likelihood of successful implementation. They are designed to put people
at the centre of decision-finding, decision-making and implementation.

MSPs relate to the ongoing debate on global governance and global
governance reform (see Chapter 3). We discuss some of the history of
and the increase in stakeholder involvement with the UN and the impact
of recent UN reform packages. Mechanisms of stakeholder involvement
developed by the CSD receive particular attention as they are the most
interesting political space for Major Groups within the UN and in the
area of sustainable development. The United Nations HIV/AIDS Pro-
gramme (UNAIDS) offers another innovative example. The chapter
concludes with a discussion of the supplementary and complementary
role of stakeholder involvement vis-à-vis the roles and responsibilities
of governments, and a call for clear norms and standards. MSPs are
meant to give voices, not votes, to stakeholders, and our suggestions
aim to make these voices heard and used most effectively.

As with any problem-solving or governance approach, there are
certain value bases or ideological fundaments underlining the promo-
tion of MSPs. These include fundamental concepts such as sustainable
development; good governance; democracy; participation; equity and
justice; unity in diversity; leadership; credibility and public opinion.
Other important concepts and strategies can be derived from these,
such as (economic) success; learning; partnerships; transparency; access

to information; inclusiveness; legitimacy; accountability; informed consent; responsibility, and appropriate ground rules for stakeholder communication. Chapter 4 outlines these concepts as they relate to MSPs. The suggestions for MSP design attempt to identify strategies and mechanisms that allow these values and concepts to be put into practice.

Scientific research that is relevant to the practical design of MSPs can be found particularly in social and organizational psychology. Chapter 5 reviews findings on decision-making processes in groups of high diversity. Among the conclusions are: MSPs and their participants need to take a learning approach to operate within a transparent, agreed and yet flexible framework. Aspects of group composition need to be considered carefully. Trust-building and overcoming stereotypical perceptions are among the first important steps. Formal group procedures are an important tool to successful communication and decision-making. Allowing the space for group members to reflect on the process they are engaged in is equally important (meta-communication).

Related to an increased interest in public participation and to the implementation of Agenda 21, numerous examples of MSPs have been conducted over the last few decades. Not surprisingly, since the 1990s there has been a significant increase of such processes within the area of environment and sustainable development. Chapter 6 looks at a number of examples, many around official decision-making processes at the international, national or local levels, and some independent initiatives. The examples vary with regard to, among other things, the issues they address, their size and scale, the way they have been designed and their linkage into official decision-making. We have conducted literature research and interviews with people who have been or are involved in these processes. The goal was not to evaluate but to obtain a descriptive analysis of the respective MSPs and to collect practical approaches, problems encountered and creative ideas on how to deal with them. The wealth of experiences provides valuable insights and examples of creative solutions to common problems of MSPs which we have used as a key resource for our suggestions.

On the basis of the findings of Part I, Part II goes on to draw conclusions. Chapter 7 presents a detailed framework for designing MSPs, going through the sequence of possible steps in the lifespan of such a process. We identify five stages – context; framing; inputs; dialogue/meetings; and outputs – and an additional sixth category of aspects which need to be addressed throughout the process. The strategies and mechanisms we are suggesting are based on a careful analysis of the values that are realized through them as well as empirical evidence that they are likely to work. In other words, all our suggestions are based on conclusions drawn from more than one approach.

Finally, we have summarized our conclusions in a set of principles and a checklist to design MSPs (see Chapter 8).

No 'one-size-fits-all' framework exists for all kinds of MSPs and the suggestions made here are not intended to pretend that there is one. Rather, they should be taken as an open-ended checklist of aspects which need to be addressed when designing, carrying out and evaluating MSPs.

In order to promote and validate the MSP approach further, there will be more steps to take than designing such processes. In an attempt to look ahead, Chapter 9 reflects on the overall conclusions from the book.