

# Count Us In. Count On Us.

## UNED Forum International Workshop on Multi-stakeholder Processes

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### Co-chairs Summary

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85 representatives of stakeholder groups (including UN agencies, governments, business, trade unions, local government, NGOs, women, youth, farmers, the education community, faith communities and the media) from around the world met in New York for a workshop on multi-stakeholder processes on 28-29 April 2001 arranged by UNED Forum.

The workshop was primarily intended to provide an opportunity for sharing experience and exchange views about the ways in which multi-stakeholder involvement and collaboration could best contribute to enriching decision-taking processes and promoting better outcomes and implementation in many different contexts. It reviewed a forthcoming report on multi-stakeholder processes by UNED Forum, recent work by the Global Public Policy Networks Project, and several presentations on specific examples of multi-stakeholder engagement in international, regional, national and local processes.

A number of points were widely supported by the meeting as follows:

#### **Why involve stakeholders?**

Many issues today cannot be addressed or resolved by a single set of governmental or other decision-makers but require co-operation 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. Global engagement of all stakeholders is crucial to making progress on global issues.

Stakeholders from all major groups are strongly supportive of reinforcing ways of bringing stakeholder input into important processes at the international and other levels. Stakeholders have a wealth of relevant experience and knowledge to contribute, and their interests are often strongly affected by the issues of international concern and the solutions that are agreed and implemented (or not agreed or not implemented). So they have every reason to want to contribute. By the same token governments and other decision-makers have much to gain from ensuring that they make themselves open to hearing and taking into account the contributions of stakeholders so that they can achieve more balanced and relevant decisions.

Stakeholder input to international decision-making processes can be achieved in a number of different ways. Input can be made at local, national, regional or international level or at any combination. It can take the form of written or oral submissions or more informal lobbying or demonstration. Each group or interest can press its own views separately, or they can seek

to collaborate in multi-stakeholder process in which the different groups and stakeholders seek to interact with each other and seek to establish common ground and compromises as well as interacting with the governments directly.

Sometimes the different stakeholders outside government may be able to make significant progress and agree useful actions between themselves independently from governmental processes. Such independent processes can have a vitality and a capacity for innovation that can advance sustainable solutions even before governments have been able to establish more general frameworks.

Multi-stakeholder engagement in an official international process is the most complex form of engagement but is potentially one of the most fruitful since it can be the means of bridging gulfs between widely different viewpoints and achieving real learning and changes of mind leading to new syntheses and solutions to intractable problems. It is therefore particularly well suited to assisting in some of the more long-standing and intractable cross-sectoral issues such as those that are at the heart of many of the international debates about sustainable development.

**Consult all stakeholders at the outset in planning a multi-stakeholder process.**

Multi-stakeholder processes are however complicated to organize, and can fail to deliver positive results if they are not properly planned, structured, managed, led and supported, and if there is insufficient common vision. The meeting agreed that it is crucially important that those considering multi-stakeholder engagement in an international process should plan how it is to be structured and organized at the outset. The stakeholders themselves should be fully consulted about the way in which they are to be involved. They need transparent and predictable mechanisms of engagement. Independent facilitation by respected and experienced persons is crucial to empower participants, resolve conflicts and achieve successful outcomes.

**Provide enough time and resources.**

Particular attention should be given to the time and resources they will need to make a worthwhile contribution including securing adequate involvement and contribution from all parts of their own networks. Effective multi-stakeholder processes can be expensive and time-consuming, but the cost of failing to engage interested parties can be orders of magnitude greater.

**Identify stakeholders through a transparent and legitimate process.**

The selection of stakeholders to participate is also crucially important. Difficult questions of legitimacy can arise in this context. Key requirements are that the process should be transparent and inclusive. It could be useful to develop more of a normative framework for the identification of stakeholders through their own legitimate channels and within their culture of leadership.

**Build the capacity of stakeholders.**

The different capacities and resources of different stakeholders need to be taken into account, and measures to ensure good support and funding for less well-endowed groups need to be secured. Training and capacity-building are important for many stakeholder groups;

conversely, the secretariats and official structures of many processes may also need to develop their understanding of what multi-stakeholder processes can offer.

### **Set goals for the process.**

It is very important that there should be a clear and agreed view at the outset as to how the multi-stakeholder contribution is to be received and fed into the main process it is designed to support in time to have a significant influence. There must be good faith and a real intention on the part of the main process to build trust between all parties, to identify and dialogue about fundamental conflicts of value and interest, and to take serious notice of the stakeholder input to their own deliberations, and to be open to being influenced by it. A purely artificial process in which it becomes clear that the main decision-makers have closed minds or have already made their decisions and are not taking any serious notice of the stakeholder contribution is counter-productive. It can cause frustration amongst stakeholders, leading to disengagement and alienation.

### **Communicate with the public.**

Communication with the wider public is crucial at all stages. Organizers should plan how to involve the media at all stages, and how to present and disseminate messages in ways that will engage popular attention.

### **Build on the Step-by-Step approach.**

On all these issues the meeting gave general endorsement for further development of the step-by step approach to organizing multi-stakeholder processes identified in UNED Forum's report. Participants agreed that the report provides a useful resource to anyone planning such processes while recognizing that every process is unique and will find its own solutions to the various questions to be addressed. There needs to be better communication between those engaged in different processes so that learning and experience can be shared and duplication and re-invention of wheels can be avoided.

### **Engage in the Earth Summit 2002 Process.**

In the immediate future the report has valuable elements for the planning of multi-stakeholder engagement in the process leading up to the 2002 Earth Summit. All stakeholders present expressed enthusiasm for creating and participating in an active multi-stakeholder engagement in the Earth Summit 2002 process.

## **COUNT US IN. COUNT ON US.**

The project and event were supported by Novartis (Switzerland) and the Ford Foundation; the workshop was hosted by BP Amoco; the web-cast was sponsored by Unit.Net.

Information about UNED Forum's project and all documents are available at  
[www.earthsummit2002.org/msp](http://www.earthsummit2002.org/msp).