

**International Forum on Partnership for Sustainable Development**  
**Breakout group B: “Agriculture, Rural Development, Desertification”**

**Key Points for Final Plenary Presentation**

The Partnerships on Agriculture, Rural Development, Desertification and Land make up 35% of all Partnerships launched at WSSD. Partnerships on sustainable agriculture, rural development, desertification and land are critical to feed a growing world population, eradicate poverty, and change unsustainable practices and policies that place unprecedented pressure on the environment and wildlife and take their toll on the earth's human population. Land degradation, desertification, the shrinking land, water and natural resource base, declining aquatic, agricultural and livestock diversity and the threats to human health are the major problems that these partnerships seek to address.

The session began with one (1) hour of presentations covering six partnerships (Land Alliances for National Development (LAND Partnerships), Education for Rural People, the Seed Initiative, Partnership Central, Landcare, and the SARD Initiative). Four of the partnerships presented focused on implementation of critical areas of Chapters 10 and 14 of Agenda 21, namely promoting access to natural and land resource (LAND Partnerships), support policies and planning, strengthening human and institutional capacities (Education for Rural People), improving management of land and natural resources (Landcare), promoting sound use of agricultural inputs and outputs, as well as integrated and regional programmes aimed at several of these (SARD Initiative). Two of the Partnerships presented focused specifically on funding, showcasing, and facilitating the development of new partnerships (Seed Initiative, Partnership Central).

Following a 5 minutes synthesis by the facilitator of cross cutting themes and summary of the place of these partnerships within the larger set of Partnerships on Agriculture, Rural Development, Desertification and Land within the CSD Partnerships database, the floor was opened for 10 minutes of brief introductions from other partnerships present, including the Global Mechanism to Combat Desertification, Vallerani, My Community Our Earth, Eco Earth Alliance, the International Federation of Organic Agricultural Movements and others.

The remaining 90 minutes was spent on discussion which focused on five questions:

1. Is anything unique about the WSSD partnerships on agriculture, rural development, desertification and land?
2. What have been the major challenges facing these partnerships?
3. Have there been any defining moments that have been critical to progress in the initiatives and what lessons can be drawn from this experience?
4. What do partnerships need in order to form and operate effectively and to be successful in achieving their objectives?
5. How can we assess the results and impacts of partnerships, during the implementation process, individually and jointly?

Participants in the session stated that, **among the WSSD partnerships, those on agriculture, rural development, desertification and land are unique** in that they tend to

- be people focused and benefit developing countries and poorer and/or segments of rural populations
- benefit from very few new financial resources, largely due to the decline and shift of resources away from agriculture and rural areas,

- tap into significant alternative resources (e.g. civil society funds, voluntary expertise, etc.) from the skills, capacities and other vertically and horizontally diverse resources that non-traditional partners bring to the table (local technology, trust networks)
- be particularly difficult to mainstream into policy planning, given the low political priority to these area at the national level. Special measures are needed both to enable governments to ensure that their international level commitments are reflected in national level policies.
- provide models for incorporating local priorities and those of the poor and rural into national and international policies.
- require integrated ecosystem, intersectoral and interdisciplinary approaches that are appropriate for spatially diverse agroecological and social contexts. The complexity means that the definition of clear cut goals and common purpose will be essential for successful implementation. There are few universal solutions, so implementation requires an understanding of the context, patience and time. This complexity also raises unique questions for scaling up and assessment of the benefits of good practices at different scales and for tradeoffs in benefits between the farm, catchment, and global levels.
- require particularly long term goals, but would also benefit from short term target to help maintain commitment to the longer term goal.
- (rural partnerships) require access to markets, which is also an opportunity for both producers and consumers
- require a greater investment in communication with rural people to reach remote rural populations. While Information Communication Technology (ICT) provides an unprecedented opportunity to reach the rural poor, there were questions about how effective it is for reaching the rural poor.
- require mechanisms to coordinate donor responses to the implementation of the Commission to Combat Desertification at various levels

**Participants identified the following major challenges facing partnerships :**

- the right of everyone to take initiative. The positive side is that civil society multilateral organizations are taking a new lead in a range of areas. The negative side is the lack of clarity on how governments and bilateral assistance should respond. Multiple competing partnerships hinder coordination, monitoring of progress, and create inefficiencies by fragmenting already scarce existing resources and causing duplication of efforts. Governments, especially those with few skilled human and financial resources, need support to sort through the disorienting plethora of partnerships and to identify, prioritize and coordinate those which are most likely to solve their greatest problems in the national context. CSD should promote a framework for greater coordination, and joint action, among partnerships operating at the national level. Governments need to ensure interministerial consistency in their priorities in order to effectively implement sustainable development.
- the profusion of partners, combined with a poor definition of roles and responsibilities on the one hand and unequal resources, power, skills, and trust of different partners on the other.
- identifying how to attract non-ODA funds from private sector and connect these to the priorities of the poor
- The inequality among partners. Different power and resources mean that “partners” benefit unequally from partnerships.
- The difficulty in ensuring that partnerships are inclusive, accountable and motivated.
- The absence of policy structures to support, certify and train community innovators and promoters.

- In some instances, the lack of a neutral facilitators to mediate and negotiate diverse and unequal interests.
- The difficulty in building a common goal, co-ownership, and around essential, but politically sensitive issues (i.e. land access)
- The tendency for objectives to be too broadly defined to be operational.
- It is important to remember that not all problems are best solved through partnerships. It is important always to determine when partnerships are the best means to achieve sustainable development and when alternative means are more effective.

**Participants in the session also highlighted the following defining moments that had been critical to progress in their initiatives:**

- following the initial groundswell of enthusiasm, to narrow the focus of the partnership for the utility of partners and to narrow the audience
- the development of a code of conduct governing the relations between diverse stakeholders
- the development of a legal framework, with defined governance procedures, goals, objectives, tasks and activities and roles, and with both short and long term planning, as well as planning for short term impacts to demonstrate that results are possible
- government agreement to adapt policies towards local initiatives. Local governments are key in this process.
- government agreement to work with civil society to develop policies and practices
- the development of a structure that simultaneously allows high level access to Governments decision making for policy advice (peak advisory body) and to facilitators who link local groups and ensure a two way exchange

A number of **characteristics were judged to be important for partnerships to form and operate effectively and to be successful in achieving their objectives**. These were cited as follows:

- focus on community based, bottom-up approaches with local ownership of and responsibility for both problems and solutions
- focus on addressing causes, not symptoms and defining long term solutions
- be based on trust, clear shared goals and longer term commitments than conventional projects (some also say that the “quality” of commitments matter)
- be voluntary and include partnerships at multiple levels
- be realistic about results in order to avoid disappointments
- have the benefit of a neutral third party or bridging organization (i.e. UN agency in some cases), and sometimes specialized managerial and administrative frameworks tailored to the special requirements of the partnership, to encourage balanced treatment among partners, a good division of responsibility, effective management of conflict, etc.
- have not just money, but also support, particularly after the initial enthusiasm
- demonstrate impacts on the ground
- draw lessons about progress and learn from these as the partnership develops
- national contexts where legislative frameworks permit partnerships are preconditions for success at the national level

**Monitoring of partnerships** was judged to be very important, as well as identifying means to assess their results. For agriculture, rural development and desertification, specific intersectoral approaches will be needed to accomplish this, particularly given the unique scaling up issues associated with agriculture and rural developments good practices and the difficulties in measuring benefits and trade-offs between sectors and between farm level, ecosystem services at the catchment level and global benefits.