

Global civil society? The Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development

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Abstract

In the face of mounting environmental degradation and persistent poverty over the previous decade, Johannesburg's World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) of August and September 2002 inherited a number of unmet accords from the 1992 Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit. Consequently, the United Nations Stakeholder Forum Implementation Conference (IC) was convened to integrate civil society stakeholders into global deliberations on sustainable development and to marshal their forces in the implementation of WSSD accords. Given the importance of the IC as the first civil society forum at a major global summit on environment and poverty, intriguing questions emerge as to its effectiveness in achieving civil society objectives. As a first attempt in exploring this topic, we examine three fundamental aspects of the IC. Specifically, we examine the relative "civility" of the IC forum in terms of (a) fidelity of representation of the community of global environment and development stakeholders; (b) autonomy of the IC agenda from state and institutional interests; and (c) interpretations of space and place as reflected in deliberative processes and outcomes. The paper begins with a review of the civil society literature with a particular emphasis on civil society representation in UN meetings since Rio. The paper concludes with a discussion of IC participation at the Johannesburg summit, and considers implications for future civil society participation in global decision-making forums.

Keywords: *Civil society; Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD); Environment; Sustainable development; Human dimensions of global change*