

NJSSI: THE NEW JERSEY SUSTAINABLE STATE INSTITUTE

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The Johannesburg Summit: Is it relevant to New Jersey?

The World Summit on Sustainable Development has just ended in Johannesburg. A few of the meeting's final recommendations, for example on poverty alleviation and safe drinking water, have received attention in the press. The broad condemnation of the United States positions and booing of Secretary of State Colin Powell received much more attention. But what actually happened in Johannesburg, and does it matter to New Jersey?

United Nations conferences like this one are the culmination of years of work to negotiate a set of recommendations that can be agreed on by the participating countries when they get to the actual meeting. The major outputs of this conference are:

- a political declaration, which sets out a series of principles regarding sustainable development, and
- an implementation plan, which is more explicit about the implications of the principles for action by nations and international organizations.

Both documents give primary attention to solving developing country problems of poverty, environmental degradation, and social issues such as health and education. The role of developed countries is to change their own behavior so as to reduce their negative impacts on the global environment, and to provide the resources – both financial and technical - with which developing countries can overcome the difficulties they face. New Jersey has a significant role to play in changing our own behavior to reduce our impacts

Outline of the WSSD's Plan of Implementation

The Plan of Implementation is organized into eleven broad chapters; those of particular relevance to New Jersey are indicated in italics.

- I. Introduction
- II. Poverty eradication
- III. Changing unsustainable patterns of consumption and production
- IV. Natural resources management and protection, with particular reference to drinking water, *watershed management*, oceans and *coastal zones*, fisheries, marine areas including *land-based pollution*, natural disasters, *preventing climate change* and responding to its impacts, *air pollution*, *agriculture*, desertification, mountain areas, sustainable tourism, *biodiversity*, *forests*, and mining.
- V. Sustainable development, globalization, and trade
- VI. Health
- VII. Small Island Developing States
- VIII. Africa
- VIII *bis* Other regions of the world
- IX. Resources for implementing the recommendations
- X. Institutional framework for implementing the recommendations

(As of the writing of this article, the revisions to the draft plan that were made in Johannesburg had not yet officially been integrated into a final plan, hence the two chapter VIIIs.)

on the environment. We have less role in providing the resources to help the developing world. The allocation of such resources involves national decisions, in which our input is limited to the influence of our elected representatives in Washington.

Chapters III and IV of the Plan of Implementation (outlined in the text box on the previous page) have clear relevance to New Jersey. Chapter III, on unsustainable consumption and production, was the subject of much of the controversy and protest in Johannesburg. Many countries and non-profit organizations felt that its recommendations were too weak and too heavily influenced by the Bush administration's unwillingness to take actions that might impose costs on the U.S. economy. One matter that came under dispute concerned whether the Plan should set a target for the share of renewables in national energy supplies or simply recommend an increase in that share; it did the latter. Another controversy related to corporate environmental and social performance, where the chapter recommends that industry take voluntary initiatives rather than calling on countries to establish mandatory standards or reporting.

Despite the controversy, and the consensus that the achievements of the conference will be measured in small steps rather than great leaps forward, the Plan of Implementation can provide an agenda to further sustainability in New Jersey if the state chooses to use it in that way. The overall recommendation of Chapter III is that regional and national programs promote "social and economic development within the carrying capacity of ecosystems" and decouple economic growth and environmental harm. To do so, it calls for such strategies as increased investment in cleaner production; integration of sustainable development considerations into public decision-making at all levels; sustainable use of energy; integrated consideration of sustainability in transportation, land use, and infrastructure policy; improved waste management and recycling; and better management of toxics.

Portions of chapter IV of the Plan, on natural resource management, are also directly relevant to New Jersey. The most significant agreement of that chapter, that the share of the world's population without access to safe drinking water must be

halved by 2015, does not have direct implications for the state. However, recommendations on protection of watersheds and coastal zones, preventing climate change, reducing air pollution, integrating land and water management to ensure agricultural sustainability, and protecting biodiversity and forests clearly are relevant for New Jersey, even if their authors may have been thinking primarily of developing countries.

New Jersey has already made headway in some of these areas. Under former Governor Whitman, state agencies were charged with integrating sustainability goals in all of their activities, and the state published *Governing with the Future in Mind*, which set out how this could be done. The New Jersey State Plan and Governor McGreevy's commitment to smart growth both address the need to integrate transportation, land use, and infrastructure policy decisions. The state is well positioned to undertake research and development into technologies that could make it possible to decouple economic growth and environmental degradation. The energy conservation revenues generated under electricity deregulation, have enabled the state to invest considerable resources in improving our record on energy, and thus climate change and air pollution. The recent allocation of funds for open space purchases, and the decision to give priority to land that is essential for watershed protection, will help protect both our forests and our water resources.

We must go further in many areas, however. Sprawl continues to change our landscape at a rapid pace. Large businesses have established strong social and environmental records, as recommended in Johannesburg, but small businesses still lack the financial margins to make the long-term investments required. We still have major problems with toxic waste, environmental justice, and air pollution. Our transportation habits clearly are not sustainable. New Jersey has a long way to go before it can claim to be living up to the goals set in Johannesburg for the contributions of wealthy societies to sustainable development.

For more information:

UN summit: www.johannesburgsummit.org

Sustainable State Institute: www.njssi.net