

## EDITORIAL

# Leadership at Summit's End

**L**ast month's editorial concluded, "With the Johannesburg Summit, sustainability needs to grow up, turning from an arena for debate into an agenda for action. The question worth asking is, who will lead the way?" As this issue of *Environment* went to press, the summit had just concluded, so it is difficult to give a comprehensive answer. To this editor, checking the Internet daily and receiving thoughtful e-mails from attendees, the summit seemed to be a circus with three concentric rings.

In the first ring, governments of the world listened to speeches from the 104 heads of state who made up the summit while thrashing out a political declaration and an action plan. In the second ring, along with governments, representatives of the nine major groups identified a decade ago in Rio—business and industry, children and youth, farmers, indigenous peoples, local authorities, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), scientific and technological communities, women, and workers and trade unions—entered into partnerships to take concrete action at scales ranging from local to global. The huge third ring spread over four distant venues and featured "side events" (forums, exhibits, protests, and seminars) that occupied most of the 20,000-plus attendees and 8,000 NGOs.

Leadership to move from debate to action will not come from governments. Despite United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan's brave words—"The summit makes sustainable development a reality"—the agreed-upon declaration and action plan are tepid at best in comparison to either the 1992 Rio treaties and Agenda 21 or the 2000 Millennium Declaration. Governments basically reaffirmed the Rio principles and treaties and the Millennium Development Goals, adding specific targets for sanitation, chemicals, and

fisheries but rejecting other targets, such as those for renewable energy. To the chagrin of some environmentalists, the documents do restore the balance between environment and development goals by emphasizing poverty reduction. They also acknowledge that a conversation on globalization, trade, environment, and development is needed, but important voices remain left out.

Partnerships seem to be a more promising vehicle for moving from debate to action. They also seem to be a vehicle for civil society to implement its own equivalent of intergovernmental treaties with the creativity, flexibility, innovation, and speed that characterize the best of private-sector and local government activity. I believe that this can happen in time, but it did not happen in Johannesburg. The 220 officially recognized partnerships were led mainly by governments or international agencies and the new funds that were promised were mainly governmental funds that already had been designated. More promising are the unofficial partnerships that are place-based, already functioning, and organized by local authorities, NGOs, and businesses.

No coherent leadership seems to have emerged from the diversity of voices gathered in protests and side events. With too many separate issues, we have yet to learn to bring environment and development truly together. However, unlike Rio, Johannesburg was a place where science, led by the International Council of Science, was very present.

At summit's end, there is still hunger to halve, water to bring, global warming to slow, forests to save, and sickness to prevent. As in the previous decade, leadership will come from meaningful partnerships, science-informed practice, innovative policies, and useful protests.

—Robert W. Kates