

# Stakeholder Dialogue

The WBCSD's approach  
to engagement



## Stakeholder dialogue a powerful catalyst for change

Stakeholder dialogues are part of the WBCSD's Capacity Building program to manage change toward sustainable development. The Capacity Building program has four core elements: Stakeholder Dialogue, Education and Training, Learning by Sharing and Scenarios.

This brochure provides the reader with a better understanding of the WBCSD dialogue experience. Stakeholder dialogue is an integral part of our work and is a powerful catalyst for change. It promotes greater transparency, information sharing and inspires society to work together.



"It was an extraordinary effort that reflects the sense of the social responsibility of both the cement industry and the WBCSD toward practical realization of sustainable development. It was a very useful exercise and highly appreciated approach. I wish that other industries would follow suit."

**Dr. Ismail Osman, Association of Enterprises for Environmental Conservation (AEEC), Cairo, Egypt**

## What is stakeholder dialogue?

Stakeholder dialogue offers a tool to engage people in serious discussion, and a designed and facilitated process for groups to initiate dialogue with those persons and institutions that have a stake in their activities.

### Basic principles and guidelines

There are many forms of stakeholder engagement and the WBCSD does not advocate a 'one size fits all' approach. However, we wish to share certain basic principles and guidelines in order to make our work better understood.

Dialogue is about communicating with stakeholders in a way that takes serious account of their views. It does not mean involving stakeholders in every decision, or that every stakeholder request will be met. It means that stakeholder input should be acknowledged and thoughtfully considered. It is about giving stakeholders a voice, listening to what they have to say, and being prepared to act or react accordingly.

Though dialogues are, in effect, simply meetings, it is important to remember that they provide a powerful tool to listen and learn more about stakeholders. They also offer a mechanism to share one's own thinking and to maintain and/or strengthen relationships.



"The session allowed us to have an in-depth dialogue with experts from many different sectors. It led to a level of mutual understanding on some of the more difficult issues that cannot be reached in a typical conference."

**Dr. Hisashi Ishitani, Professor, University of Tokyo, Japan**

## 10 keys to success

- Allow enough time for planning, planning and more planning
- Start thinking about the longer-term engagement process early and consult your stakeholders on how or if they want continued communication
- Be aware of and manage expectations: yours and theirs
- Be realistic: do not start what you cannot finish
- Focus on quality not quantity: participants should be invited on the basis of their credibility and ability to be thought provoking
- Keep away from public positions and slogans: as soon as possible shift the focus of the dialogue to specific interests and values
- Acknowledge genuine differences, everyone should make an effort to share perspectives, listen and learn
- Be prepared to be as open and transparent as possible
- Aim to build joint ownership for actions towards change to be taken following the dialogue
- Be flexible and open to improvisation in the program based on stakeholder desires

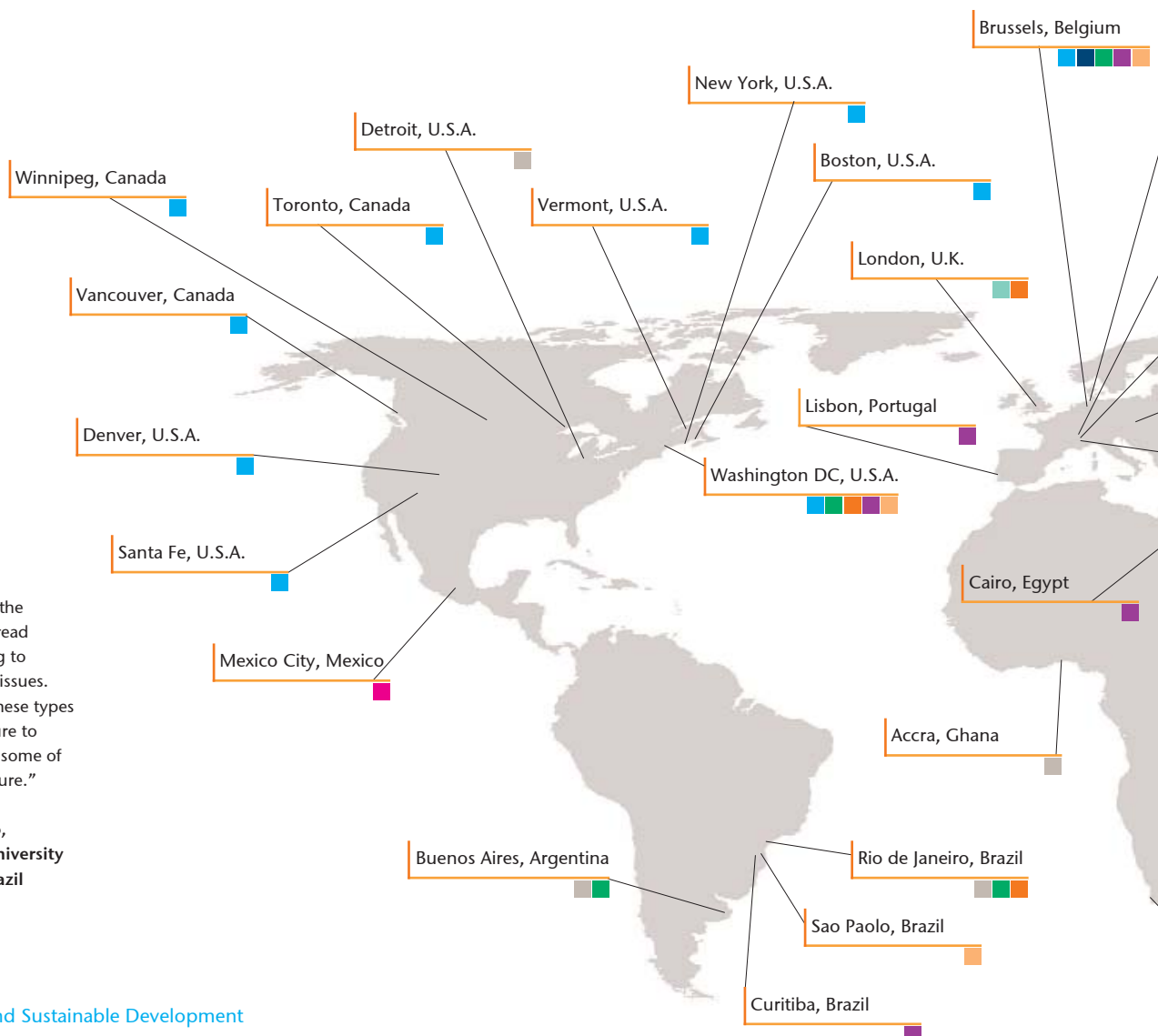
# The WBCSD's experience:

## What our projects have been exploring around the globe



"It was obvious from the dialogue that widespread interest exists in trying to resolve these difficult issues. With the support of these types of activities, we are sure to move toward solving some of these issues in the future."

**Suzana Kahn Ribeiro,**  
Professor, Federal University  
of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil



### Mining, Minerals and Sustainable Development

- How can the industry improve its performance as an agent for social development?
- How can company performance in sustainable development be measured?

### Access to Water

- What can business learn from stakeholders' practical experiences in order to build more sustainable water management systems?
- What partnership issues have stakeholders had in water management projects, and how were these addressed?

### Sustainability through the Market

- What are the roles and responsibilities of business, government and society in promoting sustainability through the market?
- How can business offer greater access to goods and services to the poorer part of society that has been excluded from the traditional market system?

### Climate and Energy

- What role can business play in bringing about a lower carbon intensive future?
- How can capital investment flows be better mobilized toward the most cost-effective greenhouse gas reduction opportunities?

### Toward a Sustainable Cement Industry

- What environmental, technological and social issues does the cement industry have to consider as it strives to become more sustainable?
- What are society's expectations and how can the cement industry respond?

# globe and what stakeholders said



“The dialogue in China was quite a success. The intensive inter-flow of a wide range of ideas stretched the mind sets of the participants and produced a very fruitful event, benefitting all that participated.”

**Qian Jing, Research Fellow,  
China Academy of Social  
Sciences, Pekin, China**



“This is an important first step in bringing stakeholders together on both a local and a global scale, to provide insights to the key public and private authorities who can make a difference.”

**Lee Schipper, Former Chief  
Scientist, International Energy  
Agency, Paris, France**



“I was impressed with how frank and open the discussion was. We need to have more such stakeholder consultations here in Central & Eastern Europe.”

**Jiri Dusik, Manager, Regional  
Environmental Center,  
Prague, Czech Republic**

## Sustainable Mobility

- What is your vision of sustainable mobility for the year 2030?
- How can society reconcile the need for increased mobility with sustainable development?

## Innovation & Technology

- Do patents on genes conflict with the public interest?
- What principles should business adhere to when it innovates?
- What social concerns are taken into consideration when new technologies are created?

## Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

- What does good CSR practice represent?
- What are the key CSR challenges and opportunities for business?

## Sustainable Forest Industry

- Can the forestry community reach greater agreement on what the effective use of forest management certification systems to enhance forests means?
- Can this community define more effective actions to combat illegal logging of forests?

## Why should business engage in dialogue?

Today, business has to make decisions in a more demanding and informed global society. Increasing competition, more domestic and international pressure to be transparent and changing societal expectations make it impossible for companies to operate without being in close contact with those around them.

Among companies, there has been a sharp increase in stakeholder engagement activities as they have come to realize that people or groups outside the core areas of influence can also be stakeholders. The traditional circle of stakeholders has expanded. Previously, the principal groups were shareholders, employees, suppliers, customers, contractors, authorities, media, the financial and the direct community. This group has now grown to embrace a wider range of actors such as youth and religious groups, NGOs, IGOs, global institutions, and many more.

A well planned and designed stakeholder dialogue:

- Helps to scope and prioritize issues
- Allows for greater understanding between stakeholders and their respective needs and constraints
- Ensures direct engagement of different groups and helps to forge alliances, collaborative partnerships and shared principles
- Enables people to both recognize and take responsibility
- Acknowledges differences and therefore the need for trade-offs
- Encourages synergy and new ideas
- Manages disagreement and conflict, and can help to avoid potential conflict by identifying problems early on
- Enables joint ownership of difficult decisions

## What makes our dialogues special?

Dialogue is a unique learning experience. The event itself is only the first step to build lasting, healthy relationships with communities.

**First of all**, WBCSD dialogues are dedicated to problem solving on issues of importance for the business community. Our dialogues are not conferences where participants can come and listen passively nor are they promotional events. They are designed to encourage interactive discussion that leads to better-informed thinking on all parties involved and serves to build trust and greater understanding. The results of these discussions influence our activities and the direction of our projects.

**Secondly**, our dialogues are proactive. They are meant to anticipate future challenges and influence longer-term strategies within companies, governments and other groups.

**Lastly**, the WBCSD's dialogue preparation respects the principle of engagement from the earliest stages of planning. They are always organized, designed, hosted and implemented by a diverse team. Comprising a group of companies, regional partners from the business and non-business communities and a local facilitator. This form of partnership enriches the process and ensures that a variety of interests and concerns are brought to the forefront early on. The challenge of this approach is to reach agreement on the overarching shared expectations of the team.



## What does the WBCSD offer?

The WBCSD has established itself as a key dialogue partner and has built substantial 'know-how' within its secretariat, regional network and member companies.

As part of capacity building, the WBCSD has set up an expert group on stakeholder dialogue that offers support to the various activities of the council.

- **General or institutional support including** access to the WBCSD's accumulated experience, the database of stakeholders, facilitators, performance reviews, learning tools, and a detailed toolkit.
- **Project- or event-specific dialogue support such as** provision of strategic guidance, stakeholder research, process design and operational support to prepare specific dialogue events.

Further, we are developing simple mechanisms for longer-term engagement strategies such as web-based dialogues. Our ability to keep stakeholders engaged in dialogue depend on how we demonstrate progress through action.

## About the WBCSD

The World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD) is a coalition of 160 international companies united by a shared commitment to sustainable development via the three pillars of economic growth, ecological balance and social progress.

Our members are drawn from more than 30 countries and 20 major industrial sectors. We also benefit from a Global Network of 35 national and regional business councils and partner organizations involving some 700 business leaders globally.

### Our mission

To provide business leadership as a catalyst for change toward sustainable development, and to promote the role of eco-efficiency, innovation and corporate social responsibility.

### Our aims

Our objectives and strategic directions, based on this dedication, include:

**Business leadership** • to be the leading business advocate on issues connected with sustainable development.

**Policy development** • to participate in policy development in order to create a framework that allows business to contribute effectively to sustainable development.

**Best practice** • to demonstrate business progress in environmental and resource management and corporate social responsibility and to share leading-edge practices among our members.

**Global outreach** • to contribute to a sustainable future for developing nations and nations in transition.

### For further information:

Visit the stakeholder dialogue "Toolkit" on our web site: [www.wbcd.org](http://www.wbcd.org) or contact:

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1 - The Environment Council: [www.the-environment-council.org.uk](http://www.the-environment-council.org.uk)

2 - Dialogue by Design: [www.dialoguebydesign.com](http://www.dialoguebydesign.com)

3 - Innovation Associates of Canada: [www.innovationassociates.com](http://www.innovationassociates.com)

4 - Global Business Network: [www.gbn.org](http://www.gbn.org)