Public–private partnerships for sustainable development are today widely seen as the most prominent outcome of the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, South Africa. Governments could then not agree on major new legislative initiatives to mitigate global environmental change and to advance sustainable development. Instead, they opted to focus on the implementation of existing policies and on the support of ‘type-2’ outcomes of the summit, with ‘type-2’ denoting a new model of global governance that complements traditional, ‘type-1’ modes of intergovernmental cooperation. Several hundred ‘partnerships for sustainable development’ have been agreed before, during and in the few years after the Johannesburg summit. While the idea of public–private partnership at the global level was not new in 2002, the high number of the newly agreed partnerships, as well as the prominence and, in parts, enthusiasm that surrounded this mechanism of global governance, was surely unprecedented. And yet, the eventual role and relevance of these partnerships remains open to debate till today.

Now, exactly 10 years after the Johannesburg summit, it is time to take stock and to provide a comprehensive assessment of what the hundreds of Johannesburg partnerships could achieve, of the reasons they emerged, and of the problems and potentials associated with this new governance mode. This 10-year assessment is the main goal of this book.

The research presented here is the result of a long-term research programme developed in 2004/05 by Frank Biermann and implemented from 2006 to 2010 under the co-leadership of Biermann and Philipp Pattberg at the Institute for Environmental Studies of the VU University Amsterdam, The Netherlands. As such, the programme was part of the Global Governance Project, the long-term joint research programme of 12 leading European research institutions in the field of global environmental governance that lasted from 2001 to 2011.

Most of the research presented in this book was generously funded by the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (grant number 450-04-313), where it was part of the larger Netherlands-based research programme on ‘Shifts in Governance’. We are grateful for this core support from the main funding body in the Netherlands, for the flexibility of its
staff members and programme chairs in adjusting programme planning under changing circumstances, and for the overall intellectual stimulation from the Shifts in Governance programme community. Additional financial support for our research in China was provided by the EU-STF programme.

The core project team included the four editors of this volume, as well as a vibrant group of visiting researchers, students and research interns, many of whom gave invaluable support to the creation and coding of the Global Sustainability Partnerships Database. In particular, we are grateful for the contributions of our (former) team members Tanja Abendschein, Hilko Blok, Eleni Dellas, Okechukwu Enechi, Kenneth Bergsli Hansen, Anna Kalinowska, Stefan Koepe, Johanna Castro Mendoza, Marta Miro, Christina Müller, Sara Pologno, Kacper Szulecki, Rui Sequeira Veras, Cheeney Zhao Qin and Ruben Zondervan.

In addition, a number of close colleagues provided important critique, valuable insights and useful comments throughout the duration of the programme. We wish to thank here in particular Karin Bäckstrand of Lund University; Jem Bendell of Griffith Business School; Daniel Compagnon of Sciences Po Bordeaux (who also joined the team as visiting professor in 2006); Jia Wenhua of the China University of Political Science and Law; Ma Zhong of Renmin University of China; Henk Overbeek of the VU University Amsterdam; Patrick Schroeder of CANGO; and Derek Vollmer of the US National Academies.

Our research is based, among others, on an expert survey and a series of interviews with leading experts on and stakeholders of public–private partnerships. We cannot thank all interviewees here by name, but wish to extend our gratitude especially to Zehra Aydin, Patricia Chavez, Neth Dano, Felix Dodds, Pamela Franklin, David Hall, Norichika Kanie, Sylvia Karlsson, Lauren Kelly, Ton Boon von Ochssée, Federica Pietracci, Jan Pronk, Diane Quarless, Jan-Gustav Strandenaes, Ann Zamit, and the entire UN-CSD partnership team. We acknowledge financial assistance by COST (European Cooperation in Science and Technology).

Special thanks go to Alex Pettifer and the entire team of Edward Elgar Publishing.

The Editors
Amsterdam, October 2011