PART 1

An Approach to National Strategies

Chapter 1

How This Handbook Can Help

This handbook is intended for practitioners: people who are or expect to be involved in developing and implementing NSDSs or other multi-sectoral national strategies. Its aim is to help them improve and build on existing strategies or start one if none exist. Its advice is based on an analysis of past and current practice, drawing directly from the experience of practitioners of many strategic approaches.

The handbook does not suggest conformation to a single model: each strategy should be designed and run by the government and citizens of the country concerned.

The handbook is not an instruction manual. Users are recommended to study it and reflect on its implications for their own circumstances, and then to design an approach suitable for local purposes, conditions and available resources. We strongly encourage implementation of existing multi-sectoral strategies. They may be narrower in scope and less ambitious than an NSDS, but any improvements needed can be introduced concurrently with implementation.








Purpose of the handbook

This handbook is intended for practitioners – people in governments, citizens' and community groups, educational institutions, businesses and international organizations – who are or could be involved in developing and implementing a multi-sectoral strategy on environment and development at the national or provincial level.

The handbook describes how to use multi-sectoral strategies to integrate environmental, economic and social concerns in national development processes. It aims to help improve the usefulness and effectiveness of all such strategies: national sustainable development strategies (NSDSs), national conservation strategies (NCSs), national environmental action plans (NEAPs), and others.

The handbook suggests ways of developing and implementing an NSDS, either by building on an existing strategy or, if none exist, from scratch. Difficulties have been encountered with existing strategies because their scope is broad and they involve many different sectors and interests. Strategies are complex processes, and managing them is logistically demanding. Although similar to existing strategies in many ways, NSDS processes are likely to be even more challenging. Their scope is wider, and their task of combining economic, environmental and social concerns will increase their technical complexity, the extent of participation required, and hence their political profile.

At the same time, the development and implementation of strategies whose focus is largely environmental – such as most NCSs and NEAPs – will continue to be important. The handbook's discussion of how to organize and manage strategies applies to these strategies as well as to the more ambitious NSDSs.

The handbook is based on an analysis of past and current practice, drawing directly from the experience of practitioners of many strategic approaches. It is a distillation of lessons learned from more than 60 national and provincial conservation strategies, environmental action plans, development plans and other multi-sectoral strategies in 50 upper- and lower-income countries since 1980. Case studies of some of these strategies have been published in IUCN's series of Regional Reviews of Strategies for Sustainability.

Many practitioners have contributed to the handbook by sharing their experience in workshops in Latin America, Africa, Asia and Europe. In so doing, they have helped develop the concept of strategies, raise standards, and propose ways of expanding their scope towards strategies for sustainable development.

Many of the methods described have been used successfully in current strategies. However, experience with strategies is evolving rapidly, and appropriate methods for some strategy elements have yet to be fully developed or tested. Some practices – for example, participatory inquiry – have been used successfully in other contexts and seem to hold promise for strategies as well. Other methods – for example, certain techniques of monitoring and evaluation – have not been tested, but are intended to meet needs recognized by a wide range of practitioners. Every strategy is to some extent experimental, and needs to be accompanied by research and monitoring.

Each country's strategy will be very different and will need to suit the nation's individual set of geographical, ecological, socio-cultural, economic and political conditions. Any form of straitjacket imposed by external agencies or conditions is inappropriate. This handbook does not suggest conformation to a single model: each strategy should be designed and run by the government and citizens of the country concerned.

How to use the handbook

The handbook presents principles and ideas on process and methods, and suggests how they can be used. It is not an instruction manual for a 'model' strategy for constant reference during the strategy process. Users are recommended to study the handbook, to consider its relevance and implications for their own circumstances, and then to design an approach suitable for local purposes, conditions and available resources.

We recommend reading every chapter in sequence for users who have not yet been involved in developing a strategy, are in the early stages of preparing a new strategy, or are considering revising an existing strategy to cover a more ambitious remit (for example, an NSDS). Other users may wish to concentrate on particular elements of the strategy process.

The handbook describes the main kinds of multi-sectoral national strategies. It suggests how to start a new strategy, as well as different ways to build on an existing strategy. It sets out essential conditions for an effective multi-sectoral strategy, ways of developing the required conditions, and alternative approaches if conditions remain unfavourable.

The handbook then provides guidance on the design and management of the strategy process, and on its main elements: participation, information assembly and analysis, policy formulation, action planning, implementation and capacity-building, communication, and monitoring and evaluation. This is the heart of the handbook, and should be useful for anyone who is actively engaged in planning, managing, or reviewing a national strategy process.








We strongly encourage implementation of existing multi-sectoral strategies. They may be narrower in scope and less ambitious than an NSDS, but any improvements needed can be introduced concurrently with implementation. It would be a mistake to postpone implementation by starting another process or preparing another document. The intention of this handbook is not to undermine any existing strategic process, but to show ways in which it can be strengthened and made more effective.

Chapter 2

Ten Lessons and Features for Success

In 1980, the World Conservation Strategy (WCS) (IUCN/UNEP/WWF 1980) recommended that countries undertake national and subnational conservation strategies. Since then, hundreds of countries and communities have developed and implemented strategies. Some have been inspired by the WCS, others by Our Common Future (WCED 1987), still others by Caring for the Earth (IUCN/UNEP/WWF 1991) and Agenda 21 (UNCED 1992). Some have been motivated or assisted by international organizations, such as the World Bank, UNSO, UNDP, IIED, WRI and IUCN. Others have acted on their own initiative or relied entirely on their own resources.

Reflecting their different histories, the strategies go by various names: conservation strategy, environmental action plan, environmental management plan, environmental policy plan, sustainable development strategy, national Agenda 21, and so on. They are referred to here by the umbrella term of 'strategies for sustainability'. Diverse though they are, the more successful strategies have common features, and lessons can be learned from them all. Here, ten lessons from fourteen years of experience with strategies for sustainability are summarized. We return to them regularly throughout the handbook.

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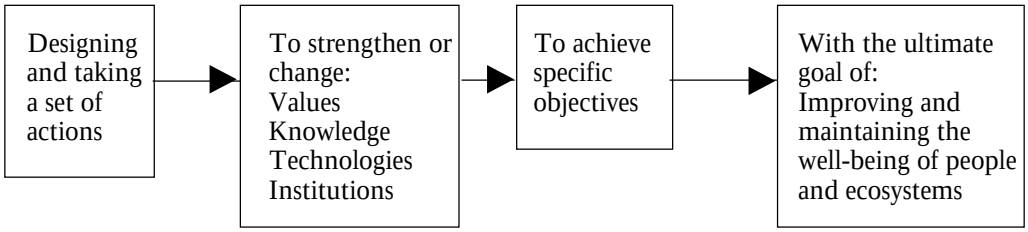
1. *Strategies seek to improve and maintain the well-being of people and ecosystems*

A strategy for sustainability is a process of:



2. *The overall goal of strategies is sustainable development*

Most strategies for sustainability have focused on environmental objectives. A few, such as Bhutan's Seventh Five-Year Plan, have mainly development objectives. But in all cases the ultimate goal is to improve the condition of both people and the ecosystems of which they are a part. This goal is variously described as sustainable development, sustainable living or sustainable well-being. It means that strategies have an important role as integrators of socio-economic and ecological perspectives and of the policies, plans and programmes of interacting sectors and interest groups.

3. *The choice of strategy objectives should be tactical*

With a broad goal such as sustainable development, it is tempting to try to do everything. But strategies with too many objectives can get bogged down, break up into a mess of projects, or reduce the objectives to those that are top priority.

Strategies need objectives that are:

- few enough to be achievable;
- encompassing enough to ensure the support of participants and prevent the strategy being fragmented and losing coherence; and
- clearly defined and measurable enough to assess progress.

4. *The strategy process is adaptive and cyclical*

A strategy is a process, not an isolated event. The process is adaptive; it develops as it goes along and responds to change. It is cyclical; over a period of several years, the main components are repeated. This means that a strategy need not and should not try to do everything at once. It can grow in scope,

ambition and degree of participation as capacities to undertake the strategy are built. Pakistan, for example, started with a national conservation strategy and went on to develop provincial conservation strategies; Malaysia developed state strategies first and then a national strategy. Neither tried to develop national and subnational strategies at the same time.

5. *The strategy should be as participatory as possible*

Participation means sharing responsibility for the strategy and jointly undertaking it. The participants in a strategy should be those whose values, knowledge, technology or insti-tutions need to change or be strengthened to achieve the objectives. The objectives determine the participants and the participants decide the objectives. Par-ticipants bring information to the strategy, ensuring that it is based on a common understanding of purpose, problems and solutions. Participation is the most effective way of communicating the information on which the strategy is based, its objectives, and the actions to be taken. People who participate in designing and deciding actions are more likely to understand their purpose and to implement them in full.

Participation should be expanded as the strategy develops. Usually, the nature and extent of participation will vary with the type of strategy and how far it has evolved. In many national strategies, for example, local involvement is at first selective and focused on representative communities.

6. *Communication is the lifeblood of a strategy*

Communication is the means by which:

- participants exchange information with each other about values, perceptions, interests, ecosystems, resources, the economy and society;
- participants reach agreement with each other on actions;
- values are changed or strengthened and knowledge is imparted; and
- participants inform others about the strategy.

Therefore, communication needs to be planned carefully as an integral part of the strategy.

7. *Strategies are processes of planning and action*

Planning is an important part of a strategy, but a strategy is much more than a plan. It is a process of developing a long-term vision or sense of direction; targeting the key things that can be done to move in that direction (priority issues, key influences on those issues, and the most effective ways of dealing with them); and engaging everyone concerned – businesses, citizens' groups, communities, as well as governments – to carry them out.








The main components of a strategy are:

- assessment, including diagnosis (survey, issue, identification and analysis at the start of a strategy) and monitoring and evaluation (during a strategy);
- designing the actions (planning); and
- taking the actions (implementation).

These components must continue together and reinforce one another. Most strategies have begun by working in sequence: diagnosis first; then planning; then implementation. But this need not be the case. It is better that implementation, for example, starts early; it does not have to wait for all planning to be completed. Once the strategy is underway, implementation and monitoring should be continuous. Evaluation and the planning of new actions should be repeated at intervals; for example, every three to five years.

Monitoring and evaluation are vital for success; keeping the strategy on course and enabling it to adapt to changing conditions and results. Evaluation needs to focus on how the strategy is carried out as well as on the results.

Although many strategies are called 'plans' rather than 'strategies' – and many strategies started out as plans – all effective strategies are action-oriented and have gone well beyond planning. For example, the Dutch National Environmental Policy Plan has become an instrument for structural change in production and consumption, with interest groups, sectors and corporations committing themselves to change their behaviour to meet agreed targets. The Seychelles used its National Environment Management Plan to establish the institutional framework for sustainable development, including a Ministry of Environment, Economic Planning and External Relations.

Therefore, it is best to think of a strategy not as a plan but as a means of planning and taking actions to change or strengthen values, knowledge, technologies and institutions. By the same token, a strategy document is an essential tool to make the strategy explicit and record the policies and actions agreed by the participants. But it is only a tool; it is not the strategy. Too great an emphasis on preparing a document can divert energy from the actions the document is meant to promote.

8. Integrate the strategy into the decision-making systems of society

Strategies should be integrated with conventional development cycles; they are not just something to be added on. In Ethiopia and Pakistan, for example, the national conservation strategies are expected by government and donors to act as the strategic framework for all development investment and actions.

The strategy should build on priority areas where government and people are already

committed. Politicians and communities need to see its benefits and relevance. It should draw on local knowledge, values, skills and intuitions.

The strategy should also build on past or current plans rather than ignore or replace them. It should recognize and capture the best of what is available and has already been done.

9. Build the capacity to undertake a strategy at the earliest stage

At a national level, this means building the capacity for cross-sectoral action, finding ways of integrating environmental concerns with development, and developing processes to alert government agencies and the private sector about their environmental responsibilities. In the Nepal NCS, this has been done by training key technical staff from various ministries in environmental impact assessment, an activity that led to environmental units being set up in key ministries and an Environmental Protection Council.

10. External agencies should be 'on tap', not on top

External financial and technical assistance should help the society concerned increase its capacity to undertake strategies for sustainabil-ity. Recipient governments must be able to take the lead in coordinating assistance. Locally-designed and locally-driven approaches to strategies should be given precedence over conditions on aid or notions of 'model' strategies. Low-level continuous support over a long period is almost always better than high-level support for a limited period. Donors should support the capacity-building process and not just the products of the strategy. Their support for implementation should include refocusing existing investments as well as new investment.








Box 1: Ten lessons and features of national strategies for sustainability

1. They seek to improve and maintain the well-being of people and ecosystems.
2. Their overall goal is sustainable development.
3. Their objectives are strategic and tactical.
4. The process is adaptive and cyclical.
5. They are participatory.
6. They rely on communication.
7. They are processes of planning and action.
8. They are integrative and inter-sectoral.
9. They build capacity.
10. External agencies should be on tap, not on top.

Definition: Strategies for sustainability are processes of planning and action to improve and maintain the well-being of people and ecosystems.

Chapter 3

The Contribution of Strategies to Sustainable Development

Sustainable development means improving and maintaining the well-being of people and ecosystems. This goal is far from being achieved. To develop sustainably, people need to improve their relationships with each other and with the ecosystems that support them – by changing or strengthening their values, knowledge, technologies and institutions.

Major obstacles include a lack of agreement on what should be done, resistance by interest groups who feel threatened by change, and uncertainty about the costs and benefits of alternatives. Overcoming these obstacles requires continuing public discussion, negotiation and mediation among interest groups, and development of a political consensus.

National sustainable development strategies are needed to provide a framework and focus for debate on sustainable development and processes of negotiation, mediation, and consensus-building; and to plan and carry out actions to change or strengthen values, knowledge, technologies and institutions with respect to priority issues. An existing strategic initiative, such as a national development plan, national conservation strategy, environmental action plan, or sectoral strategy, could be built into a national sustainable development strategy.

Strategies can help countries solve inter-related economic, social and environmental problems by developing their capacities to treat them in an integrated fashion. Existing strategies have already resulted in improved organizations, procedures, legislation, public awareness and consensus on issues.

Strategies are not panaceas, however. They are breaking new ground in the ways societies and governments tackle complex issues. Therefore, they can be controversial, take time to develop and get results, and require special management skills. This handbook aims to help strategy participants and managers overcome such difficulties, and design and implement a successful strategy for sustainable development.








The challenge of sustainable development

Over the past 30 years, growing numbers of people have come to recognize that efforts to improve their standard of living must be in harmony with the natural world. Many have also realized that a lack of development can be as great a threat to nature as reckless or misguided development.

The idea that conservation and development are two sides of the same coin became current in the 1970s. The World Conservation Strategy (IUCN/WWF/UNEP 1980) called for the integration of conservation and development:

'...because unless patterns of development that also conserve living resources are widely adopted, it will become impossible to meet the needs of today without foreclosing the achievement of tomorrow's.'

The World Conservation Strategy called development that is sustained by conservation 'sustainable development': a term that in 1987 was taken up and widely publicized by the Brundtland Commission's report, Our Common Future (WCED 1987). Since then, people have struggled with what sustainable development means in practice, and how to achieve it. They have wrestled with the meanings of 'sustainable' and 'development'. Some have proposed rival terms, such as 'ecologically sustainable development', 'ethical and sustainable development', 'sustainable living' and 'sustainable well-being'.

Regardless of terminology, the central concept is the same; the human system is an integral part of the ecosystem. A society is sustainable only if both the human condition and the condition of the ecosystem are satisfactory or improving (Box 2). If either is unsatisfactory or worsening, the society is unsustainable.

Human and ecosystem well-being

Hence, sustainable development (or sustainable living or sustainable well-being) entails improving and maintaining the well-being of people and ecosystems.

Human well-being exists if all members of society are able to define and meet their needs and have a large range of choices and opportunities to fulfill their potential.

Ecosystem well-being means ecosystems maintain their quality and diversity and thus their potential to adapt to change and provide a wide range of options for the future.

In most societies today, neither condition is being met. In some, progress is being made in one area at the expense of the other. Even in wealthy societies, which make huge demands on resources and the environment,

Box 2: The twin pillars of sustainable development

The twin pillars of sustainable development are respect and concern for people and ecosystems. Development is likely to be sustainable if:

1. It improves the quality of human life. The purpose of development is to improve the quality of human life. It should enable people to realize their potential and lead lives of dignity and fulfillment. Economic growth is part of development, but it cannot be a goal in itself; nor can it go on indefinitely. Although people differ in their goals for development, some are virtually universal: a long and healthy life, education, access to resources needed for a decent standard of living, political freedom, guaranteed human rights, and freedom from violence. Development is achieved only if it makes lives better in all these respects.

2. It conserves the Earth's vitality and diversity. Development must be conservation-based: it must protect the structure, functions and diversity of the world's natural systems on which our species depends. To this end we need to:

- Conserve life-support systems. These are the ecological processes that shape climate, cleanse air and water, regulate water flow, recycle essential elements, create and regenerate soil, enable ecosystems to renew themselves, and keep the planet fit for life.
- Conserve biological diversity, including all species of plants, animals and other organisms, the range of genetic stocks within species, and the variety of ecosystems.
- Ensure that all uses of renewable resources are sustainable. These resources include soil, wild and domesticated organisms, forests, rangelands, farmlands, and the marine and freshwater ecosystems that support fisheries. A use is likely to be sustainable if it is compatible with maintaining the viability of the species and ecosystems affected by the use.
- Minimize the depletion of non-renewable resources, such as minerals, oil, gas and coal, which cannot be used sustainably in the same sense as plants, fish or soil. But their 'life' can and should be extended; by recycling, by using less of a resource to make a particular product, or by switching to renewable substitutes where possible.
- Keep within the Earth's carrying capacity. There are finite limits to the capacity of ecosystems and to the impacts that they and the Earth as a whole can withstand without dangerous deterioration. Limits vary from region to region, and the impacts depend on how many people there are and how much food, water, energy and raw material each person uses or wastes. A few people consuming a lot can cause as much damage as a lot of people consuming a little. Policies, technologies and practices that bring human numbers and lifestyles into balance with the Earth's carrying capacity are essential.

Source: IUCN/WWF/UNEP (1991).

there can be extreme poverty and social decay among the least advantaged. This widespread evidence of unsustainability is summarized in Box 3.

Two sets of relationships are crucial to improving the well-being of people and ecosystems:

- human relationships, both inter-personal (among individuals and families) and inter-community (among communities, organizations and nations); and
- relationships between people and the ecosystem.

The model shown in Figure 1 portrays these relationships as two interacting cycles of pressures, conditions and responses; one cycle being within the human system (inter-personal and inter-community relationships), the other between the human system and the ecosystem.

The key area of the model is the one marked 'human responses'. To improve the well-being of both people and ecosystems, societies need to improve the ways they respond to social and ecosystem change and moderate their pressures on ecosystems and people.

Specifically, societies need to change or strengthen:

- the **values** that guide them in human and human–ecosystem relationships;
- the **knowledge** that enables them to understand and make sense of these relationships;
- the **technologies** with which they apply their knowledge and equip themselves with tools and infrastructure; and
- the institutions – the customs, laws, social and economic incentives, and organizations – by which they manage the relationships.

Values

Values based on respect and care for each other and the Earth are the foundation for a sustainable society. The transition to sustainability will require changes in how people perceive each other and other life on Earth, how they evaluate their needs and priorities, and how they behave. Values are important because what people do depends on what they believe. Widely-shared beliefs are often more powerful than government edicts.

Values that emphasize respect and concern for people and respect and concern for ecosystems can be found in many religions and cultures and in basic global statements such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN 1948), the World Charter for Nature (UN 1982), and the Rio Declaration (UN 1992). Seldom, however, are the values expressed in such declarations, or embraced by religions or cultures, manifest at ground levels.

Box 3: Signs of unsustainability

Rising human numbers and consumption of resources: Since the industrial revolution, human numbers have grown eightfold. Water withdrawals have grown from 100 to 3600 cubic kilometres a year. The 5.3 billion people now on the Earth use 40 per cent of its most elemental resource: the energy from the sun made available by green plants on land.

Poverty: More than a billion people live in absolute poverty. One person in five cannot get enough food to support an active working life. One quarter of the world's people are without safe drinking water. Every year millions of children die from malnutrition and preventable disease.

Resource depletion: In less than 200 years, the planet has lost six million square kilometres of forest. An estimated 60,000–70,000 square kilometres of agricultural land is made unproductive by erosion each year. The sediment load from soil erosion has risen threefold in major river basins and by eight times in smaller, more intensively used ones.

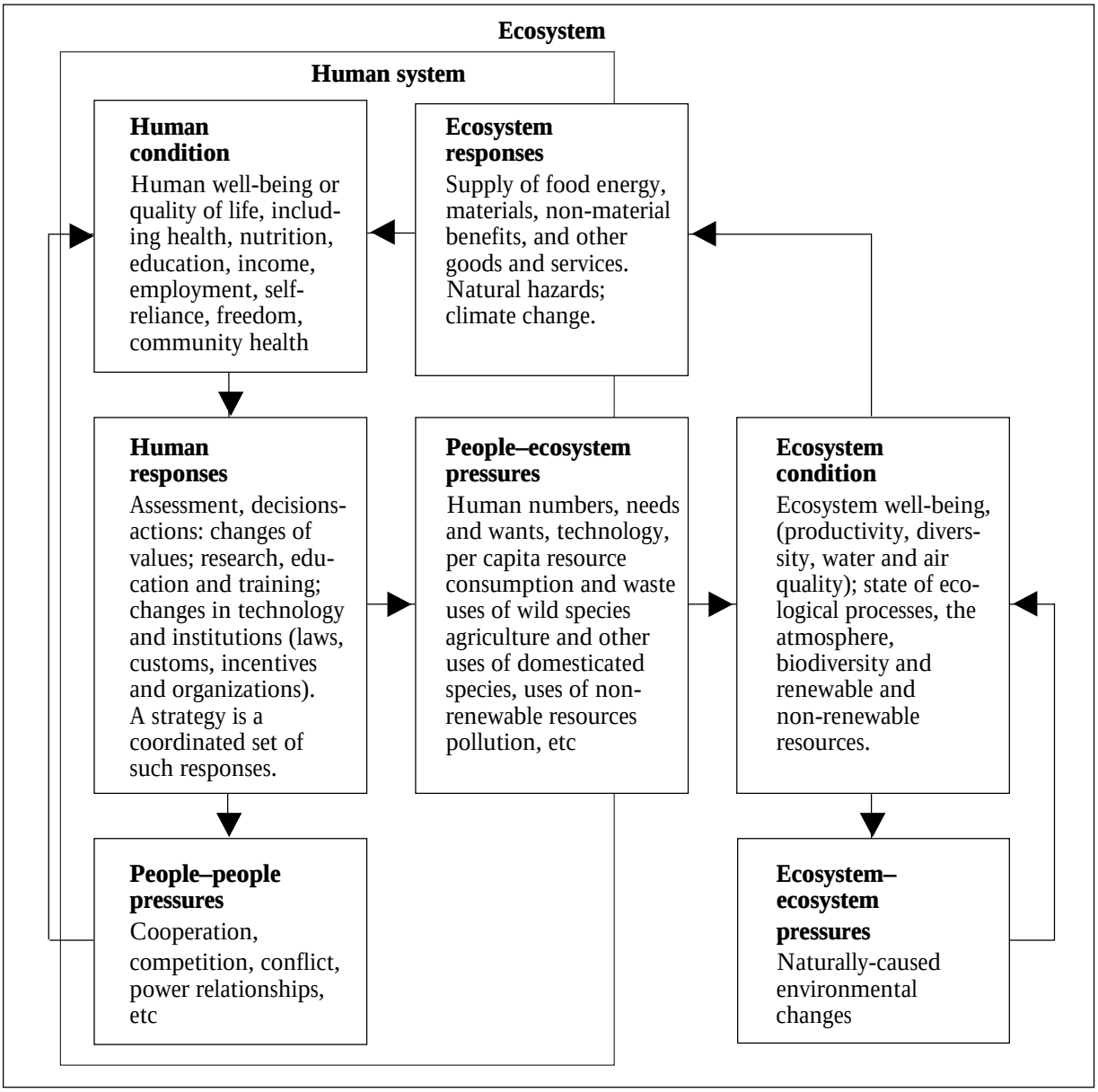
Pollution: Human inputs of nutrients into coastal waters already equal natural sources. Human-caused emissions of many heavy metals now range from double those from natural sources (for example, arsenic and mercury) to five and even 18 times higher than natural rates (cadmium and lead respectively).

Global climate change: The climate regime to which people and other forms of life have long been adapted is threatened by human impact on the atmosphere. Since the mid-18th century, human activities have more than doubled the methane in the atmosphere, increased the concentration of carbon dioxide by 27 per cent, and significantly damaged the stratospheric ozone layer.

Debt: The combined cumulative debt of lower-income countries is more than $1 trillion, and interest payments alone have reached $60 billion per year. As a result, since 1984 there has been a net transfer of capital from lower-income to upper-income countries. Nonetheless, many upper-income countries also run substantial deficits.

Source: IUCN/UNEP/WWF (1991).

Figure 1: Relationships between people and the Earth



Notes: a) The human system is a part of the ecosystem.
b) Relationships crucial to the well-being of people and ecosystems are portrayed as two interacting cycles of pressures, conditions and responses — one cycle within the human system, the other between the human system and the ecosystem.

There are many reasons why people live unsustainably. People who are poor are often forced to do things to help them survive for the present that they know create problems for the future. The more affluent live unsustainably because of ignorance, lack of concern, or incentives to wasteful consumption.

People will adopt attitudes and practices more conducive to sustainable development when they are persuaded that it is right and necessary, when they have sufficient incentive, and when they can obtain the required knowledge and skills. Societies must provide incentives, formal and informal education and training to promote values that support a sustainable way of life and discourage values that are incompatible with it.

Knowledge

There is a lack of scientific information and an inadequate understanding of ecosystem functions. This means that development often proceeds in ignorance of the possible consequences, and with no or inadequate measures taken to avoid or counter negative environmental effects. Predicting the effects of human activities is difficult, and continuous monitoring of vulnerable ecosystems is essential. Direct cause and effect are often far from obvious and are the subject of disagreement among scientists. Political and economic change at all levels, from international to local, add to the uncertainty. But the problems are too big and the consequences of delay too serious to risk inaction until there is scientific certainty. In any case, given the many variables, scientific certainty is most unlikely.

Environmental, social and economic problems are complex. Their interactions are hard to detect and change constantly. A wide range of scientific, economic, political and philosophical knowledge and skills is needed to understand and resolve them.

Understanding ecosystems, societies and their relationships therefore needs constant improvement through research. Existing information on these relationships should be made more accessible and useful through synthesis and analysis, which should be widely communicated and incorporated in education and training programmes.

Technologies

Technologies provide people with tools and infrastructure: a means of communication, transportation, energy supply and use, water supply, waste disposal, and extraction of raw materials and their manufacture into products. Research and development are needed, as well as better manufacturing, engineering and physical planning processes, in order to develop and apply technologies that:

- minimize hazards to people and ecosystems; and
- minimize the use of energy and raw materials, reduce waste, and prevent pollution.








Institutions

Laws and incentives

Laws and incentives are necessary to ensure that people and their organizations behave sustainably. But existing legislation and incentives do not provide adequately for sustainability, and often the two systems conflict with each other. For example, the law may tell a business not to pollute a river, but more powerful economic incentives may encourage it to do so.

At present, incentives to deplete resources and degrade ecosystems are strong because the market treats ecosystems and their functions as useless, limitless or free of charge. The market does not take account of the full value of ecological processes or biodiversity, or of the costs borne by society when these values are degraded.

Comprehensive and effective legal frameworks are needed to safeguard human rights, the interests of future generations, and the vitality and diversity of ecosystems; and incentive systems should be in harmony with them.

Organizations

In many countries, governmental planning and decision-making systems are weak compared with financial and commercial interests. Some are excessively bureaucratic; many are insufficiently participatory to reflect the interests of local communities or the poor. Other organizational problems include limited political awareness of the social and ecological aspects of sustainable development, insufficient skilled personnel and lack of money. All such problems are closely related, and are exacerbated by each other, as well as by other problems such as inadequate legislative frameworks and lack of scientific information.

Traditionally, development planners have concentrated on controlling the allocation of resources to promote economic growth. Planning horizons have tended to be short: typically three to five years. In general, environmental and social concerns have been subordinated to crude measures of economic performance such as gross domestic product (GDP), employment generation, and foreign exchange earnings.

Development policies – particularly sectoral plans and annual budgetary processes – are usually given priority over environmental policies. Both are fragmented and poorly integrated with each other. In some countries, national planning focuses excessively on projects, particularly large-scale projects, rather than on the institutions and programmes needed for sustainable development. Or, project plans may entail major policy decisions for which the national plan provides no guidance or which override the national plan. Often there is a poor fit among national, regional and local decision-making and powers to act.

Miscommunication, gaps, overlap and conflicts among sectors are common. This lack of horizontal integration is most obvious:

- within economic development planning, notably between sectors;
- between development policies and plans and environmental policies and plans (partly due to the longer time scale of the latter; and
- in the ways that it is made difficult for interest groups and the public to understand and affect development and environment decisions.

Mechanisms for integration are weak and usually only exist at lower levels of planning, such as regional or local land use plans. Environmental impact assessment (EIA), although important for identifying and preventing environmental and social problems, is applied to projects and programmes more often than to development plans, sectoral plans or policies. As such, it does not have 'upward reach': it can change or mitigate a project but is unlikely to alter the policy or plan that gives rise to the project.

Failures of economic planning and the rapid decline of central planning systems have led to proclamations of the supremacy of the market system. There is no doubt that the market system has been more successful than state planning at promoting enterprise, economic growth, and economic efficiency. But a healthy society is much more than an efficient economy. Many social and environmental objectives require some other mechanism than one designed to maximize utility or profits. Moreover, the market has been very poor at integrating environmental factors into economic decision-making. Such integration remains a central need.

Given the complexity and rapidly changing nature of economic, environmental and social problems, rigid bureaucratic structures are ineffective. Worse, they are likely to compound the problems; as are governments acting alone and, still more so, individual government agencies acting alone. In addition, politicians lack sufficient motivation to undertake the thankless task of mediating among conflicting economic, social and environmental objectives that diverge substantially from the status quo.

Today new forms of government are needed, with more flexible structures. Governments need to be organized to facilitate a greater flow of information and expertise among sectors – rather than just within single sectors – and between governmental and non-governmental entities.

Communities and local groups provide the most accessible channels for people to express their concerns and take action to create culturally-appropriate sustainable societies. To enable them to do this, communities need effective control over their own lives, including secure access to resources and an equitable share in managing them; the right

to participate in decisions; and education and training. They must also be able to meet their needs in sustainable ways, and to conserve their local environment.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) like environmental groups and social development groups have enormous potential to mobilize local and national energies toward sustainable development. They are already leading valuable efforts to combine socio-economic development and environmental conservation at the grassroots level. But too often they have been marginalized by both government and the market, lacking equitable arrangements to become partners in planning and decision-making.

One approach is for government agencies, communities, businesses and non-governmental interest groups to form partnerships or dynamic networks in which they work together to solve common problems in an integrated fashion. In so doing, they should take care to ensure that a network operating at one level (eg, community, provincial, national or international) coordinates with partnerships working on the same or a related issue at other levels.

Obstacles to change

Making the required changes to values, knowledge systems, technologies and institutions is fraught with difficulties.

- Lack of agreement on the existence and severity of the problems, how to resolve them, and who among nations and interest groups is responsible for doing so. Disagreement is inevitable, because the issues involve value judgements and because of the absence of scientific certainty.
- The systemic or structural nature of many of the problems. Problems such as poverty and inequalities within and among nations are not mere side-effects of the way we do business. They are deeply embedded in our institutions. Meeting basic needs will require changes in the distribution of wealth and control over resources. Achieving sustainability will require changes in the ways corporations and consumers use resources and generate waste. Powerful groups – from big corporations, governments and political parties to ordinary workers, consumers and voters – will try to block changes that they perceive to threaten their immediate interests. Only the threat of even worse change if the required action is not taken – and confidence that compensating benefits can be obtained in the near future – will overcome this resistance.
- Lack of a model of economic development that would provide an acceptable standard of living for all, and at the same time keep environmental impacts and uses of energy and raw materials within sustainable bounds. The industrial model of development is not a viable option. It

has brought prosperity to only about 1.5 billion people – few in world terms – and its environmental costs have been huge. Even if the expected eventual world population of 10–12 billion people were able to industrialize, the impact on the planet would be catastrophic. Yet people and their governments are reluctant to try different ways of developing because the results are so uncertain. It is a case of 'better the devil you know than the devil you don't'.

Overcoming such obstacles calls for:

- Continuing public discussion of the nature of sustainable development, its ethical framework, and how to make the transition to sustainability, in order to develop a sense of common interest and a collective vision of the future.
- Negotiation and mediation. Decisions intended to lead to sustainability depend on value judgements: for example, the appropriate balance of short-term and long-term needs, or of industrial production and environmental quality. Such decisions involve difficult trade-offs between potentially conflicting objectives and different options. Often they have far-reaching consequences. Hence, they are essentially ethical and political and need to be negotiated among many sectors and interest groups.
- Development of a political consensus. Consensus does not mean unanimity or the absence of dissent: differing values and perspectives are a fact of life. Nor does it mean the exclusion of minority concerns. Consensus means general agreement: a common understanding of what values are shared and how to behave when values conflict. The ultimate aim is to expand consensus to include all values necessary for sustainability and all interest groups.

The need for strategies

'National sustainable development strategies should be seen as a voyage and not as a harbour.'

Partnerships for Change Conference, Manchester, 1993

Strategies are needed to overcome the obstacles to sustainable development and make the necessary key changes. Haphazard or piecemeal attempts to do this are unlikely to succeed. The changes required are profound, and, to avoid doing more harm than good, will have to be made incrementally. But a process of incremental change is likely to lose direction without an explicit strategy to keep it on course.

It is not suggested that all of a nation's efforts toward sustainable development be entirely subsumed into one single strategy. Such a grand design is impractical and unnecessary. What is necessary is to provide the many actors involved with a sense of collective endeavour, a common (albeit

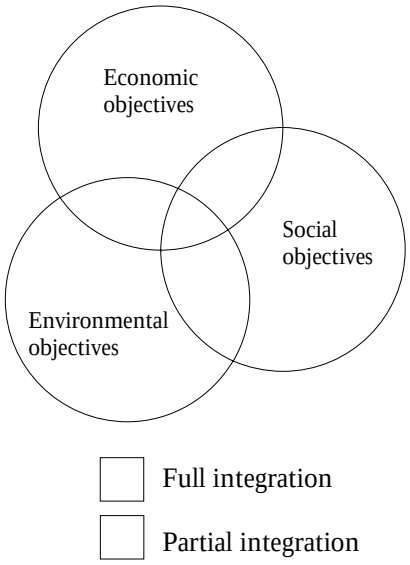
evolving) conceptual framework, and a focus and energy source for a set of key initiatives.

National sustainable development strategies (NSDSs) are needed to:

- provide a forum and context for the debate on sustainable development and the articu-lation of a collective vision of the future;
- provide a framework for processes of negotiation, mediation, and consensus-building; and to focus them on a common set of priority issues;
- plan and carry out actions to change or strengthen values, knowledge, technologies and institutions with respect to the priority issues; and
- develop organizational capacities and other institutions required for sustainable development.

The purpose of NSDSs and other multi-sectoral strategies is to mobilize and focus a society's efforts to achieve sustainable development. National strategies for sustainability are participatory and cyclical processes of planning and action to achieve economic, ecological and social objectives in a balanced and integrated manner (Figure 2). NSDSs aim to achieve all three objectives; other strategies for sustainability emphasize one or two of them. The process, in most cases, encompasses the definition of policies and action plans, their implementation, monitoring and regular review.

Figure 2: Sustainable development: integration of objectives



Sustainable development will entail integration of economic, social and environmental objectives where possible, and making trade-offs among objectives where integration is not possible.

All countries probably have some kind of existing strategic initiative that can be built into an NSDS. This may be a national development plan, a national conservation strategy or an environmental action plan. It may be a strategy covering a sector such as forestry, agriculture or transport; or a theme such as biodiversity. A national strategy could also be built from several subnational

strategies. Chapter 4 discusses how to start an NSDS or develop one from an existing initiative.

The role of strategies

The purpose of strategies for sustainability is to mobilize and focus a society's efforts to achieve sustainable development. They can do so by providing the means to:

- define choices, goals, targets and standards for sustainable development;
- illuminate the ethical dimensions underlying the choices and goals;
- analyze ecological, economic and social issues in a comprehensive and integrated fashion, clarifying links, exploring ethical considerations, identifying policy gaps, and showing how to reduce conflicts between environment and development;
- identify and evaluate options for addressing priority issues (problems and opportunities), which includes identifying appropriate packages of legal reforms, economic instruments, institutional development, capacity-building, and other programmes;
- prepare and carry out sectoral and cross-sectoral policies and plans to rationalize responsibilities for environment and development, reduce duplication, close gaps, prevent or reduce conflicts, and take advantage of compatibilities and synergies among sectors and interest groups;
- improve decision-making through better information and analytical techniques, and by enabling those most affected by decisions to contribute to them;
- develop understanding and build consensus so that decisions have strong support;
- identify, promote and support actions leading to sustainable development and reduce, slow or stop actions impeding sustainable development;
- identify and apply practices to sustain the resource base of the economy, achieve sustainable levels of resource use, restore degraded natural resources, make use of unused or under-used resource potential, improve the efficiency of existing resource use, and diversify the use of existing resources;
- determine priorities for action, evaluating costs and benefits and the trade-offs between the often very different concerns affecting society;
- allocate limited resources;
- develop and strengthen institutions for sustainable development; and
- build capacities to handle complex and inter-related issues.

National sustainable development strategies are gaining recognition as a highly appropriate course of action for many countries. This was highlighted both in Caring for the Earth (IUCN/UNEP/WWF 1991) and in Agenda 21 (UNCED 1992) (see Box 4):








'[Agenda 21's] successful implementation is first and foremost the responsibility of governments. National strategies, plans, policies and processes are crucial in achieving this...'

Governments – in cooperation, where appropriate, with international organizations – should adopt an NSDS based on, among other things, the implementation of decisions taken at UNCED in 1992, particularly in respect of Agenda 21. This strategy should build upon and harmonize the various sectoral economic, social and environmental policies and plans that are operating in the country. The experience gained through existing planning exercises such as national reports for UNCED, national conservation strategies and

Box 4: Agenda 21 and Caring for the Earth

Agenda 21 is the action plan of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED, Rio de Janeiro, 1992), agreed to by 178 governments. Other UNCED agreements were the Climate and Biodiversity Conventions, the Forest Principles, and the Rio Declaration. The 40 chapters of the Agenda 21 document cover a great many issues relating to sustainable development, including developing the organization, skills and resources required for implementation. Its actions are to be undertaken at all levels, from the local to the international. Agenda 21 attempts to integrate environment and development, identify links among sectors, and examine cross-sectoral issues such as poverty, consumption, and financial resources.

Agenda 21 is not legally binding, but it does represent political commitment at the highest level. A recent survey of 81 countries showed that 65 of them had designated organizations to oversee implementation of Agenda 21. All United Nations' agencies are responding to Agenda 21.

Caring for the Earth is a global strategy for sustainable living, prepared by the World Conservation Union, the United Nations Environment Programme, and the World Wide Fund for Nature. It builds on the World Conservation Strategy (IUCN/UNEP/WWF 1980), continuing the emphasis on conserving the Earth's vitality and diversity, while adding an ethical dimension and proposing actions to improve the quality of human life, keep within the Earth's carrying capacity, and integrate development and conservation at individual, community, national and global levels. Caring for the Earth contributed to, and complements, Agenda 21. The two could well be used together.

Those chapters of Agenda 21 and Caring for the Earth which are particularly relevant to a discussion of NSDSs are listed at the end of this chapter.

environment action plans should be fully used and incorporated into a country-driven sustainable development strategy. Its goals should be to ensure socially responsible economic development while protecting the resource base and the environment for the benefit of future generations. It should be developed through the widest possible participation.

The benefits of strategies

Some countries undertake strategies for sustainability when they begin to recognize that ad hoc and piecemeal attempts to solve environment and development problems are not working. The problems may be resource depletion; erosion, pollution and other forms of environmental degradation; loss of natural habitats; increased competition for land; rising levels of friction among resource users; frustration of social or economic objectives; or rejection of decisions by groups who feel excluded from decision-making.

Strategies have a number of strengths. Their integrated multi-sectoral approach should enable countries to act on the basis of a better understanding of how environmental, social and economic problems relate to each other. Strategies can stimulate and focus cross-sectoral debate, provide an overview and analysis of key environment/development issues, and differentiate between negotiable and less negotiable issues.

Strategies can help to overcome problems of organizational and policy fragmentation and compartmentalization by:

- developing multi-agency networks;
- setting in motion analysis of the main constraints to more integrated management;
- providing on-the-job training in integrated management; and
- developing institutions and organizational arrangements that are better equipped to cope with uncertainty, rapid change, and the need for more integrated decisions.

A major obstacle to economic and social development is the shortage of national management skills. Strategies can help to develop these skills. This is especially true of skills in integration: in short supply in both upper-income and lower-income countries.

Strategies, if they are participatory, are likely to be unconstrained by the limits of governance. They will be able to engage both governments and other major actors, such as businesses, communities, and NGOs.

Strategies combine the coherence of plans and the flexibility and opportunism of ad hoc approaches. They can integrate planning with other components of the decision-making system such as investment procedures and political processes.








Box 5: Some benefits of strategies

The following is a sample of the benefits gained so far from a selection of national and provincial strategies. Only a few highlights have been given: not all the benefits from the strategies concerned are included.

Bangladesh (National Conservation Strategy): Better treatment of environmental issues in the Forest Master Plan and the World Bank Third Forestry Project.

Botswana (National Conservation Strategy): Establishment of a National Conservation Strategy Advisory Board and Coordination Agency. Introduction of an environmental impact assessment procedure as part of the national planning and development control system. This has resulted in cost savings from the selection of dam sites, and a reversal of a decision to implement the Southern Okavango Integrated Water Development Project.

Canada (Green Plan): 80 initiatives and programmes on toxic substances, waste reduction, sustainable agriculture, national parks, new technologies for energy efficiency, reduction of ozone depletion, and enforcement of environmental regulations, among others. Legislation on trade in wild animals and plants, and environmental assessment.

Costa Rica (National Conservation Strategy for Sustainable Development): Establishment of the innovative National Biodiversity Institute (INBio). Formation of a National Commission and Master Plan for Environmental Education.

France (National Environmental Action Plan): This crystallized public policy on the environment; set priorities on major environmental issues, to which most interests agreed; helped develop governmental expertise; and led to greater governmental investment in such expertise.

Madagascar (National Environmental Action Plan): Establishment of the Office National de l'Environnement (ONE), a coordinating body within the Ministry of Economy and Planning. Adoption of a comprehensive national policy on the environment. Establishment of two umbrella bodies for environmental NGOs to help local NGOs improve their management capacity.

Malaysia (National Conservation Strategy): Adoption of natural resource accounting and of an environmental auditing system within government. Establishment of a Resources and Environment Section within the Economic Planning Unit.

box continues

Nepal (National Conservation Strategy): Establishment of an environmental core group, an inter-sectoral network consisting of some 70 senior government officials from 20 ministries and departments as well as divisions of the National Planning Commission, to develop new environmental policies and procedures. This group has acted as a catalyst for environmental assessment activities, the establishment of environment units within key government sectors, and the preparation of environmental assessment guidelines for Nepal.

Netherlands (National Environmental Policy Plan): Some major agreements on structural changes in production and consumption have been made. Partnerships of government agencies, industry, business and citizens have been established. There have been 17 covenants signed between governments and industrial sectors and six more are being negotiated. Once these are completed, 80 per cent of the pollution caused by industry in the Netherlands will be covered by covenants to reduce it.

Nicaragua (National Conservation Strategy): Involvement of all of Nicaragua's 143 municipalities in participatory diagnoses of the needs, problems and solutions. This contributed to the national dialogue between antagonists in the recent civil war and launched locally-driven efforts to solve local problems in many parts of the country.

Norway: Annual budgets now contain estimates of environmental effects of the proposed expenditure of each ministry. New environmental planning guidelines have been tested at the local level. EIA rules are being better implemented.

Pakistan (National Conservation Strategy): Effective communication of sustainable development issues and the NCS through the work of the Journalists Resource Centre for the Environment (JRC), established as part of the strategy process. With the recent addition of informal communications programmes such as television, radio, street theatre and participatory methods of communication, the messages of the NCS are reaching many levels of society.

Zambia (National Conservation Strategy): As a result of deliberate and patient capacity-building within mid-level personnel during the development of the NCS, a committed and knowledgeable core of people has been built up within the government to implement the strategy. The group provides an effective base for new institutions, such as the National Environment Council, and a means of internalizing the strategy within government.

Zimbabwe: Greater public awareness of environmental issues.








The benefits of strategies to date, including better organization, legislation and procedures, have been significant (see Box 5).

The difficulties with strategies

The potential of strategies for sustainability is only beginning to be realized. Because they are still a relatively new concept, preparing and implementing them is time-consuming, and remains a learning process in most cases. Many strategies are still more akin to conventional plans than to the strategic, dynamic and participatory processes described in this handbook. Also, because they are new, and because of the nature of the problems they are tackling, results are still far off in terms of objectives achieved and improvements in human and environmental conditions.

A strategy is not a panacea. The obstacles to sustainable development discussed earlier can disrupt and impede a strategy and bring it to a halt. It is an ambitious undertaking no matter how well-equipped a country is. Potential problems include the following:

- The concepts of sustainable development and integrating human and ecological concerns are still unfamiliar and poorly worked out. Some of the required methods are not widely known (a constraint that this handbook aims to address). Some remain to be developed and tested.
- The changes promoted by the strategy may include changes in decision-making structures and resource allocation, which may be resisted by those in government and positions of influence.
- The process calls for wide participation and consensus-building, and hence for freedom of expression and assembly, which may not be acceptable to certain forms of government. In addition, consensus is often not possible on issues about which there are deep differences in values.
- Because it deals with complex issues and involves many interest groups, a strategy usually requires time to develop, plus significant managerial and other resources.
- The long-term nature of strategies – optimally longer than the tenure of a particular government – means that their continuity is often at risk.
- The process relies on cross-sectoral thinking and techniques, for which traditions and skills may be weak.
- The process is necessarily experimental: not all outcomes can be foreseen and few can be guaranteed.
- For some issues, external forces beyond the reach of the strategy (like terms of trade and international markets) may be immovable constraints.

Some of these difficulties may prevent the successful development of a strategy. The cyclical nature of strategies allows them to

be incremental and flexible. Consequently, many difficulties can be tackled as part of the strategy process. Opportunities for doing this are identified in later chapters. The conditions necessary for an effective national strategy are identified in Chapter 4.

Conclusion

Sustainable development means improving and maintaining the well-being of people and ecosystems. Since we cannot stand still, the alternative to sustainable development is a situation in which ecosystems degrade and lose their viability and people's choices are limited by a mounting struggle against want, insecurity and catastrophe. The poor already live with this situation and there is evidence that it is spreading.

In general, present values, knowledge systems, technologies and institutions make it easier to live unsustainably than sustainably. Changing them is an enormous challenge, made all the more difficult by the fact that many people feel threatened by change, and viable alternatives are not clear.

An integrated approach to these problems is necessary; one that combines concern for people and concern for ecosystems. Also needed are processes to encourage and focus public discussion, negotiation, mediation, and development of a political consensus. Strategies for sustainability can provide both these needs.

Strategic initiatives like national conservation strategies, environmental actions plans and national development plans provide building blocks and experience for the development of national sustainable development strategies. They show some of the benefits and many of the difficulties of undertaking strategies. Their lessons provide ample material with which to design and undertake an effective strategy for the transition to sustainability.








Endnote

Chapters of Agenda 21 *that describe the need for national strategies: Preamble 1.3; Social and Economic Dimensions 2.6; Combating Poverty 3.9; Changing Consumption Patterns 4.26; Demographic Dynamics and Sustainability 5.31, 5.56; Protection and Promotion of Human Health 6.40; Promoting Sustainable Human Settlement Patterns 7.30, 7.51; Integrating Environment and Development in Decision-Making 8.3, 8.4, 8.7; Protection of the Atmosphere 9.12; Integrated Approach to the Planning and Management of Land Resources 10.6; Combatting Deforestation 11.4, 11.13; Fragile Ecosystems, Desertification and Drought 12.4, 12.37; Sustainable Agriculture 14.4, 14.45; Biodiversity, objectives (b); Biotechnology 16.17; Oceans 17.6, 17.39; Freshwater and Water Resources 18.11, 18.12, 18.40; Toxic Chemicals 19.58; Solid Wastes 21.10, 21.18, 21.30; Local Authorities 23.2; Financial Resources 33.8, 33.22, 33.15; Science 35.7, 35.16; Education 36.5; National Capacity Building 37.4, 37.5, 37.7, 37.10; International Institutions 38.13, 38.25, 38.36, 38.38, 38.39, 38.40; Information 40.4; Rio Declaration – Principle 10; Convention on Biodiversity – Article 6; Convention on Climate Change – Article 3, 4, 12.*

Chapters of Caring for the Earth *that describe the need for national strategies:*

Chapter 8, Providing a National Framework for Integrating Development and Conservation: Action 8.2; Chapter 13, Farm and Range Lands: Action 13.1; Chapter 17, Implementing the Strategy: Action 17.7; Box 31 (Targets – page 180: Adoption by all countries of a national strategy for sustainability by the year 2000); and Annex 8, Strategies for Sustainability.

Chapter 4

Building a National Sustainable Development Strategy

Strategies may be international, national, or local, and they may be sectoral or multi-sectoral. This handbook covers national multi-sectoral strategies. In many countries, economic and environmental strategies are unintegrated, each being undertaken parallel to the other. The number of partially integrated strategies is growing as environment strategies address economic and social concerns, and development plans pay more attention to environmental factors. Although integration is increasing, no fully integrated sustainable development strategy yet exists.

A national sustainable development strategy should build on existing strategy initiatives such as a national conservation strategy, environmental action plan or development plan, or a sectoral or subnational strategy. Only in exceptional circumstances will it need to start from scratch.

Conditions required before developing a multi-sectoral national strategy include: a defined need and purpose; a location for the strategy's steering committee and secretariat where they can have the greatest influence on the national development system; high level support; the commitment of key participants; and a conducive political and social climate.

Necessary conditions that can be generated during the strategy process include: wide understanding of the concepts of sustainable development and the strategy, and of the need for both; clear goals and objectives; a body of well trained, experienced and committed people to drive the strategy; adequate resources; and effective communications.

Many of these conditions can be developed by working on a strategy which is less ambitious than an NSDS, such as a sectoral, regional or local strategy. The feasibility and scope of an NSDS can be determined by assessing whether the conditions can be met (and how to meet them), where change is most needed, how the strategy would relate to the decision-making system, how existing strategy processes can best be enhanced, what resources would be needed, and how they could be provided.








The main kinds of national strategy

The many different kinds of environment and development strategies may be grouped into six categories, depending on their geographical scope – international, national, or local – and on whether they are devoted to a particular sector or theme or are multi-sectoral (Table 1).

- International strategies may be global in scope or cover two or more countries grouped politically or by natural region.
- National strategies focus on a single nation. Various forms of them are described in Box 6. In countries with federal systems, provincial, state or territorial strategies are similar in scope and organization to national strategies.
- Local or regional strategies cover parts of nations or provinces, the parts being defined politically or administratively (municipalities, counties, regional districts, etc) or naturally (coastal zones, drainage basins, mountain ranges, forests, etc).

At present, most multi-sectoral national strategies have a primary focus on either environment or development. Conservation strategies and environmental action plans cover many environmental and resource management issues, from biodiversity to human settlements. They aim to achieve specific conservation or environmental objectives and to integrate environmental conservation into development.

Conservation strategies and environmental action plans point out the contribution of conservation to development, but seldom deal directly with other aspects of development. They tend to have had their strongest inputs from environmental and natural resource interests, and their inclusion of economic and social interests is usually weaker, employing few techniques for examining economic and social issues.

Development plans cover resource allocation, infrastructure development, public investment, employment generation, and many other aspects of economic development. Economic development tends to be interpreted narrowly, however, and environmental and social concerns are rarely treated in depth. Some development plans explicitly recognize the impact of the plan on the environment and the contribution of environmental resources to the plan's objectives. But environmental analysis is usually cursory and poorly integrated with economic analysis.

In many countries, economic and environmental strategies are not integrated. Each is undertaken independently, often at a different time, or, at best, in parallel to the other. Development planning and decision-making largely ignore environmental concerns, including the environmental strategy, if one

Table 1: Classification of selected environment and development strategies

	Multi-sectoral	Sectoral or Thematic
International	• Stockholm Conference Action Plan[1] • World Conservation Strategy[2] • Report of World Commission on Environment and Development (Our Common Future)[3] • Report of Latin American and Caribbean Commission on Development and Environment (Our Own Agenda)[4] • Caring for the Earth: a Strategy for Sustainable Living[5] • Agenda 21[6] • Strategies for shared regions (Regional Seas Programmes, river basin strategies, etc)	• Global Biodiversity Strategy[7] • Tropical Forestry Action Programme[8] • Strategy and Agenda for Action for Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development[9] • Global Strategy for Health for All by the Year 2000[10] • Plan of Action to Combat Desertification[11] • World Population Action Plan[12] • International Environmental • Education Programme[13] • Vancouver Action Plan for Human Settlements[14] • Mar del Plata Action Plan for Water Resources Development[15] • Strategy for the Protection of the Marine Environment[16] • Climate Change Strategy[17]
National *	• National Development Plans • National Conservation Strategies • National Environmental Action Plans • Green Plans • National Environmental Management Plans • National Sustainable Development Strategies • Provincial conservation and sustainable development strategies	• Sectoral master plans • Tropical Forestry Action Plans • National Plans to Combat Desertification • National or provincial strategies and action plans on biodiversity, climate change, energy, environmental education, indigenous peoples, population, etc.
Regional or local	• Conservation/environmental/ sustainable development strategies and action plans for political/ administrative regions, natural regions, municipalities, etc.	• Regional or local strategies and action plans on biodiversity, climate change, energy, environmental education, indigenous peoples, population, etc.

*Note: shading indicates strategies covered by this book. * National includes provincial or equivalent strategies in countries with a federal system. 1. UN 1972; 2 IUCN/UNEP/WWF 1980; 3. WCED 1987; 4. UNDP/IADB 1990; 5. IUCN/UNEP/WWF 1991; 6. UNCED 1992 7. WRI/UNDP/UNEP 1992; 8. FAO/WRI/W.BANK/ UNDP 1987; 9. FAO 1991; 10. WHO 1981; 11. UNCOD 1977; 12. WPC 1974; 13. UNEP/UNESCO 1975; 14. UNCHS 1976; 15. UNWC 1977; 16. IMO 1983; 17. WMO/UNEP 1992.*








Box 6: Various types of national strategy

Many different strategic approaches have been advocated by governments and international agencies in different contexts. They cover a spectrum, from those that focus mainly on environmental concerns and their integration into the development process — for example, the early National Conservation Strategies (NCSs) — to those that deal with social and economic issues as well; for example, later NCSs and National Environmental Action Plans (NEAPs). Of the approaches listed here, NCSs and NEAPs have provided most of the lessons for all forms of strategy development. Both approaches have had their problems and difficulties as well as successes; but, over time, the lessons learned have led to improvements, with some convergence in approach. National strategies fall into two categories: multi-sectoral; and sectoral or thematic.

Multi-sectoral strategies

National Development Plans encompass a wide variety of planning exercises undertaken by national governments, often by the central Ministry of Finance or Development Planning. They are usually for specific periods, and include five-year rolling plans (focusing on increasing productivity or competitiveness, fiscal targets, major infrastructural development, etc); annual budgets; and plans covering human resources, the structure of manufacturing and industry, and public sector enterprises (including investment and privatization). They also include structural adjustment plans negotiated between governments and the International Monetary Fund/World Bank.

National Conservation Strategies were conceived by IUCN, WWF and UNEP (1980 onwards). These were proposed by the World Conservation Strategy (IUCN/WWF/UNDP 1980) as the means of providing a comprehensive, cross-sectoral analysis of conservation and resource management issues, to integrate environmental concerns into the development process. They have aimed to identify the country's most urgent environmental needs, stimulate national debate and raise public consciousness, help decision-makers set priorities and allocate human and financial resources, and build institutional capacity to handle complex environmental issues. NCSs have been strongly process-oriented. Information has been obtained, and analysis undertaken, by cross-sectoral groups. NCSs have sought to develop political consensus around issues identified through such group interaction. Their results include policy documents approved at high level, action plans, and specific programmes and projects.

box continues

National Environmental Action Plans are promoted by the World Bank (1987 onwards) as a condition for receiving loans. These have been undertaken primarily by host country organizations (usually a coordinating ministry) with technical and financial assistance from the World Bank, various international organizations, NGOs and other donors. They have been designed expressly to provide a framework for integrating environmental considerations into a nation's overall economic and social development programs, sometimes in response to structural adjustment imperatives. They also make recommendations for specific actions, outlining the environmental policies, legislation, institutional arrangements, and investment strategies required. They have usually culminated in a package of environmentally-related investment projects, many of which are intended for donor assistance (World Bank 1990, 1991).

Green Plans, produced to date by Canada and the Netherlands, are an evolving process of comprehensive, national programmes for environmental improvement and resource stewardship, with government-wide objectives and commitments. Key goals include cleaner air, water and soil; protection of ecosystems and species; and contributions to global environmental security. The Netherlands National Environmental Policy Plan is radical. It calls for massive reductions in many emissions and wastes within a generation, backed by major clean-up of contaminated sites, to restore and maintain environmental carrying capacity. Targets and schedules provide a means of gauging success and reinforcing the commitment to environmentally responsible decision-making.

National Environmental Management Plans are currently being developed by many island countries of the South Pacific, coordinated by the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) with support from the Asian Development Bank, UNDP and IUCN. These plans follow a process of round table discussions and consultation with key decision-makers and organizations. They lead to the definition of a policy framework and portfolio of programmes and projects for donor support.

National Sustainable Development Strategies (NSDSs) were called for by Caring for the Earth and Agenda 21. In this handbook, we suggest NSDS as a generic name for a participatory and cyclical process of planning and action to achieve economic, ecological and social objectives in a balanced and integrated manner. NSDSs may take many forms, and incorporate or build on many of the above approaches (EAPs, NCSs, etc.).

box continues








Provincial conservation and sustainable development strategies: in federal countries, provincial (or state) strategies are the equivalent of NCSs and NSDSs in countries with unitary systems. Federal governments may undertake national strategies as well.

Sectoral or thematic strategies

Sectoral Master Plans, such as agricultural sector plans and protected area systems plans, are often prepared as a sectoral expression of a five-year development plan, and as a means to coordinate donor involvement in a sector. They have been widely prepared in Asia, sponsored by the Asian Development Bank, for such sectors as forestry, agriculture and tourism. Most are not participatory processes. Several have involved a massive research and policy development effort over many years, and have attempted to address inter-sectoral issues. The plans are a comprehensive information resource, but some bear little relation to the capacity of the sector to implement them.

Tropical Forestry Action Plans (1986 onwards) are sponsored by FAO and promoted under the Tropical Forestry Action Programme (TFAP). These are related to a global strategy developed by FAO, UNDP, the World Bank and World Resources Institute (FAO/WRI/WB/UNDP 1987). National TFAP exercises are undertaken by the country concerned, starting with a multi-sectoral review of forest-related issues, and leading to policy and strategy plans. They are followed by an implementation phase for policies, programmes and projects. The plan seeks to produce informed decisions and action programmes with explicit national targets on policies and practices, afforestation and forest management, forest conservation and restoration, and integration with other sectors. Round tables involving governmental bodies, NGOs, bilateral and multilateral donor agencies, and international organizations are held at different stages of planning and implementation.

National Plans to Combat Desertification (1985–1988) are sponsored by CILSS (the Permanent Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel). These documents analyze the socio-economic and ecological situation, review current activities and discuss policies and actions required to combat drought; they represent the national anti-desertification plans for a number of Sahelian countries.

In addition, national plans are arising out of the international Climate Change Convention and the Biodiversity Convention, and country poverty assessments are planned by the World Bank.

box continues

Documents contributing to the strategy processes

Various country environmental profiles and state-of-the-environment reports are prepared by governments, bilateral aid donors and NGOs. In general, they present information on conditions and trends, identify and analyze causes, links and constraints, and indicate emerging issues and problems.

UNCED National Reports (1991–1992) on environment and sustainable development are descriptive and analytical documents. They were prepared by national governments, sometimes with NGO involvement. In practice, they varied enormously, but the UNCED Secretariat guidelines proposed that each report should address development trends and environmental impacts and responses to environment and development issues such as principles and goals, policies, legislation, institutions, programmes and projects, and international cooperation. Many countries consulted local, regional and international NGOs and industry. The reports identify how national economic and other activities can stay within the constraints imposed by the need to conserve natural resources. Some consider issues of equity and justice. Certain of them are intended as the foundation for future NSDSs.

CSD National Reports are designed for reporting to the Commission for Sustainable Development on progress in implementing Agenda 21. Few have been produced to date.

Note: The 1993 Directory of Country Environmental Studies (WRI/IIED/IUCN 1992) lists, and provides abstracts for, most of the main documents resulting from the above approaches.

exists. Environmental strategies have been undertaken without sufficient regard for existing planning and decision-making procedures. Some strategies have either duplicated or otherwise failed to coordinate with existing individual sector development plans (such as forestry, agriculture and wildlife). There has often been scant assessment of how the strategy would relate to the development planning system, how to use its strengths, and how to influence it most effectively. One reason for this is the failure to overcome perceptions of the conservation strategy as anti-development or as applying to only a few sectors.

As environmental strategies address economic and social objectives more directly, and development plans pay more attention to environmental objectives, the number of partially integrated strategies is increasing. They include development plans








that have not just an environmental chapter, but incorporate environmental considerations in all chapters. They also include conservation strategies and environmental plans that relate directly to the development planning system, and so have begun to make improvements to the development planning process and sectoral decisions.

There are many reasons for this move towards integration:

- increasing knowledge about development and environment issues and their interactions;
- the emergence of global environmental and development concerns as key international issues;
- greater public interest and pressure for change; and
- the need to define more precise actions, including an environmental investment portfolio.

We know of no example of a fully integrated strategy; one that combines all aspects of social, economic and environmental policy into a sustainable development strategy, as called for by Agenda 21 and Caring for the Earth. The trend is clearly in this direction, however. Sustainable development strategies have the potential to replace the development planning process as we know it today.

The history of national strategies

Placing national strategies for sustainable development in a historical context can help to ease the confusion felt by governments and communities when confronted with the vast array of unrelated strategy options, models and demands on their limited resources.

The momentum for national strategies has built up over the past 30 years. The various approaches have evolved in three broad stages, leading gradually to greater emphasis on local initiative.

- For some ten years from the early 1970s, effort was concentrated on developing international strategies to tackle specific problems such as population, human settlements and pollution.
- The 1980s saw the international effort overlaid by a growing interest in more comprehensive strategies at a national level among governments of both north and south. By the end of 1994, more than 100 countries will have embarked upon some form of comprehensive national strategy process; all striving for cross-sectoral relevance and impact.
- The 1990s have seen an emphasis placed on the need to build capacities to institutionalize and refine these processes with growing attention to the sub-national or local level, for that is where action takes effect. Each level continues to be important in building the global strategic framework for sustainable development.

International efforts to nurture cooperative management of common resources have been limited by the ability of each participating country to act. Governments have accepted a growing range of international obligations and have needed to express these in umbrella national strategies.

A recent example is the Convention on Biodiversity Conservation, which calls for the preparation of national biodiversity strategies. Initially, countries took their lead from the World Conservation Strategy (WCS), published in 1980. The WCS introduced the term 'sustainable development' and promoted the preparation of national conservation strategies (NCSs). This concept, based on a process of consensus-building, was the main guiding force in national attempts to reconcile conservation with development for the first half of the 1980s. By 1985, some 30 countries had embarked on a NCS process, largely in isolation from one another but often with assistance from IUCN, which was learning as it went along.

The World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), which ran from 1985 to 1987, reinforced the value of national strategic approaches and led to a second wave of initiatives. What was becoming apparent during this period was the need for a new, strategic, inter-sectoral approach to managing change; an approach that would overcome the weaknesses of economic planning and piecemeal environment protection policies.

At that time, a number of international organizations came on the scene, with a variety of thematic strategies for selected countries. This greatly complicated the situation. Until then, strategies generally had been the initiatives of governments or national groups, proceeding at a pace and pattern best suited to them. From 1985 on, in response to a global action plan on drought, the United Nations Sudano-Sahelian Office (UNSO) for Africa supported the preparation of national plans to combat desertification. A year later, after the development of a global forestry strategy, the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) began sponsoring the preparation of national Tropical Forestry Action Plans (TFAPs). To date, TFAPs have been prepared for 91 countries in all parts of the world. In 1987, the World Bank began helping four countries in Africa prepare National Environment Action Plans (NEAPs). By 1991, ten additional NEAPs had been started. These were in response to an internal World Bank directive, requiring action plans as a Bank loan precondition for the least developed countries. In 1992, this directive was reinforced and expanded to cover all 110 of the Bank's borrower countries.

It was appropriate that the next major addition to the strategies family should








come with the UN Conference on Environment and Development, otherwise known as the Earth Summit, held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. The action plan of the conference, Agenda 21, calls on governments to adopt national strategies for sustainable development that 'build upon and harmonize the various sectoral, social and environmental policies and plans that are operating in the country'. A Capacity 21 programme was established within UNDP to promote and support the strategies.

The labels in this smorgasbord of strategies – for example, NCSs, TFAPs, NEAPs, NSDSs, Green Plans and NEMPs (National Environment Management Plans in the South Pacific) – imply that each is a distinct entity. In practice, this is not so: there is a great diversity within each type, and overlap among them. Yet one can safely generalize that strategies which have departed from the original model to express true national identity have tended to be the most successful.

Entry points into a multi-sectoral national strategy

It is likely that some kind of strategy on environment and development is being, or has been, undertaken in most countries. Fresh initiatives should be linked to ongoing or past processes, and be clearly identified as extensions or components of them. NSDSs and other multi-sectoral strategies should build on existing strategic initiatives, not attempt to duplicate or ignore them. Some NEAPs, for example, have ignored established NCSs. Substantial investments have already been made in these existing processes. New investment is likely to be more effective if it draws upon and enhances these processes and does not distract, undermine or devalue them.

The object is not to create a new or separate sustainable development process but to improve existing processes of planning and decision-making. National economic plans, and longer-term strategies such as Malaysia's *Vision 2020*, are highly influential because they are linked to powerful economic, industrial and financial ministries. NSDSs should be fully integrated with these plans. Otherwise they risk being marginalized as outside the mainstream of national priorities, and they may be unable to influence the main economic agents of change.

Entry into the kind of multi-sectoral strategy cycle described in this handbook will therefore probably involve one of the following:

- the further development of an existing multi-sectoral national strategy, such as a National Development Plan, National Conservation Strategy, or Environmental Action Plan;
- expanding a narrowly-focused initiative, such as a structural adjustment programme;

- building on a sectoral or thematic strategy or on a multi-sectoral regional or local strategy; and
- start-up (although this implies starting from scratch, all countries have some form of policy-making and planning process on which to build).

Necessary conditions

The conditions required for an effective multi-sectoral national strategy depend on its scope. The more comprehensive a strategy, the more complex it is. It will require a bigger information base and a wider range of participants. It also demands more money and professional staff with considerably more integration and management skills.

Many difficulties with national strategies have been due to inexperience and lack of appropriate models. Sometimes problems have been severe enough to cause the strategies to lose momentum, reach an impasse on critical issues, lose leadership and vision, or even be abandoned. In some cases, countries have embarked on multi-sectoral strategies before they were ready for them. The necessary conditions and capacity may need to be developed gradually, through a less ambitious strategy process that, in due course, can be made more comprehensive.

Conditions before developing the strategy

Necessary conditions required before developing a multi-sectoral national strategy include:

1. A defined need and purpose. The need for a strategy, as the best response to well identified problems, must be evident. It may be that a multi-sectoral national strategy is not an appropriate course of action. A thematic strategy, local strategy, or some more specific action may be better for the time being.

2. A location for the steering committee and secretariat where they can have the greatest influence on the national development system. It is impossible to develop and implement a strategy without a clear decision about which organization is directly responsible for it. If the strategy is to be influential, the organization has to be influential.

3. High level support. Political support at a high level – parliamentary, cabinet or head of state – is crucial for the development of a strategy. Support must be visible, and must be based on an understanding of the strategy process and its costs and likely benefits. Since the strategy includes the formulation and implementation of government policy, the highest levels must both support the strategy process and understand its products as they evolve. This support should include:








- a commitment to develop and implement government policy arising from the strategy, and to commit government funds (and, if necessary, donor assistance) for this purpose;
- the intention to follow and to consider the policy implications of the strategy throughout the process, and not merely to consider the whole strategy agenda whenever it is formally submitted for adoption;
- instructions to government departments that their policy formulation and planning should be coordinated with the strategy, unless the topic is outside the scope of the strategy; and
- the intention to keep the strategy process open and inclusive, and not confidential and closed – encouraging participation in the strategy, giving participants ready access to information, and encouraging them to adopt critical approaches.

4. The commitment of key participants. The participation of certain groups and individuals will depend on the strategy's scope and purpose. Obviously their participation is essential; if some cannot be induced to participate, this is a sign of inadequate support. A more limited strategy, requiring the involvement of only those who are keen to participate, should be considered, with a view to bringing others on board as the strategy gains in momentum and support.

5. A conducive political and social climate. Political unrest will make it difficult, if not impossible, to develop a strategy, mainly because the necessary broad consensus cannot be reached. However, the situation shortly after a major political change could provide the right stimulus. Political conditions must be conducive to free speech and participation, giving confidence for creative thinking and a mandate to think critically.

Conditions that should be provided while developing the strategy

Necessary conditions that can be generated while developing a strategy include:

1. Wide understanding within the country of the concepts of sustainable development and the strategy; and of the need for both. This can be developed in the course of the strategy, provided a nucleus of key people and organizations are supportive from the outset.

2. Clear objectives, together with a monitoring mechanism, so that the strategy continues to pursue them and is not diverted or hijacked. The objectives have to be those of the people implementing the strategy, and so must be set in a participatory manner. They can be refined as the strategy progresses.

3. An engine to drive the strategy, including well-trained and experienced personnel. A body of committed people inside and outside government is needed to drive the strategy throughout, and to provide the main energy source. Capable staff with good management skills and judgement are essential for managing the strategy process. The capacity to manage the process can be developed as part of the strategy.

4. Adequate resources. Funds have to be available, either from national sources or a combination of national sources and donor funding (see Chapter 10 on donor support). National sources include special allocations of government revenue, adjustments to existing government sectoral budgets and investment plans, the corporate sector, and other participants, such as NGOs. The minimum required is for a steering committee and secretariat to carry out core functions of policy review and development and initial capacity-building activities.

5. Effective communication. Communication is the means by which participants in the strategy:

- exchange information with each other;
- reach agreement with each other on actions;
- undertake actions to change or strengthen values and knowledge; and
- inform others about the strategy.

Together with participation, communication is the crucial element of the strategy, pervading all others. A communications plan needs to be developed and implemented, covering modes and frequency of communication among participants and between participants and others.

Overcoming obstacles

Several obstacles must be overcome in order to foster the conditions for an effective strategy.

Lack of support

A lack of high-level support for a strategy can be overcome by developing awareness and support among interest groups and the public, and by taking every advantage of events that publicize the need for and benefits of a strategy. Many strategies received their initial stimulus from international initiatives, notably the World Conservation Strategy, the report of the WCED (Our Common Future), and UNCED's Agenda 21. Others have been galvanized by disasters and crises such as the Mount Pinatubo eruption in the Philippines. In Zimbabwe, politicians were influenced to support the development of the national conservation strategy when they were flown to a drought-stricken region and saw for themselves the full extent of land degradation.








Lack of capacity

If there is a lack of well-trained personnel, experience or resources, there are several ways to build on, and learn by, experience, using limited resources. One way is to form a team to undertake projects that could eventually contribute to a strategy. Bhutan, for example, has begun by forming a National Environmental Secretariat, with close working ties to the National Planning Commission, whose first task has been to develop an environmental assessment procedure for the country.

Another option is to develop either a thematic or a local strategy first. The more modest subject scope of a thematic strategy (covering a single theme such as energy or forestry), and the geographical scope of a local strategy (covering a region or locality), can make them suitable as pilot projects. Through them, the necessary skills can be developed in strategy preparation and implementation, including integrating sectors and managing a complex participatory process. Guinea-Bissau is an example of a small, yet highly diverse country that is developing four local strategies and a regional strategy to gain experience and build the capacity to undertake a national strategy. An advantage of these local strategies is that they cover areas that, ethnically, economically and ecologically, are relatively homogeneous. This makes it easier to find solutions toward sustainable development, although difficulties remain in obtaining the support of national authorities for local development plans. The regional strategy covers half the area of the country and two-thirds of its population. So its problems are similar to those that would be faced by a national strategy, but on a somewhat more manageable scale.

Determining the scope

National, local, or sectoral strategies: which comes first?

The variety of national approaches suggests that every answer is potentially correct. Malaysia began with state conservation strategies before embarking on a national conservation strategy, while Pakistan and Zambia developed their national conservation strategy first, and are now developing provincial conservation strategies. Australia's national conservation strategy led to Victoria's state conservation strategy, which, in turn, provided a framework for municipal conservation strategies. Several of Canada's provinces and territories undertook strategies before the federal government; and in some provinces, the first strategies were at the local level. In Cuba, regional multisectoral strategies provided crucial experience for the development of a national sectoral strategy (on protected areas). Guatemala has also started regionally (in Petén). Nicaragua began at the national level, but involved all municipalities in developing the strategy. Ethiopia's national strategy is being

Box 7: Many strategies but no strategy? The case of British Columbia

The Canadian province of British Columbia illustrates the complex mixture of strategies that can arise as governments respond to different political pressures. The province has several thematic strategies (such as biodiversity and protected areas); two multi-sectoral strategies (the Strategy for Sustainability and the Land Use Strategy) and a number of local strategies. Connections among the strategies are not entirely clear.

The Strategy for Sustainability is being developed by an advisory body: the Round Table on the Environment and the Economy. It focuses on selected issues: energy, an economic framework, education, and community sustainability.

The Land Use Strategy is being developed by all groups with an interest in land use (a great many), guided by an independent statutory body: the Commission on Resources and Environment. The strategy is conceived as having three levels: provincial (a framework for the entire province); regional (involving negotiation and allocation of land among the main types of uses); and local (involving detailed management by users, communities and government agencies). Logically, the provincial framework would have been developed first. But allocation of land in regions such as Vancouver Island is politically much more pressing. Consequently, although the strategy is expected eventually to have local and provincial levels, the regional level is being worked on first.

Several local strategies have been developed, mostly in areas where land use controversies are particularly heated. Many were initiated before the land use strategy began.

In short, British Columbia has sectoral and multi-sectoral strategies at local, regional and provincial levels. The scope and level of the strategies has been determined in response to the political needs of the day. This has given each strategy a high degree of political support, at least initially. Also, the number of different strategies at different levels has provided opportunities for a great many different interest groups, agencies and individuals to be involved in the debate on, and movement toward, sustainable development. They have also gained valuable experience in undertaking strategies.

However, the somewhat confusing and ad hoc array of strategic initiatives, coupled with poorly developed links with other decision-making machinery, has its costs.

elaborated through a set of regional processes. The province of British Columbia has multi-sectoral, sectoral and local strategies (Box 7).

Local or regional multi-sectoral strategies and national thematic strategies are valuable for developing experience and building capacities to undertake more complex








national strategies. But they are not without problems and are only effective where supported by a suitable national policy framework. Local resource allocation and management decisions taken without reference to national priorities and criteria can result in unacceptable disparities with other areas or simply may be impossible to implement. The success of the Tortuguero Conservation Strategy, a local strategy to control the expansion of banana plantations in Costa Rica, depends not only on actions it is generating at the community level but also on national-level actions.

Local strategies often consist of a mixture of actions undertaken by the participants and recommended actions to be undertaken by higher-level government authorities. Appropriate national policies can define the scope of such recommendations and so ensure that the expectations of the local strategy are realistic. A local strategy in Canada collapsed because of the lack of policies at the provincial level that would have enabled strategy participants to strike an acceptable balance between jobs and protected areas.

There are also risks to undertaking a thematic or sectoral strategy before a multi-sectoral strategy. Sectoral strategies often ignore important inter-sectoral links and impacts. It may prove difficult for an eventual multi-sectoral strategy to harmonize different thematic or sectoral strategies that have been developed in isolation.

Ideally, a national multi-sectoral strategy should be developed before local or sectoral strategies, because it can provide a framework for all other strategies whereas local and sectoral strategies cannot. But if it is easier or more effective to develop a local or sectoral strategy first – or if one or the other is necessary to build capacity or support for a national multi-sectoral strategy – then the local or sectoral strategy should come first.

These are key questions that will help to determine whether to undertake a national multi-sectoral strategy, a national sectoral strategy, or a regional or local strategy:

- Where is the need for change most critical: the nation, a region, a local area, or a sector? Would policies at a higher (eg national) level constrain or foster the possibilities for change at a lower (eg local) level?
- What organizational/staffing/financial capacity is required for the strategy?
- What conditions for an effective strategy are missing and how could they be fostered?
- What can be done with minimal external assistance?

The decision-making system and existing strategies

Where does the NSDS fit in the decision-making system and how does it relate to existing initiatives? In practice, almost all

countries are already likely to have several multi-sectoral and sectoral strategies or strategy-like initiatives at national, local and intermediate levels. The questions then are:

- How would the national sustainable development strategy relate to existing planning and decision-making processes? Does it fill a clear niche?
- What opportunities are there to build on and enhance existing strategy processes and structures? Should the national sustainable development strategy: a) be developed from an existing strategy? If so, which one?; b) start off as a coordinating framework for several existing initiatives, and be developed from there? If so, which strategies and related initiatives most need coordination?; or c) be developed from scratch?

The desirable alternatives are a) or b). Alternative c) would apply only in the unlikely situation of a complete absence of strategic initiatives; if there had been a long gap since the last initiative ceased to play any meaningful role in the country; or if there were unacceptable political costs associated with existing or recent initiatives.

Upgrading an existing strategy

There are several ways of developing one or more existing strategies into a National Sustainable Development Strategy.

If there is an economic development plan but no conservation strategy or environmental action plan, then the latter could be prepared, although there is a risk that it would be a poor relation of the development plan. To avoid this:

- the agencies and planning team responsible for the development plan should be closely involved in the conservation strategy; and
- the development plan and conservation strategy should be closely linked, with the scope and content of the two corresponding to each other – one providing the socio-economic perspective, the other the socio-environmental perspective (obviously this will entail modifying the development plan, including expanding its scope).

An alternative procedure would be review, modify and expand the development plan so that it provided fully for conservation of ecological processes and biodiversity, protection of natural and cultural heritage, and sustainable use of resources.

Similarly, if a conservation strategy or environmental action plan exists but there is no economic development plan (often the case in upper-income countries), then the conservation strategy could be reviewed, modified and expanded to address social and economic objectives.








In either case, the logical time for modification and expansion is when the development plan or conservation strategy is due for review. Expanding the scope will involve widening the range of participants in the strategy. Environmental interests and sectors would participate in the development plan; and development sectors and interests would participate in the conservation strategy.

Modifications to the existing development plan or conservation strategy might include:

- Incorporating environmental factors in economic policies, plans and decisions.
- Developing institutions to integrate social, economic, and environmental objectives.
- Incorporating environmental components throughout the development plan. Each sector would identify the contribution of environmental goods and services to the sector and the sector's impact on the environment. The plan would include policies and measures to maintain the environmental goods and services and reduce impacts on the environment. Priority would be given to those areas where environmental goods and services are most at risk or environmental impacts are most severe.
- Incorporating socio-economic components throughout the conservation strategy or environmental action plan. The strategy would address not merely how to ensure that economic activities are environ-mentally sound, but how to improve economic performance in ways that are ecologically sustainable and how to improve the quality of life in ways that are economically viable.

The most appropriate course is to combine development and environmental initiatives into one initiative, involving participants in existing multi-sectoral strategies, and building on the processes, institutions, policies and agreements of those strategies.

An NSDS could start out as a simple way to coordinate and provide a framework for the often-large number of development and environment initiatives that a country pursues at any one time. These may include a national development plan, national conservation strategy, environmental action plan, forestry action plan, biodiversity strategy, and Agenda 21. Without such a framework, there is a risk of conflict and duplication and of new initiatives diverting attention and resources from the overall process.

Chapter 5

Participation in Strategies

Sustainable development involves trade-offs between economic, social and ecological objectives. Such trade-offs cannot be determined by 'scientific' means alone, no matter how multi-disciplinary. They are value judgements, and therefore 'people-centered' approaches to sustainable development strategies are needed. Participation of stakeholder groups is critical for decision-making, and for all tasks of the strategy cycle, taking different forms for each task. The result will be a more realistic strategy, with a broader base of knowledge, understanding and commitment from the groups involved, and with better links to promising local initiatives.

The challenge of participation is considerable: 'horizontal' participation across sectors and geographic regions has to be complemented by 'vertical' participation from national to local levels. Although existing structures and methods for participation are usually weak, it is best to begin by using them. Introducing new elements – participatory inquiry, communications/information and education campaigns, round tables and special committees – is relatively easy and can have great impact. NGOs and local governments can help to bring this about. It is a mistake to think that participation is entirely a non-government affair: ultimately, governments need to find appropriate roles as facilitators in participation, and hence to continually increase the effectiveness of strategies.








Why participation is integral

People involved in strategies for sustainability commonly say that what is important is not the strategy document itself, which becomes outdated almost as soon as it is published, but the strategy's beneficial products in terms of:

- enhanced understanding of sustainable development issues, both within and between interest groups;
- improved communications within and between interest groups;
- consensus on the main issues, and what to do about them;
- networks of committed individuals and institutions; and
- renegotiations of responsibility between interests, and joint actions for sustainable development.

In other words, successful strategies are participatory. Conversely, 'failed' strategies – those that appear to be going nowhere, even though the documentation may look good – are frequently characterized by a lack of participation.

'Tell me and I'll forget; show me and I may remember: involve me and I'll understand.'

quoted by Andrew Campbell, Landcare, Australia

Few strategies, however, have been either entirely participatory or completely non-participatory. Most strategies, to get close to their declared objectives, have had to incorporate existing participation structures and methodologies, improve them or even create new ones.

Agenda 21 echoes these observations. Not only does it call for NSDSs as the principal vehicles for addressing Agenda 21 at national level, but it also recommends that they be developed 'with the widest possible participation'. How can this be done? So far, beyond general observations, there has been little analysis of how participation has taken place in previous strategies, the impacts of this, and the constraints to improvement. There are many challenges; notably, how to focus efforts given the potentially limitless scope of participation and the down-to-earth realities of limited resources and time; and how to build participation into strategies born of bureaucratic or donor initiatives, which themselves are not always conducive to participation.

Sustainable development can be thought of as the balanced achievement of economic, environmental and social goals. This involves the integration of these goals where possible, and making trade-offs among them where necessary. In such a balancing act, however, specific local needs and circumstances must be acknowledged – there is no single mix of goals that is right for every group in every country. Neither is the right mix static: it will evolve over time. A further balancing act is needed to

determine the trade-offs between the current generation and the next. Uncertainties in the environmental system (such as climate change), in the economic system (such as commodity price changes) and in the social system (such as changing numbers of people and their values) need to be accommodated.

One might assume that a judicious mix of economic, environmental and social sciences can arrive at the right balance between goals, and between generations. In practice, however, this is shown not to be the case. A 'science-based' approach such as this should be complemented by a more 'people-centred' approach. This is because:

- Economic, environmental and social goals are value-laden. Therefore local values, as well as local knowledge and ideas, need to be integrated with scientific analyses in strategic decisions. Multiple perspectives should be sought.
- Sustainable development requires the joint awareness and action of governments, communities and individuals. The individual is ultimately the key player. Sustainable development will, in practice, be the result of many millions of actors working separately and together.

Clearly a strategy cannot be planned and implemented by government alone. All actors need to be motivated to deliver a sustainable future. In trade-offs, some actors will be 'losers' and others will be 'winners'. Debate, consensus-building, commitment and action is essential – by both 'winners' and 'losers', and by those who are central to power as well as those who have been marginalized in the past. This is particularly so in the context of a strategy. All parties need to feel some ownership and commitment to the process. A range of groups will be required to act, often jointly, in order for the strategy to be implemented; but each group must feel the actions meet their individual, as well as collective, goals. This is difficult to achieve. A key element is to seek a mandate from affected groups before the strategy policies are defined.

A common response by governments to the challenges of a comprehensive national strategy has been to 'go it alone', often under pressure from development banks. They have viewed the process as a multi-disciplinary, scientific and governmental planning exercise (perhaps involving the academic community). There is a clear distinction between participatory and multi-disiplinary methods, yet these two approaches are not mutually exclusive. Land-use planning and Geographic Information Systems are usually low in participation and higher in multi-disciplinary methods; whereas participatory rural appraisal is very high in participation and not very multi-disciplinary (Carley 1994).

To be effective, national strategies need to be both highly participatory and highly multi-disciplinary. The challenge is to








Box 8: Trends observed as participation in strategies increases

- NGOs, local governments and other catalysts provide more opportunities for participation.
- More use is made of participatory methodologies to gain information on local situations, views and needs.
- External agents facilitate activities, rather than directing or managing them.
- More tasks are done in a participatory way, especially making decisions.
- Decisions are more usually based around consensus.
- More networks are formed.
- More local groups are formed.
- Local groups are increasingly empowered to be active in strategy development and in implementation.
- These groups exercise more local control of resources.
- More work is done jointly, or repartitioned, between government and locals.
- There is increasing emphasis on learning, and approaches are more adaptive.
- Policies and plans become increasingly coherent across sectors.
- The costs of participation, which are initially high, drop considerably.
- The work takes more time, but has greater impact.
- Work programmes become more feasible and practical.
- The institutional environment becomes receptive to further participation.

accomplish this in an efficient manner, establishing a balance that best reflects society's varied perspectives and needs.

It is helpful to consider participation in strategies as a sharing by groups of people in all the tasks ultimately affecting them (information gathering, analysis, decision-making, implementation and capacity-building, and monitoring and evaluation).

Some approaches to participation, in the process of defining the balance among economic, social and environmental goals, and between the present and the future, marginalize affected groups or limit their stake. Box 8 lists trends associated with the progression from activities with lower levels of participation to those with higher participation.

The time taken by participatory work tends to be longer than with normal planning/ project cycles, at least in the first year or so. This is because groups need to form and consult with their constituencies, and debate issues and objectives in a more lengthy

manner than with strategies prepared by 'professionals' alone.

The benefits of participation

The benefits of participation tend to differ with the different tasks, and iterations, of the strategy cycle. They may be summarized by strategy task, as follows:

Participation in information and analysis brings:

- a broad knowledge base and spread of opinion, offering the best informed judgement on issues, trade-offs and options in the time available;
- increased debate, mutual education, understanding of major issues both within and between different groups; and
- the tackling of issues that cannot be identified, properly defined or dealt with by other means (ie, changing values, local conditions, rights and claims and lifestyles, and particularly issues like poverty which otherwise may be submerged).

Participation in policy formulation and planning creates:

- practical and realistic objectives, targets and standards, which are negotiated so that they are locally acceptable, meaningful and practicable;
- 'ownership' of, and commitment to, the strategy, built up by groups actually working on it (essential if the strategy is to result in social mobilization);
- greater political credibility of the strategy than were it just a product of technicians and bureaucrats; and
- accountability and transparency – people can see what 'government' does.

Participation in implementation and monitoring achieves:

- increased capacity (learning by exposure and debate; learning by doing);
- more extensive networks for tasks (for example, monitoring);
- increased momentum and coverage in action programmes through expansion of networks and others buying into the process; and
- efficient mobilization and management of resources and skills.

The costs of participation

Generally, the more participants in a strategy, the higher are the costs of participation. These costs are a function of:

Time requirements. The time commitment to participation will depend on the strategy component and the maturity of the strategy process (ie, how many turns of the cycle have been completed). The planning or policy formulation component has taken three to six months for some World Bank NEAPs with minimal participation. Conversely, it has taken from 18 months to four years to set up and undertake the more








comprehensive participation exercises associated with NCSs and Green Plans (for example, Botswana, Nepal, Canada, and Pakistan) or local strategies (for example, Aga Khan Rural Support Programme [AKRSP], India and Pakistan). We should expect a strategy to progress in a manner, and over a time, that is set by the main participation processes used; consensus-building will usually take the longest. Planning occurs regularly in a strategy process; implementation and monitoring are ongoing. Participation, therefore, is continuous, changing in form, function and breadth throughout the strategy cycle.

Specialist skill requirements. Skills in participatory inquiry, communications, education and media activities are all essential in order to establish the right links and ensure a high quality of communication and participation. Strategies have involved journalists (Nepal), graphic designers and environmental educationalists (Pakistan, Zambia), and participatory rural appraisal staff (AKRSP) to facilitate the communication flow. Each exercise tends to take a specific slant: we do not yet know of a national-level exercise that has consistently employed a broad range of communication skills.

Communications requirements. Participation exercises require the means for different groups to meet at various levels in the field (transport, meeting rooms and equipment), and to communicate through the medium appropriate to the groups in question (telecommunications, mass media, traditional media, etc). The role of public information, education and communications (IEC) in strategies is considered in the final section of this chapter.

Management requirements of the participation process. The management of all participatory components is complex, and requires professionals with advanced administration skills and those who know how to apply the various skills and methodologies to the appropriate participation structures available in the country. However, process management should not amount to orchestration; there is a need for skilled facilitation. The outcome of participatory activities will be only as socially and politically diverse as the openness of the facilitators permits.

Initial participation exercises in strategies tend to be relatively expensive; the costs of making contact, establishing mechanisms, etc, can be high. Many 'failed' participation exercises are the result of early abandonment (within the first year or two) as patience with the necessarily slow and sometimes experimental start to participation wears thin in the face of donor or governmental pressures for a 'product'.

Experience with participation exercises in major local strategies shows that the costs can go down considerably with each iteration; as the scope, purpose and methodologies for participation of each

group in each strategy task become clearer and better focused in the strategy work plan.

The risks of participation

A balance must be struck between involving as wide a range of participants as possible to forge a broad-based and durable consensus without overloading the facilitating and mana-gerial capacities of the animators and leaders of the strategy. The more well-developed and representative the existing participation mechanisms, the more cost-effective they are likely to be. If managerial capacities are weak and participatory mechanisms are poor, the number of participants can be limited at first; but participation should be increased with the development and reiteration of strategy tasks.

The more immediate risks of a participatory approach, as opposed to a top-down approach, are:

- The strategic vision/direction may be less clear, at least for the first year or so. Given the multiple perspectives incorporated, it may be more difficult to focus on priorities.
- Momentum may be lost, as the time taken for participatory strategies is longer. This is possible at both 'higher' levels, including donors, and 'lower' levels; but can be minimized by regular feedback of information (and, most important, by implementing policies on which consensus has already been reached at the earliest stage possible).
- The integrated approach to social, environmental and economic problems that comes with broad participation is more complex than a single system of analysis and response.
- Control over certain critical aspects (for example, pollution regulation) may be lost if responsibilities become spread too thin among participants.
- If improperly managed, the participatory processes can result in expectations being raised too high among certain groups; more issues being identified than can be dealt with; or impasses and conflicts where consensus or compromise cannot be reached.
- There are political risks of stimulating or aggravating conflicts between groups, or having the process co-opted by elites.

These risks can be minimized through good planning for participation, good management of the participation process and through maintaining independence from party politics. Adequate time, and a determination not to rush into producing a document or into taking precipitous actions, are required.

The use of participatory approaches should not be a one-off event, but be part of a process in which incremental learning is one step in a longer-term commitment to adaptive planning and sustainable development. Success will come only with the








adoption of new principles and practices for joint learning and action. Most important, effective participatory work requires shifts in attitudes and behaviour in professionals, and shifts in institutional settings. Participatory methodologies alone are not enough to ensure significant institutional change. The strategy process should not only adopt the best of existing participation approaches, but itself be a vehicle for introducing the new values and approaches required for sustainable development.

Structures and methods for participation

The strategy should build on the structures and methodologies available for participation in the country or locality.

Examples of existing systems and institutions on which to build include the planning system, the political system, traditional structures (for example, village-based systems) religious systems, the education system, the agricultural extension system, the arts/theatre and the media.

In the absence or weakness of existing participatory structures, informal or one-off structures can be put together specially for the strategy process; for example, special committees and round tables – constituted for the strategy – to discuss specific common or cross-sectoral issues. This is a very common approach, at least for the first iteration of a strategy.

Methodologies which a strategy can utilise include participatory inquiry, resource surveys, 'Green' audits, consensus-building, planning methods, EIA negotiation, voluntary agreements, joint management, traditional methods (for example, of conflict resolution), media techniques (for example, 'phone-ins') and communications and information techniques.

All of these methods need to become well-known and routinely used. Special efforts should be made to build capacity in them even before a strategy begins. Experience in major local strategies has shown that the early development of participatory inquiry has been particularly critical. This explains why there are so many variants of participatory inquiry established under different names for local circumstances (see Box 9).

Consensus

One of the aims of participation is to develop a strategy with a broad base of support. This requires building consensus among participants on objectives, principles, issues, priorities, policies and actions.

In many strategy processes, decisions by the steering committee and other committees are also made by consensus, although consensus is not always clearly defined. Consensus means general agreement: a condition in which all participants can live with the result, although not all (and maybe

Box 9: Participatory inquiry

In recent years, there has been a blossoming of participatory approaches for research, extension, planning and monitoring. Some focus on problem diagnosis; others are more oriented to community empowerment. Some participatory approaches in rural areas concentrate on facilitating on-farm or farmer-led research. Other approaches are designed to get professionals in the field listening to farmers. Some have been developed in the health context; some for watershed management; and some for food security assessment. Some have been developed in government extension institutions and others in NGOs. This diversity of names, applications and 'owners' is a sign of strength. It implies that each variant is to some extent dependent on location-specific contexts and problems.

These new approaches and methods imply downwards shifts of initiative, responsibility and action; especially to farmers and rural people themselves. Earlier investigations, where researchers collected data and took it away for processing, are superseded by more investigation and analysis by local people, who share their knowledge and insights with outsiders. Methods like participatory mapping, analysis of aerial photographs, matrix scoring and ranking, flow and link diagramming, seasonal analysis, and trend diagramming are not just means for farmers to inform outsiders, but methods for farmers' own analysis.

Even though there is great difference between these approaches, a series of common principles underpin most of them:

- A defined methodology and systematic learning process: in each case this focuses on cumulative learning.
- Multiple perspectives: the objective is to seek diversity, rather than characterise complexity in terms of average values.
- Group inquiry process: this implies three types of mix, namely multi-disciplinary; multi-sectoral; and mixes of outsiders (professionals) and insiders (local people).
- Context-specific: the methodology is flexible enough to be adapted and changed to suit each new set of conditions and actors.
- Facilitating experts: the role of the 'expert' is best thought of as helping the people in their situation carry out their own study.
- Leading to action: the inquiry process leads to debate about change, and debate changes the perceptions of the actors and their readiness to contemplate action. Action is agreed, and implementable changes will therefore represent an accommodation between the different conflicting views.

box continues








Participatory inquiry is the methodology that overarches these approaches and their methods. In the strategy process, inquiry occurs during appraisal, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. It is also used in the context of research, extension and education. The techniques of participatory inquiry cover:

- **Group and team dynamics**
  Team contracts
  Team reviews and discussions
  Interview checklists
  Rapid report writing
  Energizers
  Role reversals/work-sharing
  Villager and shared presentations
  Process notes and personal diaries
- **Interviewing and Dialogue**
  Semi-structured interviewing
  Direct observation
  Focus groups
  Key informants
  Ethno-histories and biographies
  Local stories, portraits and case studies
- **Sampling**
  Transect walks
  Wealth ranking and well-being analysis
  Social maps
  Interview maps
- **Visualization and Diagramming**
  Mapping and modelling
  Mobility maps
  Seasonal calendars
  Daily routines, activity profiles
  Historical profiles
  Trend analyses and time lines
  Matrix scoring
  Preference or pairwise ranking
  Venn diagrams
  Network diagrams
  Flow diagrams
  Pie diagrams

Methods which contribute to participatory inquiry include participatory rural appraisal, participatory action research, Diagnostico Rural Rapido, Farmer Participatory Research and Groupe de recherche et d'appui pour l'auto-promotion paysanne.

Source: Pretty (1993).

none) of them may embrace it with great enthusiasm. Consensus does not mean wholehearted agreement or unanimity: differing views, values, and perspectives are a fact of life. Nor does consensus mean majority agreement, whereby minority concerns are effectively excluded.

When a strategy is implemented by several entities, the policy and plan are negotiated

and developed collaboratively by them all. For such a process to work, all participants must have a roughly equal incentive to reach agreement and work together. Consensus then becomes a particularly valuable basis of agreement, because no participant can be outvoted. All participants are obliged to do their best to accommodate each others' interests – or to compromise – to reach agreement where possible, and to identify remaining contentious issues to be resolved later.

Either the mandating authority or the steering committee should produce guidelines on what to do when consensus cannot be reached. Both consensus views and dissenting views should be recorded. Where issues are too contentious, or effectively non-negotiable (at least for the time being), it will be necessary to state this clearly and to agree when and how an issue may be revisited. There are then many ways of proceeding. For example, work may not proceed further than policy options; thereafter, the highest authority, such as cabinet, may decide how to proceed. In British Columbia, Canada, where a provincial land-use strategy is being negotiated by a large number of interests, decisions revert to government when consensus cannot be reached on issues.

Consensus is not necessary at all stages of the strategy. Indeed, given the value-laden and uncertain nature of many of the issues and the enormous interests at stake, strong and persistent disagreements are likely. Fundamental differences of value are probably immune to consensus. An exploration and understanding of the diversity of concerns and opinions is very important; and wide participation in the strategy process provides a continuing vehicle for this. Consensus is required (or is desirable) on the objectives and principles of the strategy, on priority issues, and on the best policy responses to priority issues. The process should aim for such consensus. Where it cannot be achieved, future iterations of the strategy should tackle the issues again.

Negotiation

The aim of negotiation is to tackle the trade-offs inherent in sustainable development in order to reach compromise in policy-making or setting responsibilities and plan objectives. It is important at the overall strategy level, and especially in setting decentralized targets. Agreed objectives and targets have a better chance of being implemented than those which are imposed. The processes of negotiation and consensus-building should continue throughout the strategy cycle, so that the strategy can adapt towards continuous improvement. The Netherlands has emphasized negotiation processes for target-setting (Box 10), while UK recycling targets, German carbon dioxide targets, and European Community (EC) sulphur dioxide and








Box 10: Participation in some national strategies

Canada's Green Plan is an example of a government-led consultative process. The plan, an environmental strategy for the federal government, was prepared through the government's budget planning process. It used the existing committee structure, from the Cabinet Committee on the Environment down through committees of deputy and assistant deputy ministers to a management team within the Department of the Environment. A 'multi-stakeholder' advisory committee was set up for the elaborate consultation process, which involved a great many interests: government; business; industry; the environment, youth and indigenous peoples; NGOs; and academics.

A background paper on the plan was released for public consultation, and its contents were substantially revised in light of the consultation; 17 meetings were held with interest group representatives; 41 open public meetings were held; and there was a two-day meeting to consolidate views. Thousands of citizens attended information sessions across the country and contributed suggestions through questionnaires and written submissions. The prescriptions of Canada's Green Plan include: personnel exchanges between NGOs and government; increased support to the Canada Environmental Network; setting up other round tables and advisory councils (on youth and information) (Hill 1993).

The Netherlands' National Environmental Policy Plan is a government-led participatory strategy. It integrates the national land use plan, national transport plan and national energy plan with national planning for agriculture and industry. Such integration has been made possible by multi-disciplinary and participatory approaches. NEPP is intended to relate national policy to local targets. The Netherlands Ministry of Housing, Physical Planning and Environment works with provincial and municipal government and other groups in the NEPP.

Participation has occurred, to varying degrees, in information generation and advice, decision-making and implementation. It is still being developed by government agencies and nine target groups: agricultural producers; the transport sector; chemical manufacturers; gas and electricity suppliers; the construction industry; consumers and retailers; the environmental protection industry; research and educational establishments; and environmental organizations, trade unions and voluntary bodies. Each group is led by a steering committee, consisting of representatives of government and of the target group. Local targets are set by local officials based on the national plan. Provinces are obliged to set targets; municipalities have the incentive of additional central government funding if they also do so. With industry, NEPP has emphasized

box continues

voluntary agreements or covenants to secure agreements with government on environmental objectives and targets. Covenants are negotiated with trades associations, and local variations are allowed for branch members. Ministry staff accept that the price to be paid for a high degree of local participation and motivation will be a certain loss of control over the direction and actions of the NEPP. The ministry has negotiated action plans with all target groups in the NEPP (Hill 1993).

A Platform for Sustainable Development was also established in the Netherlands in 1993 as a forum for agenda-setting and consultation. Members are drawn from many social groups. Debate will be stimulated by campaigns targeted at politicians and the general public; the effectiveness of this presupposes a high degree of participation already existing in the Netherlands — something that is borne out by recent experience.

Nicaragua's National Conservation Strategy involved participation based on the local government structure. Workshops were organized in each of the country's 143 municipalities to make a participatory diagnosis of problems and needs. Short documents summarized the results and were submitted to a second round of workshops — again in every municipality — to decide on proposed actions. Many activities were organized, with groups such as artists, teachers, youth, and political parties, to ensure that a broad range of groups could participate. This helped establish strong links between the strategy and communities and institutions. It also contributed to the national dialogue between antagonists in the recent civil war, and launched locally-driven efforts to solve problems in many parts of Nicaragua.

Nepal's NCS is one of the longest-lived national strategies in Asia, in terms of both participation and implementation. The strategy was closely tied to the National Planning Commission but run as a long-term project. It was decided that the strategy should not initially get too involved in institutional struggles. Key to strategy implementation is a multi-disciplinary, 80-member Environmental Core Group involved in different sectors, although largely from government. From this multi-disciplinary approach sprang a number of participatory exercises in environmental assessment and village planning with villagers and the private sector. User groups were seen as appropriate participants for strategy implementation, as they took a less compartmentalized view than government departments. Hence, for implementation, emphasis was placed on developing the policy context and specific tools to encourage participation of government departments, the private sector and villagers in carrying out EIAs, land use and village plans, for example. This approach of "showing the way by doing" makes the case for institutional change more convincing.








nitrogen oxide targets were set without negotiation. Although the latter targets made a powerful political impact, they have not been met in practice.

The strategy actors and their roles

'Now is the right time to act. But the government acting by itself is insufficient. Government policies that are not owned by the people will not sustain themselves as governments change.'

Gary Lawrence, Sustainable Seattle Initiative

Governments can help provide the right conditions for participation. Initially, however, they are rarely capable of efficiently conducting the necessary participation themselves. Usually, certain changes are desirable to improve participation with successive iterations of the strategy cycle. Governments need to offer conditions conducive to increasing participation. NGOs and local authorities can then take the lead in participation, learn from it, and build their capacity. Governments should build structures and an empowering policy environment to actively support participation; indeed, government itself may conduct certain participation tasks where appropriate and efficient.

Governments

Governments can be highly efficient at running certain strategy tasks with participation – since they can apply many government institutions to the task and can realize economies of scale. Hence, while NGOs may initially play a strong role in acting as catalysts to a new institutional setting with greater participation, this role may become less necessary over time. It is a mistake to think of participation as exclusively an NGO preserve.

A national strategy must involve participation of the major 'horizontal' sectors of the national government, as well as the major 'vertical' divisions, including all the provinces/states and samples of each of the different types of lower level government. Institutional participation of government is therefore important, so that the strategy consensus reflects the views and needs of many government organizations. Also important is the participation of key individuals in government – the kinds of people who can cross barriers and engender vision and change.

The strategy should be able to survive changes in government, and so government participation should be structured accordingly; ie, not overly-dependent on political patronage. Parliamentary and other political processes might be used to ensure cross-party support. The strategies of Victoria (Australia), the Philippines, Nepal and Pakistan are among those that have successfully survived changes in government. In most such cases, the strategy:

Box 11: An important role for local government

In the UK, local authorities are coordinating some of the most innovative sustainable development initiatives in the country. An early local authority environmental audit in the UK — The Green Audit of the county of Lancashire — formed a basis for subsequent participation. It acted as a scene-setter to help begin discussion, as opposed to starting with potentially confrontational dialogue. This led to the participatory Lancashire Environment Forum, a multi-interest group that used the Green Audit to develop the local Agenda 21. The recommendations of this are based on consensus. However, the for-um recognizes that consensus is not immediately possible on everything; as well as defining common positions, the forum also clarifies areas upon which there is not yet agreement — part of the process of setting out the evolving agenda.

In the city of Leicester, there is a strong emphasis on participatory monitoring, to complete the strategy cycle and keep it turning. Public opinion is considered essential for keeping the pressure on; for example, opinion surveys on whether Leicester is getting cleaner are used as a principal basis for the participatory approach.

- is not strongly affiliated to a political party;
- is not entirely in the hands of politicians or civil servants who could be moved by the new government; and
- has strong support outside government.

Usually there are several forms of participatory structures available within the government: the planning systems (town and rural planning tends to have more participatory structures than economic planning, but even so are essentially top-down); the decentralized administrative system; and the education system. These systems have all been used in strategies. Often, however, special committees and round tables have to be set up to increase 'horizontal' participation across interest groups and sectors; not only to ensure that government participation is broad enough, but also to be able to bring in non-governmental inputs. Existing institutional systems are weakest in facilitating these cross-sectoral forms of participation on a continuing basis.

Local government

As Box 11 illustrates, local government can play a key role in implementing strategies. The degree of involvement of local government varies, however, and depends on:

- The size of the country and the number of local governments.








- The stage of the strategy. With each cycle of the strategy, more participants, and hence more local governments can be involved.
- The design of the strategy. For example, the national strategy may be designed to develop gradually from national, to provincial, to local level. Or it may be designed as a national framework, in which local governments and communities can develop their own strategies; the state conservation strategy of Victoria, Australia, provides for municipal strategies (of which there are 24 so far). Or it may start off with the development of local strategies.
- The resources, capacities and political power of local governments.

One way of involving local governments in the early stages of a national strategy is through an association of local governments. This is also an appropriate procedure if resources are limited.

Non-government sectors

'A key element in the success of the follow-up to Rio is NGO involvement. NGOs have been able to bring in new ideas which would otherwise be kept out.'

Nitin Desai, CSD

In theory, non-government sectors can play significant roles in all elements of the strategy process. They can be full participants in information collection and analysis, decision-making, implementation, monitoring and adaptation. They can also be advocates and advisers. The roles of non-government sectors will vary greatly between countries, depending on political and social conditions, historical precedents, and their strength and diversity.

Potential non-governmental participants include:

- academic and research institutions;
- associations of resource users (farmers, hunters, fishers, tourism operators, etc);
- banking and financial organizations;
- community groups;
- environmental organizations;
- human development organizations;
- indigenous peoples (some may be involved as governments);
- industry and business (corporate sector);
- the judiciary;
- the media;
- professional associations;
- relief and welfare organizations;
- religious groups;
- schools, teachers, and parent–teacher associations;
- trade unions;
- women's groups;
- international organizations; and
- individual members of the public

Agenda 21 clearly states that non-governmental groups have substantial roles to play in sustainable development. It emphasises

that pluralistic civil society, comprising civic groups working alongside government and the private sector, is critical to sustainable development. Non-governmental groups, where truly representative, can be effective in organizing the many niches of civil society; where government recognizes and supports this role financially, technically and legally, the prospects for sustainable development are good.

Until recently, however, governments have tended to dominate strategy processes, perhaps bringing in non-governmental inputs in information collection, in some field implementation and in communication and education processes. For strategies where policy frameworks were prepared with little non-governmental inputs, the value of such involvement has recently been realized, and actively sought in implementation and future iterations of the cycle.

When involving non-governmental interest groups – NGOs, community groups, the private sector, etc – care has to be taken to ensure the representativeness and accountability of these groups. This is particularly the case in making the key decisions of the strategy.

Representativeness: How representative of the interest is the participating group? An apparently single interest may in fact consist of several competing interests. The fishing sector, for example, may be divided into industrial fishing, artisanal fishing, and recreational fishing, and may be further divided by catch or gear (for example, crab fishing, shrimp fishing, trawling, purse seining). To provide a fair reflection of the fishing sector, representation should come from all these interests. If complete representation of a sector is not possible (and it seldom is), participants in the strategy should be aware of those interests not being reflected and how their concerns differ from those of the 'representative' group.

Accountability: How accountable are the individuals to their interest group? For example, the terms of reference of the Steering Committee and other committees and working groups should state whether members are there in their personal capacity or as representatives of a particular group. In the latter case, there must be a mechanism by which the representative is accountable to the group, reports to it, and receives instructions from it. This is not difficult to achieve when the interest group is represented by an association with democratic procedures, such as a national chamber of commerce, an association of municipalities, or a professional association. It is more difficult when a coalition or temporary association has to be put together expressly to participate in the strategy.

Fairness: Are all interest groups equally well-equipped to participate, in terms of time, money, skills and access to informa-








tion? National and provincial government officials are paid to participate and usually have ready access to information. Most large corporations have the resources needed to attend meetings, analyze papers, and collect data. Many small businesses, community groups and environmental and social interest groups do not have these resources. To be on an equal footing with wealthier and more powerful participants, they need financial and sometimes technical support to attend meetings and prepare informed positions. Some governments have introduced special funding programmes for this purpose. Unfortunately, these can be expensive, particularly when many interest groups are involved. But not always; in Nepal, the NCS process includes a special NGO support programme which facilitates these contributions to strategy implementation. As little as US$1000 and focused technical help can ensure long-term input and mount a community project.

These three principles – representativeness, accountability and fairness – are difficult to maintain in practice. A reasonable aim is for as much of each as possible, within the constraints of budgets, timetables set by political deadlines, and capacity to manage a logistically complex process.

NGOs

NGOs are diverse; and proliferate in types and numbers. They cover a spectrum from long-established, major international and national institutions to fragile, local operations with no staff or guaranteed funding. They may work on single issues, or broad-based development concerns. Almost all operate through organizing groups of people to make better use of their own resource.

The United Nations (UN) uses a broad definition of NGOs, to include non-profit organizations in the private sector, academic and research organizations and local government. This broader scope is reflected in the term much-used by Agenda 21: the 'major groups' or the 'independent sectors'. NGOs are also known as the 'third sector' in contrast to the government and business sectors.

'The vast majority of the [NGO] bodies are national or local in nature, and a successful transition to sustainable development will require substantial strengthening of their capacities.'

WCED 1987

Agenda 21 calls on governments to draw on the 'expertise and views of NGOs' for sustainable development. NGO expertise and views encompass many practical functions:

- mobilizing the public, or certain groups;
- detailed field knowledge of social and environmental conditions;
- delivery of services (disaster relief, education, health);
- encouraging appropriate community

organization and capacity building;
- research, policy analysis and advice;
- facilitation and improvement of social and political processes;
- mediation and reconciliation of conflict;
- awareness-raising and communications;
- watchdog, warning and monitoring;
- advocacy and challenging the status quo; promoting alternatives; and
- training in, and use of, participatory approaches.

These functions are often complementary to government and the private sector, and can be exercised by individual NGOs or by partnerships and networks.

NGO coalitions can complement and buttress weak governments. This is common, for example, in the case of welfare and in engagement with local communities, where institutional constraints mean that governments are limited in their capacity to use participatory methods. On the other hand, NGO coalitions can act as a check and critic where governments and the private sector are too strong (for example, appropriating natural resources and causing adverse social and environmental impacts).

NCSs or NEAPs have tended to involve environmental NGOs more than other types. In contrast, sustainable development strategies aim to deal more extensively with the social dimension, in which development NGOs or community-based organizations (CBOs) have much experience. This is particularly the case as strategies address the common policy/planning system failure to link government to local communities and resource users; understand and act on local complexity; and enlist local resource users in implementation. All of these are areas where NGOs have comparative advantages: at the middle level between central government and local communities.

To date, national strategies show no standard pattern of NGO involvement. Governments have almost always been dominant in strategy processes and their outcomes. In some instances, outside agencies have had to ensure that local NGOs were formally involved. In Indonesia, Togo, Kenya and Rwanda, for example, the World Bank was responsible for initiating tripartite government/NGO/Bank meetings on sectoral and national development strategies.

Occasionally NGOs can play central roles in sustainable development in a government vacuum. In Kenya and Tanzania, for example, NGOs operate a major proportion of the health system. In Northern Pakistan, the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (AKRSP) is the leading actor in rural development support. The Bangladesh Rural Advancement Centre (BRAC) runs a large proportion of that country's primary schools. These major operations are the exception. Yet their much-publicized success tends to have resulted in NGOs being viewed principally as 'delivery mechanisms' – or worse, as amateurs – rather than as








development organizations with lessons to share.

Last, it must be remembered that NGOs do not act as one group. With respect to sustainable development, they cover a range of approaches:

- 'interest'-based NGOs, eg, natural history societies and professional associations;
- 'concern'-based NGOs, eg, environ–mental and animal welfare campaigning and advocacy groups; and
- 'solution'-based NGOs, eg, education and rural development groups.

It is the type of approach, as much as the function of the NGO, that will really determine how it can participate in a strategy. Many NGOs, particularly the solution-based groups, are comfortable with ideas of participation and consensus and actively promote them. Others, who work through lobbying and advocacy, tend to see their role as one of 'disagreeing', and prefer not to seek compromise. A few of these NGOs (particularly from environmental and welfare campaigning interests) therefore have taken approaches which appear to be incompatible with sustainable development, which depends upon negotiated trade-offs. Normally, such NGOs will stay on the margins of a participatory strategy. In such a strategy, the debate and consensus will take place within a middle ground; nonetheless, it should seek to involve all sectors and major groups.

The private sector

It is important to seek representative, accountable members of the private sector (trades and industry associations, local chambers of commerce and industry and the trade unions, etc). Usually, however, it is also effective to bring in the private sector leaders who are responsible for forming new patterns of investment and operation in the country. This is the approach of the (global) Business Council for Sustainable Development (BCSD), Round Table structures in Canada, and in the Pakistan NCS.

Private sector involvement tends to mean that big business and industry, (ie those responsible for much of the resource use, waste creation and employment), are often important participants. However, this should not exclude the involvement of socially-significant smaller-scale industries which may be important for employment (the approach of Ireland); smaller businesses with particularly high resource requirements (for example, small-scale mining, or forest/agricultural processing); or those industries with particularly sensitive environmental impacts (for example, tourism). National strategies in Germany and the Netherlands have programmes of intensive negotiations among industry associations, unions and the appropriate level of government to decide on operating standards and targets.

Direct involvement with communities and individuals

The local level is the most practical one for public participation, in the sense of involving individuals directly rather than through organizations. Few governments – or individuals for that matter – can afford the same degree of participation at state or national levels that can be achieved locally. If it is not practical to involve every community – and in national strategies it usually is not – a method of sampling communities will be needed. This should ensure that participating communities are reasonably representative of the diversity of communities in the country, the communities most affected by the priority issues, all geographical regions, ecological zones and livelihood types. Furthermore, the sampling methods should, of course, be able to obtain information and insights from the whole community – not just the leaders – and particularly from those who are in some way marginalized.

It is often difficult to sustain community interest in processes that take a long time. Loss of interest is inevitable if the strategy appears removed from people's more pressing daily concerns. On the other hand, community strategies that meet people's needs will attract and retain support for a long time. In general, the sooner the national strategy is complemented by local strategies and other local activities, the better. There is also a strong argument for undertaking a range of demonstration local strategies from the outset in a national strategy as a way of feeding and testing policies.

Planning for participation

Different types, and different degrees, of participation are needed for each strategy task, and for each phase or cycle of strategy development. These must be planned for, based on the following factors:

Definition of strategy theme

The likely 'parcel' of main issues to be dealt with together needs to be elaborated. It may amount to, for example:

- sectoral environmental concerns;
- cross-sectoral environmental concerns; and
- comprehensive sustainable development concerns (where these cover significant social issues, they will generally demand more participation than strictly environmental concerns).

Definition of strategy level

It needs to be decided at which main levels policy and institutional change are required to address the above issues. These will usually be:

- national;
- provincial; or








- local (the lower levels of administration, for example, municipality or district).

However, often the key to effective change will be to link one or more levels; for example, a national strategy must not be thought of as entirely a national-level exercise.

Stakeholder analysis

The groups most likely to be affected by, or to affect, the strategy need to be identified. They include:

- government;
- resource user groups;
- local government;
- consumer groups;
- NGOs;
- traditional community groups;
- academics;
- business;
- religious/cultural groups;
- unions;
- communities; and
- eminent persons.

The definition of strategy theme and level, and stakeholder analysis, should be carried out at the same time. Together, they will help to refine the strategy objectives and approach, in particular the choice of participation structures and methodologies, and incentives required for participation.

Choice of participation structures and methodologies

The general range of participation structures and methods suitable for a given strategy will depend upon its theme and level, and the stakeholders in the process.

The particular participation method used at any time within the strategy will depend on:

- the specific strategy task (eg, information collection, analysis, decision-making, implementation, monitoring); and
- the maturity of the strategy (the number of times the strategy has gone through its cycle).

Structures available for participation: For most strategy tasks, the promising structures tend to be: the planning system; traditional structures (for example, village-based systems, religious systems); and specially-constituted committees, round tables and core groups and networks. For communications, information, education and monitoring tasks, the useful structures are: the education system, extension system, the arts/theatre, and the media.

Participation methodologies: For survey, analysis and monitoring tasks, useful approaches include:

- participatory inquiry (Box 9);
- resource surveys; and
- 'green' audits.

Box 12: Why is it difficult to institutionalize participation?

Why is participation so difficult to institutionalize, if it has so many intrinsic merits? The following seem to be the key constraints:

- In the initial phases of a strategy, participation requires considerable time and extra effort in development of human resources. Generally no extra incentives are provided to the staff members for the extra effort required. To introduce participation requires more financial resources and is more costly compared to conventional programmes in the initial phase. Most institutions and programmes feel constrained in making such investments since they are evaluated primarily by the criteria of achievement of physical and financial targets.
- Participation requires major reversals in the role of external professionals, from "management" to facilitation. This requires changes in behaviour and attitudes, and can only be gradual. It requires significant retraining but, usually, inadequate resources are devoted to training.
- Participation also threatens conventional careers; professionals feel a loss of power in dealing with local communities as equals and including them in decision-making. This discourages professionals from taking risks and developing collaborative relationships with communities.
- Participation and institutional development are difficult to measure and require using quantitative and qualitative performance indicators together. Existing monitoring and evaluation systems cannot measure these well; thus, physical and financial indicators, which are easier to measure, dominate the performance evaluation and impact analysis process.
- While many programmes initiated by external agencies tend to use participatory methods for planning, they do not make corresponding changes in resource allocation mechanisms to local institutions, and they tend to retain financial decision-making powers for themselves. This hampers the growth of local institutions and leads to poor sustainability of the programmes.
- Participation is a long drawn-out process and needs to be iterative in the initial period of two to five years before being scaled up and replicated. Most development programmes tend to blueprint the process of participation and institution building in the early phases without enough experimentation and iteration. As a result, the institutional forms which evolve are often ineffective.

box continues








- Participation is also directly linked with equity. Many strategy implementation programmes, although initiated on the basis of consultation and participation of all groups, fail to monitor equity aspects. This results in programme management and benefits being usurped by elite sections of the community and in the majority losing interest. External institutions need to play a strong role in catalyzing equitable development of local institutions.

Any policy or strategy formulation process should take stock of existing efforts at local level, and use them as building blocks for strategy preparation. The process of strategy formulation has an important bearing on its successful implementation. Organic growth of a strat-egy through local and regional inputs, based on action and learning from results, increases the chances of all the stakeholders developing a long-term interest in implementation.

Source: Shah (1994)

For policy formulation and decision-making tasks:

- consensus-building;
- negotiation; and
- traditional methods, for example, of conflict resolution.

For implementation tasks:

- voluntary agreements; and
- joint management.

For communications, information, education and monitoring tasks:

- seminars;
- workshops;
- interviews; and
- exhibitions and plays.

The government planning and administration structure and the political structure will largely determine whether it is possible for a national strategy to be built up from local initiatives, or whether the initiative has to start from the top, and filter down through participation and existing decentralization structures. It will also partly determine what kind of mix of participatory and multi-disciplinary approaches can be taken. In Uganda, for example, the government's decentralization policy allowed strong inputs from most of the 38 districts in the strategy (through consultations and three-day workshops) although the results have been selectively used at central government level. Some key constraints to institutionalizing participation are discussed in Box 12.

It is important at the outset that strategy participants know how far up the decision-making hierarchies their recommendations can and will reach. One of the failures of participation has been disillusionment resulting from unrealistic expectations about its impact on policies and actions.

Scheduling and resources required

A phased approach to participation is likely to be best, beginning with the use of participation structures and methodologies with which the majority of participants are familiar. They should also be acceptable scientifically (trustworthiness criteria are available for participatory techniques as well as for 'scientific' approaches) and politically (representativeness and accountability). It is very difficult to bring about intensive consultation with all the stakeholder groups in an initial strategy cycle. As with the scope of the strategy, it is best to build up to greater ambitions; otherwise the strategy runs the risk of being overwhelmed. The capacity for participation can be built throughout the process; indeed, participation has been instrumental in much of the capacity-building of many successful national and local strategies.

Linking levels of strategy experience

It is important to link national-level strategy experience with local-level participation experience. Participation in strategies can have both 'horizontal' and 'vertical' reach. Horizontal participation is required across sectoral interest groups, government ministries, and communities in different parts of the country, to ensure that impacts across sectors or regions are dealt with. Vertical participation is required to facilitate a two-way flow of influence and to address problems that are experienced farther down the hierarchy; from national to local levels, or from leaders right down to marginalized groups and individuals. Vertical participation is also required because localized activities will lead to cumulative problems experienced farther up the hierarchy.

Recent national strategies have tended to concentrate on horizontal participation, with extensive government and academic contributions at national level. Much multi-disciplinary analysis has been undertaken, and policies have been changed, often extensively – at least on paper. In almost all of the strategies, there was relatively little participation initially. However, as a result of these strategies there were, in many cases, strong recommendations for participation in subsequent local strategy planning, implementation and monitoring (see Box 10). Although there have been some improvements to national-level government institutions and some regulatory instruments have been introduced, there has generally been little impact so far on the ground. There appear to be many local blocks to implementation.








Local participatory approaches, conversely, show examples of both horizontal and vertical participation. There has been considerable involvement of government, communities and sectoral interests at many levels – sometimes resulting in impressive work on the ground, with much generation of local information and some localized institutional change. Of these approaches, particular progress has been made in:

- joint community/business/local government initiatives in urban or peri-urban areas, often catalyzed by local governments and NGOs – for example, Groundwork UK, local Agenda 21s undertaken by Australian and UK local authorities;
- buffer zones (economic support zones) around national parks, with joint government/community planning and action, including many well-documented examples, for example, in India, Nepal and Zimbabwe; and
- extensive rural development projects based upon social organization and/or environmental protection, often at watershed and river basin level, again catalyzed and/or managed by NGOs, for example, the AKRSP in India and North Pakistan.

Although most did not start as local strategies, many of these successful local projects have had to evolve strategic approaches to thrive, linking with national policy and institutional initiatives.

In spite of individual successes, the problem of 'scaling up' such local participatory initiatives remains plagued by policy and institutional inertia. In many instances, it may be necessary for government departments to sort out their own differences – using multi-disciplinary approaches – before embarking on full-scale participation. In Australia, the very different approaches of federal, state and municipal strategies have necessitated an Inter-governmental Agreement on the Environment to ensure consistency among them; this has had the effect of putting the federal strategy in the ascendancy.

A number of approaches have managed to make the leap from participation at local level to national level; for example, Gestion de Terroir in the Sahel, which has always addressed the administrative and legal constraints to local activity, and which gradually builds up a larger, national-level presence. The AKRSP in Northern Pakistan has led to a major government-led National Rural Support Programme. This may have been influenced by the fact that AKRSP staff also played key roles in the Pakistan NCS.

In general, however, we know that the genesis and implementation of national strategies and local participatory efforts have tended to be very separate. Furthermore, there have been few efforts to unite them to their mutual advantage. The successful harmonization of national strategies and

local participatory efforts will be dependent on the following factors.

Building on existing participatory structures, methods and projects

There must be a conscious effort by national strategy coordinators to improve top-down and bottom-up approaches. A variety of actors and structures can be used to explore possible existing links, including NGOs and local authorities, traditional structures, specially-formed committees and round tables, and major sustainable development projects.

Alternatively, new methods for forging links could be adopted, including participatory inquiry, voluntary agreements and joint management.

Capacity-building

At the policy level, capacity is needed to deal with the rich insights and information coming from local participatory approaches, to devolve appropriate power to participating partners, and to monitor the impacts. At the local level, capacity is needed to take up the challenges that newer policies offer. It is becoming increasingly clear, however, that it is at the middle level – the province or municipality – where capacity-building can reap the most benefits. At this level, there is much potential to link top levels (where policy is set) and bottom levels (where policy is implemented, and from where policy-relevant information is required).

Public information, education and communication

Public information, education and communications (IEC) activities are integral to the entire strategy process because:

- they keep participants informed of progress with the strategy, through all tasks and phases and from cycle to cycle;
- they provide a consensus expression of the strategy—particularly the policy framework and action plans; and
- they help implement and monitor the strategy by generating a wider understanding of strategy goals and how to achieve them; encouraging participation in, support for, and feedback on the strategy; and leading to behaviour change.

The most appropriate IEC activities will vary with each strategy: Box 13 gives some key questions which can help determine optimum communications strategies.

Keeping participants informed of strategy progress

During all phases of the strategy, the secretariat can act as a clearing house for communications; for example, organizing workshops and briefings, publishing a newsletter of strategy activities, reporting on progress to different groups, and maintaining an information base. In addition to issuing press releases, regular briefings of the media will be needed. Certain activities will








Box 13: Communication strategies

The National Institute of Design in India has defined a sequence of eight questions which it follows in the field when developing communications strategies for national or local development programmes. This approach has been tested and refined through more than a decade of field experience. The eight key questions to ask are:

1. **Target audience:** whose behaviour must communication attempt to change?
2. **Target response:** what is the behaviour change that is needed?
3. **Research involved:** what do we need to know about existing knowledge, attitudes and practices before planning our messages?
4. **Target message:** what messages can be exchanged between planners/activists and target audiences to help achieve the desired response?
5. **Media:** what media are best suited to the exchange of the target message?
6. **Media resource institutions and individuals:** what skills and talent can be drawn upon to help develop and implement media decisions?
7. **Budget:** what will be the cost of communication plans to reach each target audience?
8. **Evaluation criteria:** what goals and indicators will be used to monitor the intended behaviour change?

Evaluation should lead to reviewing each step in a sequence, and reactivating the sequence in the next phase of the communications strategy.

be more specific to given strategy tasks and cycles:

- **Building commitment to the strategy:** Early priority should be given to communicating the purpose, objectives, work plans, and likely benefits of the strategy; and to setting up working links with the communication facilities of specific participant groups and the media. Videos (Botswana and Pakistan) and well-presented strategy 'prospectus' briefing documents (Nepal and Zambia) have been used successfully.
- **Strategy analysis and policy formulation:** Major contributors to the strategy will need to be accessible (for interviews, press briefings, lecture circuits), to enlarge the immediate strategy constituency. Public debate on draft findings and emerging options can be encouraged in both the mass media and traditional

media. Journalists have played strong roles in some strategies, such as Pakistan's.

- **Action planning and budgeting:** Networks of education and 'extension' agents can be set in place, according to the field requirements of the action plan. Such communications agents will be required as much for industry and businesses as for rural resource users and the resource-consuming public.
- **Implementation:** The various implementing agencies will run their own communications programmes (with the media having established its role as critic and monitor), encouraging the public to play similar roles in pushing for, and monitoring, standards and indicators of sustainability. A strategy communications clearing house may still be required. This could be linked to the information resources centre required for strategy planning work. The clearing house coordinator may organize awareness campaigns, specialized seminars, training sessions, briefings, etc, for the various communications agents.

Consensus expressions of the strategy

The common practice of referring to the strategy document as 'the strategy' is misleading and encourages people to spend excessive efforts preparing documents instead of developing and implementing the strategy. Documents are only intermediate products of the process.

Strategy documents, covering at least the policy frameworks and action plans, are essential nonetheless, so that all participants know what was agreed to and what is expected of them. Without documents, the strategy may quickly lose coherence and break up into ad hoc decisions dictated by the immediate needs of the agencies concerned. The documents need not be too lengthy, however. Coherence, consensus and clear direction are important features of a strategy and the documents will need to express these features, while providing an overall framework. Other components of the strategy, such as the investment portfolio, may require longer and more detailed documentation.

To be most effective, the central strategy document needs to be published and widely available in its approved form. Government agencies, local authorities, major NGOs and many businesses will need the full document. But highly technical reports are not useful for politicians and busy decision-makers. High quality, clear, concise documents written in everyday language, with charts, maps and illustrations, should be used for these groups. The main strategy documents may need to be in several different forms, each targeted to a particular audience.

Condensed information can be made available to the public – in local languages where appropriate – and to schools and universities, the latter highlighting educa-








tional aspects of the issues. Audio and video versions could also be produced (for example, as was done for the Pakistan NCS and local Agenda 21s for UK local authorities).

Soliciting feedback

It is important to encourage diverse groups to implement, monitor and revise the strategy. Ultimately, the success of a strategy will depend on changing some attitudes and types of behaviour, and strengthening others. Methods of soliciting feedback include:

- **Public relations activities:** these tend to have a short-term impact, and are principally one-way communications. They can be conducted through the mass media and advertising.
- **Public awareness activities:** these have a medium-term impact. They work by consulting groups in the strategy process, through traditional and mass media and government/NGO participation structures; involving them in the debate on sustainable development, and keeping them informed about all aspects of the outcomes.
- **Public participation:** this has a longer-term impact, and takes a much longer time. It depends upon incentives, formal and informal education and training, and results in behaviourial change. Mass media activities are much less significant here. Active participation and experience are key, particularly in setting and monitoring indicators of sustainable development.

An IEC plan will be needed. It should identify key participants/audiences, topics and means of communicating them, and roles in IEC. The plan will obviously be revised and more detailed once strategy implementation begins; the Pakistan NCS devotes a whole chapter to the communications strategy.

Skills in planning and running an IEC programme will be vital; as will training, where these are in short supply. The IEC team will need to understand the conceptual basis, genesis and dynamics of the strategy, as well as the technical issues. A priority task for the IEC team will be to set up a network of principal communications agents and media for different localities, topics and groups.

Choice of media

Effective media communication will empower individuals and groups, enabling them to use their skills and resources and identify new ways of working together. The media should, therefore, enable participating groups to communicate what they feel, what they know, and what they want. Accordingly, successful communication cannot be solely a one-way media campaign, but must be a two-way process of information exchange and learning. The key will be in linking participants with appropriate media.

The most effective media for communication will differ according to country and locality circumstances, topic, audience/ participant group and cost considerations. Mass media should be seen as a supplement to, and not a substitute for, other media and public information and education in the process of behaviour change. We have become accustomed to thinking of mass media as prime agents of change. They can and do contribute to change, and they have importance in raising the awareness of the general public and in influencing key decision-makers and opinion-formers. Yet, the real change must take place at the local, community and individual level – and here 'mass' approaches are of limited relevance.

In many low-income areas, print and electronic media may not be appropriate for most participants; here, person-to-person communication (including entertainment and performing arts) may have greater impact. Agricultural extension agents – if generally effective – will also need to be involved.

When creating a strategy constituency in the print, electronic and traditional media, and in the education system, it will be important not to restrict the role of these various media to delivering strategy 'messages'. Where socio-political conditions allow, media roles should encompass those of strategy critic, monitor, and solicitor of opinions.

Conclusion

One of the major challenges facing many strategies is to increase the level and effectiveness of participation. The constraints to participation outlined in Box 12 need particular attention. Priority may be given to:

- institutional reviews of the main agencies that should be promoting and supporting participation;
- training in participatory methods;
- close monitoring of early participation exercises – and particularly of their risks; and
- promotion at high levels of the real impacts of participation.

Strategies based fully upon participation will find that their institutional framework, management and cost structure begin to change in line with the trends listed in Box 8. The national strategy secretariat and task force, for example, may be complemented by local groups, which come to take a lead in further iterations of the strategy. Strategy teams may increasingly bring in people who have been active in participatory projects, but who so far have had little to do with the strategy process. National planning procedures may better accommodate multi-actor approaches, and previously marginalized groups may share platforms with recognized authorities.








With participation structures up and running and joint efforts at strategy implementation under way, more contentious issues may then be tackled; this could mean greater concentration on mediation and conflict resolution. The funding structure should begin to incorporate new longer-term provisions for joint action, such as trust funds for community initiatives. All of this will have major implications for the way that strategies are managed. The critical mass of effort should then begin to turn away from national strategies and toward local strategies.

PART 2

The Strategy Cycle