

**International Institute for Environment and Development
(IIED)**

in collaboration with the

**Network for Environment and Sustainable Development in Africa
(NESDA)**

**RETHINKING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT
STRATEGIES**

Promoting Strategic Analysis, Debate and Action

By

Barry Dalal-Clayton, Stephen Bass,
Nick Robins and Krystina Swiderska

IIED Environmental Planning Issues
No. 24

*Draft
18 May 1998*

IIED

3 Endsleigh Street, London WC1H ODD, UK
Tel: (+44-171) 388 2117; Fax: (+44-171) 288 2826

NESDA

PO Box 95 Guichet Annexe BAD, Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire
Tel: (+225) 205419; Fax: (+225) 205922

PREFACE

This document is the first output of a project, “*Rethinking Sustainable Development Strategies*” (1998-2000), which aims to promote strategic analysis, debate and action for sustainable development in selected countries in sub-Saharan Africa. It is being undertaken collaboratively by IIED and NESDA with multi-disciplinary country teams. Funding for project implementation is currently being provided by the EC (DG VIII) and UNDP.

The paper is intended as a discussion document to stimulate debate, particularly at a time when governments and donors are considering how best to respond to the target date of 2002 set by UNGASS (1997) for all countries to have a sustainable development strategy in place. Whilst the paper draws on past experience of sustainable development strategies and their equivalents, it is forward looking and suggests the need to rethink approaches. The desirable outcome is that, by 2002, countries have not merely produced further strategy documents, but have introduced meaningful processes capable of making a real difference in moving towards sustainable development.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The paper distils lessons from research and other activities undertaken over the past decade by IIED on national sustainable development strategies and equivalent or related processes. This work has tracked the experiences of such processes in both developing and developed countries.

We have also drawn from discussions at a project scoping workshop, held at IIED in November 1997, funded by UK DFID. The authors are grateful to the workshop participants for their inputs and ideas:

Ndey Njie, IUCN/Capacity 21, The Gambia;
Nancy McPherson, IUCN, Switzerland;
Artur Runge-Metzger, EC DG8, Belgium;
Joseph Koroma, Coordinator, NESDA, Cote d'Ivoire;
Albert Greve, Multi-Donor Secretariat, World Bank, USA;
Koy Thomson, IIED; and
Nick Johnstone, IIED.

Additional support for project planning and for preparing this paper has been provided by the Netherlands DGIS.

The authors - are all staff members of IIED:

Barry Dalal-Clayton:	Director, Environmental Planning Group
Stephen Bass:	Director, Forestry and Land Use Programme
Nick Robins:	Co-ordinator, European Programme
Krystina Swiderska	Research Assistant, European Programme

CONTENTS

Preface	1
Acknowledgements	1
Acronyms	3
Summary	4
1. Why Sustainable Development Requires a Strategic Response	5
2. Lessons from the Past	6
3. Time for a New Focus	11
4. Promoting Strategic Analysis, Debate and Action	14
References	18
Annexes	
1. Past Studies and Experience with National Strategies for Sustainable Development	20
2. Challenges for More Effective Strategic Analysis, Debate and Action	22
Boxes	
1 Donor Round Tables on Aid and Sustainable Development	9
2 Why Recommendations of Past Reviews have not been Addressed or Implemented	10
3 The Challenge of Globalisation for Strategy-Making	12
4 Strategic Analysis, Debate and Action: An Iterative Approach	15
5 Outline Country Round Table Agenda	16
6 The Network for Environment and Sustainable Development in Africa (NESDA)	20
7 The International Network for Green Planners (INGP)	21
Tables	
1 Strategies and their Responsible Agencies in Selected Developing Countries	8
Figures	
1 Formal Strategies in Context	11

ACRONYMS

CBO	Community-Based Organisation
CDE	Capacity Development in Environment
DAC	Development Assistance Committee (of OECD)
DFID	Department for International Development (UK)
DGIS	Environment and Development Department (Netherlands Foreign Ministry)
EC	European Commission
IIED	International Institute for Environment and Development
INGP	International Network of Green Planners
INTERAISE	International Environmental and Resource Assessment Information Service
IUCN	World Conservation Union
NCS	National Conservation Strategy
NEAP	National Environmental Action Plan
NESDA	Network for Environment and Sustainable Development in Africa
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
NSDS	National Sustainable Development Strategy
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
Sida	Swedish International Development Agency
UNCED	United Nations Conference on Environment and Development
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNDP/PCSD	United Nations Department for Policy Co-ordination and Sustainable Development
UNGASS	United Nations General Assembly Special Session
WRI	World Resources Institute
WTO	World Trade Organisation

SUMMARY

Agenda 21 urges all countries to introduce a National Sustainable Development Strategy. In 1997, five years after Rio, the UN General Assembly Special Session set a target date of 2002 for introducing such strategies in all countries. The OECD-DAC has set a target date of 2005 for countries to meet the same aim. Yet no official guidance has been provided on how to develop strategies. Indeed there is much current debate on what such a strategy is or should be, and how donors can help in their development and implementation. Whilst past experience indicates that a blueprint approach is not appropriate, there has been little examination of whether past strategies have had any effective impact. There remains uncertainty about how best to proceed.

Evidence from past strategies shows that:

- most have continued to be environment-driven, rather than encompassing sustainable development;
- the focus has often been bureaucratic, focused on a document rather than change;
- there has been a lack of consideration given to future needs;
- participation has been weak and as a result, strategies have been poorly linked to real development trends; and
- the donor role has been ambiguous: providing resources, but often dominating the process.

This paper re-examines the experience to date, considers why recommendations of past reviews have not been addressed or implemented, draws out some key lessons and identifies a range of challenges. It argues that a new focus and approach is required which places less emphasis on the production of a strategy document and focuses on processes which can facilitate strategic analysis, debate and action. Such an approach should be more cost-effective, politically appealing and economically viable, and respond to real needs locally, while enabling countries to contribute better to international decisions. We set out IIED's first thoughts on why such a new start is required and what it might mean in practice. Our focus is primarily on developing countries, but many of the themes have relevance elsewhere.

In any country, a process of strategic analysis, debate and action for moving towards sustainable development would involve, *inter alia*:

- facilitating a process of stakeholder dialogues on key sustainable development issues and processes (that work) for sustainable development. This would need to be an iterative process over time (possibly as much as one year) and involve a range of approaches including, for example, semi-structured interviews with individuals, discussion groups, a series of round tables and workshops, and other participatory approaches at national to local levels - as appropriate or feasible.
- within this context, reviewing the recent experience in undertaking NSDSs and equivalent initiatives (including Convention-related action plans);
- developing capacities to analyse, debate and act strategically for making the transition to sustainable development; and
- identifying how international cooperation agencies can best help in this process.

We conclude by suggesting how to get started on the process and suggest some basic elements of the approach.

1. WHY SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT REQUIRES A STRATEGIC RESPONSE

When the world's leaders met in June 1997 to review progress since the landmark Earth Summit, the assessment they faced was a sombre one. The total number of people living in poverty had grown significantly since 1992 and inequality had surged both within and between countries. The state of the global environment had also continued to deteriorate. Looking ahead, the UN forecasted that "the next quarter century is likely to be characterised by declining standards of living, rising levels of conflict and environmental stress" unless hard choices were made to break these seemingly remorseless trends away from sustainable development (UNDP/PCSD 1997).

For the last decade or more, there has been growing awareness that moving towards sustainable development will require often deep structural changes in the economy, society, resource management and political life. Policies that subsidised resource depletion and marginalised the poor would have to be curbed. Markets would need to reflect the social and environmental costs of production and consumption. Governments and corporations would also have to become more open and accountable for their actions. Decision-making would have to become more prudent, with extended time-scales to respect the interests of future generations. And power would need to be redistributed to give those countries and communities currently excluded from critical resources and decisions the capacity to negotiate a better deal. In other words, sustainable development would require a strategic response of a quite unprecedented kind.

At the Earth Summit in 1992, the governments of the world progressed some way to meeting this challenge by agreeing as part of the Agenda 21 action plan that all countries should introduce a National Sustainable Development Strategy (NSDS) (UNCED, 1992). Many governments responded to this call, building on the mainly environment-focused national conservation strategies (NCSs) and national environmental action plans (NEAPs). Five years on, the growing urgency of the global situation led governments to set a target date of 2002 for introducing such strategies in all countries (UNGASS, 1997). And as part of the OECD's new strategy for development cooperation, *Shaping the 21st Century* (OECD-DAC, 1997a), donor agencies have committed themselves to supporting developing countries to introduce these strategies -- a commitment confirmed by the UK, for example, in its White Paper for International Development (DFID, 1997).

Yet, for all this apparent 'faith' in national strategies, little has been done to examine whether these processes have so far had any impact in practice. Whilst there has been research on strategies by international organisations, there has been no official guidance on how to develop such strategies or to implement them effectively. Such guidance that exists implies the generation of entirely new frameworks rather than building on locally tried and tested decision-making processes. Having set themselves new targets, it is apparent that most governments and donor agencies have given little thought to what to do next. But they are aware that blueprint strategies across the world should be avoided. This approach has not worked in the past, failing to recognise the imperative of fine-tuning strategies to the diverse conditions that exist across the world. Today, adopting a blueprint model would be even more irrelevant and positively counter-productive as nations, industries and citizens across the world struggle to cope with the implications of globalisation.

It is no longer possible to view strategies for sustainable development as somehow focused solely on the social, economic and environmental conditions within a nation's borders. In an increasingly liberalised global economy, trade and investment flows impinge critically on a country's natural resources and its ability to manage them fairly and sustainably: this

particularly affects poor countries faced with unequal terms of trade, a high ratio of trade to national income, and large debt burdens.

International rules for trade, aid, investment, intellectual property and the environment now set the frame of reference within which national sustainable development strategies can be conceived. And the worldwide shift to market-based approaches to the economy, exemplified in structural adjustment programmes, along with democratic styles of governance requiring popular participation at every level of decision-making, require a rethinking of the traditional planning process, still resounding with the echoes of the corporatist 1970s and 1980s.

But it is not just that the global context within which nations develop strategies that has been transformed in recent years: most governments have been faced with a combination of intensifying obligations to sustainable development and diminishing resources, or in other words, 'policy inflation and capacity collapse'. It is no surprise therefore that those involved in sustainable development are desperately overworked.

All this means that the strategic analysis, debate and action so essential for sustainable development has to be done differently than in the past. It has to be smarter and more cost-effective, politically appealing and economically viable, responding to real needs locally, while enabling countries to contribute better to international decisions. This paper sets out IIED's first thoughts on why such a new start is required and what it might mean in practice. Our focus is primarily on developing countries, but many of the themes have relevance elsewhere.

Definition

At present, there is much confusion and considerable debate about what a National Sustainable Development Strategy actually is or should be. In this document, we use the term as a shorthand to encompass any of, or even the sum of, a range of initiatives that an individual country may have taken to represent their response to commitments entered into at UNCED in Rio de Janeiro, 1997. Such initiatives could include, inter alia:

National sustainable development strategies (named as such);
Environmental action plans;
Conservation strategies;
Climate change action plans;
Desertification action plans;
Biodiversity action plans;
Forestry action plans; and
other initiatives and processes that strategically address the issue of sustainable development.

2. LESSONS FROM THE PAST

Growing interest in national strategies has led to an expanding body of analysis by international organisations, governments and independent institutes: this is summarised in Annex 1. From this, five main lessons can be learned of relevance to developing countries:

- Most strategies have continued to be environment-driven, rather than encompassing sustainable development.
- The focus has often been bureaucratic, focused on a document rather than change.

- There has been a lack of consideration given to future needs.
- Participation has been weak and as a result, strategies have been poorly linked to real development trends.
- The donor role has been ambiguous: providing resources, but often dominating the process.

i. Environment-driven

Almost all strategy initiatives are undertaken by environment ministries and departments (see Table 1). This immediately characterises the process as being pre-occupied with environmental issues - rather than a sustainable development focus one which is properly the concern of all sectors and all parts of government and society. It also places responsibility for the strategy in a ministry which is usually weak and of low influence within the government.

ii. Bureaucratic focus

Approaches to date have been dominated by environment officials and experts preparing papers and drafting chapters of a strategy document or action plan, workshops (again often restricted to officials and experts) and weak inputs from across government, political parties, the private and business sectors, NGOs and other interests, or from the public. The emphasis has usually been placed on delivering a document (often in a limited time); this has meant both rather sketchy analysis, and an inadequate process of building consensus on the key issues and possible solutions or ways forward.

iii. Ignoring future needs

Virtually all strategy processes have based their policy recommendations on an assessment of past and current trends. None have generated scenarios which consider environmental and developmental conditions in the future and develop policies that respond to these challenges, blind spots and priorities identified in these scenarios. In effect, most strategies continue to respond to historical problems rather than the issues in a rapidly changing world. At best, some strategies have set environmental targets for the future (e.g. reduced pollution levels), but such targets have been based on present day problems. In addition, past strategies have generally failed to deal with issues such as risk and uncertainty which, for example, would have led to them addressing approaches to 'climate change proofing'.

iv. Weak participation and links to real development

Few strategies have yet been adequately participatory. Although all countries are struggling with this issue by trying to involve as many stakeholders as possible, civil society participation is not always easy to achieve. Equally, there are usually a multitude of political, market and civil society processes which are *not* included in the strategy which turn out to be highly significant for (or against) sustainable development. Thus, few if any countries have made sustainable development the centrepiece of their long-term planning exercises: this means shifting the focus to ensuring that sustainable development is contained in the strategies that count, and not just those produced by the environment ministry.

One area where progress could be made is in building bridges between national and local levels. Most current strategies are still controlled by central government institutions and experts, with occasional participation of NGOs. In the North, the Local Agenda 21 movement has achieved considerable momentum amongst local authorities, citizens' groups, NGOs and

businesses. However, there is often little linkage between the efforts at national and local levels. In

Table 1: Strategies and their Responsible Agencies in Selected Developing Countries

Country	Strategy	Responsible Agency
Burkina Faso	NEAP, 1993	Ministry of Environment & Tourism
Bolivia	NEAP, 1993	Secretariat Nacional del Medio Ambiente
China	Environmental Action Plan (1991-200), 1994	National Environmental Protection Agency, and State Planning Commission
Cook Islands	National Environmental Management Strategy, 1993	South Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP)
Cote d'Ivoire	NEAP, 1993	Ministry of Environment & Tourism
Dominica	NEAP, 1994	Ministry of Agriculture, Lands, Fisheries & Forestry
El Salvador	National Environmental Strategy, 1994	National Council on the Environment
Fiji	National Environment Strategy, 1993	Environment Unit, Ministry of Housing and Urban Development
The Gambia	NEAP, 1992	Ministry of Natural Resources & the Environment
Ghana	NEAP, 1988	Environmental Protection Agency
Grenada	NEAP, 1994	Ministry of Health, Housing & Environment
Guinea	NEAP, 1994	Ministère du Plan et de la Coopération
India	NCS & Policy Statement on Environment & Development, 1992	Ministry of Environment & Forests
India	Environment Action Programme, 1993	Ministry of Environment & Forests
Jamaica	NEAP, 1994	Natural Resources Conservation Authority
Kenya	NEAP, 1994	Ministry of Environment & Natural Resources
Laos	NEAP, 1993	Organisation for Science, Technology & Environment
Malawi	NEAP, 1994	Dept. of Research & Environmental Affairs
Maldives	NEAP, 1993	Ministry of Planning & Environment
Mongolia	NEAP, 1995	Ministry for Nature & the Environment
Namibia	Green Plan, 1992	Ministry of Wildlife, Conservation & Tourism
Pakistan	NCS, 1992	Environment & Urban Affairs Division
Philippines	NSDS, 1990	Dept of Environment & Natural Resources
Rwanda	National Environmental Strategy, 1991	Ministère du Plan, Projet Environnement et Développement
Sri Lanka	NEAP (1995-1998), 1994	Ministry of Environment & Parliamentary Affairs
Tanzania	National Conservation Strategy for Sustainable Development, 1994	National Environmental Management Council
Tanzania	NEAP, 1994	Ministry of Tourism, Natural Resources & Environment
Uganda	NEAP, 1995	Ministry of Natural Resources
Zambia	NEAP, 1994	Ministry of Environment & Natural Resources

developing countries, there is now considerable experience of participatory development activities at local levels, but national strategies have yet to find ways to adequately and effectively interface with the existing local experience. There continues to be a lack of trust and dialogue between central governments and local communities in a context of advancing decentralisation in many countries.

v. *An Ambiguous Donor Role*

The pressure for strategies in developing countries has often come from donors as a requirement for the release of aid or to generate a menu of projects from which they can choose. Seldom have such strategies been prepared as a result of a domestically-driven agenda or a general concern about broader international obligations and pressures other than aid. Frequently there has been little conviction in their utility. In principle, donor agencies now recognise in principle that this needs to change. For example, the OECD's Principles for Capacity Development in Environment (CDE) stress the importance of strategies which provide a framework for donor coordination (OECD-DAC, 1997b). Some development assistance agencies - such as the EC and SIDA -- have also tried to evaluate how their aid portfolios support sustainable development through the hosting of open, participatory round table exercises with developing country partners (see Box 1).

Box 1: Round Tables on Aid and Sustainable Development

- **SIDA:** In 1994, the Swedish Parliamentary Commission on Aid commissioned IIED to explore, with recipients of aid, the contribution of Swedish development assistance to India and Zambia (SIDA, 1994). A range of SIDA projects was measured against the "spirit of Rio", the themes that cut across Agenda 21, such as policy integration, internalising costs, poverty focus, environmental prudence. As part of this process, IIED facilitated round table exercises with Indian and Zambian stakeholders (government, NGOs, CBOs and academics). The round tables discussed the fundamental premises of aid in relation to other domestic and international processes. Many participants in Zambia noted that this was the first time that they had been able to discuss the overall roles of aid in context (as opposed to planning its use). The influence of aid in terms of policy and institutional change was seen to be far greater in Zambia than in India (a much larger and more complex country). The round tables also assessed the particular "value added" of Swedish aid in terms of taking forward Agenda 21.
- **European Community:** In October 1997, the European Commission hosted its first sustainable development round table in Kampala, Uganda (Lane, Robins & Swiderska, 1998). The round table revealed that progress had been made jointly by the EC and the Uganda Government since the Earth Summit towards putting the principles of sustainable development into practice. There was a new willingness to use EIA in project design, and to 'mainstream' community participation in project design and implementation. Non-governmental organisations were being included as partners in development. Capacity strengthening was viewed as a basic requirement. New thinking was emerging on incentives for wildlife conservation, and the importance of an interdisciplinary approach was recognised. But there was also the harsh reality of how both donors and developing country governments are to introduce knowledge-intensive sustainable development at a time of declining financial and administrative capacity. On the ground, participation and environmental assessment are still largely at the pilot stage and have far to go before becoming standard practice. The round table closed with a suite of recommendations on project management, environmental management, resettlement, donor coordination, decentralisation and public-private partnerships. Many of these recommendations will have resonance for EC development assistance as a whole, as part of the current reform of the Lome Convention framework.

It is no surprise, therefore, that strategies for sustainable development are still seen as internationally-generated precepts which seldom exert much influence on the key decision-

making processes and, of course, on political and business development processes - which lie in the national planning, finance, and major line ministries. Relatively little advance has been made in providing lessons for better and more effective approaches. Over the last few years, numerous conferences, workshops and reviews have assessed strategies and made numerous recommendations. Yet few of these recommendations have been addressed or implemented: the various reasons for this are listed in Box 2.

Box 2: Why Recommendations of Past Reviews have not been Addressed or Implemented

Not Addressed:

- the key players involved in developing NSDSs have had no 'handle' on the pros and cons of market issues/forces as a means of achieving sustainable development; or on the politics that surround decision-making;
- lack of institutional memories (within government departments and in donor agencies);
- staff turnover - with loss of valuable experience of individuals;
- NSDSs in developing countries were seldom, if ever, designed to be continuing (cycling) processes, and therefore mainly ended with the completion of a strategy document and set of project proposals;
- NSDSs seldom fitted with the resources (financial, skills, etc.) available;
- Ownership of most NSDS processes was perceived to be, or was in practice, outside the country concerned;
- NSDS fragmentation, particularly through identifying fundable individual projects which were often 'cherry-picked' by donors, leaving important strategy elements unfunded;
- NSDS recommendations were often flawed due to a lack of or inadequate ground-truthing;
- NSDS often set no priorities and gave no guidance to assist prioritisation.

Not Implemented:

- NSDSs have not matched the level of institutional capacity in individual countries - they have often been too comprehensive/complex for the prevailing institutional climate;
- no clear targets for communication and advocacy (lack of communications strategy);
- some review documents have been too generic for decision-makers (lacking a clear "hook");
- some reviews have been very descriptive with too little analysis;
- reviews have been too focused on environmental issues;
- lack of indicators;
- lack of ownership within countries/agencies - and thus reviews perceived as the opinion of their authors;
- need to look at all policies (i.e. is a NEAP the right tool ?) and to include countries with no NEAP when undertaking a review;
- reviews have not asked if NSDSs/NEAPs have been effective;
- reviews have not adequately addressed how to incorporate NSDS/NEAP outputs into other policy processes;
- reviews have not adequately examined situations where people have been motivated to change (i.e. determining the effective points of entry);
- reviews have not adequately addressed the issue of NSDS teams having capacity to address inter-related issues; and
- lack of a follow up by IIED/IUCN to their 1994 Strategies Handbook;

Much of the continuing review activity appears to repeat basic conclusions about best practice which have been well accepted for several years, but are not practised in reality - for example, the need to be holistic, integrated, cyclical and participatory.

In conclusion, there is now a need to shift from a focus on fine-tuning internationally-generated National Sustainable Development Strategies, or their equivalents, to a richer mix of effective processes of *strategic analysis, debate and action* for sustainable development

3. TIME FOR A NEW FOCUS

The focus now needs to shift from the framework of formal strategies as such to the broader issue of *improving decision-making processes in a time of rapid change*. Figure 1 loosely illustrates three things:

- (i) There is an immense and fluctuating arena of change, including: major trends of globalisation, privatisation and decentralisation; significant changes in the expectations of stakeholders; and huge swings in all sorts of systems from markets to the global climate (see Box 3).

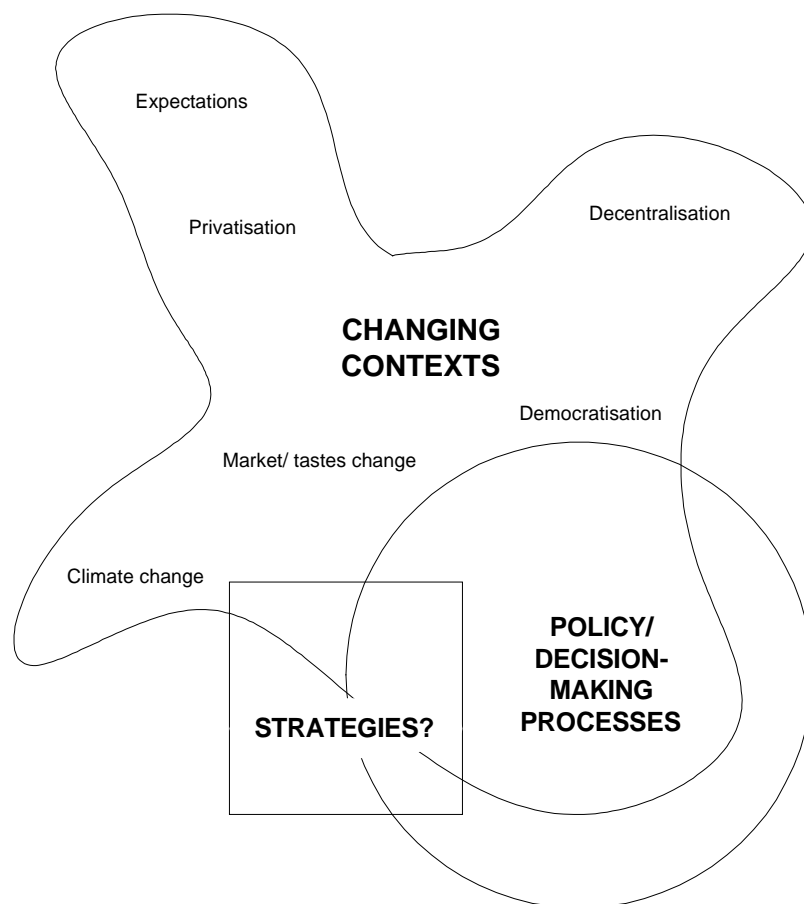


Figure 1. Formal strategies in context

Box 3 The Challenge of Globalisation for Strategy-Making

The process of globalisation has been driven by a variety of factors: trade liberalisation, increasing foreign investment, falling costs of communication, rapid technological innovation, the spread of economic reform programmes and the proliferation of multilateral institutions and agreements. But the impacts of globalisation have been weakly addressed in national strategies for sustainable development so far. Yet globalisation has profound implications for sustainable development in developing countries and there is an urgent need for a new approach to the international dimension of national strategies.

Trade and investment provide a critical source of capital for driving economic growth in developing countries, and are becoming increasingly important with the decline in aid flows. Increased trade and investment in developing countries could have a significant impact on the environment if increased productive activity -- such as mineral extraction and new manufacturing processes -- is not accompanied by robust social and environmental controls. Inequalities within developing countries could also widen as poor people find themselves less able to exploit new economic opportunities and become more vulnerable to a loss of access to resources and environmental degradation associated with privatisation and industrialisation.

Steering globalisation towards sustainable development depends on the capacity of governments to stimulate and regulate market access arrangements that prevent environmental degradation and ensure that benefits are widely distributed. Critical policy areas include:

- **Structural Adjustment:** Stabilisation and adjustment can exacerbate unsustainable use of natural resources and environmental degradation due to weak institutional capacity and regulatory frameworks and lack of clear tenure over resources. In many cases, the poor are the worst affected by these impacts. This remains a central issue for national strategies for sustainable development.
- **Trade:** Export-led development is now regarded as a major route to prosperity for poor nations, but the least developed countries still stand to lose out from the Uruguay Round of trade reforms. Furthermore, the wider implications for resource use and sustainable development of trade liberalisation have yet to be fully assessed. Strategic analysis is required to enable countries to understand the wider implications and use these to negotiate countervailing measures.
- **Foreign Investment:** Recent OECD negotiations for a Multilateral Agreement on Investment have highlighted the need for developing country governments to take a strategic perspective on the how to balance the need for a secure investment regime to attract and retain foreign capital with mechanisms to encourage corporate responsibility for social and environmental performance.
- **Development Assistance:** Aid levels are now at their lowest levels for 25 years with little sign of reversal. This stagnation means that strategies for sustainable development are critical for deciding priorities for donor support and providing the framework for donor coordination.
- **Policy Coherence:** The long-term prospects for sustainable development in poor nations are often highly dependent on decisions in other countries, for example, on agriculture and fisheries policies. Sustainable development strategies could help to identify the costs of policy incoherence in other countries as a first step to policy reform.

National sustainable development strategies provide an opportunity for developing countries to anticipate the adverse social and environmental effects of globalisation and benefit from its advantages. Addressing the international dimension in national strategies will require greater dialogue and partnership at two levels: *internally*, between central government ministries, the private sector, local authorities and communities to identify global impacts; and *externally*, with foreign governments, corporations and NGOs to negotiate new deals for sustainable development.

- (ii) There are existing policy-making processes and other decision-making processes (such as the market) which have been able, *to some extent only*, to keep track of change and to make appropriate responses. These responses will vary from ignoring change, to adapting, to actively trying to influence the change process itself. Many of these processes will be long-standing e.g. development planning mechanisms and traditional village governance.
- (iii) Finally, there are the recent formal strategies - NCSs, NEAPs, NSDSs, etc. These have been better able to deal with some aspects of change than the above decision-making processes, but not with others. For example, they have been quite good at handling environmental matters, but less so social and economic matters. Furthermore, these strategies have only partially incorporated existing decision-making processes (development planning and budgetary processes have often been excluded). And there is the need to ensure synergy between related national plans for biodiversity, climate, desertification, forestry) - this challenge has also been identified by UNDP (1997) in its report on an expert meeting in Israel on synergies in national implementation of the Rio agreements.

The implication is that a better exploration of the arena of change is required, and of the role not just of strategies but also of existing forms of policy- and other decision-making processes in dealing with change. If we remain confined to an examination of strategies' efficiency, we may *both* lose sight of areas of change in which they have not yet been effective, *and* ignore other processes that might be more efficient and can be incorporated in strategic approaches in future. Furthermore, we might make the mistake of attributing progress to a strategy alone, as opposed to other processes that have been going on in parallel.

Given that the donor community has re-focused on NSDSs and many agencies are now reviewing how they can best assist developing countries with such processes, the time has come to determine what actual influence NSDSs (or their equivalents) have had on policies and practices and sustainable development outcomes, and to explore what changes in approach would improve their influence and contribution. The need for such a 'stocktaking' is even more imperative given the added burdens placed on governments, and the considerable potential for overlap, in meeting obligations to develop and implement action plans under the Rio conventions (particularly those for Climate Change, Biodiversity and Desertification, but also the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests and the WTO agreements).

Alternative and/or substitute approaches will need to be constructed around ingredients that can be seen to have worked (*'practices that work'*). It will be necessary to find those approaches which work, given the state of institutional development in any given country. For example, existing forms of participation can readily be employed, but a more complex or comprehensive approach to participation might be inappropriate at present. Information on this should surface through stakeholder dialogues at all levels and be agreed - to the extent possible - by consensus. Future approaches will redress the 'policy inflation/capacity collapse' problem by emphasizing capacity development for:

- information generation;
- debate;
- analysis, especially cross-sectoral (e.g. for assessing impacts);
- valuation;
- conflict resolution; and
- consensus-building.

Such improvements in capacity should suit different forms of political and institutional environment and are applied individually or in aggregate.

Furthermore, from international experience in developing and implementing NSDSs over the last decade, we can now identify a range of challenges that will need to be addressed if NSDSs are to become more effective. Annex 2 lists a range of such perceived challenges that were identified during a workshop held at IIED in November 1997. But these perceptions need to be refined and others identified and addressed.

4. PROMOTING STRATEGIC ANALYSIS, DEBATE AND ACTION

In any country, following such an approach of strategic analysis, debate and action for moving towards sustainable development would involve, *inter alia*:

- facilitating a process of stakeholder dialogues on key sustainable development issues and processes (that work) for sustainable development;
- within this context, reviewing the recent experience in undertaking NSDSs and equivalent initiatives (including Convention-related action plans);
- developing capacities to analyse, debate and act strategically for making the transition to sustainable development; and
- identifying how international cooperation agencies can best help in this process.

We conclude this brief paper by suggesting how to get started on the process. The basic elements of such an approach are shown in Box 4.

Stakeholder dialogues

This would need to be an iterative process over time (possibly as much as one year) and involve a range of approaches including, for example, semi-structured interviews with individuals, discussion groups, a series of round tables and workshops, and other participatory approaches at national to local levels - as appropriate or feasible.

Box 5 gives an example of a round table process that IIED and NESDA are following in a number of African countries over the next two years. The round tables will focus on priority themes and are intended to complement the other dialoguing and provide periodic fora for reflection, learning and consensus-building.

Outcomes

The process would aim to provide a funnel for information, issues, experiences and lessons on approaches that can be effective in providing a framework for thinking and acting strategically about sustainable development. It should also identify hitherto missing and critical elements (including traditional, political, and private sector approaches) that may be required to build a process that has a chance of being accepted across government and society and being genuinely influential. The outcome should be an indication of what an improved NSDS process should look like and also what external assistance might be required.

Box 4: Strategic Analysis, Debate and Action: An Iterative Approach

- Country baseline surveys (interviews, meetings, etc.) to;
 - gather information on a core list of key sustainable issues as well as other important factors;
 - provide multiple perspectives on the nature, adequacy and effectiveness of the main decision-making process(es) that are dealing with the issues;
 - assess the type and degree of involvement of different actors; and, in this context, and
 - evaluate the relevance of the existing strategy, and its influence and impact on national policy-making and development actions.
- Round tables;
- Workshops, discussion groups, other participatory processes (national-local levels);
- Iteration, funneling of lessons, surfacing of approaches;
- Evolving country 'case-books' (to capture the flow of the process and the emerging lessons) and preparation of country reports;
- Initiating more in-depth follow-up, where possible;
- Promoting improved approaches to NSDSs - processes of strategic analysis, debate and action for sustainable development;
- Promoting capacity development for such approaches; and
- Liaison and collaboration with governments, UNDP and donors.

Follow-Up and Role of Donors

The process of stakeholder dialogues should make it (increasingly) apparent what a more effective and nationally-relevant NSDS process should involve in a country. In response to the needs and priorities identified, more in-depth follow-up activities/processes may need to be pursued.

Countries would be in a strong position to articulate their goals for sustainable development, and their needs and priorities, at international fora, and to negotiate with donors how the latter can provide assistance to

- promote an improved approach to NSDSs - an ongoing structured process for strategic analysis, debate and action for sustainable development that builds on the nationally and locally tried and tested approaches that work (as revealed during the stakeholder dialogue); and
- promote capacity development for such approaches.

Box 5: Outline Country Round Table Agenda

In their work in sub-Saharan African countries, IIED and NESDA are proposing to adopt a round tabling process as part of country stakeholder dialoguing. Issues will be scoped in the round tables, sometimes based on overview papers. It is envisaged that the definition of issues at the round tables will progressively help to structure analysis, which will then be taken forward for further debate in subsequent focus group meetings and round tables.

Round table 1 (Scoping):

(a) *Brief overview of positive and negative changes in sustainable development (SD) in the last five years:*

- historical and political time line of main changes/events
- general progress in:
 - understanding SD issues
 - agreeing/planning SD responses
 - implementing SD
- What are the key areas for attention ?

(b) *Preliminary identification of the NSDS or equivalent(s):*

- Where can the NSDS be correlated with key positive changes ?
- Where it has helped, what component institutions and processes have been useful ?

(c) *Preliminary identification of international issues affecting progress towards SD:*

- Development assistance
- Policy coherence (e.g. aid, trade, investment, agriculture, environment)
- Harmonising a “new” idea of an NSDS that is useful locally and acceptable internationally as a vehicle for taking forward national obligations

Round table 2 (Processes that Work):

(d) *Identifying institutions and processes that work:*

- Key actors, institutions, policies, processes, projects, programmes, and procedures that have contributed to the progress identified above - through providing better information, analysis, debate fora, consensus-building, and instruments for action
- Those used in the NSDS
- Others in political, governmental, civil society and market areas
- Others from the international scene

Round table 3 (Ingredients for an improved approach):

(e) *The role and form of an improved approach to an NSDS:*

- Bringing together the above into a concept for a useful approach to an NSDS, e.g.:
 - ↓ a way of co-ordinating indigenous processes and institutions that work ?
 - ↓ a framework for identifying and addressing SD issues tactically through the above ?
 - ↓ a set of criteria by which a local NSDS can “match up” with international requirements as laid down in Agenda 21

(f) *The role of international co-operation in the above*

Conclusion

Countries have four years to meet the UNGASS target of having a sustainable development strategy in place by 2002. The target provides a stimulus to rethink approaches to developing such strategies, to listen to the views of stakeholders about what would be useful - and what already works - in domestic circumstances, and to support processes which address priority issues and needs. In this way, by 2002, there should be in place not just a series of country strategy documents, but real national processes making a real difference.

References

- Bass SMJ, Dalal-Clayton DB and Pretty J (1995): *Participation in Strategies for Sustainable Development*. Environmental Planning Issues No.7, International Institute for Environment and Development, London
- Carew-Reid (ed) (1997): *Strategies for Sustainability: Asia*. IUCN in association with Earthscan Publications, London.
- Carew-Reid J, Prescott-Allen R, Bass S and Dalal-Clayton DB (1994): *Strategies for National Sustainable Development: A Handbook for their Planning and Implementation*. International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), London, and World Conservation Union (IUCN), Gland, in association with Earthscan Publication, London
- Dalal-Clayton D.B. (1996): *Getting to Grips with Green Plans: National-level Experience in Industrial Countries*. Earthscan Publications Ltd, London.
- Dalal-Clayton DB, Bass S, Sadler B, Thomson K, Sandbrook R, Robins N and Hughes R (1994): *National Sustainable Development Strategies: Experience and Dilemmas*. Environmental Planning Issues No.6, International Institute for Environment and Development, London.
- DFID (1997), *Eliminating Poverty*, White Paper on International Development, Department for International Development, London, HMSO, UK.
- Dorm-Adzobu C. (1995): *New Roots: Institutionalising Environmental Management in Africa*. World Resources Institute, Washington DC.
- ERM (1994a): *Approaches to Strategic Environmental Management*. Paper I prepared for the Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and Environment in the Netherlands by Environmental Resources Management (UK), and presented to the First Meeting of the International Network of Green Planners, 30 March - 1 April 1994, Maastricht, The Netherlands
- ERM (1994b): *Developing Plans and Strategies*. Paper II prepared for the Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and Environment in the Netherlands by Environmental Resources Management (UK), and presented to the First Meeting of the International Network of Green Planners, 30 March - 1 April 1994, Maastricht, The Netherlands
- ERM (1994c): *Implementing Plans and Strategies*: Paper III prepared for the Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and Environment in the Netherlands by Environmental Resources Management (UK), and presented to the First Meeting of the International Network of Green Planners, 30 March - 1 April 1994, Maastricht, The Netherlands
- ERM (1994d): *Moving from Environmental to Sustainable Development Strategies*. Paper IV prepared for the Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and Environment in the Netherlands by Environmental Resources Management (UK), and presented to the First Meeting of the International Network of Green Planners, 30 March - 1 April 1994, Maastricht, The Netherlands
- Hill J (1993): *National Sustainability Strategies - A Comparative Review of the Status of Five Countries: Canada, France, the Netherlands, Norway and UK*. Paper Presented to the Department of the Environment Seminar on Sustainable Development, Oxford, 18-20 March 1993. The Green Alliance, London
- IIED (1998), *The Road from Rio*, Report of the Round Table on EC Aid and Sustainable Development, Kampala, Uganda, November 1997.
- Lampietti, JA and Subramanian, U (1995): *Taking Stock of National Environmental Strategies*. Environmental Management Series Paper No. 010, Environment Dept., The World Bank, Washington DC

Lane, C., Robins N. and Swiderska K. (1998): *The Road from Rio: EC Aid to Uganda Since the Earth Summit*. Report of the EC-Uganda Round Table on Sustainable Development, 30-31 October 1997. European Commission, IIED and Forest Research Institute, Uganda.

Lopez A (ed) (1997): *Strategies for Sustainability: Latin America*. IUCN in association with Earthscan Publications, London.

NESDA (1995): *Proceedings of the Workshop on Strategic Frameworks for Environment and Development: Lessons Learned from Successful Community-Based African Initiatives*. 25-29 October 1995, Cape Town, South Africa

OECD (1995): *Planning for Sustainable Development: Country Experiences*. Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, Paris.

OECD-DAC (1997a) *Shaping the 21st Century*, Organisation for Economic cooperation and Development - Development Assistance Committee, Paris.

OECD-DAC (1997b) *Principles in Practice: Capacity Development in Environment*, Organisation for Economic cooperation and Development - Development Assistance Committee, Paris.

REC (1995): *Status of National Environmental Action Programs in Central and Eastern Europe*. Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe, Budapest

SIDA (1994): *Sustainable Aid*, Swedish International Development Agency, Stockholm.

UNCED (1992): *Agenda 21*. United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), United Nations General Assembly, New York.

UNDP (1997): *Synergies in National Implementation: The Rio Agreements*. Sustainable Energy and Environment Division, United Nations Development Programme, New York, NY, USA.

UNDPCSD (1997): *Critical Trends: Global Change and Sustainable Development*. United Nations Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development. New York.

Wood A (ed) (1997): *Strategies for Sustainability: Africa*. World Conservation Union (IUCN) in association with Earthscan Publication, London.

World Bank (1995): *National Environmental Strategies: Learning from Experience*. Washington, DC: The World Bank, Washington DC.

WRI (1996): *World Directory of Country Environmental Studies, 3rd Edition: An Annotated Bibliography of Natural Resource Profiles, Plans and Strategies*. WRI/IIED/IUCN. World Resources Institute, Washington D.C.

Annex 1:

Past Studies and Experience with National Strategies for Sustainable Development

A significant body of literature has described the activities of developing and developed countries in this field and has analysed experience to date (mainly on process rather than outcomes), e.g. Hill 1993; Carew-Reid *et al.*, 1994; Dalal-Clayton *et al.* 1994; ERM 1994a,b,c,d; Bass *et al.* 1995; OECD 1995; Dalal-Clayton 1996. IUCN has compiled case studies of strategies undertaken in different regions (Carew-Reid 1997; Lopez 1997; Wood 1997). The Regional Environment Centre for Central and Eastern Europe has assessed progress in the development and implementation of National Environmental Action Plans (NEAPs) in CEE countries (REC 1995). The World Bank has also reviewed its experience in promoting NEAPs (Lampietti & Subramanian 1995, World Bank 1995). During 1998, the World Bank Multi-Donor Secretariat for NEAPs is funding a study of more recent experience of NEAP performance in three African countries - The Gambia, Benin and Uganda - with the objective of improving their implementation through environmental support programmes.

The INTERAISE project (International Environmental and Resource Assessment Information Service), undertaken collaboratively since 1989 by IIED, WRI and IUCN for the OECD Development Assistance Committee, maintains a documentation collection of all national strategies and similar documents. These documents are abstracted in the World Directory of Country Environmental Studies (the 3rd edition was published by WRI in 1996).

A number of national and regional NGOs and networks also focus on NSDSs, NEAPs and similar approaches, and work to facilitate the exchange of information and experiences, e.g. the Network for Environment and Sustainable Development in Africa, NESDA (see Box 6), and the International Network for Green Planners, INGP (see Box 7).

Box 6: The Network for Environment and Sustainable Development in Africa (NESDA)

NESDA is a voluntary organisation which had its origins in the 'Club of Dublin' formed by participants at a World Bank meeting on National Environmental Action Plan (NEAP) processes, held in Dublin in 1990. The 'Club' later evolved into NESDA which was formally established in 1992 as a non-profit international NGO, with offices located in the African Development Bank, Abidjan. Its structure comprises a small permanent secretariat staff and an association of full and associate members.

The mission of NESDA is "to help African countries achieve sustainable development through the informal exchange of information, ideas and experiences amongst practitioners and capacity-building in the field of environmental management. Its program is focused on capacity-building and the development of joint activities with members and partners to strengthen locally-initiated programmes and institutions. It also focuses on technical advisory and support services in the identification, formulation, refinement and evaluation of strategic frameworks for sustainable development as well as the provision of fora for national and regional dialogue, networking, debate and conflict resolution".

NESDA has assisted African governments, institutions, the private sector, NGOs and local communities in capacity-building for strategic planning and implementation of NEAPs, NSDSs and similar programmes. In collaboration with WRI, NESDA has undertaken a study of institutional arrangements for environmental management in Africa (Dorm-Adzobu, 1995). NESDA has also organised a series of regional and thematic workshops for its members, and developed a roster of experts in different disciplines who are available to provide consultancy services and training for strategic planning processes. NESDA regularly disseminates relevant information to network members and partners through its newsletter, FLASH. The network is in the process of developing national chapters in its

member countries to encourage and facilitate participation of its members in national sustainable development programmes.

Website: <http://www.rri.org/nesda>

Box 7: The International Network for Green Planners (INGP)

The INGP was founded in December 1992 by a small group of experts from governments and agencies engaged in strategic environmental management which met in Washington D.C. It is now coordinated by a Secretariat housed in the Directorate for Strategic Planning of the Dutch Ministry for the Environment. The Secretariat is responsible for registering members (now numbering some 200 practitioners from around the world), facilitating contacts and exchange of information on issues of interest amongst members and agenda-setting within the network, and assists in organising international and regional network meetings. INGP communication is assisted by *Green Page* - a periodic network newsletter. Another useful tool is the *Green Planners' Guide* which provides brief professional profiles of INGP members.

Four international meetings have been held to date:

- The inaugural meeting in Maastricht, in April 1994, provided a forum for exchange of ideas and experiences and considered policy processes and mechanisms.
- The second meeting in San Francisco in June 1995 concentrated on issues related to implementing green plans: barriers, stakeholder involvement, problem definition, goal development, and measuring progress, with water management as a focal theme.
- The third meeting in Costa Rica in October 1996 dealt with issues concerning the integration of economic, social and environmental policies.
- The latest meeting, held in Brussels in April 1998, focused on three themes: cities and sustainability, integration, and indicators for sustainable development.

Contact: INGP website: <http://www.ingp.org>

Annex 2:

Challenges for More Effective Strategic Analysis, Debate and Action for Sustainable Development

A number of perceived challenges were identified during a workshop held at IIED in November 1997.

(a) **Scoping of Need** - a needs assessment is required which:

- provides a baseline assessment of conditions and needs at national to local levels;
- identifies available skills & training needs;
- identifies the pre-conditions for a strategy process; and
- enables the bureaucracy to look at the 'big picture' rather than its own domain.

(b) **Conceptual Framework** - this should:

- provide a strategy design which reflects the needs assessment;
- ensure clear relationship between objectives and implementation;
- identifies the broad framework for the strategy is, e.g sustainable development, natural resources, biodiversity, etc.;
- makes sure that the strategy is integrated into macro- and micro-economic framework(s);
- ensures the strategy adapts and builds on existing plans and strategies for coherence;
- ensures that the strategy is cyclical (not a one-off project), is not too product-oriented, and sets priorities.

(c) **Process**

(i) **Communications strategy** is required which:

- captures and systematically shares experiences through networks;
- seeks to sensitize governments and raise awareness levels;
- ensures written outputs are easy to read and accessible to all;
- provides for communication with all interested and affected parties; and
- ensures the strategy is an iterative and learning process.

(ii) **Participation (stakeholders)** - the strategy process needs to be:

- truly participatory involving as many stakeholders as possible;
- build alliances and partnerships;
- bring stakeholders on board from the beginning;
- improve environmental management at the sub-national and local level; and there is a need to
- develop indicators for effective and relevant participation.

(d) **Analytical and Policy Content** - strategies need to:

- address the poverty and social agenda;
- pay more attention to changing consumption and production patterns;
- involve better use of economic analysis;
- integrate gender issues in their analysis and development.
- provide for a link between the needs of the Rio Conventions; and
- provide for greater coherence with international policies, e.g. trade, investment, aid, etc;

(e) ***Institutional Arrangements/Cross-Sector Linkages*** - strategies processes should address both horizontal (H) and vertical (V) linkages, and:

- be integrated with other decision-making and planning and policy processes [H];
- offer a programme approach to avoid fragmentation of the process and implementation [V +H];
- put in place support systems through decentralisation processes and extension processes [V];
- be developed by strategy teams which take a broader vision [V + H];
- manage co-ordination at all levels [H];
- bridge between levels [V] ;
- address sub-regional environmental problems [V];
- manage/address global issues in national context [V]; and
- focus locally and on ground strategies in local realities [V].

(f) ***Resources (Funding + Human resources)*** - there is a need to:

- avoid heavy reliance on external funding (need to ensure long-term sustainability of process and implementation);
- develop appropriate skills for strategy management, development and implementation
- deal with problems of high staff turn-over and motivation; and
- assess value-added and opportunity costs for strategic processes.

(g) ***Political Considerations/Issues*** - strategies need to:

- be inspiring for national leaders;
- generate domestic political will and government buy-in to the process;
- mobilise public support;
- build new alliances and constituencies; and
- develop mechanisms for resolving conflicts with vested interests.

(h) ***Donor issues:*** - strategies need to:

- Provide a framework within which donors' contributions can be co-ordinated
- Identify precise areas where donors can help the process;
- Include mechanisms for minimising donor-driven processes;
- Recognise the reality of donor conditionality; and
- Stimulate donors to take a longer term and more flexible approach.

(i) ***Learning (including Monitoring & Evaluation*** - there is a need for:

- Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems for strategies including clear performance goals and targets, and indicators for sound environmental management;
- Mechanisms for M&E to trigger change or adjustment of strategy process and implementation;
- Measure impact (what works, what doesn't);
- Link to pilot demonstration(s) for action and learning;
- Strong monitoring of performance capacity; and
- Effective M&E for learning from implementation.