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**NATIONAL SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES:  
EXPERIENCE AND DILEMMAS**

By

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The analysis presented here is based on the experience of IIED working with many other institutions, organisations and individuals in assisting or promoting the development of strategies for sustainable development or their near equivalents. In particular, we have drawn from work undertaken collaboratively by IIED and IUCN during 1992-94 which has led to the preparation of a book, "Strategies for National Sustainable Development: A Handbook on their Planning and Implementation", shortly to be published in association with Earthscan Publications Ltd.

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## 1. Introduction

National sustainable development plans or strategies are focal points for integrating environment and development in decision-making, and for defining and implementing sustainable development priorities. Their importance and value run as a strong theme throughout Agenda 21<sup>1</sup> (UNCED, 1992), notably in the Preamble and in Chapter 8 (Box 1). A major challenge for National Sustainable Development Strategies (NSDSs) is to translate the words and commitments of UNCED into concrete policies and actions that help individual nations embark on paths towards sustainable development, and to stay on course.

An NSDS can help to establish an 'enabling environment' so that progress can be made in working towards sustainable development. It can provide the broad national policy framework necessary for the task. It can identify the legislative and institutional arrangements necessary to support, rather than impede, the process. This may mean introducing changes to harmonise and strengthen laws and regulations, or restructuring government administration and developing plans for capacity-building. Action plans, with both short- and long-term goals, can be elaborated and implemented. These may best be focussed on national-level initiatives such as transport infrastructure or power generation.

Many difficulties and uncertainties are encountered in developing a strategy for sustainable development, whether at the national or local level. Some observers suggest that genuine sustainable development can never be achieved, given the seeming intractability of the problems involved, the many contradictions and conflicts which sustainable development seeks to tackle, and the propensity of people and nations to pursue their own interests. It is important to understand the limitations of an NSDS which cannot, by itself, bring about sustainable development. We discuss these and a range of other dilemmas that may need to be confronted by countries and communities in strategy development and implementation.

Specifically, this paper discusses the evolution of the NSDS concept and provides examples of various national strategy processes that have been undertaken during the last decade. Through an NSDS, key decisions are made on policy and institutional conditions required to move towards sustainable development. However, most decisions which are likely to affect the sustainable development of a country are not taken at the national level but at the local level. A number of local-level strategies which are based on participatory approaches are also described. We draw attention to attributes and components of these various approaches which appear to have worked, and those which have been less successful. A number of principles are identified which may be of use to countries or organisations involved in developing an

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<sup>1</sup>Agenda 21 - the action plan of UNCED: Chapters which describe the need for national plans: 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 of Biodiversity - Article 6; Convention on Climate Change - Article 3, 4, 12.

NSDS.

### **Box 1: Agenda 21 on National Strategies**

#### *Preamble*

"Its [Agenda 21's] successful implementation is first and foremost the responsibility of governments. National strategies, plans, policies and processes are crucial in achieving this. International cooperation should support and supplement such national efforts."

#### *Chapter 8*

"Governments, in cooperation, where appropriate, with international organizations, should adopt a national strategy for sustainable development based on, inter alia, the implementation of decisions taken at the Conference, 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 the Conference, national conservation strategies and 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. It should be a thorough assessment of the current situation and initiatives".

Source: Agenda 21 (UNCED 1992)

## **2. The Concept of Sustainable Development and the NSDS Approach**

Several landmark reports have been instrumental in promoting the concept of sustainable development as an integration of social, environmental and economic goals that meets the needs of tomorrow as well as today. Since the 1972 UN Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm, worldwide acceptance of the importance of environmental issues has grown enormously. The World Conservation Strategy (IUCN/UNEP/WWF, 1980) and, subsequently, the report of the World Commission on Environment and Development - the Brundtland Commission (WCED, 1987), promoted closer links between environment and development. The WCS emphasised the integration of environment and conservation values/concerns into the development process. The WCED emphasised issues of social and economic sustainability. The follow-up to the World Conservation Strategy, "Caring for the Earth: A Strategy for Sustainable Living" (IUCN/UNEP/WWF, 1991) elaborated the Brundtland theme, integrating environmental/conservation, social and economic imperatives and elaborating principles for their practical integration. Subsequently, Agenda 21 and the conventions and agreements reached at the Earth Summit comprise a global programme of action for tackling environment and development issues. This emphasises the importance of national strategies and supporting policy instruments for giving these effect. In this section, we review first what is meant by the term 'sustainable development' and, secondly, we discuss how NSDSs may help to translate the idea into reality.

## On Sustainable Development

Many observers believe that the 'battle' to gain acceptance of the *concept* of sustainable development is effectively won. It was the dominant theme of the 1992 UN Conference of Environment and Development (UNCED) which universally endorsed the concept, particularly in Agenda 21. Governments and decision-makers often claim that they are now concerning themselves with the business of *implementing or operationalising* the concept, particularly through local Agenda 21s, sustainable development strategies, 'green plans' and related action plans of various kinds. The numbers of such plans and strategies being developed around the world is growing rapidly. But it remains to be seen to what extent the basic philosophy of sustainable development has been actually understood or is being seriously incorporated into policy-making.

There are a number of problems: firstly, there is ample evidence to suggest that sustainable development is still perceived widely - and particularly by governments - as an essentially environmental issue.

Secondly, the definition of the term 'sustainable development' and its constituent objectives vary tremendously. The term appears increasingly in the publications and vocabulary of governments, development agencies, research organisations, academic and teaching institutions, and individual scientific disciplines, and a wide variety of definitions have been offered. Many are general and broad-scale; others are more specific, particularly when cast in the perspective of particular sectors or disciplines. But some interpretations appear to lack logic. For example, "this project will be sustainable as it is linked to an on-going Bank project" (GEF, 1992).

Thirdly, and perhaps because no universally-understood terms exist, it has been easy for governments and agencies to claim that they are practising sustainable development - justifying old decisions or short-term attitudes as sustainable development by defining it in a manner consistent with their interests. Sustainable development as merely a "buzzword" is, therefore, dangerous.

Without doubt, defining sustainable development is difficult. It is much easier to focus on what is almost universally understood to be unsustainable: e.g. rising human numbers and, more especially, their growing consumption of resources, poverty, resource degradation, pollution and debt. At present, we consider that the world is moving away from, rather than toward, sustainability. The prevailing pattern of economic development, based on ever-increasing levels of "throughput growth", has created a range of global environmental changes which threaten the habitability of the earth (Brown *et.al.* 1993; Meadows *et.al.* 1992). It is these "sustainability imperatives" that drive the search for more appropriate forms of development.

Sustainable development appears to have been defined first in the World Conservation Strategy (IUCN/WWF/UNEP 1980) which states that:

"For development to be sustainable, it must take account of social and ecological factors, as well as economic ones; of the living and non-living resource base; and of the long-term as well as the short-term advantages and disadvantages of alternative action".

Subsequent definitions have varied **from** a narrowly-defined concept largely concerned with "environmentally sustainable development", i.e. with optimal resource and environmental management over time, e.g.

"Environmentally sustainable economic development involves maximising the net benefits of economic development, subject to maintaining the services and quality of natural resources over time" (Pearce *et al.* 1987)

**to** a wider concept concerned with sustainable economic, ecological and social development, e.g. as endorsed by the Brundtland Commission:

"Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (WCED 1987).

A useful and clear synthesis of definitions of sustainable development is provided by Hardoy *et al.* (1992).

Redclift (1992) captures a growing consensus concerning the role of communities when he argues that

"sustainable development might be defined by people themselves, to represent an ongoing process of self-realisation and empowerment" ..... and that "the 'bottom line', in practical terms, is that if people are not brought into focus through sustainable development, becoming both the architects and engineers of the concept, then it will never be achieved anyway, since they are unlikely to take responsibility for something they do not 'own' themselves".

We agree that, while sustainable development comprises certain universal principles, its precise objectives in operational terms have to be negotiated locally in each case. For it is here that communities and individuals take daily decisions about resource use or land management - decisions which affect their livelihoods and often their survival. This is the case in both rural and urban areas. Therefore, it is vital that an NSDS is not developed in isolation, at the national level only, and in a 'top-down' manner. The NSDS process needs to be as fully participatory as possible, initially within political, social and cultural constraints that may exist. It will also need to be complemented by sub-national (regional/provincial, district) and even more local-level strategies which will be best able to address the real and substantive issues which concern local communities.

In this paper, sustainable development is taken to mean achieving a quality of life that can be maintained for many generations because it is:

- **socially desirable**, fulfilling people's cultural, material and spiritual needs in equitable ways.
- **economically viable**, paying for itself, with costs not exceeding income, and

- **ecologically sustainable**, maintaining the long-term viability of supporting ecosystems.

The balance between these objectives is represented in Figure 1.



Figure 1

National and local strategies will take different forms (at very local level, they may comprise little more than a set of participatory procedures and some joint activities) - but they must be consistent between levels.

It is easy to talk about sustainable development (we know at least the necessary elements of the idea), but much harder to actually make significant progress towards achieving it (Box 2). There is a crucial need to balance present and future needs, allow for uncertainties, and acknowledge local differences. Furthermore, the trade-offs will have to be negotiated within the context of prevailing cultural and political circumstances and institutional and administrative arrangements - and these differ from country to country (see Figure 1). Box 3 elaborates the issues encountered in making choices and trade-offs in support of sustainable development.

Ideally, the boundary conditions identified in Figure 1 should fully support the process of developing a national or local strategy for sustainable development. Governments are responsible for providing enabling conditions which both permit and facilitate the necessary dialogue and negotiation between all sectors and interest groups in society. But in the real world, ideal conditions are rarely likely to exist. So we have to do the best we can in the given circumstances and aim towards a more sustainable world. By making a start, a strategy process - as it gathers momentum and value - has the potential to stimulate changes in the boundary conditions themselves: for example, leading to greater democracy, encouraging a review or overhaul of institutional arrangements, administrative procedures and legislative frameworks, and fostering consensus among different strata and groupings in society. Embarking on a strategy process should lead to *'sustainability resonance'*, i.e. an informed and purposeful reflex to issues of sustainable development throughout government and society, particularly in terms of policy- and decision-making.

## **Strategic Approaches**

To date, many different strategic approaches have been advocated by governments and aid agencies in different contexts. The main planning "models" are listed in Box 4. They cover a spectrum from those that focus mainly on integrating environmental concerns into the development process (e.g. the early national conservation strategies - NCSs) to those that deal with social and economic issues as well (e.g. later NCSs and National Environmental Action Plans - NEAPs). The character and process of the different approaches have been greatly influenced by the organisations which have promoted each "model" (e.g. IUCN in the case of NCSs, and the World Bank in the case of NEAPs).

Guides have also been produced for some of these approaches. In 1984, IUCN published a practical framework for conducting National Conservation Strategies, indicating how the ideas of the 1980 WCS could be translated into operational national strategies (IUCN, 1984). In 1990, the UNCED Secretariat circulated guidelines for the preparation of national reports for UNCED, advising how countries could present national perspectives and experience, together with information on policies, activities and issues at the national level that would assist the conference to meet its objectives (UNCED, 1990).

## **Box 2: The Language of Sustainable Development**

There has been an explosion of literature, conference proceedings and international agreements on the subject of sustainable development in the last decade. Much of it describes the elements which are seen to be essential to move towards the goal of sustainable development, but mainly in a theoretical sense and often in terms of fashionable phrases or "buzzwords", e.g.

**Acceptability** - sustainable development should be acceptable to the widest possible number of people, realising that there are bound to be 'winners' and 'losers'.

**Awareness-raising** - increasing understanding of the key issues, problems and solutions amongst society and its institutions.

**Empowerment and participation** - enabling all stakeholders to be involved in defining what it means for them and in implementing the action needed.

**Holistic** - sustainable development should be concerned with all issues that are important to improving and maintaining the well-being of people and ecosystems, striking balances and making (often difficult) trade-offs where necessary.

**Institution-building** - providing an institutional framework which supports effective implementation of agreed action, with trained, skilled and experienced staff.

**Integration** - environmental and economic objectives, along with social imperatives, need to be met in a balanced and integrated way (Figure 1).

**Monitoring and evaluation** - sustainable development must be capable of being monitored and assessed. Indicators will be needed to measure success in moving towards set objectives.

**Realisable benefits** - sustainable development should go beyond 'just talk' and deliver measures which yield tangible benefits to both present and future generations.

**Replicability** - the philosophy and approaches to sustainable development should be generic and acceptable to all nations and societies, although implementation will differ according to local cultural, religious, social and political norms.

**Responsiveness** - to be successful, sustainable development must reflect the needs and aspirations of society as a whole.

**Rewarding** - progress towards sustainable development is only likely to be achieved if those involved in setting objectives and designing actions, those likely to be affected by their outcome, and society as a whole, perceive or receive genuine benefits.

**Social acceptability** - taking special care to deal with issues which are vital to the social fabric of nations and communities, and ensuring that the impacts of development are socially acceptable.

### **Box 3: The Elusive Nature of Sustainable Development: Making Choices on Trade-Offs**

There are three main systems basic to development: the ecological system, the economic system, and the social system (Barbier 1987, Sadler 1987, Holmberg et al, 1991)(see Figure 1). These systems are complex, and are characterised by uncertainty and non-linearity. Societies apply a set of goals to each system. Examples are: in the ecological system to protect biodiversity; in the economic system to increase production of goods and services; and in the social system to ensure equity in the distribution of these goods and services.

Agenda 21, the action plan of UNCED, repeatedly emphasizes these three systems and the need to apply an integrated approach to them. It also partially describes a set of generic goals for each system.

A pragmatic way of tackling the question: "How best to achieve sustainable development?" is to start with the premise that development intrinsically involves trade-offs between potentially conflicting goals, such as between economic growth and conservation, and modern technology and production methods or indigenous and traditional practices.

The objective of sustainable development is to optimise goal achievement both within and across the three systems at one and the same time, through an adaptive process of integration (where possible), but more usually through trade-offs agreed amongst many sectors of society. It is adaptive because of uncertainty, and because individual preferences, social norms, ecological conditions, and state of development change over time.

Trade-offs may be negotiable within certain limits, or it may be decided that some trade-offs are completely negotiable. For example, limits may be set on the expropriation of natural "wilderness" habitat - as in the notion of critical natural capital (a term used under so-called "hard" sustainable development). In contrast, it may be decided that forms of land use may be traded off completely, as in the notion of constant natural capital. We do not yet have all the necessary tools (economic, or social) to either understand the interactions of ecological, economic and social systems; to assisting making the trade-offs in practice; to set the limits; or to measure progress. New development indicators are needed. Two types of indicator are particularly needed: improved "**rates of change**" **environmental indicators**; and **sustainable development indicators**, which give broad, 'barometric' indications of progress towards sustainability (or, conversely, away from it).

The question then arises: who should make the decisions on trade-offs ? Here, Agenda 21 calls for "the widest possible participation". Such participation is especially necessary because of the relative paucity of "scientific" tools and indicators available to give us "the answers". Hence, consensus-building and conflict resolution are vitally important. Sustainable development paths are ultimately societal decisions. However, work towards developing and using tools and indicators is also urgently needed.

#### **Box 4: Examples of National Strategic Planning Approaches**

(Note: The term "led by" indicates the organisation or agency which has promoted or has been centrally involved in advocating the approach concerned)

- ◆ **Traditional National Development Plans**, produced by national governments (often by the central Ministry of Finance and/or Development Planning), usually time-bound (eg, rolling 5-year plans) and focusing on fiscal targets, major infrastructural development, etc.
- ◆ **National Conservation Strategies**, led by IUCN. These were proposed by the World Conservation Strategy in 1980 as means to provide a comprehensive, cross-sectoral analysis of conservation and resource management issues, in order 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, assist decision-makers to 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. They have resulted, *inter alia*, in policy documents approved at high level.
- ◆ **National Environmental Action Plans**, led by the World Bank. These have been undertaken primarily by host-country organisations (usually a coordinating ministry) with technical and/or financial assistance from the World Bank, various international organisations, NGOs and other donors. They have been expressly designed to provide a framework for integrating environmental considerations into a nation's overall economic and social development programs. 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.
- ◆ **National Tropical Forestry Action Plans**, led 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 WRI. National TFAP exercises are undertaken by the country concerned, starting with a multisectoral review of forest-related issues, and leading to policy and strategy plans. They are followed by an implementation phase for policy measures, programs and projects. The plan seeks to produce informed decisions and action programs 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 organisations are held at different stages of planning and implementation.
- ◆ **National Plans to Combat Desertification**, led by CILSS (the French acronym for the Permanent Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel). These documents analyse the socioeconomic 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.
- ◆ **National Energy Assessments**, led by the World Bank under the Energy Sector Management Assistance Program (ESMAP).

/cont.

**Box 4: Continued.**

- ◆ **Integrated Regional Economic-cum-Environmental Development Planning**, led by the Asian Development Bank. A modified approach to regional development planning which incorporates conventional physical planning considerations, but with strength and attention given to environmental and economic in which environmental parameters.
- ◆ **Environmental Strategies, Country Environmental Profiles, and State of the Environment Reports**, prepared by bilateral aid donors, governments and NGOs. These vary but, in general, they present information on conditions and trends, identify and analyse causes, linkages and constraints, and indicate emerging issues and problems.
- ◆ **UNCED National Reports** on environment and sustainable development are descriptive/analytical documents. These were prepared by national governments in 1992. In practice, these 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, programs and projects, and international cooperation. UNCED guidelines were also issued on procedures for report preparation. Many countries consulted local, regional and international NGOs, women's groups, 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, justice and fairness. They are intended as the foundation for future NSDSs.
- ◆ **CSD National Reports**: Designed for reporting to the Commission for Sustainable Development on progress in implementing Agenda 21. Few produced to date.
- ◆ **Green Plans**: An evolving process of comprehensive, national programmes for environmental improvement and resource stewardship, with government-wide objectives and commitments, produced to date by Canada and Holland. Key goals include: cleaner air, water and soil; protection of ecosystems and species; and contributions to global environmental security. The Dutch National Environmental Policy Plan is very 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 reinforce commitment to environmentally responsible decision-making.
- ◆ **Convention-related National Plans**: Under the Conventions on Climate Change, Biodiversity and Desertification, national action plans are called for to deal with these issues.

To this list may shortly be added the country poverty assessments being planned by the World Bank.

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

In 1992, the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the OECD released guidelines on "Good Practices for Country Environmental Surveys and Strategies" (OECD, 1992). This DAC document identifies the approaches which have been successful to assist donors, governments and NGOs to organise the process and incorporate the results in policy-making for sustainable development. The World Bank has issued Operational Directive 4.02 (World Bank, 1992) providing guidance to staff for assisting borrowers in preparing NEAPs, and including a description and sample outline of a NEAP.

IIED and IUCN have recently completed a detailed review of a wide range of past strategies (Carew-Reid *et al.*, 1994). This publication distils the experience of many countries and practitioners in developing and implementing strategies. It draws on numerous case studies and experience discussed at several regional workshops to identify *key lessons and guiding principles*. These include the following:

- National sustainable development strategies are cyclical processes of planning and action in which the emphasis is on managing progress towards sustainability goals rather than producing a "plan" or end product.
- They must be genuinely multi-sectoral and integrative, aimed at engaging relevant interests and overcoming institutional and policy fragmentation.
- It is crucial to focus on priority issues, and identify key objectives, targets and means of dealing with them.
- "Widest possible participation" means sharing responsibility and building partnerships among all concerned - business, community and interest groups, as well as governments - but only where the partners feel it is appropriate.
- The approach taken must be adaptive and flexible, recognising that problems are characterised by complexity and uncertainty, and policy responses and technological capability change over time.
- Monitoring, evaluation and learning from experience are keys to a successful strategy, and must be an integral part of the process.
- The preparation of an NSDS is an exercise in capacity-building, and should be organised to enhance institutional arrangements, sharpen concepts and tools, foster professional skills and competence, and improve public awareness.

Following UNCED, the UNDP launched Capacity 21 - an initiative designed to help countries to develop NSDSs through encouraging and assisting capacity-building (see Box 5). Implementation of this initiative is still taking shape and it is still not clear how it will relate to, or interact with, the mandates of other UN agencies. However, UNDP is cooperating with UNEP and WHO in some countries. As a first step within a country, UNDP assesses where it should fit in with existing initiatives.

### **Box 5: Capacity 21**

Capacity 21 is an initiative of UNDP that is designed to help developing countries put into practice the principles agreed in Agenda 21 at UNCED in 1992. It became fully operational in July 1993 and operates with Trust Funds currently totalling US \$ 26m. It has the following broad objectives:

- to assist countries to incorporate sustainable development into development policies and to integrate environmental issues and development planning;
- to assist countries to involve all stakeholders (including local communities, NGOs, local assemblies, etc.) into development planning and environmental management; and
- to create a body of experience and expertise in sustainable development and capacity-building that will be of continued material value to (and influence the operation of) developing countries, UNDP, specialized agencies, NGOs and other donors.

Capacity 21 aims to achieve its objectives through programmes that help countries to build local capacity to improve environmental management and incorporate environmental management issues into development programmes and the national planning process. The aims of Capacity 21 parallel closely those of the Network for Environment and Sustainable Development in Africa (NESDA) (see Box 8).

Capacity 21 has full projects in Cameroon, Chile, China, Colombia, Gambia, Honduras, Iran, Lebanon, Morocco, Philippines, Sudan, Syria, and a project with WHO. Preparatory activities are being funded in Bolivia, Eritrea, Mozambique and Pacific Island States.

**The Sustainable Development Network (SDN)** is an integral part of Capacity 21. It makes relevant information on sustainable development available readily to decision-makers. SDNs aim to link sources and users of information. This is promoted by a combination of face-to-face meetings and electronic and other means of communication. Participants include government bodies, research institutes, NGOs and grass roots entrepreneurial organizations worldwide. The purpose of SDNs is to foster informed dialogue and communication to encourage and empower stakeholders to become more active participants in the development process.

Source: Environment News, Vol 4, Jan/Feb 1994, UNDP.

Monitoring progress on preparing and implementing NSDSs is one of the agreed functions of the new UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD). Paragraph 3 of the CSD resolution agreed at the 47th UN General Assembly (UNGA 1992) states that the Commission should have as one of its functions,

"to consider information provided by Governments, including, for example, in the form of periodic communications or national reports regarding the activities they undertake to implement Agenda 21, the problems they face, such as problems related to financial resources and technology transfer, and other environment and development issues they find relevant".

Furthermore, the Secretary General of the UN is requested to prepare reports for the first substantive session of the Commission on (amongst other issues),

"ways in which upon request the United Nations system and bilateral donors are assisting countries, particularly developing countries, in the preparation of national reports and national Agenda 21 action



plans".

In the aftermath of UNCED, many countries are moving ahead with the preparation of an NSDS or equivalent plan. Beyond the principles outlined in Box 1, no guidelines on NSDSs were issued by the UNCED Secretariat and none have yet been provided by the CSD (although there have been national reporting guidelines, but these were found to be too complex and were issued too late by the CSD and subsequently have been modified). In addition, UNCED called for other national plans to implement international agreements and other conventions concluded at Rio (Climate, Biodiversity, Forests, etc.). More recently, in October 1994, the International Convention to Combat Desertification has been concluded. It also calls for national action plans. All of these have yet to find their niche and it is far from clear if they will be incorporated as subcomponents of an NSDS, although logic dictates that they should.

### **3. The Main Elements of a Strategy Process**

Every country will need to determine, for itself, how best to approach the preparation and implementation of an NSDS. To a great extent, the process decided upon will be fashioned by prevailing political, bureaucratic and cultural circumstances. Furthermore, economic, environmental and social conditions and circumstances will differ in each country. As a consequence, a 'blueprint' approach is neither possible nor desirable. Nevertheless, the review of past strategies by IIED and IUCN (Carew-Reid *et al.* 1994) has revealed a number of steps which appear to be common to the more successful strategies. From these, it is possible to suggest the following basic steps in undertaking a strategy process:

#### *(1) Determine if Conditions are Appropriate*

Experience shows that strategies are difficult to develop without a conducive political and social climate. Political unrest inhibits reaching the necessary broad consensus, particularly if free speech and participation is denied, and it restricts confidence in thinking creatively and critically. High-level political support (at parliamentary, cabinet or head of state level) is crucial, as is a commitment to follow up and implement the strategy that evolves. Funds necessary to support the strategy process should be secure, from government or donor sources, or from both. A feasibility study can help to assess the usefulness, timeliness and practicability of undertaking a strategy.

#### *(2) Decide on an Entry Point*

From the previous discussion, it follows that an NSDS should be a participatory and cyclical process of planning and action to achieve economic, ecological and social objectives in a balanced and integrated manner. Some of the elements of the cycle follow one from the other; others (e.g. information analysis, monitoring and evaluation, and some implementation) proceed throughout the cycle. In any given country, it is likely that some kind of strategy on environment and development exists (Box 4) in which substantial investments have been made. Any new initiative to undertake an NSDS logically should build on ongoing or past

strategies and be clearly identified as an extension of them. The proliferation of calls for national strategies on sustainable development, biodiversity, climate change, desertification, etc., in the international arena could easily result in overburdened national capacity - and yet more rushed, uncoordinated plans. This must be avoided. We return to this issue later. It may be best to commence the NSDS at whatever stage in its development a significant past or ongoing strategy has reached. Whatever the entry point, it will be necessary, at an early stage, to build up a picture of what has gone on before, assess what information is available, identify key issues and assess whether existing analysis of them is adequate.

### *(3) Establish an Engine to Drive the Strategy*

A body (or bodies) of committed people both inside and outside government is needed to drive the strategy throughout, to provide coordination and impetus. High quality staff with good management skills and judgement are essential for managing the process - but this can be developed as part of the strategy. Usually a Strategy Secretariat is formed, responsible to a Steering Committee. It has often been found useful to select a respected but independent Chairperson for the Steering Committee. Experience suggests that neither body should have vested interests in a sector, or be located within a sector or interest group. The Secretariat may best be positioned as an independent body with authority to execute its tasks and located where it has the greatest influence on the national development system, e.g. in the Prime Minister's Office or the Ministry of Finance and Planning.

### *(4) Decide the Process Design*

The strategy process, although cyclical, can be considered to comprise a number of elements:

- Participation
- Information assembly and analysis
- Policy formulation
- Action planning (and budgeting)
- Implementation, including capacity-building (enabling and equipping)
- Communication (including the preparation of strategy documents)
- Monitoring and evaluation

The separation of these elements is somewhat arbitrary. As the strategy progresses, research (information assembly and analysis) and policy formulation are likely to be a part of implementation. Participation and communication are features of the way that all other elements should be approached.

One of the first tasks for the Steering Committee and Secretariat will be to decide on the scope of the strategy, the main group of "stakeholders" to be involved, the issues it should address, the approach to be followed and how to manage the above elements. A work plan and schedule of responsibilities may be drawn up.

### *(5) Determine the Participants*

Participation implies full involvement of relevant groups in appropriate tasks required for

developing and implementing the strategy. These include contributing to its design, exchanging information and sharing in decision-making. But the extent of participation which is possible (given local political, cultural and other circumstances), and which is necessary, will need to be determined. We discuss this issue more fully later. Stakeholder analysis can help to identify the key players and interest groups. They are likely to include government at all levels (from national to local) and non-governmental participants (notably industry and business, religious groups, community groups, trades unions, social interest groups, environmental organisations, resources users such as farmers and fisherfolk, academics and professional associations, schools and teachers, banking and financial organisations, the media, the judiciary, individual members of the public, and international organisations).

Mechanisms for securing participation will be needed. They can include both existing mechanisms and those which have to be specially constituted for the strategy. The latter have included technical core groups, national round tables or committees, specific working groups, public hearings (at all levels), workshops, surveys, soliciting written briefs from interest groups and individuals, and media activities. The use of techniques of participatory inquiry<sup>2</sup> will also be of great benefit.

#### *(6) Information Assembly and Analysis*

Before launching into a major effort of information assembly and analysis, an initial overview of key issues, major problems and opportunities may be helpful, adopting an issue- and/or sector-focused analysis. This may also provide an appropriate starting point for analysing environment-economy-society linkages. Examples of the more-detailed analyses that should follow include: trends in resources and ecosystems and their importance and relevance for different resource users, and the sustainability of current resource/ecosystem use; identification of policy and economic signals and the responses to them of different sectors and population groups; detailed sectoral analyses; cross-sectoral analyses; analysis of the principal functional/institutional constraints to sustainability, and definition of priority issues, problems and opportunities to be resolved by the strategy.

Information assembly and analysis can be undertaken through commissioned background studies and workshops, and by government agencies, universities, research and policy institutions and independent professionals. It may be helpful to establish a strategy information system.

#### *(7) Policy Formulation and Priority-Setting*

The policy framework includes the principles, goals and objectives of the strategy, targets for the achievement of the objectives, and the chief provisions for accomplishing them. A broad consensus on the definition of priorities will be critical: to forge unity of purpose; to give focus to the strategy; and to prevent it from becoming paralyzed by being too comprehensive, or obsessed with data collection and seeking ever more detailed information. The Steering

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<sup>2</sup>**Participatory inquiry:** A generic term for a wide variety of participatory techniques. Some of the better-known ones include: Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA), Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), Farmer Participatory Research (FPR), Diagnosis and Design (D & D), and Farmer First Methods (FF).

Committee should adopt criteria for deciding priorities.

Policy dialogues, round tables and similar fora which encourage interaction and problem-solving represent key mechanisms for this phase of activity. But they require sufficient time to be effective. Strategy start-up activities are process-rich and it takes a considerable effort for different groups to learn to work together, share responsibility and build trust.

*(8) Address the Hard Questions of Sustainable Development*

The major issues and obstacles to moving towards sustainable development in any country must be analysed and addressed in depth. These issues are bound to be subject to sharply differing opinions and divergent attitudes to environment-economy relationships and risks. It is likely that their resolution will take considerable time and effort, but an NSDS can begin immediately by identifying the high-priority, strategic initiatives that promote the transition to sustainability. Policy dialogues should focus initially on win-win shifts, for example, strategies for research, development and investment in the environmental "industry" or initiatives to promote energy conservation and efficiency. Eventually, however, the more intractable issues must be dealt with, including those which were left unsaid at UNCED or which presently elude national policy debate, e.g. population (and immigration levels) in the context of national and regional carrying capacities.

*(9) Action Planning and Budgeting*

Wherever possible, the strategy should be linked to action plans. An NSDS is a "macro" approach that is given force and substance by practical, on-the-ground "micro" actions. Key actions include: policy, legislative, institutional and organizational changes; steps to build capacity within government, in the non-governmental sector and amongst local communities; and a range of programmes and projects. In the initial phase, strategy design should be field tested, as far as possible, at the micro-level, and results incorporated into ongoing planning and policy dialogue. This can be achieved through the negotiation of protocols and agreements with national and local agencies responsible for implementation of development. Such arrangements add practical value to an NSDS and encourage a formal buy-in by organisations, including the private sector.

Each action will need to be described in terms of its purpose, inputs and outputs, implementation arrangements, roles and responsibilities of implementing agencies, critical tasks and paths, financial requirements, and monitoring and evaluation arrangements. Many actions will proceed before the full set of strategy policies are formulated and/or formally adopted.

A critical condition is ensuring that the preparation of an NSDS is coordinated with the economic and fiscal analyses that dictate how the government intervenes in the economy (e.g. the annual budget). In developing countries, many of these actions are likely to require donor funding.

*(10) Implementation and Capacity-Building*

An NSDS should be a cyclical process, with implementation and capacity-building continuing throughout. Implementation should be guided by, and feed, the regular review and revision of the strategy policy framework and action plan - possibly every three to five years, depending on a country's planning cycle. Capacity-building is an explicit aim of feedback at all levels. It is the 'glue' that holds together and strengthens the process.

Implementation can begin from the earliest stages of a strategy for issues where a government or group of other participants is already committed to action. Secretariats may need to mount demonstration programmes/projects - at least in the first cycle of implementation - to test and show the practical application of policies, and to build capacity and commitment within relevant sectors to take on the work. Such pilot projects should relate principally to initiating processes, methods and institutions for decision-making and joint action that are inter-sectoral or fall outside existing sectoral mandates.

Capacity-building and implementation should embrace the corporate sector, NGOs and communities, as well as government. The government can create an 'enabling environment' for development action by all sections of society, not just for the state. Government agencies will need to enhance their capacity to deal better with their policy mandates and also to relate to interest groups. Equally, support for NGOs will be important to enable them to play key roles, particularly in catalysing participation and local action, and in ensuring better and sustainable performance of projects, programmes and the economy.

#### *(11) Communication*

Communication is an integral component of the entire strategy process: keeping participants informed of progress; providing a consensus expression of the strategy (particularly the policy framework and action plan); and contributing to implementation by helping to generate wider understanding of sustainable development, and encouraging participation. These roles will require the preparation of a communication plan.

Communications mechanisms include: workshops and briefings, distributing a newsletter, maintaining an information base and publishing strategy documentation, issuing press releases, and organizing other media coverage.

An NSDS should show and exemplify what the transition to sustainable development means to ordinary people and major groups. It must be relevant to their concerns and interests; otherwise, it may be misunderstood and be opposed.

#### *(12) Monitoring and Evaluation*

Strategies comprise two main aspects - process and products. However, many outputs are difficult to define. Monitoring and evaluation are essential management tools and will need to cover both aspects, but be linked closely. It may be internal (by the Secretariat, by evaluators from sponsoring or authorizing organization, or by participant groups), external (by an outside body), or collaborative (involving strategy staff, groups participating in the strategy - such as government, NGOs, business groups - and maybe external evaluators). The results of monitoring and evaluation should be made widely available. Monitoring and evaluation

requires indicators to reflect the status and trends of a particular process element or product. Participatory mechanisms for carrying out monitoring and evaluation will be unprecedented in many countries, and will need development. Some examples are given in Box 6.

## Box 6. Assessment in a Local Strategy in Pakistan

Insight into national strategy progress may be gained through a sampling of local strategies. A long-term participatory project in three districts of Pakistan aims to arrest environmental degradation, and to improve natural resource use. This seven-year process, which is in its early stages, is a collaborative venture involving the Governments of Punjab and North West Frontier Province, IUCN-Pakistan, IIED and the European Commission. It will proceed through community baseline assessment of local resources, needs and problems; i.e. assessment itself will be a focus for the social organisation required for sustainable development. This will lead to community organisations forming at, for example, village, social group (women) and resource user group level, and thence to participatory planning. Assessment of progress will be a judicious mix of scientific assessments and participatory monitoring of the economic, ecological, social and institutional systems surrounding the local strategy. Indicators are currently being explored. They should provide the following information on how the project is meeting its sustainability aims:

### WHAT SHOULD BE ASSESSED?

#### **Economic sustainability:**

- Is the economic productivity of degraded land improving; and are economic activities building on natural resource potentials?
- Are input/output ratios, and subsidies for external inputs, decreasing?
- Are production, processing and storage losses being minimised?
- Is the local economy diversifying?

#### **Ecological sustainability:**

- Is natural resource production combined with conservation (of soil, water, and wild/domesticated biological diversity), to ensure resilience?
- Are harvests constant or increasing, but not at the expense of conservation?
- Is the use of ecological processes optimised (e.g. biological nitrogen fixation, waste assimilation, and recycling of water and nutrients)?
- Is pollution minimised, both on-farm and off-farm?
- Are environmentally damaging practices being phased out?
- Are natural resource limits and potentials becoming better understood, and regularly monitored?

#### **Social sustainability:**

- Are natural resource use systems increasing people's control over their own lives, and the range of choices open to them; are they compatible with local values (e.g. of taste and taboo) and systems of decision-making?
- Are costs and benefits of natural resource rehabilitation and use equitably distributed - so more people have access to resources for shelter, energy, materials and food, or so that they have incomes to pay for these basics; are special efforts made to redress imbalances, notably those disfavouring women?
- Is there a growing body of commonly-held knowledge on natural resource limits and opportunities, and is local innovation in natural resource use increasing?
- Is there a growth in local (para)professional capacity, capable of conducting natural resource research and planning?
- Is the farmer playing a leading role in rehabilitation and natural resource systems?
- Are people who used to rely upon unsustainable activities for their livelihood being supported in their transition to sustainable activities?

/cont.

Box 6 cont.

- Is there a tendency towards full employment, with suitable off-farm employment to take the pressure off the land?

**Institutional sustainability:**

- Is local environmental rehabilitation taking place against a background of supportive, stable policy? i.e.
  - internal institutions (community rules and norms on resource allocation, multiple use, cost and benefit sharing, conflict resolution, and pursuing other collective natural resource values)
  - external institutions (government land tenure, revenue policy, social support systems, natural resource technical support systems, and infrastructure)
- Are communities developing a diverse institutional support network in environmental rehabilitation, including Government and the private sector - or are they over-reliant on one project?

**CHOICE OF INDICATORS**

One option for assessing progress on these elements of sustainability is to focus on a few indicators - each of which covers the interaction of economic, ecological, social and institutional dimensions. These indicators will be fully developed during the community planning process, since they must be consistent with local strategy aims:

- 1. Changes in Productivity** (yields, resource conservation measures, costs);
- 2. Changes in Resource Quality** (extent of resource-conserving practices; use of ecosystem functions; extent of resource-degrading practices; extent of local contribution to conservation technology development);
- 3. Changes in Local Resilience and Vulnerability** (agricultural and wild products managed and farmed, access to credit, impacts of drought on livelihood, human health);
- 4. Changes in Self-Dependence of Groups and Communities** (extent of participation, local skills and capacities, effectiveness of local resource management/rehabilitation groups, dependence on external resources);
- 5. Replication of Strategy Successes to Non-Strategy Sites** (replication rates by neighbours, federation of groups to tackle broader-scale issues); and
- 6. Changes in Operations of Support Institutions** (new roles for professionals, enabling policies, increasing links with other agencies, local commitment to increasing capacity).



#### **4. Past Experience with National Strategies**

A number of the initiatives listed in Box 4 have aimed to deal with the wide range of issues implicit in the concept of sustainable development, and have led to significant changes in development policy and practice. Others have not been so successful. These initiatives are characterised by a range of strengths and weaknesses (see Box 7).

Many of the approaches overlap in subject and geographical scope, and some have been duplicated in the same country. An analysis of the documents from any country which has undertaken more than one of the different processes indicates that they have used essentially the same data. As a result, old, inaccurate or suspect information has sometimes been repeated without validation or updating, often by the same individuals. This arises from the fact that the gathering of new information and data requires time (particularly when long-term trends are involved) and is costly, and rarely has sufficient time been allowed, or funding made available, to support such work or to seek new perspectives and involve a wider range of actors.

Public consultation has been a feature of the development of many national plans or strategies, but rarely have the results of such consultations been included in a clear or obvious way in the final documents. Furthermore, this consultative process has been confined largely to information collection, with very little participation in decision-making. It has, therefore, rarely amounted to full participation of society in the design and orientation of the plan or strategy. The preparation of national surveys, plans or strategies frequently has involved (foreign) consultants talking to the same people in the governments who, in turn, have had to meet conflicting demands (by aid donors). On occasion, an element of 'green conditionality' also has been involved, as the preparation of a plan or a strategy document has been linked to the release of aid funds.

Without doubt, of the approaches listed in Box 4, National Conservation Strategies (NCSs) and National Environmental Action Plans (NEAPs) provide many of the important lessons for developing guidelines for an NSDS. As well as successes, both approaches have had their problems and difficulties, but the experience has been an iterative one and the lessons learned have led to improvements over time, with much convergence. The early examples of NCSs (eg, Zambia and Nepal) focused more on ecological issues but had no mandate to address social and economic considerations. The more recent examples (eg, Botswana and Pakistan) were able to take up such issues.

Both NCSs and NEAPs have worked on the presumption that governments are dominant throughout the development process. They have included public consultation to varying degrees, but can almost all be criticised for not involving adequately the business community - yet the latter, in many countries, are key actors in resource use.

## **Box 7. Strengths and Weaknesses of Past Strategies**

### **Key successes (however partial or inadequate) have included:**

- promoting greater public awareness of environmental issues in particular and, more generally, of the concept of sustainable development;
- starting a dialogue between different actors to identify environmental and sustainable development problems and to identify possible solutions;
- providing a mechanism/forum to discuss key environmental, social and economic issues in individual countries, and to establish priorities and priority actions;
- generating a focal point around which donors can concentrate their efforts to assist a country;
- fostering legal reform (e.g. introduction of EIA legislation) and institution- and capacity-building (e.g. establishment of new institutions such as environment ministries/agencies, and training);
- establishing innovative demonstration projects;
- through strategy experience, enabling better government participation in international events (e.g. UNCED) and providing experience and lessons for designing national reporting mechanisms under international Conventions;

### **In general, weaknesses have included:**

- being undertaken when there was insufficient high-level understanding of the implications of a strategy, and inadequate backing;
- lacking clarity on aims and scope;
- being driven too much by outside interests;
- being undertaken when there were insufficient skills, management structure and manpower for the process;
- having inadequate financial resources over too short a period, or discontinuously;
- being overly comprehensive rather than strategic and tactical;
- not building on previous strategies;
- not adequately prioritising activities;
- lacking integration with key national processes;
- lacking detailed (costed and time-bound) action plans;
- failing to reorient existing investments, and lacking new investments arising from the strategy;
- lacking adequate economic analysis;
- lacking adequate social analysis;
- involving insufficient public participation and business interaction (as opposed to consultation) - and as a consequence, being weak on consensus-building and conflict-resolution;
- being poorly timed, e.g. coinciding with elections.
- losing momentum; and being overtaken by other initiatives.

However, there have been notable exceptions in the case of each of the weaknesses listed here.

The NEAP process was pioneered in Africa by the Africa Regional Technical Department (AFTEN) of the World Bank. The early NEAPs (notably Lesotho and Mauritius) have been criticised for being driven too much by external (World Bank) influences and by the imperative to deliver a basket of bankable projects for presentation at donor conferences. The prospect of multi-million dollar donor support is seen by some to have "corrupted" or distorted the process. However, NEAPs have addressed the vital need for major environmentally-related investment. Some of the more recent NEAPs (notably Seychelles and Ghana) have built on the lessons of earlier exercises by being largely country-driven and focusing much more on processes of decision-making, participation and capacity-building, as well as defining projects for financing.

According to Greve (1994), currently there are well over 30 African countries involved in various stages of a process, begun in 1988, to develop NEAPs. The first countries to initiate NEAP exercises were Lesotho, Madagascar, Mauritius and Seychelles. The process was accelerated after UNCED in 1992. Currently, 13 African countries have completed NEAPs: Benin, Burundi, Ghana, Lesotho, Madagascar, Mauritius, Rwanda, Seychelles, The Gambia, and Uganda. A number of others are in draft or well advanced: Cameroon, Comoros, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Gabon, Guinea, Kenya, Malawi and Sierra Leone. Others are in their very early stages.

An international workshop was held in Dublin in 1990 to review the NEAP process in Africa, attended by African experts involved in NEAPs in their respective countries and others (World Bank, 1990). The workshop highlighted four themes which are important to the NEAP process: environmental information systems (EIS), the integration of NEAPs into the macro-economic framework; the environmental institutional framework; and public participation issues. Known as the "Club of Dublin", this informal consultative group or network of African NEAP experts met again in Mauritius in 1991 (World Bank, 1991). It added three further themes: environmental education, training, communication, and awareness; NEAP financing; and ensuring accountability, monitoring, and evaluation. The 'Club of Dublin' was renamed the Regional Facility for the Environment, subsequently becoming the Network for the Environment and Sustainable Development in Africa (NESDA)(see Box 8). This early experience of NEAPs in Africa has been reviewed by Falloux and Talbot (1993).

Many countries in Eastern Europe have already prepared NEAPs, some with World Bank assistance, and most of the newly independent states of the former Soviet Union are also undertaking the process.

The World Bank is currently engaged in an internal evaluation of its experience with NEAPs. A study undertaken as part of this process (Lampietti & Subramanian 1994) has reviewed 33 NEAPs from around the world and has identified six key elements to their preparation: screening problems, setting priorities, identifying underlying causes of problems, ranking interventions, choosing instruments and policies, and analyzing institutions.

In developed countries, the Dutch National Environment Policy Plan (NEPP) (a near equivalent of an NSDS) stands out (VROM, 1993)(Box 9).

The 'Club of Dublin' workshops identified key issues for national strategic planning. Similar lessons emerged from the NCS experience in many countries, as revealed during a 1988 NCS Workshop at Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe. These various axioms and those from more recent workshops and case studies undertaken by IUCN and IIED - covering both developed and developing countries - have been incorporated into a handbook on NSDSs (Carew-Reid *et al.*, 1994). From this past experience, a number of principles are evident which need to be taken into consideration in planning or undertaking a process to develop an NSDS (see Box 10). In the final analysis, the value of any strategy lies in implementation and action. This is a matter of political will and public response. In industrial democracies, limits to change are backstopped by material values and consumer behaviour - the very forces which threaten limits to growth.

### **Box 8: The Network for Environment and Sustainable Development in Africa (NESDA)**

The NESDA Secretariat was established in December 1992 and operates from a base at the African Development Bank, Abidjan. It is sponsored by the World Bank, UNSO and the ADB. Its aim is to offer services, upon request, to African governments, institutions, the private sector, NGOs, and local communities on matters related to capacity-building for strategic planning and implementation of sustainable development programmes. It shares information and experience through regional and thematic workshops. It maintains a roster of experts in different disciplines who undertake consultancies, and assist in training activities and at conferences/workshops. NESDA regularly disseminates relevant information to network members.

Source: Khalikane (1994)

### **Box 9: The Dutch National Environment Policy Plan**

As a small, intensively-settled country, the Netherlands has had to confront pressing thresholds of environmental carrying capacity earlier than other industrialised societies. The basic premise of the NEPP is that far-reaching measures are required to deal with environmental degradation in the Netherlands. It argues that without key policy changes, "agriculture, forestry, recreation and nature protection will be seriously damaged". A principal objective is "to maintain the environmental carrying capacity on behalf of sustainable development". Global, continental, fluvial, regional and local-level targets for environmental quality are identified under three different scenarios: continuation of current policy, maximum utilisation of emission-related measures, and a mix of emission and source-oriented measures (such as shifts from private car use to public transportation). The attainment of regional and local targets, for example, entail sharing reductions in emission levels and volume of wastes of the order of 70-90%. A "target group" approach, based on consultation and the negotiation of covenants, is endorsed for implementation of the policy targets and objectives. This process is backed by new legislation and intensified enforcement, and supported by efforts to reach international agreements on continental and global problems.

The NEPP was followed-up in 1990 with a supplement - the NEPP-plus, and subsequently by a NEPP-2 in 1993. The latter (VROM 1993) was debated by the Netherlands parliament in March 1994 and was unanimously supported in almost every aspect. NEPP-2 differs from the first NEPP by concentrating on implementation by those target groups, or sections of them, which are more difficult to reach. It also includes efforts to mitigate the impact of the Dutch 'ecological footprint' (see Box 15) on other countries.

### **Box 10: Some Principles for National Sustainable Development Strategies**

Consensus was reached at UNCED that countries should draw up a national strategy/plan to implement Agenda 21. In this paper, the term NSDS is used for such initiatives, but various others are also used - it is the process rather than the name that is of the essence. Thus, they may be called 'strategies to implement Agenda 21, National Agenda 21s, NSDSs, amongst other names. Many countries, both north and south, have experience over the last ten years in developing conservation strategies, environmental action plans, green plans, sectoral strategies and many similar exercises. Analysis of this rich experience suggests a number of basic principles for success. These principles are not fixed rules or prescriptive tenets, but they may be helpful to governments and individuals in a country in developing an NSDS. The principles listed below are short and somewhat cryptic. The arguments underlying each are discussed in detail in a recent handbook (Carew-Reid *et al.*, 1994). To be successful and effective, a NSDS will need to:

- 1 **recognise that it cannot be a panacea** and will be a difficult and experimental process. The strategy should not be seen as a grand, elaborate plan for sustainable development. Rather, it should be as practical as possible, and as modest in scope as is necessary to really help a society work towards achieving sustainable development. This will entail focussing on social, economic and environmental objectives, and then integrating policies that reconcile the goals. This will lead to plans and programmes for interacting sectors and interest groups;
2. **secure high-level government support** (Parliament, Cabinet, or Head of State), use or be closely linked to the official development planning framework, and involve civil society;
- 3 **promote broad, but appropriate participation** of interest groups or 'stakeholders' likely to be directly affected by or to be key to implementation (eg, government, private sector and business groups, church, NGOs, academics, citizens' groups and local communities, etc.). 'Participation' will vary according to different political and social circumstances. Participation implies involvement in - and shared responsibility for - the strategic process. It requires a partnership of all concerned;
- 4 be undertaken at a time **when the necessary resources are available**. However, an NSDS may not be opportune during periods of overriding instability, eg, a major drought, major political flux or insecurity, etc.;
- 5 **develop multi-agency networks** to help overcome problems of institutional and policy fragmentation and compartmentalisation;
- 6 promote the **integration of planning** with other components of the decision-making system such as investment procedures and local political processes;
- 7 avoid being a 'one-shot' event, but be part of a **cyclical process of planning and action** which enables lessons learned from defining and implementing previous strategies, and the current strategy, to feed into refining, amending and improving it as circumstances and situations change;
- 8 **take a long-term perspective** - an NSDS is likely to take several years to develop - and be targeted at long-run objectives (say 20 years hence);
- 9 **avoid trying to do everything** - attention on priority issues, the key influences of those issues, and the most effective way of dealing with them is essential. There is no need to be comprehensive at the start;

**Box 10: Continued.**

- 10 **be inter-sectoral and integrative** - taking account of all the main factors that influence objectives, and drawing on analysis of the interactions among sectors and interests;

- 11 **be adaptive** - many outcomes will be uncertain, and individual preferences, social norms, ecological conditions, technological capabilities, and the state of development change over time. Hence, **monitoring and evaluation need to be integral parts of a strategy**, and a strategy will need to be capable of changing in the light of evaluation;
- 12 **build on past or current strategies/plans** (e.g. those in preparation) rather than ignoring or replacing them (i.e. capture the best of what is available and has already been done);
- 13 **seek wide-based perspectives**, balancing science-based and people-centred approaches (drawing on local knowledge, values and skills); and
- 14 **support institution-building and capacity development** (developing and implementing a strategy will need skilled people and capable/effective institutions).

**An NSDS should be a country-led exercise/process.** Where donor support is needed:

- 15 it might best be mobilised through a **donor coordination group** to foster cohesion and support, with regular briefings to understand the purpose and implications of the NSDS;
- 16 it will help to differentiate between the support needed from the donor development community for the strategy process itself as opposed to the indicated investment needs thereafter. Defining an action plan with indicated financial needs is different from drawing up a strategy. **A strategy comes first - an action plan second;**
- 17 donor interests and the availability of financial support should **not deflect an NSDS from its planned strategic focus.**
- 18 Donors should:
- be supportive of country-driven initiatives that result in government commitment**, as opposed to donor-led processes that result in donor projects;
- refrain from imposing any particular strategic model**, or unduly influencing its principles, style and content;
- avoid viewing or promoting a country's NSDS process as a brand new initiative, as this may threaten useful existing initiatives (a National Conservation Strategy, National Environmental Action Plan, etc.). Rather, they could **actively encourage the integration of the NSDS process with other initiatives;**
- offer support to a long-term process**, and avoid withdrawing support once an NSDS document has been written but before implementation has begun; and
- avoid making inappropriate comparisons** between the strategies in different countries (strategies will all differ - of necessity - according to geographical, social, cultural, economic, and political conditions).
- 20 Expatriate personnel should assist only where local expertise is lacking. Donors should **refrain from supplying an 'expatriate team' to run the NSDS process for the country.**

## 5. Dilemmas Posed by the NSDS Approach

A number of strategies are often cited as being successful, in that they are beginning to tackle systemic environment/development problems. In some cases, however, the "success" of a given strategy might more easily be ascribed to just a few of its components, as opposed to the strategy as a whole. Therefore, a fundamental question is to what extent is a national, comprehensive strategic plan fundamental to sustainable development? Agenda 21 assumes it is, but is not clear about the exact ways in which a national plan may be helpful, and about precedents for success, and about any complements that must accompany it.

The 1993 Directory of Country Environmental Studies (WRI/IIED/IUCN, 1992) - a product of the INTERAISE Project<sup>1</sup> shows that there are numerous environmental plans, profiles and strategies. Many of these plans appear to exist in parallel with national policy affairs, rather than as an integral part of them. It is, therefore, legitimate to ask: do they really serve the purposes of sustainable development, and are they properly understood, subscribed to, and acted upon? There is reason to be cynical, particularly when 'anti-planning' governments agreed to no less than five new plans to be prepared at a national level after UNCED. Governments especially have a propensity to call for the preparation of 'plans', particularly as a result of international initiatives. International agencies, international NGOs and consultancy companies - eternally concerned with finding legitimate roles and making order out of apparent chaos - also tend to favour such plans, and often benefit financially by becoming involved in their development.

A number of "alternative" purposes of strategies may be postulated:

- to initiate real change (in a situation of tremendous flux in economies, faced with major environmental change and with a lack of precedent about how to deal with such extensive change, *planning* is the accepted means to set out the issues and options);
- to rationalise the status quo - repackaging and justifying existing short-term, unsustainable approaches in the language of sustainable development;
- more cynically, to create a delaying tactic, or a 'smokescreen', or a way of marginalising some interests, thus ensuring inaction on challenging issues; or
- more narrowly, to 'spin' money by paying the professional fees of those engaged in strategy preparation.

The point is that strategies could easily end up as unproductive and even damaging efforts (eg, by tying up skilled personnel who are needed elsewhere, by diverting financial resources needed for other priorities, or by raising expectations which cannot be satisfied), whilst at the same time giving the impression of there having been a rational process to agree on priorities. This also runs the risk of prejudicing the ideas of sustainable development, participation and

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<sup>1</sup> INTERAISE: The International Environmental and Natural Resource Assessment Information Service, a project undertaken collaboratively by IIED, WRI AND IUCN and sponsored by members of the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC).

multi-sector approaches. The challenge is to think about these possible implications - to address the possible dilemmas and not merely to go through the motions of the planning tasks described above. The principal question is not **what** should be done for sustainable development - it is easy to create a "planner's dream" - rather, **how** it should be done, and **who** should do it.

In this section, we consider several dilemmas which must be faced by those contemplating or responsible for developing an NSDS or similar plan:

1. The political context
2. What is the key objective ?
3. Building strategic capacity - a single spine discipline or a tool kit approach ?
4. Boundary issues - the scope problem
5. Multiple national strategies
6. The limits of consultation and participation
7. Style issues

Our aim is to stimulate discussion; not to provide answers.

### **Dilemma Number One: The Political Context**

Figure 1 illustrates that political considerations represent a critical boundary condition in working towards sustainable development. Strategies need to face up to great structural constraints and inequalities in local, national and international power structures, i.e. they must grapple with political issues. Strategies are also about defining values and making choices, which are overwhelmingly political tasks.

The critical questions are:

- Who makes the choices ?
- Who will be the winners and losers ?
- How far are political means, and democracy in particular, required as processes for making the choices ? and
- How much must the strategy process therefore overlap with party politics ?

These issues are important because the answers collectively determine *who* prepares the strategy, *how* (through what processes) and in *whose* interests.

Some of the likely agenda items for an NSDS are already highly politically-charged, such as land ownership, environmental degradation and poverty. At the very least, the NSDS process must be strongly aware of the political dimensions of the issues with which it attempts to deal. Strategies could misinform, and misdirect efforts, if they give the impression that politically neutral planning alone can deal with such issues.

At a more ambitious extreme, however, the long-term goal of an NSDS could be to create an *alternative* national consensus. After all, the scope of Agenda 21 was arguably almost as



wide as politics and government itself.

Many observers have commented that significant progress towards sustainable development can be achieved only in a democratic society, where "stakeholders" have reasonable opportunities to engage in planning and decision-making processes. This observation, however, does not deal with the complexity of the issue. The answer to the question "is democracy necessary for a successful strategy?" really depends upon how democracy is defined. If it means effective representative systems and participation, the answer is "yes, democracy is needed".

However, the answer is "no" if democracy means the supremacy of an individual's rights to produce and consume irrespective of the effects on others. The answer is also "no" if the electoral cycle means politicians push short-term goals to win votes from individuals with strong aspirations to consume more resources, as opposed to doing what is sustainable in the long term. Many would argue that radical change is necessary for sustainable development, because of the inequality prevalent in distribution of resources and in the costs and benefits of their use. Yet democracy has tended to lead to slow incrementalism, and is not good at introducing radical change.

An important question, therefore, is whether it is the intention of a NSDS - or whether its effect will be - to bypass the current democratic process in a country, or to accelerate it, or to supplement it? We suggest a middle course. It is clear, as we have discussed above, that some form of participation is necessary in a strategy. It is suggested that a broad range of political views is represented amongst participants, but that party politics do not form the main forum for strategy formulation. A key element in developing a successful strategy is to identify, and support, a pluralist *national* "engine" to drive and manage the strategy (comprising mixed government, private sector, academic and community interests which, between them, will cover a broad political spectrum) - but also to link it up effectively with many *local* interests throughout the country. NGOs and local authorities may form better links and catalysts than can the party political system - at least initially - for the capturing of many perspectives and the generation of commitment. Party politics tends to polarise the issues; sustainable development, in contrast, may be more easily negotiated with a committed "middle ground" of interest groups. Whilst such a national-level "engine" alone can result in the realistic, broad definition of needs and issues, it certainly cannot result in nation-wide understanding and commitment.

Sustainable development will entail quite radical changes in institutional roles - and for this reason it may be quite legitimate for governments to start with a strategy which concentrates on government roles and especially their integration, before going on to a wider, participatory process. This may well be the case for highly-developed government systems, which perceive risks of moving from centralised, sectoral norms towards more experimental, integrated, participatory modes of operating. To illustrate some of the dilemmas posed by the political context, we compare the United Kingdom and China in Box 11. The key issue in both cases is the right balance between participation, equity and widespread commitment on the one hand, and governmental efficiency and clarity of national purpose on the other.



## **Box 11: Political Dilemmas: The United Kingdom and China**

### **The United Kingdom:**

The UK has a strong political tradition based on electoral democracy. Indeed, it claims to have the oldest parliament in the world. Yet, ironically, this tradition still undermines participation. Whilst there are numerous examples of participatory initiatives that have worked well in the UK (e.g. Leicester Environment City Trust), there is, on occasion, strong resistance to public participation (as opposed to consultation), particularly at local authority level where many Councillors feel that such approaches undermine their traditional elected functions.

The UK government - in the words of its NSDS (HMSO 1994) - "published a consultation paper on the UK Strategy for Sustainable Development in July 1993. At its launch, the Secretary of State for the Environment invited views from all the interested organisations and individuals. The paper itself had built on an earlier round of consultations initiated in November 1992, a seminar held in March 1993 at Oxford for over 100 representatives and ongoing meetings with interested organisations". In addition, over 500 representations were sent to the government from bodies and individuals. The UK process was generally held to have had a very low level of genuine participation, although there was much one-way consultation. Dissatisfaction with the process amongst NGOs and others was high, and although the UK government "heard" their views, these views (in summary form) were relegated to an eight page annex in the 268 page strategy document. NGOs and others felt that they had made little or no material impact to the rest of the strategy. For NGOs in the UK, "participation" was far removed from what this paper describes as "full involvement in developing and implementing the strategy". The highly critical reception given to the strategy by UK groups was further evidence of a disenchantment with the process.

Nonetheless, the strategy did promise further "participatory" mechanisms to carry it forward. Under the title, "Working Together" the strategy describes three initiatives:

- A Government Panel on Sustainable Development, made up of 5 or so respected individuals to advise the Prime Minister.
- A UK Round Table for Sustainable Development, which will meet twice a year, chaired by the Secretary of State for the Environment.
- An ill-defined "Citizen's" initiative.

Although the Roundtable is to involve all of the "major groups" as defined by Rio, a number of NGOs have already decided to boycott it. The main independent forum of major environmental groups in the UK, 'UNED-UK', "broadly" welcomed the initiative, "albeit conditionally and a little tentatively". In a letter to the government, UNED-UK wrote, "The DoE-controlled talk shop model for a Roundtable is unlikely to win much favour from many of the sectors involved in the follow up to Rio, and would, we believe, rebound on the government in that it would be constantly encouraging the emission of yet more hot air as a substitute for real action. It would be hard to counter that negative image" (UNED-UK 1994).

In the context, therefore, of this particular dilemma, "The Political Context", the UK, sometimes held to be the 'cradle of democracy', appears to have designed a sustainable development strategy mechanism which hardly touches the decision-making process.

/cont.

### **Box 11 continued**

#### **China:**

In comparison, China is a totalitarian state. Whilst the last decade has seen a remarkable transition towards a market economy, the political system and government remains firmly under the control of the Communist party. People are not permitted to challenge the system. The Environmental Action Plan for China (NBEP/SPC, 1992) and China's Agenda 21 (SPC/SSTC/ACCA21, 1994) have both been prepared as top-down exercises at national, ministerial level by committees and teams involving government specialists and academics. Both plans were discussed at an international symposium held in Beijing in January 1994, attended by high-ranking officials from many Chinese regions and cities and several overseas 'experts'. Delegates were enthusiastic about the idea of greater public consultation, but this appeared to be only in terms of plan implementation. Central planning is still practised rigorously. There is no other mechanism that could yet be followed in China without overturning the political system. It is difficult to see how a genuine participatory approach would be allowed. In any case, given the size and population of China, such a process would be very time-consuming and problematic. Furthermore, there is an atmosphere of determination and urgency in China as it focuses on rapid industrial development and is courting foreign investment vigorously.

### **Box 12: Environmental Action Plans and World Bank Lending**

The International Development Association (IDA) is an affiliate of the World Bank Group. It aims to promote economic development by providing concessionary finance (interest free, but including a small administrative fee) to the less developed areas of the world. IDA's resources come from contributions by donor governments. By comparison, the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) - another World Bank facility - raises most of its funds on the world's financial markets and lends to developing countries at interest rates somewhat below those of commercial banks and with longer maturities. IDA member governments replenish the funds available triennially. Each round of replenishment is numbered consecutively. During IDA-9 replenishment, "donors urged that by 30 June 1991, or at the latest before the end of the IDA-9 period [June 1993], EAPs be completed for all IDA recipients with priority given to those countries where major problems have been identified, and the results incorporated into country lending strategies". The process was encouraged further during the IDA-10 replenishment when "the Deputies attached great weight to timely completion and high quality of EAPs with effective public participation". The donors also agreed that "IDA should assist governments in achieving this, but the Deputies stressed that the EAPs are the government's own plans".

Guidance to World Bank staff for assisting borrowers in preparing EAPs is provided in Operational Directive 4.02 (July 21 1992). The World Bank Operational Manual Transmittal Memorandum for OD 4.02 states that "it was decided subsequently that EAPs should be initiated also for IBRD countries". However, the Bank's 'encouragement' to develop EAPs in these countries was much softer, mainly since IBRD money is borrowed at near market rates.

The tone of donor language in the IDA replenishments appears quite reasonable - "urging EAP completion", "attaching great weight" and particularly encouraging "effective public participation". But the feeling 'on the ground' is that, in many countries, the EAP is perceived as a virtual condition for IDA funding - both by World Bank staff and by recipient government officials. This has often resulted in rushed EAPs, with little opportunity for "effective public participation" and, in some cases, none at all (e.g. Tanzania - see Box 13). In others, the EAP has included a considerable effort to encourage a participatory process, e.g. Malawi.

Sources: IDA (1990), ODA (1993).

## **Dilemma Number Two: What is the Key Objective ?**

In many cases, governments appear to have started on a national strategy process either in response to their commitments under Agenda 21, or in order to satisfy World Bank requirements to qualify for loans under IDA-9 and IDA-10 funding (see Box 12). Very often their objectives change during the strategy process - either because of external impositions or (rather more positively) as the result of local negotiation. In Tanzania, for example, a short consultancy exercise to write a NEAP document was virtually imposed on the country as the World Bank lost patience with the slow progress of developing the National Conservation Strategy for Sustainable Development (see Box 13).

If the prime intention of the NSDS is to provide an *environmental* "report card" - and in a form that is useful to the policy process - then the end-product will be very different from one designed to elicit broader policy changes.

A true *sustainable development* strategy, on the other hand, will need to enrich the policy debate with issues of productivity and equity as well as environmental sustainability. It will need to identify the gap between the current situation and a realistic scenario of sustainable development. It will need to continually chart a course through a period of transition to sustainability, and identify the benefits and costs to different groups on the way. It will need to be based on adaptability in the face of change, rather than resisting change by propping up the status quo. The iterative or cyclical process that this entails will be far more open-ended than a traditional, one-off planning exercise or "report card".

There is no key or sacrosanct objective; different groups will want to achieve different things by preparing NSDSs. The point is that the constituency involved needs to agree on objectives, and the final objectives should determine the process - and not the reverse of this, as has often happened. In the past, all too many strategic plans have been driven by process considerations, and their promoters have been surprised when they fail to meet any objective at all. Even worse, some processes have been set up that are simply ignored when the outcomes are surprising or conflict with the promoters' hidden agenda.

## **Dilemma Number Three: Building Strategic Capacity - a Single Spine Discipline or a Tool Kit Approach?**

Many contemporary national strategies focus on conservation and physical planning. However, we have argued that sustainable development is about the more fundamental tasks of balancing social, environmental and economic objectives. It can be contended that economics should be the central discipline for balancing these objectives. It is certainly true that economic analysis often drives national policy and planning processes. It is also argued that economics should provide a common "currency" for comparison. It is certainly the case at present that options for sustainable development need to be approved by the economists who advise key ministries such as the treasury, and who are central to corporate planning. The world to some extent hangs upon the economist's decisions, even though it is acknowledged that economics has been ill-equipped to handle many environmental and social issues ("externalities" which are considered outside the main structure of the discipline) and to

handle the needs of many who are too poor to operate through the market system.

## **Box 13: Strategy Development in Tanzania**

### **1. National Conservation Strategy for Sustainable Development**

A process to develop a National Conservation Strategy was initiated in 1988. SIDA provided financial and technical support to a Strategy Secretariat within the National Environment and Management Council (NEMC). Two national technical workshops were held: in Dodoma (November 1990) when priority areas for action were identified, and in Tanga (April 1992) when analyses, solutions and recommendations were presented.

Following UNCED in June 1992, the strategy was renamed the National Conservation Strategy for Sustainable Development (NCSSD). The bulk of the draft NCSSD draws from the workshop materials and from written contributions from sectoral ministries. It was approved by the NEMC Board in September 1993. In the draft NCSSD document (NEMC, January 1994), the strategy is posited as a "framework for integrating development and conservation". Its final Chapter represents an environmental action plan for Tanzania.

In 1992, the Ministry of Tourism, Natural Resources and Environment (MTNRE) took the view that the NCSSD process was not leading to the development of an environmental policy, although the NEMC had prepared a draft discussion document on environmental policy and was working towards including such a policy chapter in the NCSSD. The MTNRE gave the task of developing an environment policy to its Environment Department. However, there was no strong linkage between the Department and NEMC. Individual sectoral departments have also prepared draft policy documents on land, tourism, population, forest, wildlife, agriculture and water.

The NCSSD process has been conducted mainly at a central level involving government and academics. It has not received public debate or benefited from local consideration and inputs. However, in March 1994, NEMC organised a national workshop in Arusha bringing together senior government officials from Tanzania's districts and regions to consider how the NCSSD might be improved to include more local concerns and to stimulate Districts to begin considering how they might develop their own district-level strategies.

### **2. National Plan for Agenda 21 (Framework)**

In parallel to the NCSSD, and following UNCED, work began on preparing a National Plan for Agenda 21 with support from UNDP. The MTNRE organised a national workshop on Agenda 21 (29 March - 2 April 1993). Participants included representatives of government departments, NGOs, academics, industrial associations, UN agencies, diplomats and donors. The aim was to define national priorities and programmes of activities or strategies to implement Agenda 21 and an action plan. The workshop considered papers covering each of the 20 chapters of Agenda 21. It recommended the establishment of a Natural Resources and Environment Centre with sufficient manpower to handle environmental issues in Tanzania.

The draft National Plan for Agenda 21 (Framework) (MTNRE, Nov 1993) was drawn up by the Environment Department for the MTNRE, but without public debate or local consideration and inputs. It summarises the proceedings of the workshop, highlighting recommendations, priorities, national programmes and responsible institutions. These are also summarised in a matrix form. Chapters are included outlining areas for environmental action. Institutional ownership of the Framework is weak and there is no on-going process to take it forward.

## **Box 13 continued.**

### **National Environmental Action Plan**

From late 1992, the World Bank consistently argued the need for the NCSSD to include an environmental action plan component as a pre-requisite for Tanzania continuing to receive Bank support under IDA-10 after June 1994. The Bank expressed increasing concern over the slow progress of the NCSSD and, in February 1994, asserted that the government needed assistance to combine issues from the various draft policy and strategy documents and to prepare a consolidated NEAP. A consultancy process was initiated and a draft NEAP was prepared. A small committee reviewed the draft which was then presented to government and received Presidential assent in June 1994 - before the Bank's deadline (MTNRE 1994).

#### **4. Dilemmas**

In Tanzania, there is now an approved NEAP document that has little institutional ownership and no on-going process, and has been prepared with no participatory debate. There is also a draft Agenda 21 Framework for which there is no clear process for its further development, and an on-going NCSSD process which is proceeding slowly and has, as yet, no approved document.

The situation has been confused by the profusion of policy drafts, the lack of overall development direction from government, and unclear or weak ownership of processes and responsibilities..

One major problem with making economics the 'spine discipline' of the strategy process is that there is a world shortage of environmentally-literate economists; and indeed, few strategy processes have yet involved economists beyond cost-benefit analyses of the projects in their action plans. A further problem is that sustainable development must entail decision-making and other institutional improvements which are not circumscribed by an instrumentalist, economics-based viewpoint. Hence, in involving economists in strategies, there must be room to bring in other disciplines and participatory processes to develop these improvements. The policy challenge of making the necessary trade-offs is to balance "science" with "participation". In other words, the various social science, environmental science and economics disciplines need to be complemented by a wide range of people-centred approaches which capture local values, knowledge, opinions and other perspectives, and gain local commitment. No one group is able to speak for the others' values and ideas, or able to engender their commitment.

Others may contend that law will increasingly become a central discipline for future strategies - as we move away from strategies which emphasise projects and investment alone, towards those which lay out fundamental change in institutions and the distribution of resources.

We suspect that what is needed is an interdisciplinary approach that uses different disciplines, often working together in interdisciplinary techniques, to improve the decision-making process, and is linked to processes of public participation. The total system must be able to acknowledge different perspectives and deal with uncertainties, but it must also have the qualities that enable decisiveness - such as those that law and economics can offer.

As Carley (1994) has observed, "good decisions come about from a steady improvement of the processes of decision-making and participation, and enhanced human resource and



institutional capabilities at national, regional and local levels".

Many methods of analysis can contribute to these processes: by building up a picture of the tasks necessary to promote sustainable development (e.g. political change, good governance, institutional coordination, equitable resource distribution, etc.); by offering resources which can be applied to those tasks; and by contributing to the development of a national consensus leading to purposive action. The relevant techniques, taken together, form a suite or framework which has been called "sustainability analysis" (Dalal-Clayton, 1993b). Sustainability analysis has been defined as (Dalal-Clayton & Sadler 1994):

"A generic term which embraces the aim of assessing the extent to which projects, programmes and policies are able to satisfy the goals and imperatives of sustainable development, particularly the integration of environment and development in decision-making. A framework for SA will, *inter alia*, need to comprise a suite or 'tool kit' of methodologies and approaches which:

- ◆ explicitly focus on the trade-offs between the biophysical, social and economic aspects of projects, programmes and policies, recognising that these take place within a framework of political decision-making;
- ◆ are undertaken in a systematic, integrative and transparent way;
- ◆ are participative (not just consultative), to the extent possible and practicable in the context of prevailing socio-cultural-political circumstances;
- ◆ need to operate within a set of defined criteria and guidelines for sustainable development, recognising that these may often only be best practice approximations; and
- ◆ recognise that environmental assessment is a major point of departure because it is a process which is well institutionalised in policy and law".

Carley (1994) discusses about 30 methods available to sustainability analysis including environmental, economic, social and integrated or participatory methods (Box 14). There are also analogous interdisciplinary methods for strategy *implementation* - matrix management, joint resource management, participatory monitoring, etc. - all of which have some precedent, but may not yet be routine in institutions' work. The development and testing of these interdisciplinary methods, their integration into the procedures of institutions, and the development of skilled manpower, are major challenges for the future.

In examining past strategies, it is possible to conclude that the **capacity** of agencies, communities and other groups **to think and work strategically** is at least as important as any strategy **exercise or plan**. We know that we cannot "plan" our way into sustainable development, which entails close awareness of changes, and appropriate adaptation. Yet there have been considerable problems in strategies in finding people who know how to work strategically, and in identifying institutions that support this approach. Time and again, people involved in strategies have become wrapped up in the minutiae of detail, and of short-term objectives - both by inclination and because the institutional environment forces them to do this. Extensive training, and the creation of institutional environments that encourage and reward strategic (i.e. participatory, adaptive, collaborative) working styles, will be necessary for truly cyclical NSDSs. This is one reason why a government-only strategy may not be a bad idea initially - to help government get its own house in order before entering a more fully participatory effort.

### **Box 14: Some Techniques Available to Sustainability Analysis**

**A: Project and Programme Appraisal and Survey Methods**

Field surveys and inventories (e.g. natural resource surveys, demographic surveys)  
Cost-benefit analysis (CBA) and variants/extensions: cost-effectiveness analysis (CEA), multi-criteria analysis (MCA) and environmental cost-benefit analysis  
Environmental assessment (EA)  
Social impact assessment  
Land evaluation and capability classification

**B: Regional/National Accounting Systems and Multi-disciplinary Data Generation by Survey, GIS and Remote Sensing**

Multidisciplinary surveys (integrated studies)  
Resource (or environmental) accounting  
Geographical information systems (GIS)  
Remote sensing  
Basic needs indicators  
State of environment reporting  
Information management and monitoring systems (e.g. voluntary/contractual inspections for compliance with regulations, monitoring ambient environmental quality, environmental audits, project evaluation/monitoring, programme monitoring, regional (cumulative) monitoring)  
Land use planning

**C: Sector Policies and Plans, Sector Sustainable Development Strategies, Stakeholder Analysis**

Sector policy and planning frameworks (detailed strategies and policies)  
Stakeholder lists/analysis  
The FAO Computersied system for agricultural population planning assistance and training (CAPPA)

**D: Multi-Sectoral Sustainability Analysis, Participatory Inquiry Techniques, Regional Land Use Plans**

Farmings systems research and extension (FSRE)  
Agro-ecosystem analysis (AEA)  
Participatory inquiry techniques  
Primary environmental care (PEC)  
Action-centred (or task-oriented) networks  
Regional/structure plans

Source: Carley (1994)

## **Dilemma Four: Boundary Issues - The Scope Problem**

Implementing Agenda 21 raises a number of boundary issues. Sustainability defined locally will have national sustainability implications and *vice versa*; and sustainability defined nationally will have regional and global implications and *vice versa*. At any level, it is possible to avoid the need for contentious trade-offs by "importing sustainability", but this just transfers the problem elsewhere. A key dilemma here is that of sustainable consumption, an issue which is greatly resisted in many industrialised countries.

- (a) *How to tackle controversial and uncertain boundary issues such as "ecological footprints" and the rights to access and shares of "environmental space" ?*

If we accept the concept of sustainable development, we must acknowledge that there are resource limits, and that greater equity in the use of resources is desirable. Sustainable development rests on two fundamental propositions: first, that the world has limited carrying capacity to support human and other populations; and second, that within these limits priority should be given to meeting the needs of the poorest. In the run-up to Rio and since, there has been an explosion of new and vivid phrases designed to capture the prevailing sense that the industrialised world is consuming more than its 'fair share' of global resources. These include "environmental space", "ecological footprints", "shadow economies" and "ecological rucksacks" (Milieudefensie 1992; McNeill *et al.* 1992; Rees 1992; Schmidt-Bleek 1992).

How can we interpret these concepts in practice ? For example, is ecological space defined per nation, or per individual ? How is the appropriation of ecological space by another person, group or nation (i.e. the ecological footprint) to be compensated for ? And should such compensation cover historical appropriations ? If it should, the USA, for example, might owe amounts in the order of the national debt for historic emissions of greenhouse gases (calculated at rates that are currently being mooted for carbon taxes). Who should be the recipients of such compensation ? The concepts of 'environmental space' and 'ecological footprints' have been considered in some detail in the Netherlands and Canada, respectively (Box 15).

### **Box 15: Environmental Space and Ecological Footprints**

In its "Action Plan for a Sustainable Netherlands" published in April 1992, the Dutch Friends of the Earth, Milieudefensie, made a rough calculation of available per capita global carrying capacity (or 'environmental space') for key energy, water, raw materials and arable land resources. It then identified the cuts in current consumption levels necessary in the Netherlands to return to sustainable levels by 2010: these ranged from 40% for fresh water to 80% for aluminium use. As a result of these and other calculations, the Dutch government was one of the few at Rio to acknowledge that it could only sustain its lifestyle by exploiting the carrying capacity of other countries (VROM, 1991).

The parallel concept of 'ecological footprints' was coined by William Rees to describe the tendency of urban areas "through trade and natural flows to appropriate the carrying capacity of distant elsewhere". Looking specifically at the Lower Fraser Valley of British Columbia, Canada, Rees found that the land area required to support the community (in other words, its 'ecological footprint') was at least 20 times the land it occupies. Looking at the issue from a Southern perspective, Anil Agarwal at the Centre for Science and Environment in India has estimated that the total biomass currently exported from the developing world to industrialised countries is 10 times greater than during the colonial period (Weiszacker, 1994). These exports of carrying capacity do not necessarily pose a problem if they are drawing on true ecological surpluses, and if enough remains for meeting local needs. Currently, there is no guarantee that trade flows are really based on these principles.

These issues have great implications for sovereignty, trade, inter- and intra-generational equity. They raise the issue of **needs** (as opposed to **demands**, which are exercised through the market place, and hence are amenable to economic analysis). They also make the issue of changing values - away from welfare based on material consumption - inescapable. To an extent, all these issues can be dealt with through attention to increasing efficiency. Some of the issues may be dealt with through international agreements, or through payments for "global services". Either way, there has to be acknowledgement that people at one level - e.g. the nation - are giving something up in order to provide benefits for people at another level - e.g. the world as a whole. Two needs follow from this. The first is that the strategy process at each level needs to be able to capture information on these cross-boundary issues. The second is that there should be cross-boundary processes of negotiation and compensation to deal with these issues. Within a nation, NGOs, local authorities, and participatory processes offer promise for such cross-boundary brokerage. Internationally, the UN system and other intergovernmental bodies offer some promise. At the moment, the UN Commission on Sustainable Development is concentrating on information on sustainability; this is a good basis for future resource payments based on who is subsidising whose consumption.

Governments are also struggling to understand how the above concepts can be incorporated in their strategy processes. At the international level, a debate has now started on how to operationalise these ideas within the drive towards 'sustainable consumption'. At the national level, a few countries have 'flagged' the issue in their strategies. For example, the Dutch have placed the idea of 'environmental space' at the heart of their second National Environmental Policy Plan, launched in December 1993 (VROM, 1993), while the UK has chosen to adopt the 'footprint' phrase to describe the positive and negative impacts of its economic activities on global and overseas carrying capacity in its first strategy for sustainable development (HMSO, 1994).

But governments have steered clear of addressing the host of controversial issues that lurk beneath the surface. The governments of the North are generally reticent about the redistributive implications of these concepts, fearing a return to the debates of the New International Economic Order in the 1970s. And although the South has called for adequate 'environmental space' for its future development, developing countries are also uneasy about actions that the industrialised North might take to reduce its 'footprint', which could lead to further obstacles to their exports. It is becoming increasingly clear that notions of 'environmental space' and 'ecological footprints' challenge head-on commonly accepted interpretations of sovereignty and trade policy, and raise perplexing issues for the inter-generational management of global resources. Some of these issues could be dealt with through a new set of international environmental agreements, whereby countries could trade their quotas of 'environmental space' for financial support. Development assistance could thus be transformed from a humanitarian obligation to a payment for ecological services received.

Before such trading can take place, a far greater degree of popular understanding is needed of the ecological entanglement being created by the accelerating process of globalisation. A first priority is for strategy processes in North and South to capture pertinent information on these cross-boundary issues. For an industrialised country, this could mean closer scrutiny of the impacts of private sector direct investments and portfolio investments in emerging markets; while for a developing country, more attention could be placed on the social and environmental consequences of commodity diversification. Beyond this, new frameworks for dialogue and negotiation need to be developed both at a bilateral and multilateral level.

- (b) *What relationship should regional strategies have to national strategies ? Which leads ?*

Nations need to realise that democratic, intergovernmental bodies are required to negotiate, legislate and enforce rules of access to "global commons" and to deal with cross-boundary sustainability impacts. It may frequently be better to begin such efforts at the regional level, where strong and tangible common concerns can be identified.

In some parts of the world, regional strategies and overviews on the theme of sustainable development have been prepared. Examples from before UNCED include the Mediterranean Blue Plan (MBPRAC 1988), the Kampala Agenda of Action Towards Sustainable Development in Africa (1989), and 'Our Own Agenda' of the Latin American and Caribbean Commission on Development and Environment (LACCDE 1990).

More recently, in 1993, the comprehensive "Environmental Action Programme for Central and Eastern Europe" spelled out a process to equalize environmental conditions in the East and West, with an emphasis on the urban environment (Box 16).

#### **Box 16: The Environmental Action Programme for Central and Eastern Europe**

In April 1993, European environment ministers met in Lucerne and endorsed the Environmental Action Plan for Central and Eastern Europe. Between US \$ 30 and \$50 million in grant funds was pledged to support better project identification and preparation, as well as numerous small investments to generate environmental benefits.

The programme was prepared by the World Bank, with the OECD as part of a task force chaired by the European Commission. Using practical examples, it indicates how economic and sectoral policies and investments can best contribute to environmental improvement. It adopts the basic premise that, due to scarce financial resources, human health impacts must be the primary criterion in setting environmental priorities. The focus, therefore, is mainly on pollution problems that affect both cities and the surrounding countryside and are common to the countries in the former Soviet bloc. The programme also encourages consensus among Central and Eastern European countries and donor agencies on environmental priorities. It promotes a mix of policy, investment and institutional actions such as cutting air emissions from specific types of industrial plants, reducing particulate and sulphur dioxide emissions in urban areas (especially linked to the use of coal in the household and service sectors), launching low-cost, high-gain programmes such as energy efficiency and environmental audits in the industrial sectors responsible for the most pollution, protecting groundwater from wastewater discharges and hazardous wastes, and undertaking municipal wastewater investments for improving ambient water quality at low cost.

During the last year, a range of actions to implement the programme have been initiated, including: translation of the programme into 19 Eastern European languages; preparation by the Kyrgyz Republic of a national environmental strategy organised around the themes of the Regional Action Plan; and a training seminar in Bulgaria for 38 officials from ministries in various countries.

Source: World Bank (1994).

The question arises as to which strategies and plans should take precedence.

In Western Europe, the environmental dimension has become an increasingly critical part of the European Community's programme of economic and political union. Following the 1972

Stockholm Conference, the European Economic Community launched the first of five multi-annual environmental action programmes to define policy and legislative priorities at the regional level. One major result has been the construction of an impressive array of EC environmental law, which member states are obliged to implement.

The history of the Community's current fifth environmental action programme reveals, however, that the question of the right balance between Community and member states is far from resolved (CEC, 1993). Launched in March 1992 by the European Commission, the EC's administrative arm, the programme - appropriately entitled 'Towards Sustainability' - received little prior input from member governments. Once published, a procedural quirk meant that member states could neither change the text of the programme, nor update it in light of the Rio conference. Instead, the 12 environment ministers agreed a resolution that approved the general approach of the programme, laying down their EC-wide priorities for implementation. As a result of this process, some governments, notably the UK, lack a sense of ownership over the fifth programme. One consequence was the playing-down of the EC dimension in the UK's own strategy for sustainable development.

But strategy-making for sustainable development in the EC has also fallen victim to the after-shocks of the debate on 'subsidiarity' that shook the Community during the ratification of the Maastricht Treaty in 1992. Defined as "placing decisions at the most appropriate level", 'subsidiarity' has sometimes become a code-word for limiting the scope of Community-level action, and returning power to the member states. In the environmental policy context, this has meant that the Commission has been reluctant to consider any close coordination of the fifth programme with the national strategies that all member states have committed themselves to delivering as part of the follow-up to Agenda 21.

Although 'turf disputes' over legal competence, power and resources are unlikely to go away, the accelerating economic and political integration in Europe and other regions means that a more sophisticated and open process of strategy-making will have to be developed, linking creatively the regional, national and local levels. One critical challenge is to find ways whereby meaningful participation can be engineered for regional strategies that goes beyond consultation with alliances of environmental or industrial lobby groups.

Regional strategies do not appear to be built upon pre-existing national ones. Rather they tend to be developed as independent exercises by ad hoc teams and without national involvement. Furthermore, they usually involve no public participation. In fact, national publics are generally ignorant about such strategies and they receive little press coverage.

(c) *How should local Agenda 21s (or local strategies) be related to national strategies. Again, which leads ?*

A national strategy can set broad policy aims and provide institutional and legal impetus and structures to foster sustainable development. But the real action and business of implementing sustainable development is undertaken by 'ordinary' people at the local level. A national strategy cannot be simply converted into provincial, district or more local strategies, particularly in large countries. Issues which are key at a national level may not be important locally, and *vice versa*. It is important, therefore, that the development of local strategies should not merely flesh out a template provided by the national strategy, but should also be driven by local priorities. Such local experience can then positively contribute to the further development and revision of national strategies. Indeed, many national strategies are now at a

stage where, to be realistic and implementable, local issues and action need to be defined. National strategies tend to be based on analyses of sectoral or resource issues; but local strategies more easily encompass livelihood issues, which are key to attending to the problems of power structure and access to resources which currently constrain sustainable development. Building sustainable development thus needs to be a two-way process, linking national and more local concerns, priorities and experiences.

An example of an engaging in a local process and its relation to the national process is given by Coast Region Tanzania (see Box 17).

### **Box 17: A Local Level Strategy in Coast Region, Tanzania**

In Tanzania, implementation of the National Conservation Strategy for Sustainable Development (NCSSD) is yet to begin. A national workshop was held in March 1994 to explain the NCSSD to Districts (see Box 13). Immediately afterwards, Coast Region and its five Districts held their own workshop to investigate the possibility of developing a sustainable development strategy for or within that region.

The workshop examined the implications and application of the concepts and imperatives contained in the draft NCSSD and in other policy instruments. The aim was to see how they were relevant in Coast Region and how they could be applied to develop a local strategy and action plan within the region.

The workshop determined that a local strategy process will have to take time and be based on a 'grass roots' exercise, building on local people's needs. A top-down exercise conducted at regional or district headquarters was ruled out. It was acknowledged that the skills and funding necessary to undertake a strategy process at the regional or district level are not available. Furthermore, the participatory method(s) will need to be experimental at first to determine the best approach. A decision was taken that a start will be made in one ward (4-5 villages) in one district in the first year; in the second year, a second ward in a second district will be added. Both wards have now been selected.

The Regional Development Director has appointed a steering committee to oversee the initiative. Project Advisory Groups are to be established in each district to support the work of the project core team (a coordinator and group of facilitators - trained in participatory techniques). This team will be assisted subsequently by village animators.

The next stage will be an 'intermediate phase' of 3 to 6 months duration which will involve:

- discussion with all actors in the wards;
- identifying available information, resources and expertise;
- analysis of available and needed skills, including those in participatory methods; and
- initiation of training participatory inquiry methodologies.

In effect, this initiative, if successful, will represent a pilot project for the NCSSD to carry its message to the local level, and will provide a means for the local communities to help the further elaboration of the NCSSD.

Source: RDD/IRA/IIED (1994a and 1994b).

### **Dilemma Five: Multiple National Strategies**

We have already discussed the variety of strategies and related initiatives that have been undertaken in many countries (see Box 4). These have often overlapped in time, scope and

content. They have also frequently displaced, undermined or duplicated good past strategies or existing strategy processes, causing confusion and exasperation amongst local staff responsible for their preparation, and ensuring that they are run as fast-track bureaucratic processes, as opposed to participatory processes of reflection, planning and joint action.

There has tended to be a presumption that past strategies and plans, including those recently completed, are inadequate, perhaps because of who has prepared them, or because of a perceived difference in objective and mandate. They have frequently been ignored, despite most of them being rich in information, analysis, agreed priorities and commitment. The key problems with them (e.g. lack of implementation capacity) have not been pinpointed and tackled; rather, they have been abandoned wholesale.

The unnecessary proliferation of multiple strategies and plans over a short period wastes money and absorbs needlessly the attention and energies of often hard-pressed staff in government and other institutions, and particularly so when they duplicate or ignore past efforts. But the problem is inexcusable when such strategies are undertaken concurrently. Several examples illustrate the point:

In **Tanzania**, three separate initiatives and documents exist in parallel, causing confusion and uncertainty: a draft National Conservation Strategy for Sustainable Development, a National Plan for Agenda 21 (Framework), and a World Bank-promoted NEAP (see Box 13).

In **Canada**, Environment Canada is developing its Green Plan II and, as with Green Plan I, this is mainly an internal government exercise. In parallel, the *Projet de société* is a multistakeholder initiative to prepare an NSDS. It is being developed as a consensus process involving over 80 businesses, government and independent organizations (see Box 18). The Secretariat for the *Projet de société* is based in the National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy. At present, there is virtually no relationship between the two exercises. In addition, a Canadian Biodiversity Strategy is being drafted which covers important components of both the *Projet* and Environment Canada initiatives.

In **China**, a national Agenda 21 has been published recently (SPC/SSTC/ACCA21 1994). It was prepared collaboratively by the State Planning and State Science and Technology Commissions with support from UNDP. Previously, the National Bureau on Environmental Protection and the State Planning Commission had independently prepared the Environmental Protection Action Plan of China (1991-2000) (NBEP/SPC, 1992). Following discussions with the World Bank on the acceptability of the plan as satisfying NEAP requirements for IDA funding, this was completed in December 1993 (Wang 1994). The two exercises appear to be quite disassociated (see also Box 11).

The problem of duplication is likely soon to be compounded further. The Conventions on Climate Change, Biodiversity and Desertification each require countries to prepare national plans, outlining what measures are needed to deal with problems and meet obligations. The administrative, institutional and financial implications of undertaking so many plans in addition to preparing an NSDS or equivalent, routine development planning (i.e. 5-year plans, etc.) and dealing with other commitments, will place an impossible burden on most nations, and particularly developing countries. Furthermore, government staff and other expertise (academics, NGOs, etc.) are likely to be overwhelmed. Either routine duties will be



neglected, or work on these plans will be less than thorough or undertaken in unsatisfactory ways.

Logically, an NSDS should form an umbrella of broad objectives, institutional roles, decision-making and monitoring processes and guidelines, under which more detailed strategies (local or sectoral) should be formulated and implemented. The Forestry Advisory Group, which keeps a watch on the Tropical Forestry Action Programme, has recommended this option. To be effective, the scope of an NSDS should cover all the issues that these other plans and strategies would need to deal with. Obviously, key issues will differ in each country. In some, they may, in fact, be the same key issues that a climate, biodiversity or desertification strategy would embrace. For instance, in Sahelian countries, it is likely that the key issues for sustainable development will be the same ones that would emerge as paramount in a desertification plan or strategy, e.g. water availability, land degradation, pastoral land tenure, etc. In the countries of East Africa, biodiversity issues are likely to be key issues in any NSDS. In most countries, those steps necessary to plan effectively for climate change will be the same ones that are necessary for working towards sustainable development, since both depend upon building capacities for resilience and adaptation (Secrett, in prep).

### **Dilemma Six: The Limits of Consultation and Participation**

There are a number of risks associated with consultation and participation and, as yet, not too many precedents for dealing with them in a strategy context:

- The vision/direction of the strategy may be less clear initially, given the fact that multiple perspectives need to be incorporated. It may, therefore, take more time to focus on agreed priorities.
- The relatively high costs of initial iterations of consultation and participation frequently cause a premature halt to these activities. The costs of locating, meeting and discussing with the different actors, and of giving them time and resources to consult with their own constituencies, need to be incurred before launching into the strategy policies and action plans. Yet the sponsors of the strategy may be impatient for these products.
- Momentum may be lost, as the time taken for participatory strategies is longer.
- The necessary balanced approach to social, environmental and economic problems may be more difficult to reach if a single system of analysis is not dominant. However, real life is much more complex than single systems of analysis, and it is healthy not to be able to over-simplify.
- Control over critical resources, e.g. environmental quality, may be lost if responsibilities become spread too thinly amongst participants.
- If improperly managed, participatory processes can result in expectations being raised too high or covering inappropriate issues; too many issues being identified than can be dealt with; and impasses and conflicts if consensus or compromise cannot be reached.

These risks could be minimised through good planning for participation, and good management of the participation process. In addition, a number of challenges need to be faced

in the task of building appropriate participation into a strategy:

- How to overcome the professional biases of planners and professionals who may not believe that it is worth consulting the people ? This will entail bringing in the evolving new techniques for assessing the "trustworthiness" of the results of participation, and hence putting these results on a par with the "statistically sound" results of scientific approaches.
- How to turn professionals from "experts" to facilitators; and to ensure that the strategy, and the professionals' inputs, are considered to have a mandate given to them by local groups ?
- When to bring in conflict resolution ? To a certain extent, consultation and participation can focus on "win-win" situations, where different groups can get together to achieve joint objectives. Many strategies have emphasised these. After a time, however, it becomes clear that "win-win" possibilities are limited, and progress is constrained by issues of conflict (e.g. the many uses of a large forest by different actors) and the critical issue is to determine an equitable trade-off. Experience of conflict resolution in strategies has been weak so far. The Project de société process in Canada appears to be the most ambitious multistakeholder exercise initiated to date, and it is currently moving from the process definition stage to the problem-solving stage (see Box 18).
- How can the tendency for plans and strategies to centralise and to become top-heavy and top-down be countered; what is the appropriate balance between centralisation and decentralisation ?
- The NSDS presupposes a high degree of social partnership and decentralisation of decision-making and independent action. Is this realistic given the attitudes of many governments to local government and, beyond that, extra-parliamentary decision-making ?
- The participatory aspects of an NSDS presuppose an ethically-motivated, educated and socially-aware public. What if the public is simply not interested in the issues of sustainable development ? Clearly, a two-way process of education and consultation is needed.

Some of the approaches to dealing with these challenges may include:

- Institutional reviews of the main agencies that should be promoting and supporting participation (because they have a cross-sectoral mandate, or deal with a resource that is used by many interest groups);
- Training in participatory methodologies (which form a good first step in defining and creating appropriate institutional and professional change);
- Close monitoring of early strategy participation exercises, and particularly their risks; and
- Promotion at high levels of the benefits of consultation and participation.

These, and other dilemmas of participation, will be addressed in detail in a forthcoming IIED discussion paper on participation in NSDSs.

### **Box 18: Canada's Projet de société**

Many of Canada's provinces, territories, regions and municipalities have prepared sustainability strategies. The Projet de société, however, aims at the overall national level. It was established in November 1992, as a follow-up to the Earth Summit, with the 'mission' to "help promote Canada's transition to a sustainable future". Its primary role is as a catalyst for change.

The Projet de société recognises several necessities: that this transition is a collective responsibility of all Canadians; that all levels and sectors of society must be engaged in identifying and implementing the necessary changes; and that new institutional models and processes are needed to achieve a common purpose and course of action. These involve partnerships and networks.

A National Stakeholders' Assembly has been established. It is not a representative body but a multistakeholder coalition of Canadian government and non-governmental organisations and individuals, drawn from over 80 sectors of society, working together freely as equals "on the understanding that some tasks can be accomplished together that could never be accomplished separately".

During its initial year, the Projet de société undertook an assessment of Canada's progress since the Earth Summit, drafted a framework and process for an NSDS, and initiated a series of practical actions to advance various elements of this approach. Based on the lessons drawn from this experience, the Projet de société is now moving to a more substantive programme of activity, including communication, planning and demonstration components that foster sustainability as a national mission.

#### **Principles of the Projet de société:**

- The process is designed to be transparent, inclusive and accountable.
- Each partner and sector is encouraged to identify and take responsibility for its own contribution to sustainability.
- Dialogue and cooperation among sectors and communities are key elements of problem-solving.
- A shared vision and agreement on key policy, institutional and individual changes are necessary for the transition to sustainability.
- Strategy and action must be linked, and must build on previous and ongoing initiatives.
- Canada's practice of sustainable development and its contribution to global sustainability should be exemplary.

Source: Projet de société (1993).

### **Dilemma Eight: Style Issues**

The manner of promoting and conducting an NSDS is critical. It is clear that in order to accelerate participation, community self-reliance and institutional change that can handle holistic concepts and uncertainties, new ways of thinking and practice will be required. These are emerging rapidly in the development community (but perhaps not in the "environment" community, *sensu stricto*). Table 1 illustrates this point with respect to institutional settings in rural development. Taking this further, one can point to changes in the policy arena, too (Table 2).

**Table 1. Comparison Between Old and New Institutional Settings**

	<b>From the Old Institutional Setting</b>	<b>To the New Institutional Setting</b>
<i>Mode of decision making</i>	Centralised and standardised	Decentralised and adapted to context
<i>Mode of planning and delivery of technologies or services</i>	Static design, fixed packages, supply-push	Evolving design, wide choice, demand-pull
<i>Response to external change</i>	Collect more data before acting	Act immediately and monitor consequences
<i>Mode of field learning</i>	Field learning by 'rural development tourism' and questionnaire surveys; error concealed or ignored	Learning by dialogue and participatory inquiry and methods; error embraced
<i>How those in institutions learn (especially at the top)</i>	Self-deceiving; misleading feedback from peripheries give falsely favourable impressions of impact	Learning through feedback and feedforward; for adaptive and iterative processes
<i>Linkages and alliances</i>	Institutions work in isolation	Institutions linked formally and informally to each other

Source; Pretty & Chambers (1993).

**Table 2: Changing Professionalism from the Old to the New**

	<b>From the old professionalism</b>	<b>To the new professionalism</b>
<i>Assumptions about reality</i>	Assumption of singular, tangible reality	Assumption of multiple realities that are socially constructed
<i>Scientific method</i>	Scientific method is reductionist and positivist; complex world split into independent variables and cause-effect relationships; researchers' categories and perceptions are central	Scientific method holistic and constructivist; local categories and perceptions are central; subject-object and method-data distinctions are blurred
<i>Strategy and context of inquiry</i>	Investigators know what they want; pre-specified research plan or design. Information is extracted from respondents or derived from controlled experiments; context is independent and controlled	Investigators do not know where research will lead; it is an open-ended learning process. Understanding and focus emerges through interaction; context of inquiry is fundamental
<i>Who sets priorities?</i>	Professionals set priorities	Local people and professionals set priorities together
<i>Relationship between all actors in the process</i>	Professionals control and motivate clients from a distance; they tend not to trust people (farmers, rural people etc.) who are simply the object of inquiry	Professionals enable and empower inclose dialogue; they attempt to build trust through joint analyses and negotiation; understanding arises through this engagement, resulting in inevitable interactions between the investigator and the 'objects' of research
<i>Mode of working</i>	Single disciplinary—working alone	Multidisciplinary—working in groups
<i>Technology or services</i>	Rejected technology or service assumed to be fault of local people or local conditions. Careers are inwards and upwards—as practitioners get better, they become promoted and take on more administration	Rejected technology or service is a failed technology or service. Careers include outward and downward movement — professionals stay in touch with action at all levels

Source: Pretty & Chambers (1993).

## **6. The Problem of Dependent Territories and Microstates**

A number of nations, mostly former colonial powers, still have dependent territories which, though linked politically and economically, have very different cultures and societies and exist in environments completely different to the 'mother country'. For example, the UK is still responsible for 12 dependencies including small islands in the tropical Caribbean and the temperate and subtropical South Atlantic. Whilst most such territories enjoy a significant measure of self-government, particularly as far as domestic policies and priorities are concerned, the 'mother country' normally retains certain responsibilities, notably for external relations and security. Dependencies tend to receive a substantial part of their budget requirements from the mother country - through the aid programme in the case of the UK. Furthermore, the civil service in such territories may be staffed by people on short-term contracts or seconded from the 'mother country'. Strategies developed for the 'mother countries' seldom take account of, include provisions for, or even make reference to, dependent territories. But when dependent territories develop their own strategies, they may require ratification by the 'mother country', especially if there are financial or legal implications. The potential for clashes of values is great. Similar problems exist for "microstates", which are too small to maintain strong independence in matters of economic and foreign policy; they may not be under the wing of a 'mother country', but there are certainly one or more 'big brothers'. The emphasis on national-level planning in Agenda 21 is putting particular pressure on micro-states; with all the planning and bureaucracy that Agenda 21 could so easily (if unwittingly) impose, one might ask if anyone will be left to keep the country running!

Nowadays, many of the remaining dependent territories, and many of the microstates, are small islands. Here, the interdependence between the environmental, social and economic systems of the island itself usually is strongly evident, and the imperative to use natural resources in a sustainable way is clear to people. Whilst the complexities of developing a strategy for sustainable development are no less difficult to manage on a small island, their compact nature makes it easier to engage the public in the process. This is aided by the fact that, in general, their publics tend to be more aware of island initiatives than those of larger countries. The latter may have much to learn from the experiments in developing strategies in their dependencies. This is exemplified by the case of St Helena (see Box 19).

However, the real dilemmas come about when dealing with the strong external economic and environmental influences on islands - about which no islander can do much, the onus being on the 'mother country' and on the international community as a whole (Bass, 1993). Here, the arguments for analysing the ecological footprint, and for an equitable intergovernmental forum to deal with its consequences, are irresistible for islands. The Alliance of Small Island States was set up because it was all too easy for large nations to resist the arguments of the small islands; equity between nations is a major feature of its agenda.

## **7. What to do next ?**

Two very important principles were incorporated into the UNCED accords: the "Precautionary Principle" and the "Subsidiarity Principle". Most strategies have yet to consider these principles clearly. It may be necessary to work towards national strategies that incorporate precaution; are drawn up in a decentralised manner; incorporate economic, environmental and social goals; and are open to adaptive or iterative change. This will mean a

period of consolidation of national initiatives, initially bringing together the perhaps



### **Box 19: The Sustainable Environment and Development Strategy, St Helena**

In March 1993, IIED together with the Royal Botanic Garden, Kew, assisted the Government of St Helena to scope out the options for developing a Sustainable Environment and Development Strategy (SEDS) for the island. St Helena is a small island of 5000 inhabitants located in the remote southern Atlantic ocean. It is, perhaps, best known as the place of Napoleon's exile and death, and for its rich endemic fauna and flora. But it also suffers severe land degradation, limited development options, and is highly vulnerable to external actions and decisions.

The six-week scoping process was cross-sectoral and inclusive of all government departments, the private sector, NGOs, and the public; it involved a wide range of surveys and data-gathering exercises and exhaustive consultations and participation (e.g. numerous official and public meetings, phone-ins, school painting competitions and seminars). As a consequence, the people of St Helena were very supportive of the opportunity presented by the process to become actively involved in determining their own fate (most decisions are taken by expatriate government officers or in the UK).

The government expressed great enthusiasm - the notion of undertaking the development of a strategy arose at a time when the future appears particularly difficult for the island's economy. The government is considering actively how to take the initiative forward and what is the best strategy management and coordination mechanism for the island. As a small island with limited numbers of professionals, St Helena requires specialist assistance to establish the strategy process.

Source: Dalal-Clayton (1993a).

disparate, overlapping and incomplete plans that exist at present.

The obsession with integrating the national plans and strategies with key national processes (such as routine development planning, budgeting and income accounting) may turn more towards a more general realisation that these very processes need to change. Major institutional changes will be necessary if sustainable development is to be taken up; the pros and cons from deviating from sectoral, ministerial norms should receive careful study.

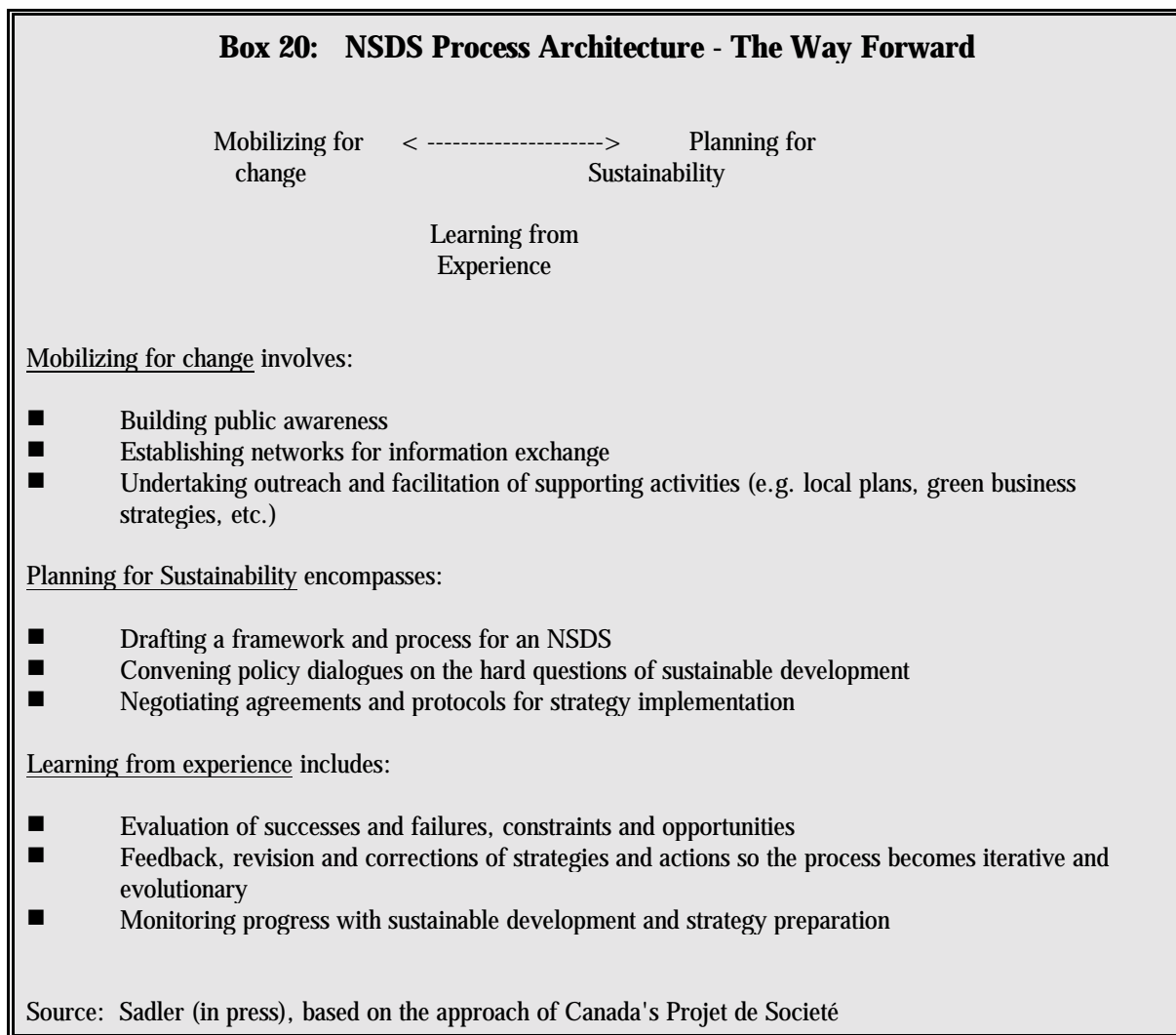
It may not be long before local strategies receive the kind of emphasis that national strategies have had recently. But local strategies will not be effective unless national strategies provide an enabling environment - one which offers decision-making powers and resources to the local level, and which ensures that poorer groups at local levels are also able to negotiate, and to take up, negotiated rights and responsibilities.

The cross-boundary effects from local to national to global need to be clarified; the means of ensuring consistency in sustainable development principles and definitions between levels need to be assured; and the possibilities of making transfers to compensate "losers" at any level need to be set out. The latter will entail stronger efforts of valuation and monitoring.

In the final analysis, sustainable development requires nothing less than a thorough 'greening' of the political, business and consumer mainstreams, and of the values, lifestyles and choices that underlie and shape them (Sadler 1992). An NSDS should serve as a mechanism for achieving this transition. It will need to be part policy agenda, part investment prospectus and part action plan. This approach combines elements of normative, strategic and operational planning. It should begin with a reconsideration of what should be done; move to an evaluation of what can be achieved under certain time frames; and, finally, outline what actions will be taken in the near- and mid-term (Sadler, in press). Much of the groundwork

for designing and implementing such an approach is either in place or under development in many countries.

Other elements remain to be added. The way forward lies in bridging the gap between principles and practice, between aspirations and their application. Learning the lessons from recent experience is a key to moving ahead with an NSDS. Box 20 summarises the architecture of an effective process.



## 8. Conclusions

In this paper, we have discussed approaches to developing strategies for sustainable development. We have argued that this requires holistic tactics which seek to integrate environmental, social and economic objectives, where possible. As figure 1 illustrates, working towards balancing these objectives involves complex systems.

Traditional policy-making is not useful for complex systems, or for goals which are not the concern of government alone - such as sustainable development. Here, an interactive, strategic approach is required. But this clearly is not the same as just writing a "strategic

plan". From experience so far, a strategy in itself may have assured that a comprehensive view of a subject has been taken; but this may not have been the most strategic thing to do! Hence, while we can suggest that preparing an NSDS can be a "policy that works", it is only one of many ways to be strategic.

Successful policies tend to evolve over time. Rarely are they deliberately integrated. Such deliberate strategic planning has always been difficult, even for individual sectors, e.g. in a country like Finland where many people and sectors have a clear involvement in forests. The transition from exploitation towards sustainable forest management in certain temperate countries has been made through incremental responses in association with general economic and societal trends, political awareness and public opinion. Careful monitoring/adaptation is important to move towards gradual integration of policies for sustainable forest management. This implies the need to look at successful examples of incrementalism vs. radical change.

In the context of sustainable development, any one policy should be compatible with other policies. However, it would be a counsel of perfection to suggest that policies must be integrated initially, since not all possible fields of conflict can be foreseen, nor may it be politically apt to raise potential sources of conflict. It is at the stage of policy implementation that any strains become obvious, and here there is an obvious merit in strategic approaches to gradually get close to the goal of policy integration for sustainable development.

Participatory monitoring, round tables, political debates, and other strategic methods can be invaluable for this. The NCS and NEAP experience so far should have taught us about how and when to use these strategic approaches.

In conclusion, it is these capabilities - to think and operate strategically - and obtaining the space within which we can operate strategically - which should now be stressed. The NCS and NEAP experience has created that space. Yet there is now a danger that the proliferation of international requirements for strategic plans - for biodiversity, climate, desertification and sustainable development - will not actually result in such strategic capability. Rather, if followed to the letter, "strategic planning" as a methodology could result in countries preparing more overly-comprehensive plans to which no-one but a donor is committed.

In this paper, we have reflected on more than a decade of experience in developing conservation strategies, environmental action plans, green plans and various other similar approaches. We have also considered some more recent efforts to develop strategies which have begun to address the broader issues of sustainable development. It is clear that countries face considerable and divergent dilemmas in this task. Some might argue that the difficulties are almost insurmountable. Nevertheless, many countries have made an encouraging start. We should remember that sustainable development is a journey, not a harbour.

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