

DFID and the International Development Target

Why is sustainable development important?

Economic inequality, social instability and environmental degradation are common features of unsustainable development. Poor people bear the brunt of these problems because their livelihoods are precariously balanced on volatile economic opportunities and environments vulnerable to change. They lack opportunities for meaningful participation in the decisions that affect their livelihoods. Systems of governance and institutional arrangements can add to this dilemma by reinforcing the influence of certain sectors on decision-making processes.

There can be no lasting development if governments, donors and civil society choose the short term view. To effectively eliminate poverty all aspects of sustainable development should be taken seriously. This means not only focusing on vigorous economic growth, but encouraging economic growth that benefits the poor and is based on sound management of the environment. More specifically, this means creating sustainable livelihoods for poor people.

Only governments can create the right political and economic framework for sustainable development. One part of the framework is effective co-ordination with other stakeholders. Ministries, civil society organisations, industry and donors can often work within their own spheres, without reference or responsibility to each other, inevitably leading to unsustainable policies and programmes. There is a need to build capacity for

participatory planning for sustainable development between these organisations.

National strategies for sustainable development (nssds) are a tool to assist countries in overcoming these sorts of problems and start to strengthen their capacity for sustainable development.

Definition: 'a strategic and participatory process of analysis, debate, capacity strengthening, planning and action towards sustainable development.'

Nssd processes offer the opportunity to redress the balance between consideration of economic growth, environmental sustainability and social progress. They serve as a catalyst to assess the success of a country's existing strategies, plans and programmes, to identify constraints to integration of different sector objectives and means of overcoming them. They encourage a process of fair representation for the integration of different priorities into developmental processes.

This Key Sheet seeks to outline the origins of nssds and the principles that underpin them; to look at the opportunities and challenges they present and to outline the DFID response.

What is the origin of nssds?

Agenda 21, the action plan formed at the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, calls for all countries to develop national strategies for sustainable development.

UNGASS, the five year follow-up meeting to Rio, called for these strategies to be in place by 2002. One of the OECD/DAC International Development Targets, adopted in DFID's White Paper, calls for:

"the implementation of national strategies for sustainable development in all countries by 2005, so as to ensure that current trends in the loss of environmental resources are effectively reversed at both global and national levels by 2015"

International Development
Target
Shaping the 21st Century
(OECD/DAC)

Most donors have experience with assisting partner countries with the development of strategic processes, for example, social policy development or environmental planning processes. But donors lack experience of working with nssds. There is a need for donors to respond to the International Development Targets and the commitment made in "Shaping the 21st Century".

Principles of the nssd approach

The central principle of an nssd is that it has **participation** and **ownership** across all sectors of society. Not only at national and local government levels, but also civil society, the private sector, local communities, minority groups and the academic community. Other principles of the approach are:

- it is **process and outcome orientated** rather than document orientated,
- it seeks to **remove constraints** to holistic dialogue and action - through capacity strengthening and institutional reform,
- it seeks to **build on existing strategic processes** rather than starting yet more initiatives.

There is no blueprint for an nssd. They should be seen as a way of working rather than a new initiative in themselves. Processes and structures will vary with country but a common issue is integration. In one country the basis for an nssd may be a basket of strategic processes that contain elements of the nssd approach. For example, a National Environmental Action Planning process would be one aspect of a country's nssd. In this case it may be more effective to draw the different strategies together. In another country, the nssd may be a single overarching strategy.

Opportunities offered by the nssd approach

formulating meaningful goals

A constraint to cross-sectoral work is a lack of awareness of the strategic choices and conflicts between different aspects of development processes. The nssd process offers the opportunity to analyse a country's or region's economic, social and environmental development trends, to take stock of interrelated policies and plans and to identify choices and conflicts. Inevitably there will be difficult choices and trade-offs to be made. But an nssd process ensures that these are not made solely on economic grounds, providing a sound basis for formulating meaningful goals and initiating action towards sustainability.

increasing the knowledge base

The participatory nature of the nssd approach offers the opportunity to expand the knowledge base amongst relevant organisations through bringing them into debate and analysis with each other. This builds awareness of sustainable development issues, creating capacity within those organisations for formulating

sustainable plans and programmes. It also forms networks between relevant organisations, establishing crucial lines of consultation and communication.

better participation & representation for poor people

Poor people often lack opportunities to participate meaningfully in the decision-making processes that affect their livelihoods. A component of the nssd process is to build awareness amongst poor people enabling them to assess the impact of policies on their lives, to articulate their entitlements and increase their influencing ability on key organisations. The complement to this is to strengthen consultation processes of organisations involved in development.

reforming institutions to be more effective

Established structures and processes influence the ability and capacity of institutions and organisations to respond to the priorities, needs and entitlements of people. The nssd approach recognises the importance of effective institutional and legislative arrangements for achieving sustainable development, indeed part of the approach is to review effectiveness of existing structures, processes and legislation to achieve the goals of sustainable development. From this, appropriate changes can be identified to improve effectiveness, such as focused partnerships between government and civil society, redesigning of organisational structures, improved representation and appropriate incentives and regulations for development practice.

recognising the importance of processes

In the past many strategic initiatives, in both developed and developing countries, have focused on the production of a document as an end-product. While documents are useful tools for communicating objectives, they cannot ensure effective implementation. All too often they remain unread and unimplemented. The challenge is to change the mindset of organisations to see participatory processes, rather than documents, as the key mechanism for achieving sustainable development.

Challenges of the nssd approach

integrating the pillars of sustainable development

A common misconception of sustainable development is that it constitutes only environmental concerns. But sustainable development involves the integration of environmental, social economic and institutional considerations and recognition of their equal importance. Economic development to date has largely overlooked environmental considerations, resulting in significant social and environmental costs. The challenge is to ensure ownership and integration of environmental and social factors into existing economic development processes.

involving the private sector in a meaningful way

Many large firms now have "Corporate Social Responsibility" or "Environment and Safety" departments. There is much that governments and donors can learn from private sector experience. By contrast, other areas of the private sector, such as small and medium enterprises, can lack awareness of sustainable development issues. These enterprises would benefit from training and incentives for sustainable business practices. The challenge is to build capacity within governments to involve the private sector in policy-making and planning processes, to develop suitable training packages and to design incentives to encourage the private sector to internalise environmental costs.

building ownership at the local level

Local ownership of policies and programmes is a prerequisite for sustainable development. Local level institutions such as local government, NGOs, traditional authorities, women's groups and church groups are often charged with implementation of policies

and programmes developed at state and federal levels. These local stakeholders need to be involved in the development of policies and programmes in order to own them.

Effective lines of communication and consultation may not exist between local, state and federal level stakeholders. This means that local stakeholders do not have a voice in national planning and decision-making processes, while state and federal stakeholders fail to capitalise on the work and contacts of existing initiatives at the local level. The challenge is to build capacity amongst local stakeholders for participatory planning and to feed local approaches and issues into national strategic planning. In particular, to strengthen mechanisms and institutions to ensure true representation of local groups at the state and federal level.

The DFID response and the Nssd Support Unit

In June 1999 DFID established an Nssd Support Unit to catalyse DFID's work with partner countries and their nssds. Working in collaboration with the geographic and advisory departments, the Unit acts as a resource group and a co-ordination point for DFID's work on nssds. The Unit is multidisciplinary, consisting of economic, environmental and social development expertise. It has access to advice from a range of sectors including governance, health and education. The Unit will draw on UK expertise in sustainable development to ensure a coherent message, to gain a wider perspective on sustainable development and in particular to make use of existing expertise and experience in other sectors.

The Unit's objectives are:

To assist developing country partners meet the international development targets on national strategies, through collaboration with DFID country programmes and joint initiatives with other advisory departments.

To broaden understanding of the nssd approach through strengthened relationships with other Whitehall departments, consultation of external experts and commissioned research.

To participate in development of nssd best practice policy and guidance for donors, through the ongoing work of the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC). DFID co-leads a Task Force which is developing guidance through lesson learning and dialogue with developing country partners.

To influence international thinking on nssds through collaboration with multilateral institutions and learning from similar work being undertaken by

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