

Romania's National Strategy for Sustainable Development: doing more with less

SUMMARY

The Romanian national strategy for sustainable development (nssd) was finalised in 1999. Its objective is "progressive improvement and preservation of the population's well-being with rational use of natural resources and conservation of eco-systems." The goal identified is average annual GDP growth of 6.5%, which will place Romania at 50% of average European Union GDP per capita by 2020. A number of key policies for the achievement of this goal are identified and an action plan for implementation has been prepared.

The nssd was initially prepared by the National Council for Sustainable Development. There was widespread public consultation on a draft strategy. Government ownership was ensured through the work of a high-level inter-ministerial committee and the final strategy contained an introduction by the Prime Minister. A number of lessons can be learned from the experience of Romania in developing its nssd.

1. LESSONS LEARNED

- **An integrated approach.** The strategy moved from an earlier focus on environmental concerns, to a much wider concern with economic, social and environmental issues. This was made possible by involving a broad diversity of stakeholders in the process who were keen to avoid a narrow environmental

focus. The key inter-ministerial drafting group was chaired by the Department for the Reform of Central Public Administration and not by the newly created Ministry for Water, Forests and Environmental protection.

- **A practical and realistic strategy.** The need to ensure that the strategy was practical and realistic became a key theme during the drafting process with concerns that the initial drafts were too academic and theoretical. The final draft is still quite dense and technical, but it is being followed up by the development of an action plan for implementation.
- **Involving stakeholders.** A public consultation process was effective in involving different stakeholder groups, and also in convincing the government that the strategy was so important that it should lead the process itself. The consultation process was aided by wide distribution of draft copies, particularly though the private sector and NGO co-ordination groups
- **Political commitment.** The importance of political commitment was illustrated by the fact that once government ownership was secured, the strategy could be debated in parliament and the government commit to an action plan to implement the strategy. Political commitment was made possible by broad consultation which made the government aware of the concerns of stakeholders such as trade unions and the involvement at an early stage of a respected politician from the Romanian Senate.

Governments worldwide have agreed that there should be a national strategy for sustainable development (nssd) in the process of implementation in all countries by 2005. An nssd has been defined as a "strategic and participatory process of analysis, debate, capacity strengthening, planning and action towards sustainable development". DFID is committed to assisting countries in the development of nssds

2. THE ROMANIAN CONTEXT

The fall of the Ceausescu dictatorship in 1989 opened up the country to democratic development and a market economy. However the legacy of Ceausescu and the unstable political situation over the last ten years have resulted in a low level of economic, social and environmental development. The country has one of the highest infant mortality rates in Europe, the economy remains sluggish and there are major environmental problems such as the pollution of up to a third of rivers. The National Council of Sustainable Development (NCSDD) was set up in 1997 based in the Romanian Academy, the leading scientific forum in the country, with financial assistance from UNDP and DFID. One of the main aims of the NCSDD was to produce a national strategy for sustainable development by early 1999.

Romania key facts

Population (1997)	22.6 million
GDP per capita	\$1410
Proportion of population living below \$1 a day (1988-96)	17.7%
Net primary school enrollment (1990-96)	95%
Infant mortality (rate by 1000 live births) (1997)	22
Safe water (% of population with access) (1990-97)	62%
Biodiversity (% of land area protected) (1996)	4.6
Energy efficiency (GDP per unit of energy use) (1996)	0.7

Source: DFID, *Statistics on international development, 1999*

3. ROMANIA'S NSSD: AN OVERVIEW

Romania has only a limited tradition of strategic planning in the last 10 years due primarily to continuing political instability. Thus there are only limited ingredients for building strategies for sustainable development. To date one of the most successful attempts has been the national strategy for sustainable development finalised in 1999 and summarised here. Another participatory process to develop national priorities began in 2000 as part of the Comprehensive Development Framework, but it is too early to evaluate this.

3.1 OBJECTIVES AND PRIORITIES

The national strategy for sustainable development recognises the Brundtland definition of sustainable development as "the capability to satisfy the demands of today's generation

without destroying the capability of future generations to satisfy their own needs".

The priorities of the strategy are:

- public health, in particular reversing the low life expectancy, the high infant and maternal deaths, and the high level of respiratory diseases
- education, in particular the drop out rate, falling secondary enrolment and chronic underfunding
- economic growth, with GDP in 1998 only three quarters of the level in 1989, and compounded by hyper-inflation of 59% in 1998, rapid currency depreciation and unemployment rates of over 11%
- conservation of energy resources, with energy use per capita twice that of developed countries

3.2 SECTORAL ISSUES

These sections of the strategy review the three forms of capital: natural, manmade (or anthropogenic) and social. The sectoral problems are presented and then possible measures for a more sustainable development path are developed.

The main environmental problems covered include air pollution, water pollution, abandoned land, loss of biodiversity and forests. Industrial pollution has decreased due to falls in economic output. Institutional and legal shortcomings, lack of funds, and lack of public awareness have contributed to environmental degradation.

The main anthropogenic problems identified are declining agricultural output, low efficiency of power stations, declining industrial production, growth in private vehicles, low tourist occupancy and non performing bank loans. A series of institutional reforms, policy measures and investments are identified to overcome these problems.

The main social problems identified are poor public health and education, low and unequal consumption patterns, weak public participation in decision making, lack of women's rights and unsustainable human settlements. Solutions include reforms of laws that limit NGO activity,

legal reforms to prohibit violence against women and better urban planning.

3.3. IMPLEMENTATION

The final section of the strategy contains more general policies for sustainable development in Romania. A series of scenarios are presented, which highlight the need for economic growth if sustainable development is to be achieved. The strategy states that the best option for sustainable development is average annual GDP increase of 6.5%, which will place Romania at 50% of European Union per capita by 2020.

Achievement of this high growth rate will require changes such as:

- acceleration of the pace of property changes and guaranteeing private property
- a legal framework to facilitate investments by opening up the market to direct investment and liberalising domestic and external capital
- a long term public investment plan that is "unperturbed by the haphazard course of events and extra-economic factors, that minimises the volume of unfinished investments and the amount of time needed for the implementation of investment projects"
- regional investment policies
- employment policies that are in accordance with EU directives and growth of service sector employment as jobs in agriculture and other sectors decline
- greater competitiveness with more exports
- much greater support and incentives given to promote the development of the small and medium enterprise sector which is the most profitable and dynamic sector in the Romanian economy

A number of more general social policies are also identified including:

- a new labour code that will contain the entire legislation in this field and will be in accordance with EU requirements
- more supportive policies to help the long term unemployed
- reform of the wages policy to allow wages to be linked to productivity
- implementation of pension reform by 2001

that introduces a new retirement pension and allows privately managed universal pension funds

- introduction of the Social Action Law and implementation of the national strategy for the eradication of poverty
- new reforms to ensure health and safety at work
- continued consultation with civil society such as trade unions through the Economic and Social Council and other bodies

Institutional reforms are also identified for the public sector to:

- demonopolise public services
- introduce the concept of fair competition in public services
- decentralise public services
- eliminate bureaucracy in public sector activity

4. DEVELOPING THE STRATEGY

The strategy for developing the nssd from 1997 to 1999 remained fluid and changed emphasis during preparation as ownership of the strategy shifted from the NCSD and the Romanian Academy to the government itself. This had a very positive impact.

An initial strategy was prepared by the NCSD drawing heavily on the expertise of the Romanian Academy. Six working groups were set up to produce working papers by the summer of 1998. However the working groups had only 3 to 4 members in each, mainly from academia and government, with almost no representation from NGOs or the private sector.

The working drafts which were produced were quite academic and focused on environmental issues with less analysis of economic and social concerns. These chapters were reviewed at a workshop with some invited NGOs and a larger spread of government officials, and the papers were redrafted.

A main synthesis group was tasked with reviewing the first full draft version of the strategy. This working group was led by Professor Bleahu, an active Senator, whose party was a small element of the ruling coalition. The membership of this group was impressive in

terms of increased political viewpoint, practical economic understanding and national standing. The group was critical of the first draft believing it to be too academic and that economic, social and environmental issues should be addressed on an equal footing. Eventually after much hard work, a new draft was ready by mid-February 1999 for public consultation.

Five hundred copies of the report were printed and distributed through local NGO co-ordination organisations, CENTRAS and PRO-DEMOCRATIA. They were sent to parliamentarians, ministers, government departments, trade unions, professional institutes, business organisations and NGOs. Sufficient interest had also been generated within the private sector for the Small Business Association to reproduce 100 copies for distribution to their members. There was an open public debate with specific invitees to which 40 people from a wide variety of backgrounds came. During the two month consultation period, there was a reasonable written response, including interest among trade unions and the opposition parties.

The process of public consultation and the advent of a period of political stability led the government to take an active interest in the process. In April 1999 a high level inter-ministerial committee was set up, chaired by the Department for Central Public Administration Reform. This effectively took over drafting of the document although the existing working groups were allowed inputs in non-controversial matters. The inter-ministerial working group was widened to include inputs from members of parliament (including the opposition), trade unions, and key NGOs and commercial organisations. The government decided to endorse the strategy initially at the level of the Minister for Foreign Affairs, but then it was decided that there would an introduction by the Prime Minister.

5. IMPLEMENTATION

The final strategy was launched in July 1999 with some press coverage. In September 1999, the strategy was debated in parliament and the government has agreed to develop an action plan to implement some of the key elements of the strategy.

6. MEASURING PROGRESS

The strategy does not provide detailed indicators to evaluate progress, but it does acknowledge their importance. "In order to establish the success of sustainable development in Romania, the clear defining of a system of indicators and the implementation of an adequate information system that will allow the monitoring and evaluation of human development in Romania is needed. This evaluation will be accepted and useful as a basis for decision-makers involved in the process of sustainable development. This includes decision-makers from the public, private and non-governmental organisations sectors." Responsibility for developing these indicators has been given to the National Agency for Communications and Information.

7. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AT THE SUBNATIONAL LEVEL

The strategy states that local Agenda 21s will be developed. Since the strategy was published in July 1999, work has started on the implementation of these local Agenda 21s. A national steering committee on local Agenda 21 has been set up to work with regional steering committees. Six municipalities in different parts of the country are now preparing local strategies.

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