



STRATEGIES FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

PRACTICAL GUIDANCE FOR
DEVELOPMENT
CO-OPERATION

STRATEGIES FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: PRACTICAL GUIDANCE FOR DEVELOPMENT CO-OPERATION

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE	5
ACRONYMS	6
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	7
1. What is the purpose of this policy guidance?	7
2. Why are new approaches to strategic planning needed?	7
3. What has been learned about previous strategic approaches?	8
4. What are strategies for sustainable development?	8
5. What does this mean in practice?	8
6. How can external partners support strategies for sustainable development?	9
7. How can sustainable development strategies be monitored?	10
BUSY READERS' GUIDE TO THIS DOCUMENT	10
1. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND THE NEED FOR STRATEGIC RESPONSES	11
1.1 Establishing national strategies for sustainable development: a Rio commitment and one of the seven international development goal	11
1.2. Challenges to sustainable development	11
1.2.1 Trends, major challenges, and responses	11
1.2.2 Decentralisation and globalisation	11
1.3 Sustainable development - a guiding vision to tackle the challenges	13
1.3.1 Integrating and making trade-offs between economic, social and environmental objectives	13
1.3.2 Country-specific approaches to sustainable development	13
1.3.3 The importance of governance to the achievement of sustainable development	14
1.4 Why we need a strategic approach to sustainable development	15
1.4.1 The need for structural changes	15
1.4.2 Difficulties in introducing changes	15
1.4.3 What being strategic means	16
2. PRINCIPLES FOR STRATEGIES FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT	17
2.1 What are strategies for sustainable development?	17
2.2 Key principles for strategies for sustainable development	18
3. CURRENT PRACTICE: EXISTING COUNTRY LEVEL FRAMEWORKS	20
3.1 National level strategies	20
3.2 Sub-national strategies	22
3.3 Local-level strategies	24
3.4 Convergence and links between national, sub-national and local strategies	24
4. LESSONS FROM APPLYING EXISTING COUNTRY STRATEGIES	24
4.1 Introduction	24
4.2 Establishing long-term vision, setting priorities and achieving integration	25
4.2.1 Vision for the future	25
4.2.2 Integration and making trade-offs	25
4.3 Ownership of strategies	26
4.4 Long term commitment	27

4.4.1	The importance of high level political commitment.....	27
4.4.2	The need for a central co-ordinating body.....	27
4.4.3	The need to involve all ministries.....	27
4.4.4	Commitment of the private sector and civil society is very important.....	28
4.5	Ensuring effective participation.....	29
4.5.1	Community-based and bottom-up approaches.....	31
4.5.2	Balancing top-down and bottom-up approaches.....	31
4.5.3	Balance between use of expertise and need for a participatory approach.....	32
4.5.4	Effective participation and the costs involved.....	34
4.6	Analysis.....	35
4.7	Convergence, complementarity, coherence and co-ordination between country frameworks at all levels.....	35
4.7.1	Regional issues.....	37
4.7.2	National issues.....	37
4.7.3	The importance of decentralisation.....	37
4.8	Strategy management systems and capacity.....	38
4.8.1	Supporting management capacity at all levels.....	38
4.8.2	Public communication.....	39
4.8.3	Systems for conflict management.....	39
4.8.4	Knowledge and information systems.....	40
4.9	Identifying indicators, establishing monitoring systems and ensuring accountability.....	40
4.9.1	Independent monitoring and auditing.....	41
4.9.2	Community-based monitoring and the value of traditional community fora in ensuring accountability.....	41
4.10	Financial resources for strategies.....	42
4.10.1	Financing the strategy process and continuing systems from recurrent expenditure.....	42
4.10.2	General budgetary assistance for a strategy is better than one-off funding.....	42
4.10.3	Financial support to district level strategies.....	43
5.	ILLUSTRATIVE STEPS FOR ESTABLISHING, STRENGTHENING AND OPERATING A SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY.....	45
6.	THE ROLE OF DEVELOPMENT CO-OPERATION AGENCIES.....	48
6.1	Supporting the development of a vision.....	48
6.2	Supporting convergence, complementarity and coherence between different frameworks.....	49
6.3	Co-ordination of development agencies.....	50
6.4	Supporting national ownership and commitment.....	51
6.5	Working to foster effective participation.....	52
6.6	Strengthening strategic analysis.....	53
6.7	Strengthening strategy management systems.....	54
6.7.1	Supporting management capacity at all levels.....	54
6.7.2	Public communication.....	54
6.7.3	Conflict prevention and management systems.....	55
6.7.4	Information systems.....	55
6.8	In-country monitoring of strategies.....	56
6.9	Financial resources for strategies.....	56
6.10	Working together in practice.....	57
6.11	Monitoring the response of DAC members to this policy guidance.....	58
6.11.1	Scope.....	58
6.11.2	Indicators.....	58
6.11.3	Options for monitoring.....	59

7.	IMPLEMENTING THE INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT GOAL ON STRATEGIES FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: SOME PRELIMINARY OPTIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL INFORMATION-SHARING	60
7.1	The purpose of international information-sharing on the implementation of strategies for sustainable development	60
7.2	Scope and types of indicators.....	60
7.3	Options for international management of information in relation to implementation of the IDG on strategies.....	61
7.4	Time frames	62
Figures		
Figure 1.	The systems of sustainable development.....	14
Figure 2.	Rationale for a systematic approach to strategies for sustainable development.....	18
Figure 3.	Mechanisms contributing to a sustainable development strategy.....	46
Boxes		
Box 1.	Key challenges to sustainable development in developing countries.....	12
Box 2.	Key principles for strategies for sustainable development.....	18
Box 3.	National Councils for Sustainable Development (NCSDs).....	22
Box 4.	The DEAP process in Zimbabwe	22
Box 5.	Local Agenda 21.....	23
Box 6.	National Visions	25
Box 7.	A competing civil society strategy in Thailand	26
Box 8.	Strategy survival through changes of government	27
Box 9.	Linking strategies to budget processes	28
Box 10.	Requirements for effective participation in strategies	29
Box 11.	Why existing strategies continue to be mainly top-down.....	30
Box 12.	Multi-stakeholder participation in strategies	31
Box 13.	Decentralised planning systems.....	32
Box 14.	Initiating bottom-up strategy approaches in Pakistan: complementing provincial and district strategies.....	33
Box 15.	Building on what exists: links between Poverty Reduction Strategies and other strategic planning processes.....	36
Box 16.	National capacity-building project, Thailand	38
Box 17.	Some examples of strategy practitioner networks	40
Box 18.	Fragmentation of Pakistan's National Conservation Strategy	41
Box 19.	The use of Commissions to hold government to account.....	41
Box 20.	Effective local democratic structures in Zambia	42
Box 21.	Examples of dependence on external funding in West Africa	42
Box 22.	UNCDF Local Development Funds Programme.....	43
Box 23.	Illustrative steps for developing, co-ordinating and continuously improving strategy mechanisms	47
Box 24.	Fostering coherence between different frameworks in Mali	49
Box 25.	Improving agency co-ordination around the poverty reduction strategy process.....	50
Box 26.	Lessons from poverty reduction strategies - learning from experience.....	51
Box 27.	Supporting strategic analysis: participatory poverty assessment in Pakistan.....	53
Box 28.	Agency adherence to the principles of strategic planning for sustainable development: the example of Uganda.....	57
Box 29.	Key questions for assessing, and learning from, development agency performance in supporting strategy processes	58

PREFACE

This document provides policy guidance on good practice in developing and implementing strategies for sustainable development. The guidance focuses on the experience of developing countries, but many of the issues covered and lessons drawn are of equal relevance to developed countries. Whilst the guidance looks at how development co-operation agencies can best assist developing countries, it should also be of value to policy-makers, planners and development practitioners in all countries, as well as of interest to academics, students and development analysts.

The guidance is the first major output of a project initiated by the OECD DAC Working Party on Development Co-operation and Environment (WP/ENV). A Task Force chaired by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) and the European Commission (EC) has overseen the project.

In developing this guidance, international experience over the past two decades in both developed and developing countries has been drawn on. This experience and the lessons derived from it have been validated and built on through dialogues in selected developing countries. During 1999-2001, members of WP/ENV worked in partnership with teams from eight developing countries to assess their experience of country-level strategies for sustainable development: Bolivia, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Namibia, Nepal, Pakistan, Tanzania and Thailand. In addition, other agencies have contributed their experience: the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (Capacity 21), the UN Department for Economic and Social Affairs and the World Bank. The International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) was responsible for co-ordinating the dialogues and provided technical support for the preparation of this document.

Through dialogues involving stakeholders from government, the private sector and civil society, past and existing strategic planning experiences have been analysed, key issues and challenges identified, and principles for good practice developed. An iterative process involving in-country discussions and three international workshops in Tanzania, Thailand and Bolivia, has led to consensus on this final text.

A second output – a source book (to be prepared during 2001) – will contain a detailed exploration of the challenge of strategies for sustainable development, with lessons, case materials, and methodologies from the dialogue countries and elsewhere. This source book will provide guidance on how to develop and implement strategies for sustainable development, providing examples of processes and mechanisms that have been shown to work.

ACRONYMS

CBO	Community-based organisation
CSD	Commission for Sustainable Development
CDF	Comprehensive development framework
DAC	Development Assistance Committee (of OECD)
DEAP	District Environmental Action Plan
HIPC	Highly Indebted Poor Country
IDG	International development Goal
NCS	National conservation strategy
NCSD	National Council for Sustainable Development
NEAP	National environmental action plan
nfp	National forest programme
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
nssd	National strategy for sustainable development
PRS(P)	Poverty reduction strategy (paper)
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
UNCED	United Nations Conference of Environment and Development (1992)
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. What is the purpose of this policy guidance?

1. At the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), governments made a commitment to adopting national strategies for sustainable development. The strategies for sustainable development called for at Rio are foreseen as highly participatory instruments intended “to ensure socially responsible economic development while protecting the resource base and the environment for the benefit of future generations”. The OECD’s “Shaping the 21st Century” (1996) calls for the formulation and implementation of such strategies in every country by 2005 – one of the seven International Development Goals (IDGs) – and for development co-operation agencies to support such processes in developing countries. The 1997 Special Session of the UN General Assembly set a target date of 2002 for introducing strategies.

2. Although it is nearly ten years since UNCED very little guidance has been available on how to fulfil these commitments. This document aims to fill that gap. Based on international experience and multi-stakeholder reviews in developing countries, it seeks to clarify the purposes and principles underlying effective national and local strategies for sustainable development; describes the various forms they can take in developing countries; and offers guidance on how development co-operation agencies can support them.

3. Although prepared as guidance for donors, it is hoped that this document will also be able to inform the World Summit for Sustainable Development and provide a basis for broader international discussions and agreement on this issue.

2. Why are new approaches to strategic planning needed?

4. Understanding of the pressing problems of unsustainable development has improved since UNCED. More is now known of environmental degradation, and social and economic marginalisation. But responses have not been concerted. There have been success stories, but they are fragmented. There have been improvements in meeting some environmental, social, or economic needs, but often in ways which cause other problems. Traditional approaches to ‘sustainable development’ are often overlooked by policy-makers.

5. Moving towards sustainable development presents tremendous challenges. Important structural changes are needed to the ways societies manage their economic, social and environmental affairs. Different countries may settle for different solutions, but all will have to make hard choices. Strategies for sustainable development are about making and implementing such choices, in a realistic, effective and lasting way.

3. What has been learned about previous strategic approaches?

6. Many countries have tried to plan their way out of problems in a technocratic manner, producing comprehensive, one-off national plans with accompanying sets of projects to be implemented. They were very often required (or inspired) by an external agency, and connected to financial conditionalities. Examples include National Conservation Strategies and Environmental Action Plans.

7. A review of experience shows that successful approaches share certain characteristics. They set priorities and establish a long-term vision; seek to promote convergence between already existing planning frameworks; promote ownership; can demonstrate national commitment; and are built on appropriate participation. Lower levels of success can be attributed to strategies which over-emphasise a product, take the form of one-off, separate initiatives, and are exclusively top-down. Strategies which have been presented as new concepts, have undermined existing processes and wasted scarce resources by starting new processes from scratch. In addition, many strategies have failed to address the deep economic, social and institutional changes needed for sustainable development.

8. While most countries have a number of strategic planning processes in existence, few, if any, have a system to effectively co-ordinate them. Developing such a co-ordination system will assist in integrating all the components of sustainable development into mainstream planning processes. Enhanced co-ordination and convergence between different planning frameworks can also relieve the the burden on capacity and resources .

4. What are strategies for sustainable development?

9. This guidance defines a strategy for sustainable development as comprising: “A co-ordinated set of participatory and continuously improving processes of analysis, debate, capacity-strengthening, planning and investment, which integrates the economic, social and environmental objectives of society, seeking trade offs where this is not possible”.

10. To substantiate the definition, this guidance also offers a set of principles. These encompass a set of desirable processes and outcomes which taken together are likely to help ensure success of strategies for sustainable development. The principles emphasise local ownership of the strategy process, effective participation from all levels, and high-level commitment. They point to the importance of convergence and coherence between different planning frameworks, integrated analysis, and capacity development.

5. What does this mean in practice?

11. An effective strategy for sustainable development brings together the aspirations and capacities of government, civil society and the private sector to create a vision for the future, and to work tactically and progressively towards it. It identifies and builds on ‘what works’, improves integration between approaches, and provides a framework for making choices where integration is not possible.

12. Focusing on what is realistically achievable, an effective strategy will benefit from comprehensive understanding, but will not be paralysed by planning overly comprehensive actions on many fronts at once. As a process of practical institutional change aimed primarily at mainstreaming sustainability concerns, the strategy is likely to be focused on only a few priority objectives.

13. A strategy for sustainable development will rarely imply initiating a completely new or stand-alone strategic planning project. Rather, a number of initiatives, taken together, could meet the definition and the principles. Bringing existing initiatives closer to an effective strategy for sustainable development might involve complementing them with a broad ‘umbrella’: a vision and set of co-ordinated mechanisms and processes to improve their complementarity, smooth out inconsistencies, and fill gaps when needed.

14. In practice, many countries have taken the approach of building on whichever strategy models have been found useful. These include development plans, poverty reduction strategies or action plans, national green plans, decentralised planning and consultation processes – or the national exercises that have proliferated over the last two decades connected to international agreements. In some countries, alternative approaches have been developed by civil society organisations. In recognition of this broad range of starting points, this guidance emphasises that the label does not matter – what is important is the consistent application of the underlying principles referred to above.

15. Depending on circumstances, a sustainable development strategy may be viewed as a system comprising the following components:

- Regular multi-stakeholder fora and means for negotiation at national and decentralised levels, with links between them.
- A shared vision and set of broad strategic objectives.
- A set of mechanisms to pursue those objectives in ways that can adapt to change (notably an information system; communication capabilities; analytical processes; international engagement; and co-ordinated means for policy integration, budgeting, monitoring, and accountability).
- Principles and standards to be adopted by sectors and stakeholders, through legislation, voluntary action, market-based instruments, etc.
- Pilot activities, to generate learning and ownership.
- A secretariat or other facility with authority for co-ordinating these mechanisms.
- A mandate for all the above from a high-level, central authority such as the prime minister’s office and, to the extent possible, from citizens’ and business organisations.

6. How can external partners support strategies for sustainable development?

16. Development co-operation agencies have offered financial and technical support to strategic planning approaches such as National Conservation Strategies and Poverty Reduction Strategies. This support has provided opportunities for country stakeholders to explore sustainable development options. Sometimes, however, bilateral and multilateral development agencies have heavily influenced the strategy process, its timing, and its outcomes – and then supplanted one strategy with another.

17. Agencies can effectively and efficiently support sustainable development strategies by applying the principles outlined in this policy guidance – assisting country-driven, capacity-enhancing participatory processes that reflect the priorities of stakeholders. Particular commitment to such principles is needed for any strategic framework that has its conceptual or institutional origins outside the country in question, so as to improve coherence between international frameworks and to strengthen and improve synergies with existing national strategies. The role of external partners

strategies should be catalytic and supplementary, with a strong focus on using and developing local capabilities, and methodological support. This is a challenging approach, which will require changes in the policies, procedures and capacities of development cooperation agencies. This guidance details action that agencies can take to put their commitments into practice and suggests ways of monitoring agency observance of the guidance.

18. Finally, strategies for sustainable development prepared by individual developing countries can be greatly compromised by external policies and institutions (e.g. those concerning trade and investment) over which developing countries often have little direct control. Development agencies can help by communicating such vulnerabilities to international stakeholders, including the private sector.

7. How can sustainable development strategies be monitored?

19. Monitoring is a core component of strategies. It needs to cover processes (such as the quality and coverage of participation and information systems), outcomes, and the changing baseline. Monitoring is not a separate exercise. On the contrary, process and outcome indicators need to be considered on a regular basis by stakeholders at the same time as vision and objectives.

20. International reporting and information-sharing (as part of a harmonised international system of monitoring of all IDGs) must be agreed in appropriate international fora. This guidance advises that it should not be based strictly on one model, but should reflect the fact that many different approaches to strategies could meet the definition and the principles outlined in this policy guidance.

BUSY READERS' GUIDE TO THIS DOCUMENT

Definition of a strategy for sustainable development	Page 17
International agreements on strategies	Page 11
Principles for effective strategies	Page 18
Experience to date	Page 24
Illustrative steps for strategies	Page 44
Development assistance agency roles in strategies	Page 47
Monitoring strategies	Page 60