CHAPTER

1

About the Resource Book

Aims

This resource book provides guidance on how to develop, implement and assess national sustainable development strategies (NSDSs). It is based on an analysis of past and current practice, in both developed and developing countries, to undertake comprehensive approaches to sustainable development. In particular, it builds on dialogues and learning in the eight countries directly involved in a project on NSDSs undertaken by the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (Box 1.1), as well as on the work of a wide range of organizations, such as the Capacity 21 initiative of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), the World Bank, World Conservation Union (IUCN), International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) and many other groups (see the extensive References chapter at the end of the book and sources of further information at www.nssd.net).

This guidance is based on experience of past and current practice in the North and South …

There is a particular focus on tried, tested and practicable approaches that have been used successfully in strategic planning processes. As such, the book's basis is 'real world' conditions rather than presenting approaches that could only be realized in an idealized or dream world. But it is well recognized that many previous approaches to strategies have failed – and even the successful ones have not worked well in all areas. We can learn from this: strategies need to experiment, wherever possible, with new ways of working; experience is evolving rapidly; and new methods for some strategy elements are being developed or tested. For instance, methods of participation, policy and scenario analysis and methods of monitoring and

… emphasizing tried and tested approaches

Box 1.1 The OECD DAC donor-developing countries dialogues project

During 1999–2001, members of the Working Party on Development Cooperation and Environment of the OECD DAC worked in partnership with eight developing countries to assess experience of country-level strategies for sustainable development. In Bolivia, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Namibia, Nepal, Pakistan, Tanzania and Thailand dialogues were held involving stakeholders from government, the private sector and civil society, past and existing strategic planning experiences were analysed, key issues and challenges identified, and principles for best practice developed. An iterative process involving in-country discussions and three international workshops led to consensus on the final text of Policy Guidance on strategies for sustainable development, endorsed by aid ministers at the DAC in April 2001

Source: OECD DAC (2001a)

evaluation, which have been used successfully in other contexts, seem to hold promise for strategies as well. Innovative and cutting-edge approaches and methodologies that have potential are also included, although examples of their successful use may not yet be available. In practice, in many countries, unsettled political and social circumstances, difficult economic conditions and/or limited skills and capacity will determine what is actually practicable.

Each country's approach to developing its NSDS will be very different. In many countries it is likely to require the coordination of a suite of different processes, some existing and others new. Other countries may choose to prepare a single umbrella strategy. Whatever its format, a strategy will need to suit the nation's individual set of ecological, socio-cultural, economic and institutional conditions. Any form of straitjacket is inappropriate, especially if imposed by external agencies. Governments should work in partnership with civil society and the private sector to establish the right system.

Each country will need to adopt an approach tailored to its own needs

Target audience

This resource book is intended for a wide range of organizations and individuals in both developed and developing countries concerned with sustainable development at national, sub-national or local levels. These are likely to include the stakeholders in making strategy decisions – for example, people in government, NGOs, citizens' and community-based groups, educational institutions and business – as well as external individuals in development cooperation agencies, multilateral development banks, international organizations and multinational companies.

A wide range of people and organizations involved in sustainable development will find this book relevant to their work

Layout

A flexible approach has been taken to the material in the resource book. It is intended to be informative and not prescriptive. It sets out principles and ideas on process and methods, and suggests how these can be used. Each chapter has been written so that it can be read, as far as possible, as a stand-alone section and used independently of others. This is a response to many requests for briefing notes and 'how to' guides on particular issues and methodologies. However, there is also considerable cross-referencing throughout the book to related materials in other chapters.

A non-prescriptive approach is followed – with principles and ideas on processes and methods, and guidance on the main tasks

This resource book contains a wealth of information and ideas in an extensive volume. No summary is provided since, to be effective, this would have required another substantial section of text. Instead, throughout the book, there are 'summary' comments in the margin. They aim to signal the essence of the text and enable the busy user to navigate quickly through chapters and sections, and find particular issues or discussions, which may be of interest and use. The 'road map' in Figure 1.1 shows how the different chapters relate to each other.

The 'road map' figure shows the relationships between chapters

Following this Introduction, Chapter 2 offers background on the rationale for strategies for sustainable development. It discusses the nature and challenges of sustainable development and the need for strategic responses to them, amplifying much of the OECD DAC policy guidance on NSDSs – and is aimed at those making policy decisions on them.

The rest of the resource book covers the practice of NSDSs. It offers guidance on the main tasks in strategy processes, with individual chapters dealing with:

- the nature of sustainable development strategies and current practices (*Chapter 3*);
- key steps in starting, managing and improving sustainable development strategies (*Chapter 4*);
- methods of analysis (*Chapter 5*);
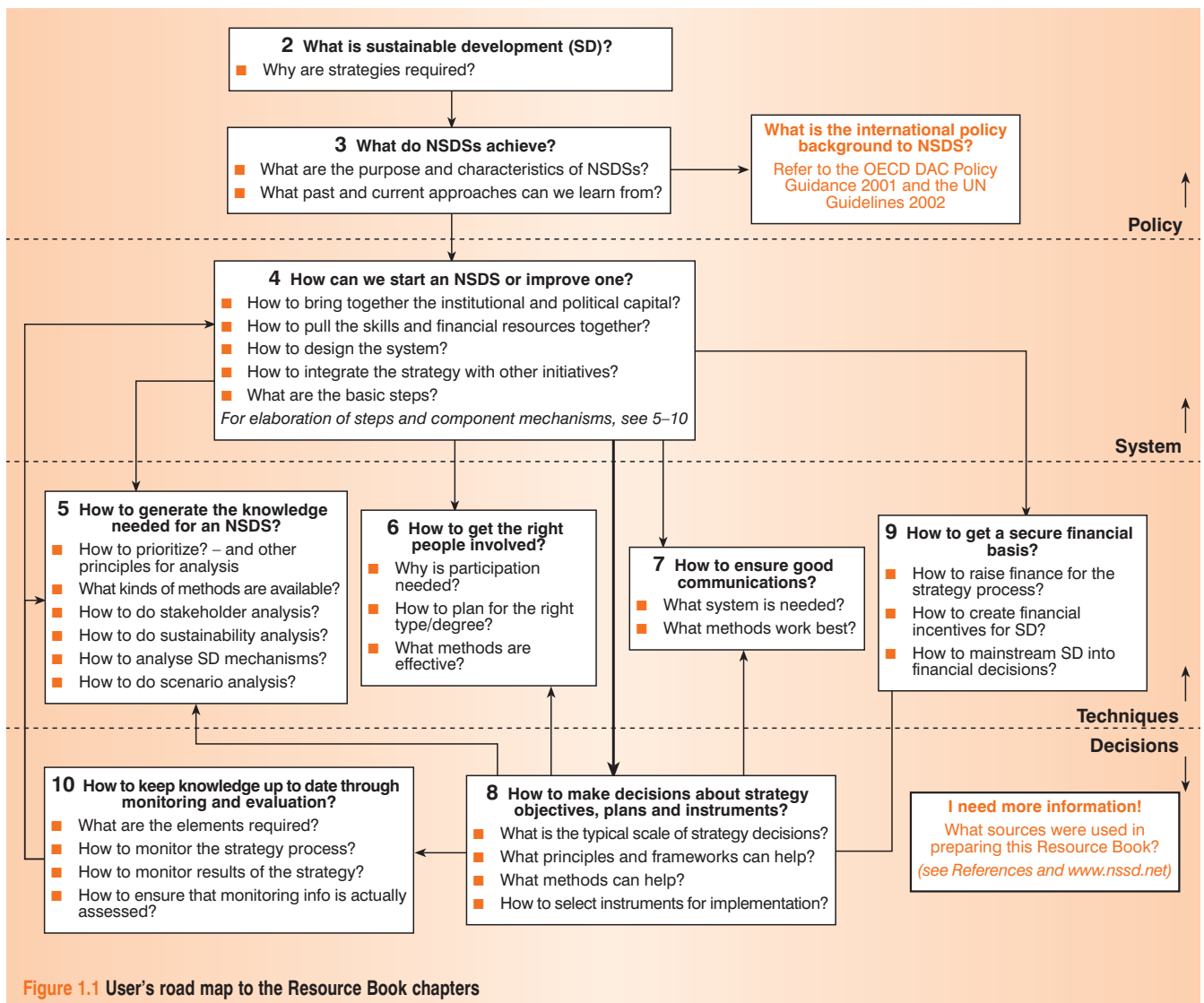- participation in strategies (*Chapter 6*);

2 What is sustainable development (SD)?
■ Why are strategies required?

3 What do NSDSs achieve?
■ What are the purpose and characteristics of NSDSs?
■ What past and current approaches can we learn from?

What is the international policy background to NSDS?
Refer to the OECD DAC Policy Guidance 2001 and the UN Guidelines 2002

Policy

4 How can we start an NSDS or improve one?
■ How to bring together the institutional and political capital?
■ How to pull the skills and financial resources together?
■ How to design the system?
■ How to integrate the strategy with other initiatives?
■ What are the basic steps?
For elaboration of steps and component mechanisms, see 5–10

System

5 How to generate the knowledge needed for an NSDS?
■ How to prioritize? – and other principles for analysis
■ What kinds of methods are available?
■ How to do stakeholder analysis?
■ How to do sustainability analysis?
■ How to analyse SD mechanisms?
■ How to do scenario analysis?

6 How to get the right people involved?
■ Why is participation needed?
■ How to plan for the right type/degree?
■ What methods are effective?

7 How to ensure good communications?
■ What system is needed?
■ What methods work best?

9 How to get a secure financial basis?
■ How to raise finance for the strategy process?
■ How to create financial incentives for SD?
■ How to mainstream SD into financial decisions?

Techniques

Decisions

10 How to keep knowledge up to date through monitoring and evaluation?
■ What are the elements required?
■ How to monitor the strategy process?
■ How to monitor results of the strategy?
■ How to ensure that monitoring info is actually assessed?

8 How to make decisions about strategy objectives, plans and instruments?
■ What is the typical scale of strategy decisions?
■ What principles and frameworks can help?
■ What methods can help?
■ How to select instruments for implementation?

I need more information!
What sources were used in preparing this Resource Book?
(see References and www.nssd.net)

Figure 1.1 User's road map to the Resource Book chapters

■ communications, information and education (*Chapter 7*);
■ strategy decision-making and linkages (*Chapter 8*);
■ the financial basis for strategies (*Chapter 9*);
■ monitoring and evaluation systems (*Chapter 10*).

Chapters 3–10 are aimed at anyone engaged in planning, managing or reviewing a strategy process. For ease of presentation, they assume a logical sequence of steps, which might be followed if commencing a strategy process from an absolute beginning. In practice, very few, if any, strategies will need to start from scratch but should build on existing strategic planning processes and stages they have reached.

Finally, an extensive list of references is provided. Other sources of materials, as well as useful contacts with addresses and websites, are provided on the strategies website (www.nssd.net) and will be of use to those involved in NSDSs on a day-to-day basis as well as academics and researchers wishing to explore NSDSs further.

How to use this resource book

The resource book is not a rigid manual – use it flexibly to suit your particular needs

The resource book offers material to inspire and assess specific local and national approaches. It is not a complete 'construction' manual. Nevertheless, it is recommended that users explore each chapter in sequence if they have not been involved in developing a strategy before, are in the early stages of preparing a new strategy or are considering revising an existing strategy to cover a more ambitious remit. Other users may find it more helpful to concentrate on chapters of particular interest or on particular elements of the strategy process, to consider their relevance and utility and the implications for their own conditions and available resources, and then to design an approach suitable for the purposes at hand.