Chapter 6

Getting Started

Strategies for sustainable development need to build on and provide a framework for other forms of strategy processes operating at national level. Once the concept of the strategy as an adaptive and cyclical process has been embraced, then, whether a biodiversity action plan, national Agenda 21, World Bank NEAP, or other multi-sectoral process, it is likely to have similar management needs.

The strategy process should include information assembly and analysis, policy formulation, action planning, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation. Each of these components is driven and facilitated by participation and communication. A multi-track process, in which most of the strategy components occur simultaneously, is likely to be more effective than a single-track process in which most occur sequentially. The strategy experience to date has usually followed a sequential approach without fully appreciating the central functions of communication and participation. Inevitably, a multi-track process including working links between the various components and continual reflection and revision will be a more complex management process demanding a broader range of skills than the more conventional approach.

The basic management structure or engine for most strategies has been a steering committee and secretariat and, although they have come in many shapes and sizes, experience suggests some general rules for their functions, location, status and composition. The start-up phase of a strategy can be a time of some frustration while relationships with existing activities are thought through, key participants (including donors) brought on board, decisions are made and the basic directions set from a range of options. Well-targeted, decisive but diplomatic management at this early stage can determine the level of success of the strategy in later phases.

The first steps

Once the political decision has been made to begin a strategy, the main participants need to have a shared understanding of the way forward. These participants include, at the least, the small group of government agencies, and possibly NGOs, which will be taking the primary responsibility for managing the process. Awareness may have built up during preliminary discussions of a possible strategy, but in some cases, these will have involved only a few influential administrators and politicians. It can be useful at this stage for a lead government agency to conduct a round of briefing meetings within and outside government on the nature of strategies and the steps the government now intends to take to get the process going.

Prior to the establishment of some formal structure for managing the strategy process, some uncertainty is to be expected, the extent of which will depend largely on the original source of the strategy initiative. This source can determine the initial management approach; although, as the managers of the strategy gain confidence and the process gains momentum, its origin fades in importance. Strategies that have departed from the original model to truly express national identity have tended to be the most successful.

The elements, structures and resources required for the management process will be generic to all strategies, be they:

- a precondition to receiving World Bank loans (110 borrower countries find themselves in this position);
- a global strategy such as Caring for the Earth or the Brundtland Commission Report;
- legal obligations under global conventions such as the Biodiversity or Climate Change agreements;
- global strategies of a sectoral or thematic nature such as those on tropical forestry and desertification which, when expressed nationally, have expanded to have multi-sectoral dimensions; or,
- previous or existing sub-national strategy initiatives.

Attracting funding and support

In some developing countries, the decision to proceed with a strategy has not met with external funding support and the initiative has gone no further. The decision to go ahead may have been made by a single ministry (often an environmental ministry), but without the critical mass of commitment within government that would ensure the redistribution of internal resources to support the process at the outset.

Early NCSs were often confronted with these initial resource constraints. Kenya, for example, was one of the first countries to express an interest in undertaking an NCS, but IUCN, as the external technical support organization, could not muster the resources. During the early 1980s, IUCN had

some 15 countries on record as having made formal requests for assistance to initiate conservation strategies. Resources for these were never found. In other countries like Nigeria, Zimbabwe and Ethiopia, where the decision to proceed with an NCS was accompanied by internal commitments of technical expertise and funds, this hiatus did not occur.

Even where resources have been available, difficult decisions on how best to proceed can still delay start-up. Guidance from an external technical agency, which can draw from extensive strategy experience, can be essential in the start-up phase. Once a decision to undertake a strategy has been made, the first step for a government is forging partnerships between donors and an appropriate technical support agency. This negotiation process can take some time; extending well over a year for the Bangladesh, Vietnam and Tanzania NCSs.

Case studies of strategies in Asia, Africa and Latin America (IUCN, 1994 A,B,C) show that the problem of attracting necessary resources in a timely way to build on government commitment has plagued NCSs at all phases of their development. World Bank NEAPs in Africa, on the other hand, have been remarkable for the efficiency with which they get up and running. There are a number of very good reasons for this, which provide lessons for the future:

- Most NEAPs have only recently been initiated (since 1992) and have benefitted from a decade of strategy experience.
- The World Bank has the authority and leverage to require governments to give priority to the NEAP process.
- The Bank has come with the NEAP requirement at the same time as their guarantee of start-up seed funding.
- The Bank supports a series of consultant technical missions leading up to and following the decision to proceed with an NEAP. These prepare much of the early design documentation (even drafting cabinet submissions on occasions), facilitate consultation, and provide backing to the establishment and early operation of the NEAP secretariat.
- The Bank uses its central position in the economy of many countries and its close relation with UNDP to draw in other donors to support the NEAP process.

Although efficacious in getting NEAP management under way, the World Bank approach can have its costs, as discussed in Chapter 10. The key to good strategy management is ensuring that the process proceeds at a pace and in a form which best suits local conditions and which is most sensitive to existing capacities.

The relationship of the initiative with other strategies, either underway or under consideration, is another factor that causes uncertainty during the period of the initial decision. A country may have embarked on








a Tropical Forest Action Plan; have obligations to prepare a Biodiversity Action Plan covering much of the same issues; be part-way through an NCS; be required as a World Bank borrower to prepare an NEAP; and, having participated in UNCED, be now debating how to respond to the Agenda 21 call for a national strategy for sustainable development. This is a common situation and has been perplexing for key policy-makers. There has now been sufficient experience of strategies to resolve these relationships and to provide a clear and decisive management framework which can accommodate them.

Strategies as cyclical processes

The strategy cycle consists of the following:

- information assembly and analysis;
- policy formulation;
- action planning (and budgeting);
- implementation, including capacity building;
- monitoring and evaluation; and
- review, revision and adaption.

The separation and sequence of these elements is somewhat arbitrary. As the strategy progresses, assessment (information assembly and analysis) and policy formulation are likely to be a part of implementation that best starts from the earliest stages. Participation and communication are driving forces of all elements of the process.

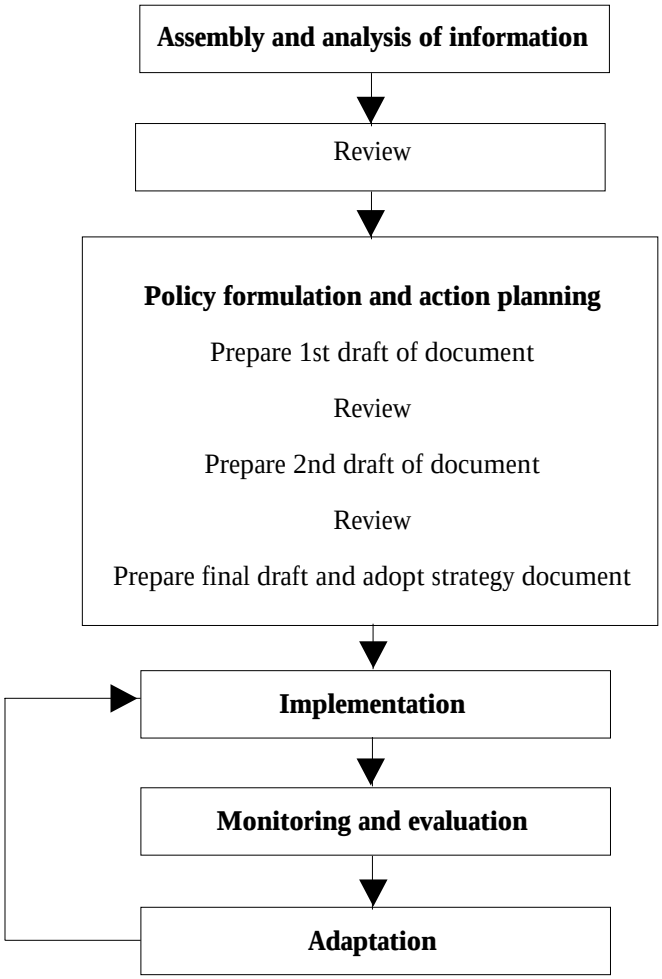
With many strategies, information assembly and analysis, policy formulation, action planning, and document preparation have followed one another, and have been concentrated largely in a preparation phase. Capacity-building, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation have been concentrated in an implementation phase.

In this approach to a strategy process, many of the elements are sequential, as if following each other along a single track. Figure 3 gives an example.

There are several drawbacks to this single-track approach. First, it encourages an excessive emphasis on the preparation of a strategy document, and an investment in information assembly, policy formulation and planning quite out of proportion to what can be implemented. This is likely to reinforce any existing prejudice that strategies are academic and irrelevant to the real business of government and society. The multiple steps under policy formulation and action planning are usual during the initial development (preparation) of the strategy policies and action plan, but may not be necessary in subsequent cycles.

Second, it fosters a view of strategies as linear rather than cyclical. In the single-track model, there is no commitment to regular review and revision of the policy framework for the strategy as an essential component of a country's development cycle. It is viewed more as a one-off event.

Figure 3: An example of a single-track strategy process



Third, it denies the strategy one of its strongest assets: its ability to focus on the elements of the process that will have the greatest strategic effect at a particular point in time. For example, communication of certain messages may be most important at one point, and capacity-building most important at another.

Finally, the single-track approach does not reflect what is needed. Participation, information assembly and analysis, communication, and monitoring are continuous process elements needed throughout the life of the strategy. Evaluation, policy formulation and action planning will need to occur regularly in each process cycle. Implementation can

take place at the same time as policy formulation and action planning.

In many cases one of the first needs is to build the capacity to undertake a strategy; until this is done, the rest of the strategy process is either halted or has to be developed by outsiders. Recognizing this, a number of strategies – in Bhutan and Guinea-Bissau, for example – have begun with capacity-building: the formation of a team, the training of that team on a project (such as organization of a core group to develop environmental assessment procedures) or a thematic or regional strategy.

Early implementation of those aspects of the strategy for which commitment has been obtained also helps to prevent a common problem with many strategies so far: a hiatus between the main preparation phase of a strategy and the main implementation. The more the division between preparation and implementation phase can be overcome, the more confident participants will be that the strategy justifies their commitment of time, energy and money. Demonstration projects can be particularly helpful to this end.

Consequently, a multi-track approach is likely to offer the most practical form of strategy process. In this approach, many (but not necessarily all) of the elements are undertaken simultaneously. Figure 4 illustrates the strategy cycle.

Using the term 'multi-track' is still a little misleading. It implies that the tracks do not meet and ignores the need for feedback. In practice, there will be feedback among the different elements of the strategy process, each influencing the others.

In addition, there will be feedback between one phase or cycle of the strategy and another. This feedback will occur through effective monitoring and evaluation. Feedback will need to reflect how the strategy influences and is influenced by events, such as changes in attitudes and behaviour, markets and prices, population growth, and environmental conditions.

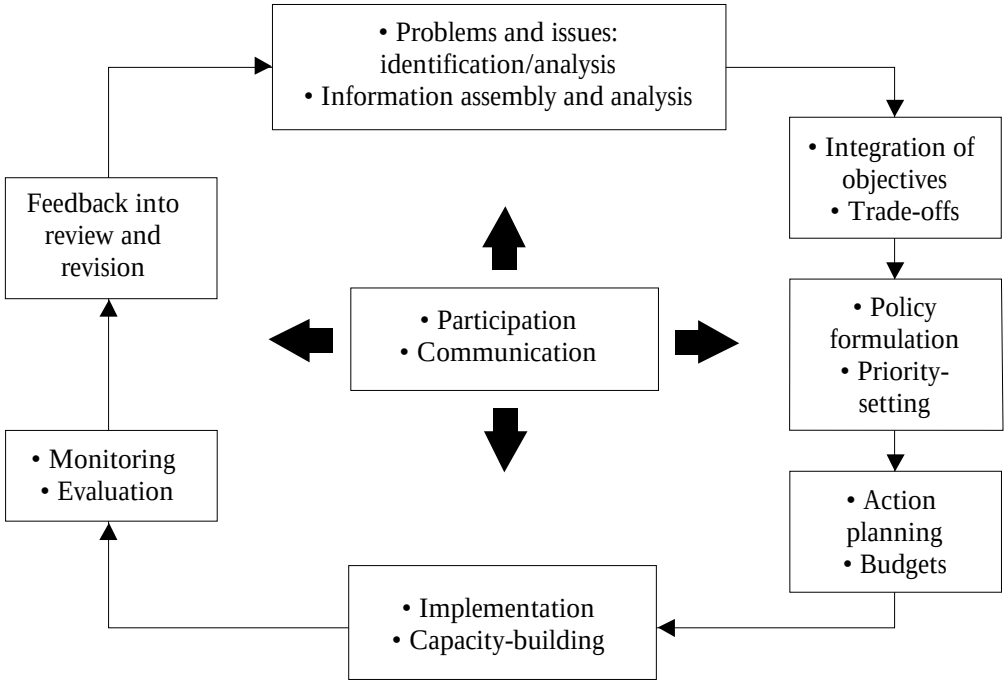
Thus, a 'picture' of a strategy would not be a long line, or even a set of long lines, stretching into the future. It would more likely be a spiral of lines indicating activities and feedback loops that progressively approach the goal.

There are, of course, many possible versions of this approach. There is no single correct way of managing a strategy. The need is to be pragmatic and incremental; aiming not for perfection but for constant improvement. The cyclical nature of a strategy, whereby each element of the process may be repeated several times, means that the strategy can start off quite modestly, gradually becoming more ambitious.

For example, participation in the strategy needs eventually to be both wide and deep,

Figure 4: The strategy cycle

This figure shows the elements of the strategy as a series of consecutive steps. In reality, many elements will occur concurrently, ie implementation of various kinds and capacity building need to continue throughout the cycle.



involving many people in all sectors of society. If a strategy were to start off by attempting to involve everybody, however, it would quickly become bogged down and exhaust its resources. Participation in the first cycle of the strategy may involve only a few key sectors of society but can be widened and deepened as the strategy develops.

Inevitably, strategies are processes which require optimization, opportunism, and often muddling through in complicated administrative and political environments. Because of their complexity, strategies must cater to and involve many interests, and offer mechanisms for defining and agreeing on trade-offs. Like all processes that determine how resources should be used and by whom, strategies are constantly subject to political forces. These are necessary and useful influences, so long as the strategy secretariat adheres to an open process and is flexible; seeking to capitalize on opportunities as they arise to promote agreed strategy objectives.

The strategy should be designed to influence the development process and decision-








making as quickly and thoroughly as possible. Political support, continuity and momentum require that the strategy get results, notably visible policy and legislative changes and demonstrable success of some concepts on the ground.

Process management

The large number of process elements, their specific technical requirements, and the number of participants in a strategy call for good process management. Regardless of where the strategy is in its cycle, two bodies are usually required for this: a steering committee and a strategy secretariat.

The main tasks of these bodies are to coordinate, facilitate and support the work of the participants; ie, the organizations within and outside government who prepare and implement the strategy. The steering committee and secretariat also may have to undertake some of the strategy tasks themselves to get it going, to demonstrate and test policies, or to execute a major change in scope or direction. But the strategy will be pointless if it is regarded as belonging to the steering committee and secretariat rather than as being a central concern and activity of the rest of government and society.

As facilitating and coordinating bodies, neither the steering committee nor the secretariat should have vested interests in a sector, or be located within a sector or interest group. This usually means that they have to be specially constituted, unless an NCS, NEAP or other type of strategy with an existing steering committee and secretariat is already in progress.

They should be located where they can have the greatest influence on the national development system. This may be in the office of the President or Prime Minister, a Ministry of Economic Planning, or an independent office directly linked to the cabinet or a powerful cabinet body. Locating the steering committee and secretariat in a line ministry is less desirable. It could identify them too much with the ministry concerned, and result in the strategy being resisted or ignored due to inter-agency rivalries.

If the strategy is a partnership of government, business and other non-governmental bodies, the location may be outside government. If so, there should still be a strong and direct link to the cabinet or its equivalent to maintain the commitment to, and influence of, the strategy.

The steering committee and secretariat may be set up for an indefinite or a specified time period. Since strategy development is unpredictable, it is important to allow for flexibility and for changes in the composition of the steering committee and secretariat as the strategy progresses. It is also important to ensure their continuity between phases or cycles of the strategy.

The steering committee and mandating authority

The function of the steering committee is to provide overall direction for the strategy, taking its mandate from the country's highest possible authority. It will also:

- facilitate inter-sectoral cooperation;
- ensure full participation and good coverage of the issues;
- consider the policy implications and refine the policy recommendations of the strategy; and
- keep the mandating authority and the participants informed at critical stages.

The mandating authority is the body that authorizes the steering committee to develop the strategy. It may be the chief executive of government, the cabinet, or the legislature. NEAPs usually call for a cabinet committee, specifically-formed for the purpose, to be chaired by the head of government. This disbands upon completion of the plan, which, in Africa, has usually taken about 18 months. The cabinet committee is asked to:

- provide policy direction;
- exercise ultimate authority for coordination;
- assure full government participation in the NEAP process;
- ensure that the cabinet is briefed on NEAP progress; and
- provide high-level back-up for the NEAP steering committee.

During the initial development of the strategy, and probably during its early implementation, it will be necessary for the steering committee to have clear authority for making decisions based on the outputs of the strategy (up to an agreed limit). But as the strategy engages more participants, and as it progresses from cycle to cycle, the character and function of the steering committee can be expected to change: it is likely to become less a coordinating and facilitating body and more a monitoring body.

Given this role, the steering committee should consist of high-level representatives of the main participants in the strategy. As the scope and nature of the strategy changes – and particularly if the participants change – the composition of the steering committee will probably have to change as well. In some countries, committee status may be considered inadequate. It could, therefore, have the status of a parastatal or permanent commission, reporting directly to cabinet. The Australian Resource Assessment Commission was a statutory authority established in 1989 to pursue the objectives of the National Ecologically Sustainable Development Strategy. Although abolished four years later, it provides a useful model for permanently institutionalizing a participatory strategy process at national level and is discussed further in Chapter 8.

The steering committee is likely to function best if it is chaired by an individual or institution acceptable to both the mandating








authority and the main participants. The chairperson will be more effective if he or she is clearly impartial and independent of sectoral interests, and has strong vision and commitment to the strategy process.

The strategy secretariat

The strategy secretariat's function is to service the needs of the steering committee, and undertake the day-to-day organization and management of the strategy process. It will usually be responsible for the following:

- Facilitating and supporting participation. This could include coordinating nominated link officers from each of the main ministries and other participating groups. It would also include coordinating programmes and helping to develop the means for the active involvement of NGOs, communities and the business sector in all stages of the strategy.
- Assembling and analyzing information, at least during the main preparation phase of the strategy and whenever it is being reviewed.
- Assisting in policy drafting on behalf of participants, particularly cross-sectoral policy (line policies will usually be formulated by the responsible agencies).
- Assisting in action planning, particularly where a high degree of coordination is necessary or where there is no clear sectoral responsibility (usually most action planning will be done by the agencies and level of government concerned).
- Identifying those areas where capacity-building is most needed, and providing a training ground for developing capacities in process management and strategy preparation and implementation. This may involve initiating specific implementation programmes with relevant agencies within or outside government, and continuing support until capacities are adequate.
- Mounting demonstration programmes and projects in collaboration with relevant sectoral agencies and communities to build capacity, develop policy and guide implementation. These may take the form of demonstration strategies at local levels or focus on particular cross-sectoral themes such as biodiversity.
- Organizing and operating a communication programme, including preparing, revising and publishing strategy documents, keeping the steering committee and strategy participants informed of progress, providing public information and maintaining media relations, and editing reports and studies.
- Coordinating (at least initially) strategy implementation and monitoring.

The secretariat should be independent and have a well-defined authority in executing its tasks, reporting in most cases to the steering committee. It will need sufficient resources for its work (constantly searching for funds is debilitating for a strategy secretariat), including high quality staff.

The secretariat will need to be headed by someone with a good understanding of the strategy process, and of high standing in environment and/or development policy. He or she should command the respect of government, business and NGOs and have access to the highest levels while remaining open to all other levels. Depending upon the scope of the strategy, other professional staff would ordinarily cover economics; environmental and natural resource management; environmental impact assessment; social sciences; development and business; legislation and institutions; participation; communications, information and education. Administrative staff will also be required, including someone proficient in organizing seminars and workshops.

Continuity of secretariat staff is particularly important. Some secretariats have relied heavily on regular input by consultants to undertake various studies or activities. Although consultants have a crucial role, particularly in the flexibility they bring to the strategy process, there are substantial benefits in the secretariat having solid technical expertise within its own staff.

These benefits are enhanced if some secretariat staff are on secondment from key government agencies or NGOs. Long-term staffing arrangements:

- increase the usefulness of the strategy secretariat as a training ground for expertise in maintaining and institutionalizing the process;
- generate greater understanding and commitment to the process among the core staff;
- facilitate an integrated team approach in addressing many of the cross-sectoral issues;
- encourage a consistency in approach, momentum and continuity to the process;
- nurture links among the many participating groups; and
- ensure that the capacity is built up for quality control, particularly in information analysis, policy formulation and demonstration activities.

The secretariat need not be large if the expertise is permanently accessible within government, as is the case in Ethiopia. There, the secretariat comprises only three professionals but has continuing access to a wide network of government experts committed to the process through a system of committees (see Box 14). The main point is to not rely too heavily on the use of short-term consultants. Otherwise, written reports can dominate to the detriment of other elements of the process.

Participation and communications are driving forces interwoven with all aspects of strategy management. Their importance in national strategies has rarely been reflected in secretariat staff expertise. Team members need to have skills and experience in participation methods, social survey, conflict








Box 14: Staff resources in national strategy secretariats

The size of a strategy secretariat will depend on the maturity of the process (ie whether it has gone beyond its first cycle), its coverage and the extent to which the secretariat has been given responsibility for managing capacity-building and demonstration projects. The following examples illustrate the approach taken by a number of countries in Asia and Africa to staffing their strategy secretariats.

Bangladesh NCS: An expatriate adviser had the overall responsibility for the day-to-day running of the NCS secretariat, reporting to the executive vice-chairperson of the Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council, where the project was housed. Initial moves to establish the secretariat began in 1989, but it took more than a year to reach its full complement, which comprised the expatriate adviser, a national consultant, two junior technical officers and three support staff. The secretariat commissioned 20 background papers by selected national consultants and reviewers. The secretariat was disbanded in 1993 following completion of the NCS document.

Ethiopia NCS: From 1990 to 1994, the Ethiopian NCS secretariat was located in the Ministry of Planning and Economic Development. The secretariat was staffed by an Ethiopian NCS Director, with support from an Ethiopian professional, an expatriate adviser provided by IUCN, and two support staff. The secretariat worked through 29 regional task forces and 12 task forces at national level covering sectoral and inter-sectoral issues. For the implementation phase, beginning in late 1994, the secretariat is expected to be included in the structure of the new Ministry for Environment.

Guinea NEAP: An inter-ministerial unit was created in 1989 to take respon-sibility for the NEAP. Composed of seven civil servants, the unit was run on a day-to-day basis by the Secretary General of the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation. He was supported by an expatriate technical adviser. The Guinean technical staff were not seconded full-time from their respective agencies. A further 80 civil servants were placed on monthly retainers to form 11 working groups for the preparation of thematic papers. This arrangement was changed in 1990 when the size of the groups was halved and a system of honoraria introduced for specific products. A core of regular short-term consultants was also used. The unit was disbanded in 1991.

Nepal NCS: At the height of activity during the NCS formulation phase (1985–88), the NCS secretariat comprised four technical experts, including an IUCN expatriate adviser, and four support staff. The NCS implementation programme secretariat, which began work in 1989, was built up in 1991 to 25 Nepalese technical staff, most

box continues

with expertise in ecology, environmental management and environmental engineering, plus 20 support staff. The NCS programme director also heads the Environment Division within the National Planning Commission. He is supported by one IUCN expatriate adviser.

Pakistan NCS: An NCS secretariat was established in 1988 and housed in the Environment and Urban Affairs Division (EUAD) to manage the process leading to the preparation of an NCS document. IUCN, which was commissioned by the government of Pakistan to develop the NCS, hired a Canadian and a Pakistani as joint coordinators of the secretariat. Various other expatriate and Pakistani expert staff worked with the secretariat for extended periods in the drafting process. In addition, 18 experts, along with three or four peer reviewers were commissioned to prepare various background papers. The NCS secretariat was disbanded on completion of the strategy document in 1991. An NCS unit was set up in the EUAD 18 months later and IUCN continues to maintain an NCS support unit. The NCS unit is being significantly upgraded to coordinate implementation activities.

Uganda NEAP: The NEAP secretariat, established in 1991, includes 12 government officials, 12 academics and 2 members from the private sector, in addition to the regular use of Ugandan consultants. Initially some 70 Ugandan experts working in nine sectoral task forces were commissioned to prepare background papers and undertake the necessary consultations. In 1992, these task forces were reduced in size to some three members each. In 1992, three technical expatriate advisers joined the secretariat which works within the Environment Department of the Ministry of Water, Energy, Minerals, and Environmental Protection.

resolution and group dynamics. Most countries have a richer experience in these fields through local strategies, which the strategy secretariat should seek to draw upon.

Organizing strategy start-up

An important distinction between the NCS and NEAP processes relates to the start-up phase. The NEAP sequence is usually as follows:

- initial missions of the World Bank lead to a decision by government to prepare an NEAP;
- through subsequent missions an agreement is drawn up among the Bank, the government and any other donors which may have become involved (ie UNDP, in the Zambian NEAP) which sets out the goals of the NEAP project, its outputs and activities including the institutional arrangements for undertaking them.








The duration of the project is usually two years but can be as little as six months, as was the case in Nepal. Funding for the project is guaranteed once an agreement has been reached and then arrangements can be made to establish the secretariat and the steering committee. This commences the process of preparing the NEAP policy document and investment programme. Therefore, the start-up phase leading to the establishment of the NEAP management bodies is a fairly closed process between the donors and government and includes commitment of funding for the full plan preparation process.

NCSs make more of the start-up phase: it is regarded as a key opportunity to increase participants' involvement in defining the approach to the strategy process. An initial agreement between the government and a technical support organization, usually IUCN, has been limited to the preparation of a project proposal, or what has sometimes been called an NCS prospectus. The steering committee and the secretariat are established for that purpose. A commitment to funding has normally covered only this initial phase, which seldom extends beyond a year and may involve as little as six months. On the basis of feedback from this document, the government then decides on the most appropriate way to move forward into the main strategy process. Continuity in funding has been a problem at this point; often because less attention has been given to nurturing donor involvement in the start-up phase than has been the case with the NEAP process.

If a government decides that an NSDS or other multi-sectoral national strategy is feasible, an early task will be to establish the steering committee and secretariat. The focus of their initial meetings, involving wider groups of participants where necessary, will be:

- defining the scope of the strategy and the main issues it should address;
- agreeing on, and prepare a statement concerning, the main purpose of the strategy and the expected outputs;
- reviewing previous or existing strategic processes, in the country and elsewhere, which may provide insight into designing the strategy process, or which could be used as vehicles for the strategy process (for example, the national and local planning systems, traditional decision-making structures) and reviewing other activities on which the strategy might build;
- identifying any critical capacity-building and training needs; and
- preparing a work plan and schedule of responsibilities including, in particular, a participation and communication plan.

On the basis of these initial discussions, the steering committee and secretariat should prepare the strategy proposal or prospectus. The main purpose of the prospectus is to help create an early understanding of the

strategy and support for it. The participatory nature of the strategy can best be demonstrated and prepared for by allowing the prospectus to be worked on by a wide range of key potential participants for future phases of the process. Thoughtful participatory design at this stage may take more time but it is likely to save time later. In Pakistan, Nepal, Zambia, Canada and many other countries, the strategy proposal was widely circulated and formed the basis of public meetings and debate.

The strategy proposal or prospectus needs to cover:

- the main purpose of the strategy;
- the justification for undertaking the strategy;
- the means of building upon and integrating existing strategy processes;
- the issues to be covered;
- potential participants;
- an outline participation and communication plan;
- possible main steps in developing the strategy;
- ways to manage the process;
- expected outcomes and benefits of the strategy process;
- an outline work plan; and
- the resources required for the process.

If the government has not set aside the necessary resources for long-term support of the strategy programme and if donors have not yet made a commitment to support anything beyond the start-up phase, then a key concern of the steering committee and secretariat during preparation of the strategy proposal will be to identify and make initial arrangements for the financing of future phases. In this respect, the prospectus should be reviewed as a funding proposal.

Start-up will need to be handled both diplomatically (to allay unnecessary fears about encroaching on rights and responsibilities) and with authority (to ensure that contributors treat the exercise with the attention that it deserves). The steering committee (and especially its chairperson) will need to be most active here. High-level seminars will be required to promote and explain the purpose of the strategy, and its likely benefits and implications. The seminars might involve the cabinet, permanent secretaries, the legislative body, and leaders of major sectors outside government. They would aim to secure the required high-level and multi-interest support for the strategy, and would continue at various stages throughout the process.

Conclusion

Managing strategies requires a broad combination of skills. In the past, an emphasis has been placed on technical skills in those fields which are the substantive focus of the process. Access to such technical expertise is vital for the central structures in strategy management, the steering committee and secretariat. But strategy experience has








shown that the wide range of inter-personal skills that establish and maintain the 'circuitry' for powering the strategy are more important to managing the process.

A number of strategy principles govern the management approach and skills required:

- Strategy processes should mediate and build consensus among conflicting interests in resource use and, in so doing, seek equitable outcomes.
- Strategies should provide for the coordination and integration of effort between communities, between sectors and between levels of government by cutting across conventional boundaries in society.
- This will require that strategies be flexible and adaptive to changing circumstances; be innovative and opportunistic in taking advantage of new approaches or support structures; and, finally, retain the capacity for learning and reflection.

Most of these principles are concerned with people's inter-actions with one another, their sense of efficacy and of control over the forces which shape their environment. They concern the way decisions are made and the commitment a strategy team can engender among key participants to the process, from the most senior politicians to the diversity of small community groups. Strategies for sustainable development require new forms of management that can respond to these principles and demands.

Another key determinant of strategy management requires an understanding from the outset that the processes are permanent. They are not one-time events but part of a cyclical process of planning and action, which enables lessons learned from defining and implementing the strategy to feed into refining, amending and improving it as circumstances and situations change. In this sense, strategies for sustainable development are best viewed as processes for managing change. Effective strategies rely on adaptive management. Many outcomes will be uncertain as individual preferences, social norms, ecological conditions, technological capabilities, and the state of development change over time.

Strategies are highly political processes that continue in times when governments are hard pressed and are susceptible to short-term pressures of all sorts. Managing strategies requires thinking strategically. Strategy teams need to take a long-term perspective, but there is little point in doing so if many of the most powerful participants pull out of the process because it has departed from day-to-day realities. As one of IUCN's strategy network members in Latin America said at a recent network meeting:

'Having a strategy is like playing chess, but not having a strategy is like rolling dice.'

Avecita Chicchón,
Conservation International, Peru

Chapter 7

Planning the Strategy

A strategy is more likely to be successfully implemented if it concentrates on a few priority issues. These issues should be central to maintaining or improving the well-being of people and ecosystems and to achieving agreed economic objectives. They should be sufficiently high profile or be able to be tackled effectively to generate political support for the strategy. And the strategy should be able to make a clear difference in the way the existing decision-making system deals with the issues.

A few broad but well-defined and measurable objectives are necessary for each issue, to enable monitoring and evaluation of the strategy and ensure it gets results. Participants analyze the issues to reach agreement on the objectives, and the policies and actions required to achieve them. This includes preparing a policy framework as well as specific cross-sectoral and sectoral policies. The policy framework should clearly relate the strategy policy to the other policies of government (and of other participants in the strategy), identifying which policies may override it and the circumstances when they may do so, and which policies are subordinate. The last of the basic elements in planning a strategy is clearly defining the actions needed to put the policies into effect.

Building momentum

The start-up phase discussed in Chapter 6 should have left the strategy team with a number of strong assets to begin in earnest their work on strategy design. The basic management structure should be in place, with the steering committee and secretariat fulfilling their respective roles and answering to an authority, possibly a cabinet committee. This structure should have firm political backing and credibility among the key participants. Core funding, adequate for three to five years, should have been identified and a firm inter-active relationship established with any donors involved, including, even at this early stage, a mechanism for donor coordination. The setting should have been reviewed thoroughly for the potential to build on past or current strategies and to forge close working relations with those that have ongoing activities or structures which could reinforce the NSDS process. Finally, a range of initial thoughts should have been written down and discussed in sufficient detail for the decisions to be made to progress to a fully fledged strategy process. This documentation may have included a project proposal or prospectus which made an early attempt, with limited external input, to define the issues, purpose and strategy process.

The strategy team will now be in a position to enlarge the process into a broader range of interlocking activities. This chapter is about the planning or design of a strategy, from the definition of policy through to action planning. Yet it is particularly important at this point to begin implementation in fields which have already been defined and endorsed by government, possibly through other strategy processes. For example, if an NCS, TFAP, NEAP or Biodiversity Action Plan has established a framework for action for particular policies that would fall within the broader scope of an NSDS, then the strategy team should work with the appropriate agencies in nurturing their selective implementation.

It might be that the government has decided to retain and expand an existing strategy process, such as an NCS, which has come the full cycle and requires thorough policy review and revision. In that case, an implementation programme would be underway and would feed the updating process. The earlier that implementation begins, the better. This message is repeated often in this handbook and spelled out in Chapter 8.

How the detailed planning for a strategy proceeds will have a considerable influence on the level of commitment that the many interest groups or 'stakeholders' are likely to bring to implementation.

Five elements to planning a strategy

Strategies may be designed in a variety of ways but there are five generic elements which reflect the lessons of experience:

1. Choose the issues.
2. Analyse the issues.
3. Decide the objectives.
4. Draw together the policy framework.
5. Plan actions to implement the policies.

1. Choose the issues

Long preparation efforts can exhaust participants and produce policies and plans that are overtaken by events as soon as (or sometimes before) they are adopted. Preparation should be in proportion to what can be implemented. It is important to target only a few issues, within a coherent strategic framework, and approach them successfully.

It is axiomatic that a strategy is selective. The most comprehensive development strategies pay little attention to biodiversity or ecological processes. And the most ambitious conservation strategies devote much more time to environment and resources than to health or social issues. Even so, many multi-sectoral strategies have started out trying to cover more than is practical. Usually, their scope has narrowed sharply once their policies have been adopted and their implementation is due. The Pakistan NCS, for example, reduced its core programmes from 14 to 8, which still may be too many for the resources available.

The Netherlands began by limiting the scope of its National Environmental Policy Plan to eight themes, consisting of interconnected issues with common environmental or economic causes (Box 15). The issues are crucial elements of the environment/ development problems faced by the Netherlands, and are few enough to be manageable.

Strategies that do not deliberately limit their scope waste time, money and effort on subjects they will end up doing little about. At best, this delays the point when the strategy tackles the priority issues. At worst, it increases the risk of the strategy losing political support and being dismissed as an unrealistic document.

Concentration on a few priority issues helps forge a unity of purpose among participants, gives focus to the strategy, and prevents it from becoming bogged down by trying to be too comprehensive. It is also easier to monitor and evaluate the strategy, and hence to keep it on track and ensure results.

The steering committee could help participants to reach agreement on priority issues by adopting criteria for deciding priorities. A priority issue might be one that meets the following criteria:

- It is central to sustainable development – to improving or maintaining human well-being and ecosystem well-being.
- Addressing it would build and maintain political support for the process. This may be because:








Box 15: Objectives and indicators: an example from the Netherlands

The ambitious goal of the Netherlands' National Environmental Policy Plan (NEPP) is to achieve sustainable development within one generation. The NEPP does not address the well-being of people and ecosystems directly but focuses instead on selected people–ecosystem interactions or 'themes' and the 'target groups' or sectors that are involved most directly in the interactions.

The themes are: climate change; depletion of the ozone layer; acidification; eutrophication; disposal of solid wastes; disturbance of local environments; dehydration of soils; and squandering of resources. Indicators have been devised for all the themes except the last two (due to a lack of data).

The target groups are: agricultural producers; the transport sector; chemical manufacturers; gas and electricity suppliers; the construction industry; consumers and retailers; the environmental protection industry; research and educational establishments; and environmental organizations, trade unions and voluntary bodies.

Each group is led by a steering committee, consisting of representatives of government and of the target group. The process is one of intensive networking and mediation. Participants set objectives and targets for their group; agree on actions to meet the targets; and have signed (or will sign) agreements with government, committing the group to the targets and actions.

Indicators play a crucial role in the NEPP, providing the means for setting targets and a measure of performance in meeting specific objectives. They have become a powerful strategic tool, used to define the contributions of each sector to an environmental problem, and hence to set both overall targets and targets for each sector.

— the issue is high on the political agenda (for whatever reason);
— the issue is already seriously affecting people, ecosystems, or both, over a significant proportion of the country, or will do so shortly if action is not taken; or
— it is highly probable that action on the issue will bring beneficial results soon.

- There is a clear niche in the decision-making system to address it. This niche may exist because:
  — insufficient attention is being paid to human aspects (for example, the economic, social, cultural and other elements of an 'environmental' issue) or to ecosystem aspects (of a 'development'

issue) and there are opportunities to demonstrate the importance of addressing all aspects;
— addressing the issue would provide motivation and opportunity for removing obstacles to sustainable development that are embedded in society;
— the issue is being neglected; or
— a number of groups are tackling the issue but coordination and a more systematic approach would significantly improve their effectiveness.

The use of these three sets of criteria together enables the issue analysis and policy development to retain their strategic focus, while being pragmatic and opportunistic. For example, the inclusion of issues that are high on the political agenda, as well as issues that will bring quick benefits, is essential in maintaining and building political support for the process.

Assembling information

Choosing and analyzing the priority issues could begin with the circulation of a discussion paper suggesting the key sustainability issues facing the country. Depending on the approach taken during strategy start-up, the prospectus document or project proposal might serve this purpose, or at least provide the basic information for the discussion paper. This could be prepared as one of the first tasks of the secretariat in the planning phase. The aim is for the secretariat to prepare and circulate sufficient documentation to provide an agenda for informed discussion.

The manner in which the secretariat will facilitate wide participation from this point will vary according to different political and social circumstances. A common approach is the establishment of task forces. In the NEAP model, for example, the basic preparation of the plan is carried out by task forces, each focusing on a particular major environmental issue or group of issues. In the more successful NEAPs, such as Uganda's, and recently Zambia's, the task forces undertook visits to local communities, and conducted provincial or district workshops.

NCSs have also used task forces of various forms. In Ethiopia, 26 regional task forces, reflecting the administrative divisions at the time, and 11 sectoral and cross-sectoral task forces, were each assisted by the secretariat to conduct consultations and prepare their individual reports covering issues through to prescribed actions.

Any initial paper or set of papers prepared by the secretariat to simulate discussion needs to present the issues simply but not simplistically. The analysis should give different points of view – expert and non-expert – without taking sides on what are bound to be contentious matters. The purpose of these initial discussion papers is to:








- set the agenda for informed discussion during the initial period of strategy planning;
- increase understanding of the complexity and dimensions of the issues and their inter-sectoral implications; and
- provide a focal activity around which the participatory process can be built.

Depending on the circumstances, information can be assembled by the secretariat and consultants in a wide variety of forms, including background studies, discussion papers, and audio-visual materials for use in a range of circumstances. The detailed communications and participation plans, which need to be prepared by the secretariat at this stage, will determine the forms in which this initial information is presented. The information can be obtained from:

- issue-based or regional task forces and associated workshops and meetings;
- government agencies (for example, they may be asked to prepare background papers, or provide published or unpublished statistics, a digest of material on file, consultation with an in-house expert, or the advice of a district office);
- short-term studies by academics or private consultants;
- short-term studies by strategy secretariat staff;
- a participatory inquiry or survey;
- longer-term research projects (to be undertaken as part of strategy implementation); and
- papers solicited from interest groups (NGOs, CBOs, etc.).

Terms of reference for studies will normally be prepared by the secretariat on the advice of the task forces. They will need to indicate the level of information required and the detail expected. It is important that background studies and discussion papers are not seen as ‘chapters’ of a strategy document; their role is to provide information and options for policy development.

Much of the information assembly, analysis and preparation of policy options should be undertaken by the government agencies responsible for the resources or sector concerned. This will enable use to be made of the expertise and information base of these agencies. It will also provide the agencies with opportunities to consider their responsibilities from a broader perspective than usual, taking account of their cross-sectoral and longer-term implications. Universities, research and policy institutions and independent professionals also have important contributions to make, particularly on issues that require independent analysis or subjects that are outside the expertise or mandates of particular agencies.

During the development of the Pakistan NCS, background studies were prepared by inter-disciplinary working groups, including a writing team, sectoral and other agencies concerned, experts from academia, and others. This overcame a problem common

to many strategy processes: the difficulty of finding sectoral experts with a good grasp of the cross-sectoral approach.

Another method is to organize a series of workshops to generate the material required. A strategy secretariat member or consultant would then finalize materials for subsequent review by workshop participants and others.

There is no single best way of going about this early information gathering, choosing the priority issues and widening the network of participants. Yet the steering committee and secretariat, as part of their work programme, will need to clearly spell out the approach they settle on and communicate it widely. Efficient management and coordination will lend credibility to the process as it gains momentum.

2. Analyse the issues

Issue analysis has two important functions:

- revealing what changes the strategy should aim to generate with respect to the priority issues, and how it should do so; and
- providing a reason and an opportunity for participants to work together, to recognize common problems and to devise mutually acceptable solutions.

Issue analysis, or problem definition, is intimately related to developing participation. If interest groups agree on what the problem is, they are halfway to a solution. Issue analysis gives participants something tangible to work with and a reason for involvement. As learning takes place, the analysis can be revised a number of times if necessary.

Issue analysis should challenge the interest groups by including forecasts of likely developments in the absence of policy (or if current policies remain unchanged). For example, what are the implications for Asian societies of the 300 million cars that automobile manufactures forecast Asians will buy in the next 30 years? Participants should consider:

- the impacts of current policies;
- new policies or policy changes that are needed; and
- likely impacts of the new policies, including costs and benefits.

Developing different scenarios is a useful way of exploring these impacts. For example, one scenario could portray the likely results if current policies remain unchanged. Two other scenarios could explore the likely costs and benefits of alternative policies; one meeting targets quickly, the other more gradually.

Analysis will need to:

- identify which issues are common across the sectors and interest groups, and which are more specific;








Box 16: Suggested components of analysis

Trends in resources and ecosystems: their quantity, quality, use, ownership and management; ecological limits to resource use (within which sustainable social and economic activity must operate) under given technologies.

Identification of **policy and economic forces** that underlie resource/ecosystem use in major sectors and population groups. These will be both international and national; for example, debt, trade, structural adjustment, exchange rates, taxation and pricing policy, government income and expenditure, balance of payments and employment.

Identification of the **responses of different sectors** and population groups to these policy and economic forces.

Assessment of the **importance and relevance of the resource base** and ecosystems for different groups of the population, analysing the relationships between the environment/resource base and demographic characteristics, incomes, health and welfare.

Detailed sectoral analyses of forestry, agriculture, human settlements, fisheries, energy, transport, industry and tourism, etc. These would examine the types and rates of use of resources/ecosystems by each sector, with respect to sector growth and productivity. In addition, they would analyse how sectors treat the links between economic, social and environmental subsystems: what are the sectoral objectives for each subsystem, how are trade-offs made in achieving these objectives, and what are their impacts?

Cross-sectoral analyses examining the interactions among major sectors. These would analyse the impacts of one sector on another; for example, resource flows, and physical, public health and landscape impacts. They would look at cross-sectoral integration in institutional, legal and planning issues: where are there gaps, conflicts, compatibilities and synergies?

Provisional assessment of the sustainability of resource/ecosystem use by each major economic sector or population group: covering effects on biodiversity, ecological processes, natural capital stocks and the sustainability of yields, economic viability, and social welfare and equity. For most issues, however, it is unlikely that there will be adequate information (time series) to make definitive statements about sustainability.

Analysis of the principal functional/institutional constraints to sustainability in terms of policy, planning processes, institutional roles and capacities, legislation, education and awareness, training, technologies, financial allocations and procedures,

box continues

capacities to monitor the development process, etc. Where are there overlaps, gaps and conflicts? Where are coordination and capacity-building required?

Analysis of development and environment patterns and consequences with respect to ethical considerations and national goals.

Definition of priority issues — problems and opportunities — to be resolved by the strategy.

Development of different scenarios and options with costs and benefits of each.

Outline policy recommendations, from above analyses.

- identify the key influences on the issues, and the most effective ways of dealing with them;
- study any action already being taken;
- agree on which issues are negotiable in the short-term and which cannot be resolved until later; and
- agree on the most efficient policy provisions and other actions to address the priority issues.

It is useful to analyse the issue sectorally and cross-sectorally. The former enables the role and impact of each sector to be clearly defined and allows policy proposals to be closely related to existing sectoral mandates. The latter breaks down sectoral barriers and helps participants to think strategically.

A sector analysis examines each sector and its contribution to development and environment, and then looks at cross-sectoral issues to identify possible conflicts and compatibilities among sectors. This is likely to be closer to the forms of analysis with which planners are familiar. More important, it is easy to relate to – and therefore to influence – the existing policy-making system. It also, however, runs the risk of repeating the usual sectoral plans and failing to provide much new insight. In addition, sector-focused analysis is very time-consuming, and can produce large amounts of information that may not be useful for the strategy. It can also tend to treat some key issues superficially.

A cross-sectoral or thematic analysis identifies a set of major problems and opportunities facing the country, and then examines their sectoral and cross-sectoral roots. That approach was adopted by the Dutch for their National Environmental Policy Plan (see Box 15). This enables participants to think strategically from the start and ensures that time and money are not wasted by collecting and analysing information that will not be used. Although a process of analysis which crosses sectoral boundaries is often contentious and meets








with resistance, it is the best way to identify early which issues are negotiable and which are not. In the Botswana NCS, resolution of the negotiable issues increased understanding of cross-sectoral interactions and opened up possibilities for resolving other issues that at first seemed intractable. A difficulty is that this approach does require skills in cross-sectoral synthesis and analysis that are often in short supply.

The initial information gathering, through to defining the priority issues and the consideration of different scenarios, will involve a number of stages and components in the strategy's approach to the analysis of information. Components of this process of analysis are suggested in Box 16.

The steering committee and secretariat will need to determine who undertakes the various components of analytical work. In some strategies, the sectoral and cross-sectoral analysis has been done by special task forces while other components are undertaken by government agencies, consultants, NGO participants, or the secretariat. Problems of information overload are common in strategies; systems will need to be set in place so that information is readily accessible and able to be manipulated (Box 17).

3. Decide the objectives

'If you don't know where you are going, any road will get you there.'

The scope of sustainable development may be too broad to be encompassed by a single strategy. Therefore, strategies might progress best by focusing on achieving a few specific objectives. For example, a local strategy for the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta in Colombia and the Dutch National Environmental Policy Plan both have the ultimate goal of sustainable development, but their specific objectives are more limited. The Santa Marta strategy focuses on improving and maintaining the quality and flow of water. The Dutch strategy concentrates on reducing pollution.

Objectives are at the heart of the strategy. This means they will not all be agreed to at once. Preliminary objectives may be proposed early on for the sake of discussion, but the objectives agreed to toward the end of issue analysis are likely to be significantly different from those advanced at the beginning. For this reason, it is somewhat misleading to speak of objective-setting and issue analysis as separate steps. They go together.

Objectives are needed for each issue. They should be:

- few enough to be achievable;
- broad enough to ensure the support of participants and encompass all aspects of the issue; and
- narrow enough and clearly defined enough to be measurable.

Box 17: A sustainable development information system

The more comprehensive the strategy, the greater the information it requires and generates, and the more challenging the information management problem. It may be worth considering establishing a Sustainable Development Information System as an integral part of the strategy process. This could consist of either a central office with, for example, hard-copy and computer files of information, plus maps and air photos, or a network of existing data centres with an agreement and procedures for cooperation on the strategy.

Individual countries may also find it helpful to identify and maintain registers (preferably computer-based) of their national expertise base — institutions and individuals in the government and non-governmental sectors with experience and skills relevant to sustainable development. This resource will be required to play a central role in providing technical and resource information and leading debate in the strategy process, and also in implementing, monitoring and evaluating the strategy.

While many countries do not yet have such registers, most bilateral donors, multilateral development banks and consultancy companies maintain rosters of environmental and sustainable development expertise, both individual and institutional. Independent, publicly-accessible registers of individual professionals who have worked internationally are maintained by both IIED and IUCN on separate but identically structured and shared databases. Making such information available may be a significant role for outside organizations and agencies in the strategy process.

Objectives that meet these criteria are required to assess progress with the strategy. They are also essential for the strategy to make actual progress. They are the logical complement to concentrating on a few priority issues. They help the participants focus their efforts to understand the implications of the strategy. Objectives give participants a yardstick with which they can measure progress; hence, they can also give participants a sense of direction and, eventually, achievement.

Strategy objectives generally will fall into two categories: those that set a long-term vision for sustainable development (for example, 20 years or a generation), and those that are consistent with the long-term vision, but tailored to a shorter time, such as the project or development cycle.

As an illustration, the specific objectives set by the National Strategy for Ecologically Sustainable Development in Australia are presented in Box 18.








Box 18: Australia's national strategy for sustainable development

Australia prepared an NCS in 1983 following wide consultation within government and with the private sector. A unit within the ministry responsible for environment provided the secretariat. The NCS was a highly compromised document, reflecting the predominance of development interests in Australian politics at the time. Within government, for example, it was up to the environment agencies to prove unsustainability when considering major development proposals from other agencies. Through the 1980s the onus of proof shifted to the development agencies so that, where there was doubt about the possible consequences of an action, a decision should err on the side of caution.

It was in this changing climate that, in 1989, a national summit of industry, unions and conservation organizations was convened to begin defining principles of what, in Australia, is called Ecologically Sustainable Development (ESD). With this began the process of preparing a National Strategy for Ecologically Sustainable Development (NSESD). A number of ESD discussion and policy papers were released and nine working groups were established involving government, the private sector and NGOs in order to undertake strategy planning in the sectors of: agriculture, energy production, energy use, fisheries, forest use, manufacturing, mining, tourism and transport. A draft strategy was prepared on the basis of working group reports and released for public comment and a final NSESD was published late in 1992, ten years after the preparation of the NCS. The strategy has been adopted by the Australia's federal, state and territory governments.

The goal of the strategy is development that improves the total quality of life, both now and in the future, in a way that maintains the ecological processes on which life depends.

Core objectives are:

- to enhance individual and community well-being and welfare by following a path of economic development that safeguards the welfare of future generations;
- to provide for equity within and between generations; and
- to protect biological diversity and maintain essential ecological processes and life-support systems.

Guiding principles are:

- decision-making processes should effectively integrate both long- and short-term economic, environmental, social and equity considerations;

box continues

- where there are threats of serious or irreversible environmental damage, lack of full scientific certainty should not be used as a reason for postponing measures to prevent environmental degradation;
- the global dimension of environmental impacts of actions and policies should be recognized and considered:
- the need to develop a strong, growing and diversified economy which can enhance the capacity for environmental protection should be recognized;
- the need to maintain and enhance international competitiveness in an environmentally sound manner should be recognized;
- cost-effective and flexible policy instruments should be adopted, such as improved valuation, pricing and incentive mechanisms; and
- decisions and actions should provide for broad community involvement on issues which affect them.

These guiding principles and core objectives are considered as a package. No objective or principle predominates over any others.

It was easy for participants in the British Columbia Land Use Strategy to agree on principles for conserving ecological processes and biodiversity, but much more difficult to agree on objectives, such as the percentages of different types of forest to be protected in parks. Addressing such objectives forced participants to discuss the role of protected areas in sustainable development, and how much protection is enough and why. In due course, the discussions changed the consensus on this issue.

The policy framework

The results of the various analyses and debates on issues will need to be collated by the secretariat with help from the task forces. It will also be necessary to record where consensus has and has not been achieved. Further work can then be done on the priority issues and objectives; the aim being to detail specific policy provisions, primarily addressing those issues and objectives where consensus has been reached.

Throughout the process, from the earliest stages of issue definition, various levels of policy will have been discussed and some will have been adopted as the favoured course of action by participants. The secretariat will need to draw these levels together within one framework so that the broad principles, goals, and objectives of the strategy (the broad policies) can provide the umbrella for more specific objectives and operational criteria, standards and targets (the specific policies).

It is important to move quickly from consideration of the broad policies to that of the more specific. As participants found during the development of the British Columbia Land Use Strategy, it is usually quite easy for participants to agree on generalities that give wide latitude for interpretation, masking crucial differences among competing interests. The Australian NCS document was too general in drawing policies on the most contentious issues. This allowed the mining industry to use the document to argue the case for large-scale exploitation of mineral resources in Kakadu National Park, a World Heritage Site. The Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service, which fought the mining industry in the high court on the issue, did not share this interpretation of the NCS policies. The policy framework should therefore set out a long-term vision of what is sustainable, together with medium- and short-term policies to move in that direction.

Focusing on specific objectives, standards and targets will bring out the real debate on sustainable development. The task of participants in the strategy is not to try to bring the debate on every issue to a quick resolution: debate on some issues is likely to continue for many years. Rather, the aim is to reach agreement on how to respond to some of the major problems and, in so doing, make progress towards sustainable development. Ultimately, some key issues for the strategy will need to be resolved by an arbitrating authority, usually the government. Institutional reforms such as the creation of the Resources Assessment Commission in Australia, can be set up to deal with these situations as part of the strategy process. Eventually, some issues may need to be resolved by parliament in the form of legislation. The secretariat always has the option of developing detailed policies, even where consensus has not been reached, with a view to these being settled through the strategy steering committee or in cabinet.

The framework should set out levels of policy that become progressively more focused. Specific policies relating to a priority objective would outline the reforms required to address it, covering:

- training, education and communications;
- legislation, regulations and standards;
- institutions;
- economic instruments and market-based policies;
- development programmes;
- planning systems and procedures;
- human and financial resources;
- technology innovation and research; and
- monitoring and evaluation systems.

Specific policies need to include clear guidance on their most appropriate practical interpretation. This practical expression may need to be demonstrated or tested through special demonstration projects or facilitating programmes as part of strategy implementation.

Relationship to other policies

The policy framework should clearly relate strategy policies to other policies of government (and of other partners in the strategy); defining which policies may override it and the circumstances under which they may do so, and which policies are subordinate. Sectoral policies within the scope of the strategy are likely to be subordinate to the strategy, for example. But the finance ministry's policy on annual budget plans may be overriding. If so, it will be important to review the budget plans' criteria for programmes and projects to ensure that activities called for by the strategy receive high priority.

The policy framework will also need to clearly define how it links with and builds upon other strategies operating at national or other levels of government. To avoid the strategy becoming marginalized and irrelevant, sectoral policy development and planning will have to be drawn into the process. This can be done by ensuring that the strategy has the proper authority, and by clearly defining at the outset its relationship with other decision-making processes. It is important that participants in all sectors understand which elements of their policy-making, planning and implementation will become, in effect, their sector's contribution to the strategy, and which elements will be left outside the scope of the strategy. Making agency policy development and planning an explicit part of the strategy will also help to integrate sectors.

Review and revision of policy framework

The strategy policy framework should be subject to periodic reviews, timed to take best advantage of the country's existing development cycles. Making and reviewing specific cross-sectoral and sectoral policies is a continuing part of the strategy process. Policy formulation, particularly cross-sectoral policies, should be widely participatory. The actual drafting of cross-sectoral policies may be done by the strategy secretariat, an inter-sectoral team, or a central agency. Usually, sectoral policy review and reform will continue to be done by the line agency concerned.

The policy framework will need also to define indicators so that progress towards the objectives and targets may be monitored and evaluated. Defining indicators can also help to make the objectives and targets more specific.

Action plans

An action plan should be part of a strategy's policy framework. Yet in work on strategies to date, it has been found convenient to separate out the broad policy framework from specific action prescriptions. The Nepal NCS document, for example, presents national and sectoral policies together, then revisits these in the form of a more detailed Conservation Action Agenda. There was a tendency in the early NCSs to emphasize building agreement on broad policy








while leaving more detailed prescriptions to be taken up as the policies filtered through government and other sectors in society. Many of the early World Bank-initiated NEAPs, on the other hand, tended to leap straight to specific project prescriptions with little emphasis on broad-level consensus-building. Today the NEAP model usually includes the preparation, over a year, of an NEAP Policy Document and a separate Environmental Investment Programme. This was the case in the Zambian NEAP, initiated in 1993.

Many NCSs have also evolved to give more detailed expression to various forms of action plans. In Vietnam, the most recent document prepared in the NCS strategy process was a portfolio of project concepts, each with a simple budget. In a regionally coordinated programme that begin in 1992, South Pacific island countries are being assisted in preparing national environment management plans, which bind broad policy prescriptions and a project concept portfolio into one document for each country.

In the Ethiopia NCS, a national policy document – drawing from those policy documents previously defined by regional level government – took two years to prepare and was completed in early 1994. Detailed investment programmes are now being developed over the next year by the regional authorities and sectoral agencies to give more detailed expression to the policies.

The purpose of an action plan or investment programme is to enable implementation of the provisions of the overall policy framework. The plan needs to flesh out the policy prescriptions and define programmes and projects that directly address the priorities for action. There are several important principles to consider when deciding on the comprehensiveness and level of detail of an action plan:

- Keep well in mind the concept of a strategy for sustainable development as a continuing and iterative process in which the main components are repeated. It is not necessary to prescribe actions covering everything. The idea is to get going on priority problems for which results are achievable. An action plan should expand and deepen over time with reflection on experience.
- The people responsible for implementing the policies should be involved in preparing the action plan, as is the case with the Ethiopian NCS. Organizations which will be involved in arranging resources for implementation also need to be involved in action planning.
- The process of designing specific programmes and projects for priority attention should be complemented by the equally important task of reviewing and redefining existing development investment against the strategy's principles.

These points are taken up in more detail in the remaining chapters, but they should be borne in mind when considering the specific approaches suggested in this section.

Maintain government commitment to action plans

The secretariat should develop a cross-sectoral action plan which addresses the basic elements of an institutional framework for sustainable development: the capacities needed for these reforms to work, including the skills in various essential decision-making methods such as environmental assessment (EA); and a series of demonstration programmes and projects undertaken with line agencies which test the policy innovations proposed in the strategy. The line ministries will also need to carefully define their sectoral action plans; these might include a range of new initiatives where gaps have been identified and where new relationships and procedures need to be built, and necessary adjustments to existing programmes and projects.

By this stage in the strategy a strong network of government technical staff should have become fully engaged in the process. Desk officers, who will be responsible for carrying forward the actions, need to be the main creative force in detailing the plans. This would help to avoid a key problem of past strategies, where action plans may have involved consultation (as distinct from participation) but essentially have been prepared by consultants.

Attracting donor funding often requires that project concepts be developed into comprehensive proposals; it is at this point that busy government teams often lose their sense of ownership. An up-front commitment to a concept is very important but is rarely made by external funding agencies. Donors need to acquire a special sensitivity, flexibility and patience in making early commitments to support the necessarily slow process of negotiation and discussions that must accompany programme design within government.

Involve the private sector

Key participants in action planning should also include non-governmental actors, particularly the business sector. Industry's participation is essential, both as an implementer and as an investor, but it is, by far, one of the least tried and tested aspect of strategies. Industry representatives should be included in various round table discussion groups from the earliest stages. Targeted private sector action plans (these are common, for example, in the transport, energy or agricultural sectors) can then be negotiated to encourage or discourage selected activities. Often, government and the donor community will need to give special attention to nurturing private sector action planning. In Nepal, for example,

industry, government and local communities have been involved in developing pollution action plans for 'hot spot' industrial areas.

Once the broad areas for action have been set with the private sector, then more focused action planning relating to specific areas can be a continuing process. A good deal of innovation and flexibility will need to be shown by government and donors in designing a range of instruments to support and encourage this process.

Processes of structural adjustment promoted by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) are often a powerful factor to be considered in defining action plans for the private sector in developing countries. Such international organizations are currently not oriented or equipped to approach the design of structural adjustment programmes as action plans for sustainable development. Narrow economic criteria predominate and, in order to reorient them, strategy teams will have to work closely with those involved in structural adjustment packages. In Nepal, IUCN helped the IMF determine the feasibility and cost of improving the environmental performance of the major tannery in the Kathmandu valley, so that these factors could be included in plans for structural adjustment.

Set priorities for action

Over time in the strategy cycle there will be a need and an opportunity for subsidiary action plans and a need for a more complete expression of the original action points. This will take the pressure off the strategy team to cover everything from the outset. The secretariat needs to constantly keep in mind that the top priority issues must be addressed first. In fact, if agreement on a range of actions relating to a key issue is reached early in the strategy process, then the secretariat should feel free to seek endorsement for them there and then. There are great advantages to the action plan being adopted for implementation in these staged editions. It allows for the more straightforward actions to proceed, and builds momentum and confidence in the process. Also, past experience has shown that if an action plan is delivered as a single package, many of the more difficult, less defined and less attractive actions fall by the wayside.

There may be political pressure on the secretariat to come up with one action plan 'product'. The World Bank NEAP model, for example, requires this. A consolidated version, or at least a clear indication of how the various action plan elements relate to each other, can be produced. This is desirable, in any case, to ensure that the overall strategic framework for the package is appreciated.

Box 19: Changes likely to be covered by an action plan

Changes to development policies, national development plans, sectoral master plans, and regional plans, to ensure appropriate vertical integration as well as integration with environmental and social policies.

Integration of environmental and social considerations into programme and project cycles. Environmental assessment is one way of doing this.

Reforms to economic policies, resource allocation and property rights policies, and sectoral policies and practices for environmental protection, natural resource management and development.

Adoption of economic instruments and other policy tools to integrate economic, social and environmental objectives.

Changes to legislation. These may include new umbrella laws, amendments to existing laws to incorporate standards and practices to ensure sustainability, and changes to rules and regulations.

Institutional strengthening and organizational development. Institutional strengthening entails creating new or better-equipped political, economic and social institutions, and links between them, to address issues of sustainability directly; and establishing links between existing public service institutions. Organizational development entails amending the mandates, policy documents, objectives, corporate strategies, functions and programmes (internal management and administration as well as professional), organizational structures, staffing, funding sources, and protocols concerning external relations to promote sustainability.

Education and training to develop the necessary attitudes and skills.

Categories of action

Five categories of inter-related actions can be identified, relating to:

1. policy, legislative, institutional and organizational change (as in Box 19);
2. new cross-sectoral decision-making methods, such as environmental assessment, risk analysis and forecasting;
3. capacity-building that relates to the ability of organizations to make the new instruments and methods work;
4. specific new programmes and projects; and
5. a wide range of adjustments and innovations to existing programmes and investments.








In summary, the action plan should lead to necessary innovations in decision-making procedures, to an identification and understanding of new administrative functions and to institutional reforms.

New laws, institutions or other major policy changes should not precede a full appreciation of the processes and functions they will fulfill. In some cases, the need for a new law or institution may be so well-recognized and enunciated in the endorsed policy framework that the government can act immediately. In most cases, although a policy commitment may be made, further effort will be required to bring on board those who will be involved in implementation. They can then appreciate the administrative implications, have a role in detailing the proposed reforms, and, most important, be able to raise their own capacity and commitment. Voluntary initiatives to implement the policy often may precede, and perhaps even obviate the need for, legislation.

For example, a government may make a commitment to establishing an effective national system of environmental assessment. Having a small local or international team prepare EA legislation for submission to cabinet and legislature is usually not the best way to ensure successful implementation. Instead, it may be more effective to develop a participatory programme in which technical people from key sectors are helped to prepare and field test EA procedures suited to national conditions, which subsequently can be expressed in law (as necessary). This was the approach adopted in Nepal through the Environment Core Group. The action plan needs to define this kind of development programme for any policy, legislative, institutional or organizational change for which there is likely to be inadequate understanding, acceptance or capabilities for implementation.

In some cases, such as a new environment agency, there may be no ideal structure, merely principles that need to be followed in such matters as its status and independence. There are several models which could probably serve the purpose equally well. The strategy secretariat should provide cabinet with alternatives and a favoured option. The final decision will be a political one.

Each action needs to be clearly defined in terms of:

- its purpose, broadly covering what needs to be done over the strategy cycle;
- specified inputs and outputs to shorter term target dates;
- implementation arrangements;
- roles and responsibilities of each implementing agent;
- critical tasks and critical paths, including links to other projects and programmes;
- a budget and financial plan, identifying public investment requirements and priorities and other economic implications of the action plan (including

cost-benefit analysis); and
- monitoring and evaluation arrangements.

Relationship to development planning and assistance

The action plan should dovetail with the national, sectoral and subsidiary development planning processes. The action plan – or at least the components to be implemented by government – would normally have to be submitted for approval of the financial and resource implications. This is likely to be a separate process from approval of the policy framework.

The type of action plan and budget will vary widely among countries. Some elements of the action plan could be made the subject of a donors' conference. As the Pakistan NCS experience has shown, the strategy process as a whole has proved to be a promising vehicle for replacing conventional concepts of aid conditionality, moving from a situation in which conditions are set by donors, to one in which they are defined by the recipient country; or to an effective combination of both (Chapter 10). However, attracting aid should not be the main preoccupation of the strategy.

Planning for implementation must recognize the existing constraints of the government and (where relevant) donors. Current economic recessions and other constraints have made the possibility of obtaining substantial amounts of new development aid money very unlikely. If anything, aid budgets are getting smaller. Also, the governments of many lower-income countries are unable to absorb significant amounts of new money, due to limited institutional capacity to undertake development projects.

Therefore, a critical step in ensuring implementation of a strategy is to assess how the recommended programmes and actions fit within the current circumstances of governments and donors. This does not mean that the policy framework and action plan need be less creative in their vision. Rather, the action plan must spell out the steps to lead governments and donors to implementation. Funding constraints also point up the crucial need for business and industry to participate fully in the strategy.

Immediate short-term measures to refocus existing investments include adding an environmental assessment component to a programme or project to better determine effects and mitigative measures (using strategy criteria in the EA framework). Another way to try and turn the focus toward sustainability is adding an environmental management component to current projects that are likely to have negative environmental consequences.

The action planning process must also help national planning commissions (or similar agencies) sort out what to do immediately with the long shopping list of projects








submitted by sectoral ministries and awaiting definition of the next annual budget and five-year plan. A process of project appraisal against the principles, priorities and criteria established in the strategy policy framework should be included in the implementation work to deal with these project lists. One of the most powerful potential 'action plans' for sustainable development in a country is the national budget, and strategies should tackle key aspects of its formulation process head-on. This work will require considerable technical input, both from those who know why the recommended strategy programmes were selected, and from economists familiar with planning budgets.

National planning bodies usually provide the channel for reviewing government programmes against national goals. They are a good way to introduce the concerns of sustainable development. Of course, the goal is to have these concerns addressed well before in the sectors themselves. Thus, when programmes are delivered for coordinated review against a broader strategic framework, it can be assumed that they are internally consistent with sustainability principles.

In developing countries, the sector programme review process within national planning agencies is weak. It often amounts to little more than assembling the various sectoral programmes and passing them on to finance agencies where the real decisions, cuts and reallocations are made. Strategy teams will need to identify the main decision points, what is decided and how, in the allocation of public resources. Exercises can be designed to be undertaken within national planning bodies which address these issues and bring together the action planning, implementation and capacity-building elements of a strategy.

Two interesting exercises of this kind were undertaken in Bhutan and Nepal as part of national strategy processes. In Nepal, as a step in developing a national system of EA, some 30 members of the environment core group drawn from the different sectors worked within the National Planning Commission (NPC) for a number of weeks. They reviewed more than 40 projects submitted as elements of the annual programmes from sectoral ministries. Access was given to all NPC files and budget documents. The goal was to test various EA procedures and criteria which the group had defined in previous exercises and to identify planning gaps and weakness in the projects under review. Most important, the group also defined the weaknesses in administrative procedures, capacities and structures within the NPC and the various agencies to which it related.

The review was in response to an action defined by the original NCS Conservation Action Agenda (ie that there should be an EA system) but it also resulted in a wide range of recommended actions that began to address more fundamental difficulties.

In Bhutan, a similar but more restricted review was undertaken, by the National Environment Strategy Secretariat, of all projects which at the time were before the NPC. This exercise was not as effective because it was one-off and not undertaken as part of a broader participatory endeavour to develop EA procedures.

These examples show why the strategy process needs to be ongoing and iterative and why the various skills and mechanisms for review are so important (addressed as monitoring and evaluation in Chapter 9).

Conclusion

Most strategies, from the initial wave of NCSs in the early 1980s through to the diverse range of types now undertaken, have been viewed as one-time planning exercises. Many of the NCSs and several of the more recent NEAPs have been compiled through consultative mechanisms akin to those which evolved during the 1970s for the development of land-use plans. Many strategies are even called plans, such as those following the NEAP model: the National Environment Management Plans of the South Pacific Islands, the Green Plan in Canada, and the Dutch National Environment Policy Plan.

Even though most have been much more ambitious and interactive than their names imply, there has often been no vision for the process beyond final endorsement of the document. Implementation has been seen as crucial to the plan's success but as something apart. Secretariats have usually closed down once a plan has been prepared and the idea of returning to the planning phase to review and revise the policy framework and action plan has been absent. This critical reassessment process has been taken for granted in conventional development planning, but not in the case of early strategies. Most of them were born through conservation or environment imperatives and have gradually evolved to be more conscious of their leading role.

Strategies have to date been viewed as projects with a predetermined lifespan and end product. Some development planners believe this is how it should be and that to regard strategies as an ongoing process would undermine their impact in a world where political realities give governments and donors alike short-term time horizons and pressure to deliver. Strategies must respect and take advantage of these political realities but, if they are to determine the way development takes place, then they need to become an integral part of the machinery of government.

Another trend reflected in the strategy experience is that a country cannot have effective centralized planning and decentralized implementation. As the common principles for development reflected in most strategies begin to change the structures and ways decisions are made then, inevitably, the

nature of strategy planning will also change. Greater emphasis will need to be given to devolution in countries where the centralizing forces have failed to nurture the local level. Methods for linking national strategy planning with strategies developing at local level and across government sectors will become more important. The Ethiopian NCS process has made a good start in this respect. Now that strategies are underway in most provinces of Pakistan, the next phase of planning within the NCS will look very different than it did in the first round, however successful that may have been.

There are two main challenges, then, facing national strategy planning over the next decade. The first is to convince governments that strategies should been seen as continuous, cyclical processes, integrated into and changing conventional development cycles. The second is to help build strategies at sub-national levels and establish effective working links among strategies so that, in future, the detail of policies and action plans will be generated by the institutions and communities responsible for implementing them.

Chapter 8

Implementing the Strategy

The sooner implementation begins, the sooner a strategy can benefit from experience. Early action brings greater commitment and momentum to the process, in addition to developing essential management capacities. Other strategies for action throughout government and at local levels will be needed. These include implementation by government, the private sector and NGOs. Each has a key function, which can be helped through the appropriate legal frameworks, economic instruments and mechanisms for mediation and conflict resolution. There should be an emphasis on cooperation rather than compulsion.

The strategy secretariat or similar body has an important role to play, particularly through demonstration and pilot programmes bridging a number of sectors. Responsibility for implementation becomes more diffuse with each turn of the strategy cycle, and as the institutional mechanisms for sustainable development mature. These will include new forms of partnership that emphasize flexibility, informality and open approaches to problem-solving and consensus-building.








Implementation from day one

Strategies are cyclical processes, with capacity-building and implementation continuing throughout. Implementation feeds into, and is guided by, regular review and revision of the policy framework and action plan, based on monitoring and evaluation.

The layers of implementation – by different levels and sectors of government and by a wide range of actors outside government – are likely to deepen with each turn of the cycle. The strategy's policy and action plan benefit increasingly as plans turn to actions, and as lessons from these actions lead to better policy and greater capacity.

Implementation can begin from the earliest stage of a strategy, in fields where government or a group of other participants is already committed to action.

Nothing reinforces a strategy process more than actions beginning to take effect. As a general rule, the earlier and more directly participants can feel the impact of strategy actions, the more they will be committed to the process. This rule reflects three important lessons of strategy experience:

1. The groups involved, whether politicians or local communities, need to see the practical relevance and benefits of the strategy process as an incentive to participate. Early action in priority areas can satisfy this need while bringing a sense of ownership and understanding of the strategy process.
2. In situations of rapid change, policy development within a strategy can be overtaken by events unless it is also acting to shape them. When actions are taken, there are often winners and losers, and the strategy team will need to find ways of minimizing the negative burdens of change and innovation if pockets of resistance are not to develop. (This concern is discussed later with respect to private sector activities.)
3. Early action helps to build capacity.

There is no limit to the kinds of implementation that can occur during the strategy's start-up and planning phases. The Zambia NCS emphasized implementation during the finalization of strategy policies and legislation, document through training programmes and local demonstration strategies. In Pakistan, the NCS planning phase saw the beginnings of a Sustainable Development Policy Institute and environment cells in a number of line agencies of the national and provincial governments. National environment umbrella legislation was drafted and broad involvement in the strategy planning process affected the receptiveness of governments to change, including the establishment of environmental protection agencies in each of the provinces, and the initiation of provincial conservation strategies.

Early implementation might be targeted to specific problems which are disclosed during the definition of issues. In Uganda, for example, concerns were expressed about pollution as a consequence of the proliferation of plastic bags. The NEAP secretariat immediately drafted regulations to control their use. Often, positive actions are already being taken by governments or communities on an ad hoc basis as a result of separate initiatives. Strategy secretariats can seek to identify these as 'good news' stories and reinforce them in other ways as elements in the overall framework for action. It is particularly important that a strategy build upon the best of what is already existing in a country. Selective support for innovative activities and the facilitation of exchange and links between them can be essential elements of strategy implementation during the planning phase. Other actions at this stage, such as demonstration programmes and capacity-building during policy development, are discussed later in this chapter, along with the role of the strategy secretariat in implementation.

Basic requirements for implementation

The most difficult time for most strategies is when plans must be turned into action. Many strategies have not made the transition. In fact, about 70 per cent of all sectoral and thematic strategies in Africa over the past ten years have not been implemented; others have been only partially implemented. Worldwide, even the most successful national strategies have seen many important components of their action plans be unsupported or overtaken by events. For some, the strategy process appears to have stopped dead following the preparation of the main document. This was the case with the Peruvian and Costa Rican NCSs.

A strategy can still be influential, even if it does not reach full implementation. Peru's NCS process stalled when the government changed. However, the draft strategy document provided a basis for Peru's national report to UNCED, a review of the TFAP, and a new proposal for a national system of protected areas. It also led to four regional conservation strategies (also halted by the unstable political situation).

Costa Rica's National Conservation Strategy for Sustainable Development (ECODES) also stalled when the government changed. But the informal networks of professionals formed during the process continue, and the intellectual influence of the strategy document – which has an ambitious cross-sectoral approach based on systems analysis – has been strong. It brought to national attention the debate about the sustainability of development. It provided a framework for the TFAP and the innovative National Biodiversity Institute (INBio); and it led the National Park Service to start working on the concept of buffer zones, and hence to a local sustainable development strategy for the Llanuras de Tortuguero. ECODES also resulted in the establishment of a National








Commission for Environmental Education and a Master Plan for Environmental Education.

Experiences such as these would suggest that, to maximize the chances of full and systematic implementation, strategy teams should nurture:

- **Continuous high-level political backing:** It is here that the secretariat will need to be particularly strategic; targeting key leaders and groups of politicians for special attention. For example, at key points in implementation of the Nepal NCS, such as when the environmental assessment legislation was due to come before parliament, the NCS secretariat worked through journalist groups and other NGOs to conduct special awareness-raising seminars and discussion sessions with parliamentarians. Also, key decision-makers were taken to the sites of demonstration programmes, particularly those politicians whose constituents were benefiting directly from existing strategy activities. Ensuring the involvement of members of opposition parties is highly desirable, although not always easy when it is most needed.
- **Integration with recognized plans and procedure:** The strategy will carry more weight where is integrated with the national development plan and donor programming cycles than if it is treated as a one-off exercise.
- **Consistent and long-term sources of funds:** Ensuring that adequate funds are on tap when they are needed will take a good deal of secretariat time, resources and creative energy. Donors should be sensitive to the effort required and cater to this as a key element in secretariat work during early phases of the strategy. Sustainable financing is the goal, as discussed in Chapter 10.
- **The capacity for action:** Every proposed action brings with it a set of assumptions – often unwritten – about the capacities of the agencies or groups responsible for implementation; a frequent cause of failure in a strategy is that these bodies are not up to the job. Every substantive action called for in a strategy needs to be inextricably linked to supporting capacity-building programmes.
- **Coordinating mechanisms:** Effective coordination is particularly important in the early stages of implementation. A focal agency, often the strategy secretariat, will need to take on this role. As the strategy engages more participants, and as it progresses from cycle to cycle, coordinating functions should devolve to a range of agencies and levels of government. Some elements of implementation can be coordinated by the private sector or NGOs. Central monitoring will be important throughout.
- **Continuity:** The structures that provide the main energy force for strategy planning (for example) should remain in place during the transition to full

implementation while arrangements are made for their functions to be integrated permanently within the workings of government.

If there were an existing cabinet-level committee with responsibility for the strategy, this could continue as the overall coordinating and facilitating mechanism. If such a mechanism were not in place, then this is a desirable innovation, even if only as an interim or bridging mechanism during the crucial transition phase where many strategies have collapsed. In Pakistan, for example, a cabinet implementation committee was established immediately following approval of the NCS document.

Similarly, during the planning phase, the technical steering committee and secretariat would have acquired a deep familiarity with the issues, developed extensive networks and skills, and experienced team work: all invaluable resources during this difficult transition. In most strategies, these structures have been allowed to break down and their reservoir of experience and staff resources have dissipated before effective alternatives had been set in place. In Nepal, for example, the strategy secretariat ceased to exist for all practical purposes following the preparation of the NCS document. Some 18 months later it had to be recreated to build the implementation phase. It was another four years before an Environment Protection Council, chaired by the Prime Minister, was established, with the ultimate responsibility for strategy coordination. A steady process of transferring secretariat responsibilities to the National Planning Commission and other agencies is still continuing.

This process of defining and transferring responsibilities, along with capacity development, takes time and needs to be viewed as an inherent part of implementation. The centres of energy for a strategy, which often have been painstakingly built up during planning, will be its most valued resources in implementation.

Implementation by national government

One of the key lessons of strategy experience is that it should be an ongoing process in which many of the components are repeated over a period of several years. Implementation will deepen and be expressed in many ways as different actors take up their roles, but a principal concern should be to fix all the elements of strategy planning within a country's existing development planning cycle. There may be a three- to ten-year planning cycle, but some countries rely principally on the annual budgetary cycle in defining development programmes.

Whatever the arrangement, a commitment will need to be made to reiterate the strategy planning process. This can be difficult if changes of government occur, which reinforces the need for a multipartisan approach








Box 20: Mediation, conflict resolution and arbitration: an Australian example

In Australia, the Commonwealth Environment Protection Agency (CEPA) was established as the central national body to implement the National Ecologically Sustainable Development Strategy process. It is required to work in close collaboration with the state and territory governments, industry, and the community to:

- determine clear national standards for and of indicators of sustainable development;
- develop well-defined processes for decision-making; and
- agree on effective consultative arrangements for better environmental management.

The CEPA works on establishing partnerships, decision-making methods and a policy framework that all Australian governments and sectors will respect. In 1989, the Resource Assessment Commission (RAC) was established to address the major issues which the strategy process had defined but on which consensus could not be reached. In carrying out its public inquiry functions, the RAC was guided by a set of policy principles (expressed in establishing legislation) for resolving competing claims and views over the use of resources. The principles are a useful model and, in summary, are:

- There should be an integrated approach, taking both conservation and development aspects into account at an early stage.
- Resource-use decisions should seek to optimize the net benefits to the community from the nation's resources, having regard to efficiency of resource use and environmental considerations, ecosystem integrity and sustainability, the sustainability of any development, and an equitable distribution of the return of resources.
- Government decisions, policies and management regimes may provide for additional uses that are compatible with the primary purpose values for the area; recognizing that, in some cases, both conservation and development interests can be accommodated concurrently or sequentially and, in other cases, choices must be made between alternative uses or combinations of uses.

In reaching consensus, or at least in coming to a position that the main parties can live with, the RAC interpreted these principles as demanding a thorough understanding of the range of beliefs and ethical frameworks underlying the different community values

box continues

relating to an issue. The RAC process aimed to ensure that even though a party may disagree with the final decision taken by a government, it accepts the reasonableness of the process which led to it. The major elements of the public inquiry process encompass research, clarifying the pertinent issues, meetings, public hearings, written submissions and the formulation of options and recommendations. Three important public inquiries undertaken by the RAC involved the sustainable use of forests, the management of Australian coastal zones and mining in a national park. A statutory authority such as the RAC is a valuable innovation in strategy implementation so that a body of expertise and a range of methodologies is built up to enable the consistent application of sustainable development principles to the resolution of major resource use issues.

Yet such an open process can threaten established development interests, and the RAC came under heavy attack from industry and opposition parties as a 'superfluous layer of green-tape bureaucracy' that drove away potential resource industry investors. The RAC was abolished four years after it began. The various sustainable development institutions, like all offspring of the strategy process, are likely to meet with strong resistance and, unless backed by committed and influential political constituency, can be short-lived.

Other desirable sustainable development structures include environment tribunals, which can mediate and, if necessary, arbitrate more specific conflict situations. These occur as strategy actions begin to define more sharply focused conflicts of interest over the use of specific sites or resources. The RAC was set up to examine national issues of conflict whereas other bodies, such as the Land and Environment Court within the Australian State of New South Wales, might conciliate on actions proposed within local strategies such as a zoning plan or the siting of an industry. Finally, administrative structures are needed to fulfill control and enforcement functions more akin to a conventional environment protection agency.

The precise form of these structures that seek to institutionalize strategies for sustainable development is not so important: in fact, one agency might fulfill any number of them. A greater concern is that there be a clear definition and understanding of their functions and relationships with other institutions, ie how they connect to the system.

to the process. Commitment to the strategy might best be expressed through a statutory obligation under an umbrella act relating to sustainable development. The reforms to government structure proposed in the strategy document may determine who will be responsible and how to manage the process.

Key sustainable development structures

It is essential that all agencies involved in implementing the strategy are clear about their relative responsibilities. The component actions are likely to be the responsibility of many bodies, both inside and outside government. The role and influence of the steering committee and secretariat or their equivalents (ie the central strategy agency) will vary. There will be:

- actions undertaken directly by the steering committee or secretariat – for example, certain demonstration and pilot projects, and communication and monitoring activities;
- actions influenced directly by the steering committee or secretariat, but undertaken by others – for example, major demonstration projects and activities of government sectoral agencies; and
- actions influenced only indirectly by the steering committee or secretariat – for example, corporate sector and individual initiatives in response to policies and incentives set by the strategy.

Choosing the central agency to drive implementation depends on how strategy planning was managed. In Nepal, the National Planning Commission provides the secretariat for the strategy and its overseeing body, the Environmental Protection Council (EPC). Similarly, in Zambia, the inter-sectoral EPC, which falls under the Minister of Environment, manages both the NCS and NEAP processes. A central strategy agency will need to have four main characteristics. It should:

1. be close to the action (ie closely related to the most powerful agencies or individuals in government, but also have links with grassroots institutions);
2. include a mechanism for high-level, credible, inter-sectoral links;
3. have a broad and flexible mandate which allows it to act as a catalyst, facilitator, demonstrator, and review body; and
4. be independent to help set in place transparent, consistent, impartial, participatory, and authoritative processes of mediation and conflict resolution in major resource issues.

Different levels of sustainable development structures and agencies established in Australia are described in Box 20.

A wide range of other structural reforms can complement and reinforce the functions of the central strategy agency. In the United States, two new executive offices have been established to coordinate the preparation of

sustainable development policy. The Office for Environmental Policy focuses on domestic issues, while the Global Environmental Affairs Office, situated within the National Security Council, deals with international issues. Both report direct to the President and have a mandate to produce action plans that set out policies and approaches to implementation. They are required to seek broad public participation and inter-agency collaboration. Also, the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has established a strategic planning group that examines critical development trends, and, on the basis of various future projections, identifies emerging environmental problems and their possible solutions.

In Pakistan, the Sustainable Development Policy Institute was established following the recommendation of the NCS. It has a monitoring and evaluation role in addition to identifying the main sustainable development issues and defining frameworks for public action.

Sustainable development law

Sustainable development structures, and the laws which underpin them, need to reflect the flowering of a comprehensive consultation and capacity-building process that begins during strategy planning and continues as part of implementation. This is particularly true for those laws that set in place the main institutional and decision-making framework for integrating the strategy process throughout government and the community. Rarely should laws be the point of departure in a strategy; rather, important signposts erected along the way so that the journey becomes a familiar and well-charted one for the communities concerned. It is particularly important that the technical officers and lawyers responsible for implementing the laws have had a central role in preparing them.

'If sustainable development is to mean anything at all, it will have to involve a partnership with the future, not just a partnership for profit.'

Chris Rose, Greenfreeze Project, UK

Law reforms will be needed at different levels of government and across sectors but the minimum content for a national system of sustainable development law should provide for:

Sustainable development principles and definitions, including a coherent philosophical framework that sets out the basic principles of sustainable development and the practical ways in which they will be applied (Box 21).

Recognition of the NSDS, including:

- legal commitment to the NSDS process;
- a commitment to revise and update the strategy policy framework (ie to repeat the strategy planning phase) regularly, for

Box 21: Principles for sustainable development law

A range of principles or approaches to sustainable development are now being expressed more frequently in international agreements and domestic legislation. Although they all encapsulate ideas that have been common in political philosophies for a long time, most have only recently been expressed as basic tenets of environmental policy.

Even the polluter pays principle, which goes back some 20 years, is only beginning to work through the decision-making system to have practical effect. The process has yet to begin in most developing countries. All these approaches are expressed in some form or other within the Rio Declaration and Agenda 21. The principles need to be cast in a way which reflects the cultural, political and economic nature of a country and the different communities within it. They work best when applied together, especially when special circumstances would mean that the rigorous application of one principle alone might be impracticable or inequitable.

The **public trust doctrine** has its origins in Roman Law. It has been extended in recent years, placing a duty on the state to hold environmental resources in trust for the benefit of the public. At its widest, it could be used by the courts as a tool to protect the environment from many kinds of degradation. In some countries, the doctrine has formed the basis of environmental policy legislation, allowing private rights of action by citizens for violations by the state (directly or indirectly) of the public trust.

The **precautionary principle** as defined in the Rio declaration holds that where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used as a reason for postponing cost-effective measures to prevent environmental degradation (or expressed more liberally, when in doubt about the impact of development, manage according to the worst-case scenario of its effect on the environment). Politically, this principle is difficult to apply and is, in fact, ignored in most countries. Erring on the side of caution is not an attractive option when considered against immediate projected economic benefits which can be spelt out in conventional development terms.

The **principle of inter-generational equity** is at the heart of the definition of sustainable development and requires that the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It depends on the effective application of the other principles for sustainable development combined.

box continues

The **principle of intra-generational equity** requires that people within the present generation have the right to benefit equally from the exploitation of resources, and that they have an equal right to a clean and healthy environment. This principle applies to the relationship between groups of people within and between countries. This principle is being applied more and more in international negotiations. But within nations, it is particularly susceptible to cultural and socio-economic forces.

The **subsidiarity principle** is resurfacing worldwide after many decades of centralized planning and decision-making. In essence, it is the principle that decisions should be made by the communities affected or, on their behalf, by the authorities closest to them. Decisions should rest at the national rather than international level and local rather than national level. This has been the basic principle governing the devolution of planning systems worldwide and is intended to encourage local ownership over resources and responsibility for environmental problems and their solutions. These growing pressures for devolution in government need to be balanced by a recognition that local areas are part of larger systems and cannot function in isolation. Often, environmental problems may come from forces outside of local control, such as upstream pollution from a neighbouring country or community. In such cases, the other principles for sustainable development would override the subsidiarity principle.

The **polluter pays principle** (PPP) suggests that the polluter should bear the cost of preventing and controlling pollution. The intent is to force polluters to internalize all the environmental costs of their activities so that these are fully reflected in the costs of the goods and services they provide. Problems will be inevitable if an industry or plant would go out of business if this principle were enforced rigorously. A community might decide, for example, that the employment benefits of keeping a factory open outweigh the health and other environmental costs of pollution. Environmental agencies in developed countries have usually taken a flexible approach, with the continuation of government subsidies in special cases and the negotiation of individual programmes to allow certain polluters to meet new environmental standards gradually.

The **user pays principle** (UPP) applies the PPP more broadly so that the cost of a resource to a user includes all the environmental costs associated with its extraction, transformation and use (including the costs of alternative or future uses foregone). The PPP and UPP can be expressed in similar ways through market systems and government regulation.








example every three to five years;
- provision for monitoring performance in implementing the strategy, say, annually, and for the regular reporting of progress to parliament.

Structures, such as those which:

- constitute the key sustainable development structures, defining their powers, functions, obligations, establishment and relationships with other institutions, ensuring that they are centrally placed and have influence in economic and development decision-making in government; and
- build strong links for communication and decision-making among sectors.

Environmental rights, involving a system of legal rights for people to take action to protect the environment, to require the government to act, to have access to information, to participate in policy-making and to question decisions.

Decision-making methods and processes, including:

- the requirement that all proposed new developments and new policies should be subject to environmental assessment;
- the use of economic incentives and disincentives, based on appropriate taxes, charges and other instruments;
- the requirement that industries, government departments and agencies be subject to periodic environmental audit; and
- effective monitoring, development control and enforcement and compliance mechanisms.
- accountability of government agencies and the private sector for their actions; and
- open and participatory methods for mediation, conciliation, conflict resolution and settlement of disputes for both broad fields of national policy and on more specific issues where consensus is lacking.

Promoting partnership, including systems that encourage partnerships for sustainable development between levels of government and with the private sector and non-government organizations.

What is possible, or even desirable, in sustainable development law will vary from country to country according to the cultural and political context. The issue of environmental rights is particularly sensitive and difficult for some countries to embrace. The rule of thumb is to seek to maximize the legal expression of these basic elements of sustainable development.

Promoting action through regulation

The bulk of existing environmental regulation is aimed at specific sectors of the economy, and specifies production, technology or emission standards to reduce environ-

mental degradation or resource depletion. Regulations can be effective and economically efficient in promoting sustainable development actions when standards:

- are based on objective criteria and scientific knowledge;
- specify a level of performance rather than a particular design or technology (ie leave it to industry to come up with the most cost-effective technology to meet the standard);
- are reassessed periodically to incorporate advances in scientific knowledge and changes in society's aspirations, and to monitor their effectiveness;
- are set after comparing the benefits of environmental policies with the costs of achieving them; and
- are based on analysis of the entire product life cycle (from production of the raw material to end use of the final product), to identify the points of intervention that will deliver the greatest result for the least cost.

Regulations have their disadvantages, however. They are seldom the most cost-effective way to reach a given standard of environmental quality and studies in the United States suggest that they can be up to six times as costly as the least-cost alternative. This is because regulations that do not meet the above criteria are often inflexible, requiring polluters to adopt standard solutions even if they were able to find better alternatives. Furthemore, regulations do not provide incentives for further improvement beyond the required standard. In contrast, economic instruments produce a financial incentive even as wastes are reduced, hence stimulating continual improvement.

Promoting action through economic instruments

In contrast to regulation, by which government aims to set rules to control the behaviour of resource users, market approaches address strategy implementation in a different way. Economic instruments aim to sensitize both producers and consumers toward responsible use of environmental resources and avoidance of pollution and waste, by internalizing environmental and social costs. They include taxes, charges, subsidies, deposit/refund schemes and tradeable permits. These are geared towards 'getting the prices right' so that environmentally and socially beneficial goods and services are not at a market disadvantage with respect to polluting or wasteful competitors. Sometimes, therefore, they need to be accompanied by regulations or other controls to ensure this.

Economic instruments can enable industry and other resource users to meet environmental standards in a cost-effective way, encourage them to do better than the standards require, and add their resources to those of government to maintain ecosystems. They can:








Box 22: Examples of market-based approaches for environmental policy

Brazil: Discontinuing fiscal and credit incentives for ranching has saved around US$300 million annually, while easing (although not eliminating) pressures for deforestation.

China: Economic instruments include fees to discourage pollution, the reform of resource prices and the planned application of environmental taxes. Certain industrial pollutants are subject to emission fees, collected by local environmental protection offices. Revenues are placed in banks and used to finance loans to firms for pollution control investments, covering 20–25 per cent of the requirements for this purpose.

Colombia: The Ministry of Development will support environmental improvements in industry through a credit line from foreign banks and international lending agencies. A Fund for Industrial Modernization will provide credits for business to buy new equipment. From 5 to 10 per cent of the fund will be used for environmental projects. Companies that invest in cleaner technologies will benefit from reductions in capital gains tax of up to 20 per cent.

India: Measures include income tax exemptions from donations to environmental institutions; a 50 per cent depreciation allowance for devices that minimize pollution or conserve resources; soft loans and investment allowances for pollution control equipment; pollution fees; and a levy on water use. Fertilizer subsidies have been removed, with exemptions for small farmers.

Indonesia: Pesticide subsidies accounted for almost 80 per cent of the retail price in 1985, creating a big incentive to over-use them. This resulted in widespread soil and water pollution and a rise in pesticide-resistant strains of pests. After a severe loss of rice production, all but four of the chemicals were banned. Subsidies were eliminated entirely by late 1988. This greatly reduced pesticide use in favour of integrated pest management systems, and saved more than US$120 million a year.

- harness market forces to encourage producers and consumers to achieve environmental objectives;
- stimulate the development of environmentally-sound technologies and products;
- reduce costs of enforcement; and
- generate revenue.

The important task is to set the prices or taxes at the right level and to introduce change gradually so that it does not result in severe economic dislocation. Subsidies, in particular, should only be used in special cases where severe environmental problems and issues of equity come into play. A

common effect of subsidies is to place a significant economic burden on a country by supporting technological backwardness and inefficiency. Also, they often result in large-scale environmental damage by discouraging full internalization of costs. Economic subsidies with negative environmental effects should be removed.

Box 22 provides some examples of how economic instruments have been used to encourage implementation of environmental policies.

Interest in economic instruments to promote sustainable development actions has grown with the increasing concern about the efficiency of over-regulation. Yet there are circumstances in which economic instruments may not work or would need to be applied carefully in combination with other approaches, especially in lower-income economies:

When people are too poor to pay: Economic instruments that rely on governments charging fees or collecting taxes from polluters are unlikely to work in the majority of rural areas in lower-income countries, where poor people live in subsistence conditions and simply cannot pay. In these areas, positive subsidies or incentives should be considered.

When markets are undeveloped: In many poor countries, a combination of undeveloped markets, uncertainty about supply and demand, and macroeconomic instability undermines the effectiveness of market-based instruments.

Choosing the right policy tools to promote action

The OECD has adopted five criteria to judge whether economic instruments or regulations would best tackle a given environmental problem:

1. environmental effectiveness;
2. economic efficiency;
3. equity (for example, distributional effects in society of the instrument);
4. administrative feasibility and cost; and
5. acceptability (to groups who will be affected by the policy).

In most cases, tools from the three different approaches – regulation, cooperative processes, and economic instruments – will need to be applied together in combinations best suited to the situation. For example, regulations and voluntary agreements could set basic standards and targets while economic instruments could provide the stimulus to meet and exceed them by whichever means each business finds most efficient. Whatever the approach, there should be a policy transition, giving industry a stable and predictable climate in which to shift from unsustainable to sustainable practices.








Integration

Of central importance to strategy implementation are integrating mechanisms that build bridges between key agencies and groups participating in a strategy and that lead to partnerships and greater collaboration. They are needed to form working links between national government agencies, between levels of government, and between government, the private sector and the public. They are important because:

- positions and decisions are likely to be respected more broadly and be able to be implemented;
- priority issues identified in a strategy are usually cross-cutting, affecting many sectors;
- implementation is the responsibility of many agencies and often can only be undertaken jointly;
- agencies that have the central responsibility for coordinating an NSDS, such as environment ministries, often are weak and need to rely on collaboration and others' self-interest; and
- monitoring of progress in strategy implementation and enforcement, where powers have been introduced, requires partnerships and collaboration.

Integrating mechanisms can include structures like committees or working groups, various forms of agreements on the way things are to be done, and innovative decision-making methods that are inherently cross-cutting, such as environmental assessment.

Integrating structures

These can take many forms. The more important are underpinned by legislation but most operate on a more informal basis. In Canada's Yukon Territory, for example, the government has established a statutory Council on the Economy and the Environment, with members representing aboriginal people, labour unions, business, women, NGOs and a municipal government, bearing in mind the need for a balance of regions and interests in the territory. The council has a broad range of functions, including monitoring implementation of the Yukon Conservation Strategy. It is an advisory body to the territorial cabinet but can report directly to the territory's legislative assembly on certain matters.

The Nepal Environment Protection Council is similarly constituted and also oversees NCS implementation, reporting directly to the Prime Minister. In the UK, an independent group of experts from government and the private sector has been established to advise the Prime Minister on areas where policies and practices conflict with the environment objectives within the government's NSDS.

As implementation deepens, national and local strategies will need to be linked effectively through integrating structures. In

Panama, the Ministry of Planning and Economic Policy is represented on the coordination team of a local strategy (Bocas del Toro). This ensures that national planning takes account of the strategy's proposals and translates them into national budget allocations. The strategy for Petén, Guatemala, was developed by the Secretary for Economic Planning and adopted as the government's official plan. A regional forum of governmental and non-governmental organizations meets once a month to consider common problems and coordinate activities.

Existing consultative mechanisms – such as inter-agency committees, inter-governmental councils (such as the Environment and Conservation Council in Australia) and the many forms that bring together governments with other groups – should be reviewed for their potential to contribute to strategy implementation. Some might need strengthening if they lack sufficient credibility to contribute effectively. A number of innovative approaches have become the main creative driving force for planning and implementation. Structures which have co-evolved as variations on the same theme include:

Round tables: A round table is a group of senior representatives of government, business, citizens' groups and other key sectors of society. It provides a forum for collaborative analysis and treatment of major issues, educating government and NGO leaders in each other's perspectives, approaches and concerns. The group should be fairly small – ideally around 25 – although that may make it difficult to cover all the key sectors. The bigger the group, the more difficult it is to develop the right atmosphere for progress. In some cases, for example British Columbia's Strategy for Sustainability, the round table is also the steering committee of the strategy. In other cases, round tables are vehicles for discussing, developing and helping to implement the strategy, but overall direction of the strategy is the responsibility of a separate steering committee.

Core groups: A core group is an inter-sectoral network of government officials from most, if not all, ministries and departments. It provides a forum for bringing in sectors to deal with shared problems. The group may be large: Nepal's Environmental Core Group involves more than 70 people, its members coming together in differing combinations depending on the policy being addressed at the time; for example, environmental assessment procedures or national heritage conservation. A core group is a working network, intended to internalize the strategy (or aspects of the strategy) within government.

Action networks: These are networks of national government agencies, local governments, and non-governmental actors that come together to solve multi-sectoral problems, often in a particular part of the

country, such as a river basin or a coastal zone. For example, an action network was formed to address problems of water pollution in the Densu River Basin in Ghana. As the problems change, the composition of the network changes. Because action networks are designed to address multi-sectoral issues, they are an important means of implementing an NSDS.

Round tables, core groups and action networks all seek to provide structures and processes for problem-solving and consensus-building beyond the conventional forms of government characterized by hierarchical, inflexible and closed decision-making. Most mediation and conflict resolution can continue within such informal and task-oriented networks and groupings. They allow participants from different organizations – who might not normally interact – to contribute as equal partners, to exchange experience, learn by doing and, through mutual support, build their own confidence and commitment to agreed actions. It is in governments' interest to facilitate, resource and acquire the skills to manage these new forms of partnership.

Integrating agreements

Agreements can be reached through conventional forms of negotiation or innovative networking. Usually the goal is to agree on collaborative ways of working that meet sustainable development objectives, often through self-management. When national environment assessment legislation was introduced to Australia, Memoranda of Understanding were negotiated with all key sectoral agencies, detailing how each would take responsibility for applying the legislation to its own activities. Also, an Inter-Governmental Agreement on the Environment (IGAE) was adopted in 1992 to provide mechanisms for:

- a reduction in the number of disputes among the commonwealth and the states and territories on environmental issues;
- a cooperative national approach to the environment;
- a better definition of the roles of the respective governments;
- greater certainty of government and business decision-making; and
- better environmental protection.

The agreement embraces many of the principles of the National Ecologically Sustainable Development Strategy, and defines the roles and responsibilities of the different levels of government. Intra-generational equity is of particular concern to the Australian federation; the agreement sets in place a consultative structure for establishing national environment protection standards, guidelines, goals and associated protocols. The object is to ensure:

- that people enjoy the benefit of equal protection from air, water and soil pollution and from noise, wherever they live; and

- that decisions by business are not distorted and markets are not fragmented by variations among jurisdictions in relation to major environmental protection measures.

The implementation of national strategies can be greatly assisted by these kinds of governmental agreements. In fact, in many countries implementation is not possible without them. Voluntary agreements with the private sector are discussed later in this chapter.

Integrating mechanisms

In strategy implementation, the various forms of environmental assessment and planning are the most valuable methods of drawing together sectors and disciplines, and conservation and development issues. Some countries have developed national systems of environmental assessment and resource-use planning as part of the sustainable development management framework. By working cooperatively to develop these various decision-making methods, participants, such as sectoral experts, can gain a better appreciation of the environmental responsibilities of their own agencies vis-a-vis other sectors. Such cooperative efforts help people better understand the role of the central planning and environment organizations and improve working relationships between them.

Implementation by the strategy secretariat

The strategy secretariat, whatever form it takes, has a special role in implementation. Its principal concern needs to be setting in place the key ingredients of an institutional and decision-making framework for sustainable development at the national level. It should focus on the inter-sectoral aspects of the strategy which are not covered by, but affect all other, government agencies. In Nepal, the NCS secretariat implementation programme includes:

- building key environment institutions;
- setting in place a basic framework of sustainable development law;
- developing national systems of environmental assessment and pollution control;
- environmental education and public awareness;
- heritage conservation; and
- developing a national system and methods of environmental planning.

In pursuing these goals, the secretariat is using the environment core group approach and other integrating mechanisms to forge partnerships with the private sector and NGOs. This process was complemented and reinforced by selected demonstration and pilot programmes.








Demonstration and pilot programmes

The strategy secretariat may, at least in the first cycle of implementation, need to mount one or more pilot programmes to test and demonstrate the practical application of policies, and to build capacity and commitment within relevant sectors. These pilot programmes should generally aim only at inter-sectoral activities or those which fall outside existing sectoral mandates.

Demonstration and pilot programmes can be introduced at any point in the strategy cycle as model sustainable development activities. They can be particularly valuable when some of the proposed approaches (ie integration, coordination and participation) are unfamiliar or even threatening. In addition, they can enable the feasibility and effectiveness of various cross-sectoral approaches to be tested in local situations.

In certain countries, such as Zambia, Botswana and Nepal, the policy and institutional changes required by the strategy have not been made until several demonstration programmes have been underway for some time, and have shown the need and direction for change. Even where policy and institutional changes are made soon after preparation of the policy framework, demonstration programmes can provide ways to introduce new approaches. Without this initial focus activity, it is often difficult for several sectoral agencies to coordinate activities and define and achieve joint aims.

Demonstration projects can have a multiplier effect, helping people understand – far more than any document can – what the strategy is all about, and generating support for it. To fulfill this potential, a demonstration project should:

- have a high chance of success;
- show what it is intended to demonstrate (this is obvious but needs to be stated);
- be monitored closely;
- have quick results; and
- select its location and participants carefully to ensure both the success of the project and wide and rapid transference of the experience.

Often, pilot projects will build on an existing activity. In Zambia, two significant regions were selected as NCS pilot districts. These were areas where a number of sectors and interest groups shared problems: an urban area, the project for which was based on a successful NGO programme; and an agriculturally marginal rural area, for which a new project was specially developed.

Implementation through other strategies

A national strategy provides an umbrella of policies and a range of well-targeted actions; the most important concerning new instruments, methods and capacities for making better decisions. These policies and actions may reach across government and down to local levels, but will be given expression

through more detailed planning and implementation.

Box 6 in Chapter 4 provides examples of the different strategy types. For example, depending upon the priorities of national government; thematic strategies, covering biodiversity, environmental education, climate change or population might be needed. These would cut across all government sectors and generate more comprehensive actions relating to the theme. Similarly, sectoral strategies will be needed to pick up on the momentum of policies and demonstration programmes of the national strategy. These will follow their own cycles and feed back to the broader national process.

In countries with a federal system, state or provincial governments may feel that the national strategy cannot be translated directly to local levels. They may feel that a greater sense of ownership and focus would come through a state or provincial strategy, once again building on and integrating with the national process. This is what is happening in Pakistan, although the way the links between the national and provincial conservation strategies will evolve is yet to be determined. In most countries, this crucial meshing of strategy cycles will come only through trial and error and exchange of experience with other countries.

Core groups or action networks have an important role to play, complemented by the kind of integrating structures, agreements and methods previously described. In countries with very large populations, such as India, or even the United States, the state or provincial level will need to be given special emphasis in providing the strategy umbrella for fostering local initiatives. In countries with a regional structure, such as New Zealand and Nepal, actions within the national strategy process will need to stress the subsidiarity principle. In Nepal, the National Environmental Planning Guidelines prepared by the NCS environment core group drew from the experience of eight local conservation strategies undertaken as pilot exercises. They reinforced the government's policies on devolution and promotion of district- and local-level strategies.

A central component of New Zealand's strategy for sustainable development is the Resource Management Act, introduced to devolve major sustainable management functions to regional councils. The councils are required to initiate their own strategy processes. A number of the state governments in Australia have introduced similar systems, placing the main responsibilities for policy definition and implementation with local government.

In a number of developed countries, the strategy processes tend to merge with the conventional land-use planning systems as they come closer to local communities. In many less developed countries, planning for








land-use tends to proceed in isolation from planning for social services. Strategy processes can bring them back together.

In Australia's Victoria State, more than 20 local governments have mounted local conservation strategies based on the National Ecologically Sustainable Development strategy model and following guidelines prepared by the state government. Local sustainable development strategies are the subject of a separate handbook in the IUCN series.

Implementation by the non-governmental community

Whatever the strategy level, much of the implementation should be non-governmental; by business and industry, schools and universities, research institutions, environmental organizations, human development organizations, community groups, and so on. The wealth-creating sectors of society are almost entirely outside government; so it is essential that business and industry be centrally involved in implementing the national strategy. Much societal organization and mobilization occurs via the host of non-market, non-governmental organizations, so they must implement the strategy too.

Input from the earliest stage

Businesses and NGOs are unlikely to become involved in implementation unless they have a sense of ownership of the strategy. It is vital that they participate in the choice of objectives and issues, assembly and analysis of information, policy formulation, and decisions on the strategy. Some strategies are, by design, basically governmental: they are meant to be implemented primarily by the national government. The Malaysian NCS is an example. Others are intended to be implemented more widely. The action plan of the Pakistan NCS, for example, includes many actions by business and industry. However, the corporate sector was involved only marginally in formulating and deciding the Pakistan NCS and so was not ready to implement the strategy when it was adopted by government. An industry round table has now been established to work through the main fields and methods for action.

The Pakistan experience highlights the strength of the target group approach adopted by the Netherlands' National Environmental Policy Plan (NEPP), in which industry, farmers and other non-governmental sectors are included as partners with government. The non-governmental partners share in diagnosis and setting targets, and undertake much of the implementation through voluntary agreements.

Cooperation rather than compulsion

The trend in the relationship between government and industry, in particular, is to

seek cooperation rather than forcing implementation of strategy policies through complex regulatory frameworks. Experience has taught that, where industry has assisted in identifying the key environmental problems, it is more likely to recognize its shared responsibility for tackling them. The main components of the cooperative approach are:

- establishing an action network or core group;
- reaching an agreement defining the cooperative actions; and
- reinforcing the agreement through incentives for action, and agreed and credible penalties for lack of action.

In the United States, this approach is being seen as a substitute for the lengthy and expensive regulatory approach, which often involves extensive litigation. In the energy sector, for example, the use of 'collaboratives' followed by voluntary 'settlements' is now facilitating the implementation of sustainable development strategies in industry. It is also helping overcome the antagonism resulting from what industry had labelled the BANANA syndrome: Build Absolutely Nothing Anywhere Near Anything. The US Federal Energy Regulatory Commission defines 'collaboratives' as a group of individuals from government, NGOs and the private sector who pool resources to constructively solve problems without recourse to litigation. Independent facilitators have often been used to help in discussions and, in particular, to reach the negotiated settlements.

In upper-income countries, voluntary agreements are increasingly becoming part of environmental policy because they can provide more flexible and cost-effective ways for government and industry to meet environmental goals. Their use in lower-income countries is limited but growing. Pioneered through the concept of self-regulation and industry codes of practice, more companies are committing themselves to improving their environmental performance. In many cases, the pressure to do so comes from employees, consumers, investors and local communities. Companies find it is in their longer-term self-interest to take action. Advantages of the voluntary approach are:

- voluntary commitments do not, of course, have to be vague or go unrecognized – precise industry standards for environmental performance and quality control have been established (such as British Standard 7750 and the ISO 14000 Series), which help with public/market recognition of voluntary efforts;
- industry is encouraged to define least-cost actions for meeting the agreed standards;
- the costs to government of setting in place regulatory systems are reduced;
- the chances of implementation are increased; and
- a more constructive relationship between








industry, government and NGOs is established, reducing delays to development.

In the UK and Japan, industries are encouraged to introduce Environmental Management Systems on their own initiative. Such systems can enhance their public image and the marketability of their products and reduce the likelihood of government taking punitive actions.

Such agreements and voluntary systems are, however, successful only if they are backed up with a government intention to regulate if industry performance does not meet the environmental goals within an agreed time scale. Voluntary initiatives are particularly difficult in marginal industries or in countries where a depressed economic situation discourages immediate action to improve environmental performance. In such cases, the cooperative approach would need to be accompanied by strong legislation and/or well-targeted incentive measures.

Building capacity

Building capacity for sustainable development is a central task of national strategies. It requires developing the necessary individual and group perspectives, skills and organization. Capacities are needed through all the main components of a strategy: for assessment, including diagnosis (at the start of a strategy), and monitoring and evaluation (during the entire strategy cycle); for designing the actions (planning); and for taking the actions (implementation).

Capacity-building needs to respect the same principles which govern the entire strategy process and which have been enunciated throughout this handbook. They relate to ways of changing or strengthening societal values, knowledge, technologies and institutions. Capacity-building applies equally to strengthening and improving governmental and non-governmental organizations of all kinds, from national to local levels. The increased capacities should lead to communities that are more self-reliant and equitable, and more open, participatory and integrated in their decision-making.

Three main types of capacity are needed at the national level:

1. Mechanisms for cross-sectoral communication, policy development and decision-making. These include participatory approaches to conflict resolution and consensus-building, improved networking, and structures and tools to facilitate coordination and collaboration.
2. Methods for integrating different environmental, social, and economic perspectives and objectives. These include approaches to planning, assessment, decision-making and information systems.
3. Ways of bringing government agencies and the non-governmental community to understand and fulfill their own environ-

mental and social responsibilities. They include furthering awareness and environmental education, research, learning-by-doing approaches, the design and handling of instruments for environmental management, monitoring and forecasting, and the application of new environmental technologies.

Early action builds capacity

An effective way of building capacities is to take action – from the earliest stages of a strategy – on those aspects to which participants are already committed. Experience in Nepal has shown that if actions are taken in policy areas that do not threaten the territorial imperative of key government sectors, then a strategy secretariat can do much to increase technical capacities and political commitment. In this case, key staff from many government sectors were involved in the development of a national system of environmental assessment. This resulted in broader thinking on environmental policy generally and a better understanding of how it is applied. It also led to the establishment of environment units within many ministries and an Environment Protection Council.

Implementing an EA programme such as Nepal's, at the same time as developing the strategy's policy framework, brings a number of important benefits to the strategy process. It:

- exposes sectoral experts to environmental or developmental problems in ways that are of immediate relevance to their work;
- increases their understanding and skills in inter-disciplinary fields, such as environmental management methods;
- forges working links among sectors and with the environment agencies on development issues;
- makes their input to the strategy policy framework more informed;
- engenders commitment to policy implementation;
- increases the chance that momentum in the strategy process will be maintained during the transition from policy formulation to action and will survive changes in government;
- creates a network of sectoral expertise, through which implementation can proceed within existing institutional arrangements; and
- achieves (it is hoped) better, more sustainable decisions as a direct result of EA.

An emphasis on capacity-building as a way of developing important areas of environment policy begins to shrink the considerable gap that often exists between policies, as expressed in various development plans and in practice. Such an emphasis forces technical staff to confront, for example, the incompatibility among policies that require decentralized mechanisms, devolved authority and cross-sectoral collaboration and the management style of their own institutions, which is most

frequently authoritarian, highly centralized and closed.

Building capacity in the non-governmental and private sectors

'Environmental debate and environmental education can go on for ages, but while poverty-ridden communities do not have benefits, we are talking to an unconverted group.'

Taparendava Mavaneke, CAMPFIRE Project, Zimbabwe

Capacity-building and implementation should embrace the corporate sector, NGOs and communities as well as government. Historically, the government has been seen as the primary agent to induce and maintain the social and economic changes required for the overall task of nation-building. By and large, such work has concentrated on increasing the skills, knowledge and professional capacities of public servants. Increasingly, evaluations have shown that the performance of government development projects and programmes is critically dependent on the functioning of both state institutions and NGOs. More recent strategies realize this: for example, the Papua New Guinea Forestry and Conservation Action Plan gives equal emphasis to the building of non-governmental and government capacity. It recognizes that NGOs are crucial in organizing and 'brokering' government services to the traditional landowners, who own 97 per cent of the land.

A particularly valuable role for strategy implementation is demonstrating and testing development options that emphasize sustainable use of resources by communities or small private enterprise. The NCS implementation programme in Nepal, for example, includes a fund to help community cooperatives and NGOs identify sustainable uses of their resources as an alternative to existing, more damaging developments.

Technical backing is provided in the management, accounting and monitoring of these small enterprises and in the initial assessment of alternatives to define benign but profitable enterprises. Successful marketing of new products, such as handmade papers, traditional cloth, soaps or artwork, often holds the key to sustainabilty. It requires special measures to promote economic partnerships; often well beyond the boundaries of the community concerned. The principles governing sustainable use in these situations – and the processes which can ensure they are upheld – need to be defined in close collaboration with the communities or groups that must apply them.

Government should create an enabling environment for sustainable development in all sections of society, not just the state.

NGOs can be effective carriers of sustainable development throughout the country; catalyzing participation, organizing and mobilizing groups, obtaining grassroots perspectives, raising awareness, and providing long-term ideas, analysis and advocacy. Building non-governmental capacities for sustainable development is as important as building governmental capacities. To work effectively with government, NGOs need simple funding and administrative mechanisms that do not compromise their independence.

Conclusion

Achieving an early focus in implementing a national strategy will depend upon the extent to which basic needs are being met. Where the private sector and NGOs are barely developed and government is highly centralized, a strategy should be very selective in what it attempts to achieve at the different levels of society. It might be most important to show results in development terms within selected communities so that the strategy constituency continues to grow. In countries that enjoy a higher level of human well-being, strategies can promote more ambitious actions that require longer-term perspectives of environmental maintenance. Whatever the level of economic development or sophistication of decision-making institutions, experience with strategy implementation suggests three approaches to management, particularly within government.

First, it needs to be open and collaborative. In implemention, the most effective forms of decision-making are those which involve interest groups in sharing problem-solving; which go beyond sectoral boundaries; and which are flexible and organic. Forms of government are needed that build on the best in traditional approaches, that are transparent and form working unions with and between groups that normally function separately.

Second, management needs to be adaptive. Strategies for sustainable development are best viewed as processes for managing and adapting to change. Never before has the need for, and the pace of, change been so great. Forces influencing change include population growth, massive movements of people from hills to coastal and to urban areas; technological innovations that enhance people's ability to shape the environment; and, increasingly more significant, changes associated with environmental debts passed from one community or generation to another.

Even in the most self-sufficient, stable communities, background levels of change are inevitable. Strategies to cope with change are required. Communities satisfied with their level of development, or committed to conserving the essential elements of their environment and lifestyle, may wish for minimal change. Such communities, whether in Indonesia or Switzerland, would seek to maintain most








elements of their natural and cultural heritage while making selective changes to certain qualities of life. The emphasis is not on permanent strategies for the years or decades to come. Rather, adaptive strategies are required in which all goals and actions are continually re-evaluated.

Third, management needs to be conciliatory. As national strategies begin to take effect, conflict between development options and interests will become better defined. Such conflict is frequently disruptive, but need not be. It can be managed so as to contribute to social integration and innovation. It can facilitate communication and define relationships and group structures in order to clarify for people their position relative to others. At this productive level, conflict can be used to initiate direct interaction among affected groups, through specific and accepted procedures that lead to the negotiation of settlements. Increasingly, institutions within and outside government will be needed to facilitate these processes of conciliation and mediation, so that mutually acceptable and respected settlements assist sustainable development.

Crucial to these voluntary processes is the information that flows from a constant assessment of the changes taking place in society and its environment. Gathering information, analyzing it and making prescriptions for settlement of conflicts holds the key to keeping strategies on track, and is the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter 9

Keeping Strategies on Track

Assessment combines monitoring, evaluating and reporting on the strategy. Assessment is primarily forward-looking; its purpose is to improve the strategy process, help it meet objectives and adapt it to changing needs.

Assessment should be an integral part of the strategy from the start and cover all aspects: objectives, participation, communication, role in the decision-making system, planning, implementation and results.

This chapter outlines an approach to assessing progress toward sustainable well-being. It is intended to be used by the people who advise, or in some way influence decision-makers involved in strategies.

As the national strategy process begins to take hold, it will need to be expressed in linked strategies at many levels: the household, farm, municipality, business, province or nation – anywhere that 'stakeholder' groups, or combinations of these, try to improve or maintain the well-being of people and ecosystems. The approach is meant to apply to assessment of all such strategies. Hence its essentials are simple and few. Details will vary from strategy to strategy, depending on the people and ecosystems involved. To make the main points clear, the chapter includes only a basic discussion.

The approach to assessing sustainability is described in five sections:

1. *the purpose of assessment;*
2. *assessing the progress of society/ecosystem interactions;*
3. *assessing the progress of a particular strategy;*
4. *participation in assessment; and*
5. *making assessments useful.*








The purpose of assessment

Assessments are essential for the success of any strategy, regardless of its scale or scope, or the education and income of its participants. Assessment is the process of judging progress toward the goal of sustainable development or well-being; asking and answering key questions about:

- human and ecosystem well-being, and their interactions and trends, so that the various strategy constituencies may progressively define, agree on and revise objectives and a strategy to achieve them; and
- the progress of the strategy itself, so that participants may improve its design and operation.

Assessment is best understood as a composite of various functions that are already well-known to strategy practitioners. In broad terms, these include the following processes and questions:

- **Monitoring.** What is happening?
- **Evaluation.** Is what was supposed to happen actually happening?
- **Analysis.** What should be happening now, and in the future?

The broader purpose of assessment is to evaluate and improve the progress society is making toward sustainable development or well-being. Its specific purpose is to enable people to:

- increase their understanding of human and ecosystem well-being and how to improve and maintain them;
- know what state they and their supporting ecosystems are in;
- determine where they and their supporting ecosystems are going;
- define where they want to be, and integrate/trade-off objectives;
- chart a course for getting there; and
- change that course in response to changes in conditions, information, values and priorities.

Assessment is an effort to determine which potentials exist and which could be improved and how (not simply what is wrong). Since sustainable development is a dynamic process, and sustainable well-being a dynamic condition, any strategy for sustainability must also be dynamic. Regular assessment enables the strategy to both respond to, and influence, changing conditions.

Who should do the assessment?

Two groups should undertake assessments: the stakeholders (people directly concerned) and independent outsiders. They do not have to do it together: 'internal' assessments by stakeholders are essential; 'external' assessments by others are desirable. The people directly concerned have most to gain from an assessment. They should be centrally involved; by participating in the assessment, they will know better what to do

to achieve their objectives, and why. For a given set of decision-makers – at the level of the town, region or country – the emphasis placed on any particular topic, or the choice of specific measures, will vary depending on local conditions and priorities. Thus, it is essential that assessment of progress toward sustainability be driven by local participants.

At the same time, unbiased opinion and independent analysis can make a critical contribution to understanding. An external assessment can give stakeholders new insights, and avoid or overcome conflicts of interest involved in self-assessment.

When should assessments be done?

Assessment should be an integral part of decision-making. It should be a regular and integral activity rather than a sporadic and separate event and should, by and large, be done through normal operations, eg of management, to keep its potentially high costs within limits. Frequency of assessment will depend on how rapidly and significantly conditions are changing, and the magnitude of the risk to human or ecosystem well-being.

Assessment should be undertaken from the start, to create a baseline; and regularly thereafter as an integral part of any strategy. Assessment is implicit in the design and implementation of successful strategies. For example, an effective national strategy begins with the assessment of the strategy's objectives and of the procedure for its design or formulation. Assessment continues throughout strategy formulation and implementation, covering both the relevance of the objectives and how they are being addressed: it also determines any revisions to the strategy.

The benefit of regular explicit assessment is that it encourages participants to rethink priorities, reset objectives, and rechart their course of action.

What should be assessed?

Assessment should provide and analyze two sets of information:

1. progress of society/ecosystem status and interactions toward sustainable well-being; and
2. progress of particular strategies toward their objectives and their contribution to the goal of sustainable well-being.

Assessing the progress of society/ ecosystem status and interactions

The information that follows addresses both the broader social, economic and ecological context within which a strategy operates, and also some very specific criteria chosen to highlight the precise nature of people–ecosystem status and interactions. Four categories are suggested: ecosystems, people, interactions between people and ecosystems, and the synthesis of these. Each of the first

three categories is portrayed as a hierarchy of information, ranging from specific measures at the bottom to complex systems at the top that build on and incorporate the lower levels (Figures 5, 6 and 7).

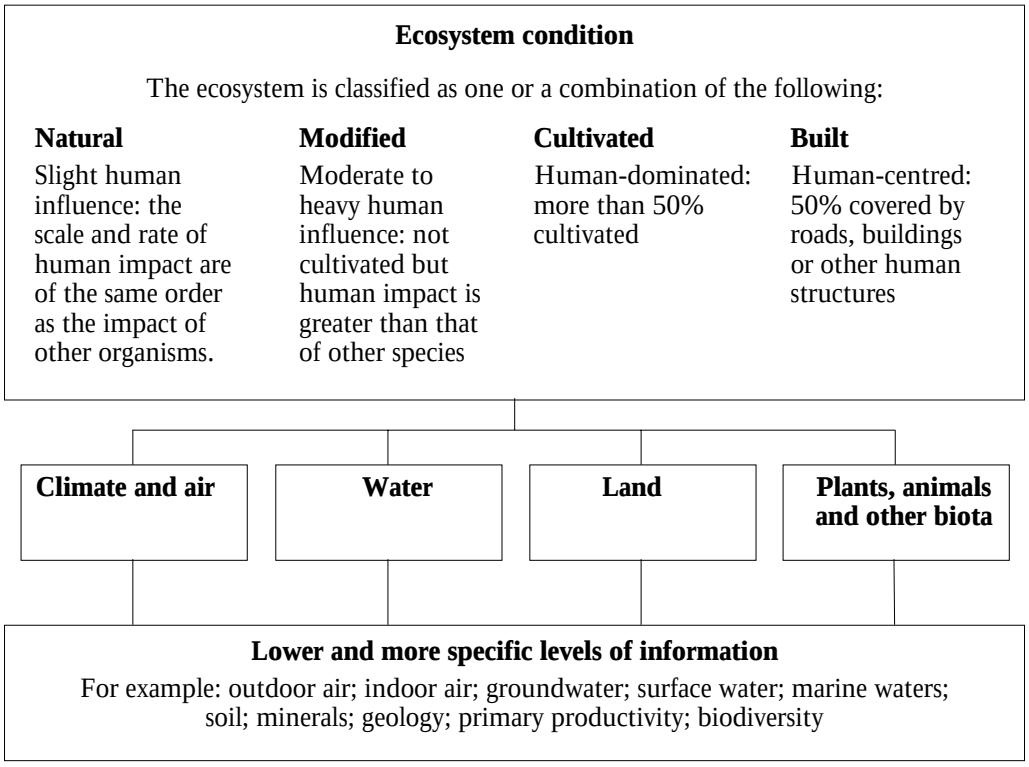
Ecosystems

The overall ecological goal is to maintain or improve ecosystem well-being. Assessment of progress toward this goal needs to consider the state of the ecosystem as a whole as well as selected resources, issues and criteria, such as air quality, water quality, soils, and plant diversity (Figure 5).

People

The goal is to improve or maintain human well-being. Assessment of progress toward this goal needs to consider the state of society as a whole as well as selected indicators, such as health, wealth, and happiness (Figure 6).

Figure 5: Ecosystem information levels



Interactions between people and ecosystems

The goal is for human activities to increase or maintain benefits or values from ecosystems while reducing stresses on them. Assessment of progress toward this goal needs to consider: how and to what extent human activities contribute to the provision of basic needs and the quality of life; how these activities are valued; how they stress or help to restore the ecosystem; and progress in meeting the goal through legislation, incentives, and other measures (Figure 7).

Synthesis

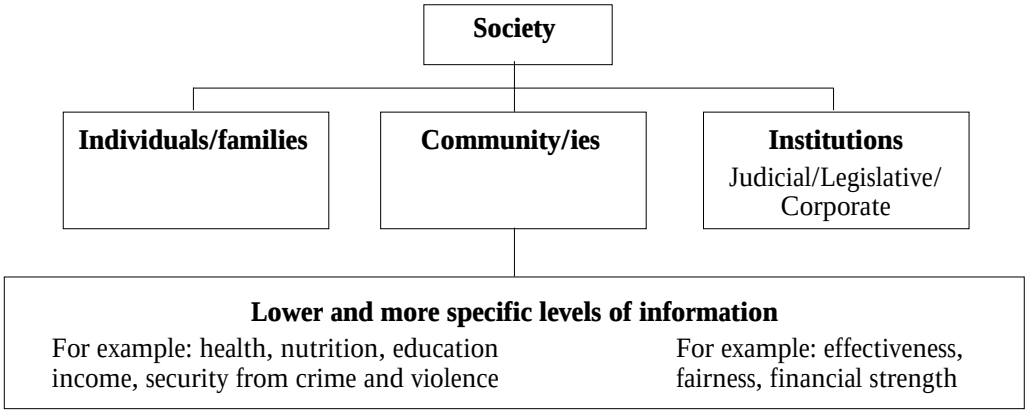
The goal is sustainable well-being. Analysis of the first three categories is likely to show that some aspects of the ecosystem, society and their interactions are getting better, others worse, and others are about the same. The most important aspects and the main links between them need to be identified to arrive at an overall picture of the state of human and ecosystem well-being. Two forms of synthesis may be required: a macro-level set of indicators akin to, for example, the UN Human Development Index; and sample micro-level indicators at the sector, landscape, community or livelihood system level.

Assessing the progress of a particular strategy

A strategy is an evolutionary process, developing as it goes along and adapting to change. It is also cyclical, its main components – constituency-building, agenda-building, design, implementation and assessment – being repeated as it develops (Figure 8).

This means that a strategy need not and should not try to do everything at once. It

Figure 6: Society information levels



can grow in scope, ambition and participation as objectives are achieved (or changed) and as capacities to undertake the strategy are built.

Assessment of a strategy needs to cover four main aspects:

1. Participants in the strategy; objectives of the strategy; and their relationship

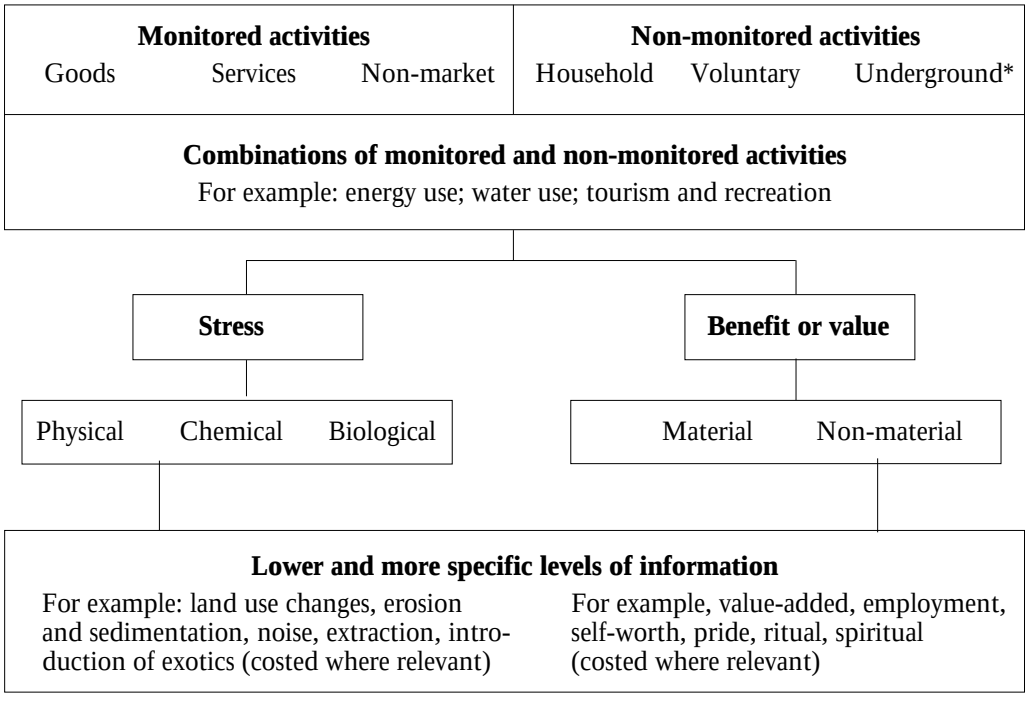
Constituency-building and agenda-building should go together throughout the strategy. The participants decide the objectives, and the objectives determine the participants.

Assessment should ask: Who are the stakeholders? What are their interests? Are interests being dealt with equitably? Who are the 'winners' and the 'losers'? Are the interests of different groups compatible with the goal of sustainable development and well-being? If not, how can they be made compatible?

2. Communication among participants, and between participants and others

Communication is the lifeblood of a strategy; the means by which participants exchange information with each other, reach

Figure 7: People-ecosytem information levels



**Underground: Clandestine, black market, illegal and similar activities*

agreement with each other on actions, change or strengthen values and impart knowledge, and inform others about the strategy. It is necessary to assess the modes, frequency and effectiveness of communication, both among participants, and between the participants and others.

3. What actions are planned, decided on and taken, and by whom; and what are the obstacles?

Actions are likely to be taken if priorities are clear, the number of top priority actions is practicable, the actors are identified, the required resources are specified, and the resources are allocated or their probable sources identified. Assessment needs to ask:

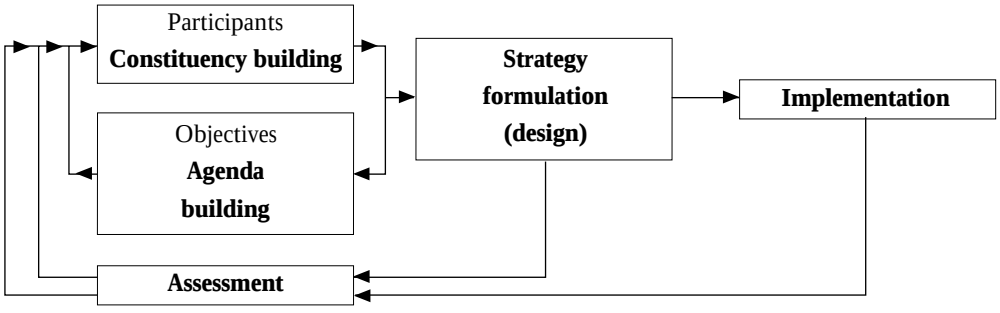
- who participates/participated, and how do/did they participate, in (a) assessment, (b) designing the actions, (c) deciding the actions, and (d) taking the actions?
- what actions were (a) assessed as high priority, (b) designed, (c) decided, and (d) taken?
- what were the reasons for any discrepancy among actions assessed as high priority, planned actions, actions to be taken, and actions that were taken: ie what actions did not have majority agreement, or were considered difficult to implement?
- what were the obstacles to making priority actions effective and how could they be overcome?

4. Effectiveness in terms of the strategy's objectives and the goal of sustainable well-being

This requires coordination between strategy monitoring and the society/ecosystem monitoring described above. Actions called for and taken as part of a strategy usually entail changing or strengthening one or more of:

- values (and habits);
- knowledge;
- technologies (and infrastructure);
- institutions (laws, incentive systems and organizations); and
- market conditions, eg price.

Figure 8: Strategy components










Any intended changes and improvements need to be identified clearly. Assessment will require an accurate description of the baseline situation (the people/ecosystem status assessment). To assess the impact of the actions on the strategy objectives, and to distinguish their impact from the effects of other factors, it is necessary to:

- clearly define the variables by which the strategy objectives are to be measured;
- monitor changes in these variables (through the people/ecosystem assessment);
- understand the relationship among the strategy objectives and values (and habits), knowledge, technologies (and infrastructure) and institutions – together with the relative importance of different factors (eg particular institutions); and
- determine the effect of the actions on values, knowledge, technologies and institutions.

Box 23 illustrates a range of questions used to monitor progress by a local strategies team in Pakistan.

Participation in assessment

The 'how' of assessment consists of two components:

1. how to use a participatory process to define the key questions; and
2. how to choose and use the right tools to help participants answer these questions.

People will often focus on the second component at the expense of the first, believing that the question of what is to be looked for it is already answered. Yet, repeatedly, attempts at assessment fail because those charged with the task do not ask themselves what questions need to be asked. They can establish this only by involving all the people who are affected by the issue. It is not possible to be prescriptive about the kinds of questions which strategy teams will need to ask.

Principles for participation

Assessments of progress toward sustainable well-being may be undertaken by corporations, communities, provinces, nations, or groups of nations. There will always be a role for scientific assessment – measurement of air, water, soil and biodiversity quality, etc. The real issue, however, is gaining an understanding of the evolving relationship between society and environment, and such assessments require broad-based participation. Regardless of who undertakes them, key rules or principles for guiding participatory assessments are:

Start with the story: If you want to learn what the problems are, don't ask what the problems are. Ask what the story is and the problems will become evident. Start with developing a consensus about the story (or stories, if a single consensus proves impossible) of the community, corporation, nation or area being addressed. Use this

Box 23: Assessment in a local strategy in Pakistan

Insight into national strategy progress may be gained through a sampling of local strategies. A major, long-term strategic project in three districts of Pakistan aims to arrest environmental degradation and improve natural resource-use through participation. This seven-year activity, 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; ie assessment itself will be a focus for the social organization required for sustainable development. This will lead to community organizations 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; 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 minimized?
- 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 optimized (eg biological nitrogen fixation, waste assimilation, and recycling of water and nutrients)?
- Is pollution minimized, 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?

box continues








Social sustainability:

- Are natural resource use systems increasing people's control over their own lives and the range of choices open to them; and are they compatible with local values (eg taste and taboos) and systems of decision-making?
- Are the 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 they have incomes to pay for these basics? And 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 there increased local innovation in natural resource use?
- 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 on unsustainable activities for their livelihood being supported in their transition to sustainable activities?
- Is there a tendency toward 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, ie, internal institutions (community rules and norms on resource allocation, multiple use, cost and benefit sharing, conflict resolution, and pursuing other collective natural resource values) and 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 possible way to assess 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:

box continues

- **Changes in productivity:** Yields, resource conservation measures, costs.
- **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.
- **Changes in local resilience and vulnerability:** Agricultural and wild products managed and farmed, access to credit, impacts of drought on livelihood, human health).
- **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.
- **Replication of strategy successes at non-strategy sites:** Replication rates by neighbours, federation of groups to tackle broader-scale issues.
- **Changes in operations of support institutions:** New roles for professionals, enabling policies, increasing links with other agencies, local commitment to increasing capacity.

mechanism to involve people from all parts of the community, especially anyone with a sense of history.

Build a broader community of interests: The different groups of decision-makers involved in the issues being assessed may not feel that they share interests. Ways of bringing them together into a common interest group include:

- identifying a broader community – by looking for other people who share the same or similar problems, the community can become broader and more powerful and understand its own problems better;
- act, don't just talk – the sense of a community of interests and the understanding of its members can best be developed through joint activities, and communities that are brought together purely through talk are less likely to hold together; and
- look for 'positives' in common, ie those changes that the majority agree have improved their well-being and that of the environment; success stories will be important for keeping the strategy on track. Equally, a minimum base of community consensus can also be established by identifying those things that all participants agree they are against.

Recognize value differences: Although the community of shared interests is broader than people think, unavoidable conflicts often exist between the interests, needs and








values of individuals, the local community, other communities or the larger society. It wwis better to bring these out into the open rather than present an illusory consensus.

Understand communication: At all levels, from conference papers to posters and television, it is essential to understand the media and the audience. Without such understanding, communication will not work (see Box 13).

Tools for participation

Although each of the tools for assessment – from thermometers to questionnaires – has its place, a few key considerations apply to the selection of tools:

- **Learning by doing:** We may break into the cycle of design-action-assessment at any point. Prolonged diagnostic exercises involving extensive questionnaires and paper studies usually yield fewer insights than a handful of thoughtful projects in which implementation is seen as a technique for learning. Action-oriented research and participatory inquiry are useful means (see Box 9).
- **Maps:** Maps of all kinds, from satellite images to sketches drawn on the ground, are powerful tools to understand problems, monitor change and communicate proposals. Although people unused to maps can experience problems, in most cultures simple map creation and reading is a skill that can be acquired quite easily.
- **Meaningful indicators:** Informative indicators can be developed only when we are clear about the question we are asking. A few well-chosen indicators are likely to be more useful than volumes of comprehensive statistics. Indicators should emerge from discussion and, where possible, should be those that people are already using. In many rural communities, indigenous technical knowledge can often supply more precise and revealing indicators of evolving society/ecosystem relationships than externally-defined 'scientific' indicators.
- **Qualitative surveys:** Assessment systems often focus on the accumulation of quantitative data. Although such data can be important, generally it needs to be accompanied by studies that reveal the story behind the numbers. A few anecdotal stories revealing how environmental change is affecting individual families or communities will illuminate the data and can often be more informative than extensive surveys.
- **Open-ended questions:** However thoroughly the problem has been discussed and however carefully the indicators are selected, the most useful information may be that which we are not looking for; the unexpected insightful observation that suddenly puts the problem in a new light. Questions should be phrased in ways that encourage comment rather than simply yes/no responses. Assessments should be structured in ways that throw people together in combinations from which

new overlaps of knowledge and interest may emerge.

Making assessments useful

A useful assessment improves decision-making and facilitates action. It can do this, however, only if it provides information that helps decision-makers identify, agree on, and take such action.

Decision-makers, whether individuals, communities, corporations, or governments, have three needs in common with respect to assessment of sustainability:

1. **Relevance:** The assessment must focus on issues that are relevant to the concerns, needs and priorities of the decision-maker.
2. **Capacity to act:** The decision-maker must be able to do something about the information provided by the assessment. Land-user families cannot do anything with information on ozone depletion. Business leaders cannot improve the sustainability of their operations with information on the crime rate.
3. **Clarity:** Decision-makers at all levels need clear signals that will help them decide what action they should take. Comprehensive information buries signals in noise; information should be selective. Therefore, it is important to select aspects of ecosystem well-being, people-ecosystem interactions, and human well-being that:
   — most reveal improvements or declines in these conditions and interactions; and
   — are relevant, appropriate and clear to the decision-makers concerned.

If the people making the assessment and the decision-makers using the assessment are one and the same, this is not likely to be a problem. If they are different, special care will be needed to fulfill these requirements. It is therefore important to ask:

— Who is doing the assessment?
— Who can use the assessment?
— How do the two communicate?
— Are both committed to continuous assessment?
— Are the decision-makers concerned committed to act on information gained through the assessment?

Communicating assessments

Assessments should be communicated in whichever ways are most useful and meaningful to the decision-makers concerned. This includes:

- Starting by identifying the full range of decision-makers concerned. For example, a community that is weakened by the policies of central government would want the findings of its assessment to be communicated to decision-makers in central government and those who influence them.








- If necessary, communicating the assessment in different ways to different groups of decision-makers and other users: different products and events (not necessarily reports); and communication in different media.
- Using the right jargon for each group of users. Jargon tends to have a poor reputation. However, communication that tries to avoid it can end up being unintelligible (or simply boring) to its intended audience.
- Giving feedback (in a useful form) to people who provide information for the assessment.

Often the most useful task that an assessment can do is expose unsolved problems and identify untapped solutions. Such information is most likely to be obtained by processes that reward the constructive identification of failure. In turn, solutions are most likely to be implemented if the decision-makers concerned perceive them as reasonable, respectable and recognizable.

Conclusion

Monitoring and evaluating strategy performance has been one of the least developed elements of the strategy process. It is also one of the most important. Mechanisms need to be set in place so that nations or communities can steer their development according to the benefits of experience, and with the knowledge of changing circumstances, so that it stays on a sustainable path. This is not easy, for it requires the nation or community to have a practical vision of sustainability expressed in its own terms. That vision will have a strong ethical and qualitative basis which has rarely been well-defined. How can a strategy assess its progress and course against goals that are intangible?

Usually, conventional methods of monitoring and evaluation rely on physical, economic or social indicators to measure what was achieved in the past, at either national or project level. These often focus on input supplies and their immediate results, especially at the project level. They might consider the number of hospital beds in a country or the number of trees planted in a village. The emphasis has been on measuring past performance through tangible products, and then considering what implications this has for future performance. These methods will continue to be valuable, although more emphasis is needed on those underlying, less tangible qualities of development which lead to sustainability.

The experience so far has been sparse, but three directions for change are emerging:

1. Emphasis needs to be on indices governing the way things are done rather than what has been done.

2. In an environment of change and uncertainty, the concern should be primarily on modifying and influencing future perfor-

mance and not on evaluating the past. The key to developing appropriate appraisal methods is understanding strategies in terms of constant change and adaptation to future needs.

3. These methods must themselves be ingredients of sustainable development and not something external to it. Concepts of action research or monitoring through action are appropriate here. They imply that those people involved in managing the strategy process, and in all elements of implementation, are each involved in a feedback loop of action–reflection–reaction. This works best at the local level where the reflection and feedback terms are more immediately beneficial to the participants.

As a consequence, assessment of strategies, including monitoring, evaluation and reporting, needs to stress process as well as products, and be anticipatory and action-based.

PART 3

Resources to Drive the Strategy

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