International Institute for Environment and Development

NATIONAL STRATEGIES FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: THE CHALLENGE AHEAD

By

Barry Dalal-Clayton and Stephen Bass

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A background paper prepared in support of Donor-Developing Country Dialogues on National Strategies for Sustainable Development – an initiative of the OECD/DAC Working Party on Development Cooperation and Environment (October 1999 – February 2001).

Strategies, Planning and Assessment Programme
IIED
3 Endsleigh Street, London WC1H ODD, England, UK
Tel: +44-171-388-2117; Fax: +44-171-388-2826
Email: Barry.Dalal-Clayton@iied.org

CONTENTS

Boxes

Annex

References

Figures

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

CDF	Comprehensive development framework
DAC	Development Assistance Committee (of OECD)
DFID	Department for International Development (UK)
EC	European Commission
HIPC	Highly indebted poor countries
IIED	International Institute for Environment and Development
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IUCN	World Conservation Union
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
NEAP	National environmental action plan
nssd	National strategy for sustainable development
PRS	Poverty reduction strategy
SIDA	Swedish International Development Agency
UNCED	United Nations Conference of Environment and Development
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
WCED	World Commission on Environment and Development
WP/ENV	Working Party on Development Cooperation and Environment (of the DAC)
WTO	World Trade Organisation
WWF	Worldwide Fund for Nature

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This paper is based on research conducted by IIED and others and the experience of many countries in developing and implementing a range of strategic planning approaches over the past 15 years. In particular, it builds on analysis and ideas about the need for national strategies for sustainable development (*nssd*s) to focus on strategic analysis, debate and action set out in Dalal-Clayton *et al.* (1998). It also draws from discussion and case studies presented at the OECD DAC Scoping Workshop on National Strategies for Sustainable Development, Sunningdale, UK: 18-19 November 1998.

Many of the key documents cited will be available (either as full text or in abstract) on the project website (currently under development) and its associated CD Rom.

1: Background to the OECD/DAC donor-developing country dialogues on *nssd*s

In support of the UN target on *nssd*s and the objectives for donors set out in the DAC's *Shaping the 21st Century* policy document, the DAC Working Party on Development Co-operation and Environment (WP/ENV) decided, at its meeting in June 1998, to work towards elaborating *'good practices for donors in assisting developing countries with the formulation and implementation of nssds and mainstreaming sustainability in socio-economic development strategies'*. WP/ENV members agreed that this work should draw on informal dialogues with developing country partners. The work will *'identify key institutional processes, factors of effectiveness, indicators of implementation progress and priorities for donor support and improved coordination'*. A Task Force, led by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) and the European Commission (EC), was established for this purpose.

A scoping workshop involving Task Force members and developing country representatives was held at Sunningdale, UK, on 18-19 November 1998, to help define broad directions for the work. The workshop was hosted by DFID with technical and logistical assistance provided by IIED. It recommended systematic in-country consultations with developing country partners. These would involve donors, government and a wide range of stakeholders in order to examine and elaborate good practice for donors in supporting *nssd*s.

The report of the workshop was discussed and approved by the DAC Working Party at its meeting in Paris on 24-25 February 1999. The report highlights some of the key challenges involved in developing and implementing *nssd*s and priority issues to be addressed in future work. It also sets out proposals for dialogues based on discussions at the scoping workshop, and on subsequent consultations with Task Force members and developing country participants.

At its November 1999 meeting, the DAC/WP/ENV approved a project to take forward the recommendations of the Sunningdale workshop. This project initiates the minimum number of dialogues (5 at country level, 1 regional) thought necessary to ensure sufficient depth and geographical representation to enable a thorough review of experience with *nssd*s and to develop effective guidelines for donors.

As well as contributing to generic guidance for donors, the dialogues aim to make a concrete contribution to *nssd* processes and donor coordination in the participating countries.

A range of donors committed funds to enable the dialogues and associated activities to proceed. IIED was engaged to provide technical support and to coordinate the overall process.

1.1 Summary of the project

Dialogues

Five dialogues will be held at a country level (Bolivia, Burkina Faso, Tanzania, Nepal and Thailand) and one at regional level (the Sahel). Each of the dialogues will be implemented by a country or regional institution. The dialogues will involve a status review of all the significant strategic planning processes for sustainable development that are recent or current in the country, followed by the dialogues themselves. The latter will involve stakeholder consultations, workshops and roundtables (their exact nature will vary).

Support to parallel strategy learning processes

The project will also collaborate with, learn from and build on existing reflective and analytical work on strategic planning supported by DAC members/observers in Ghana, Namibia and Pakistan.

Planning workshops

There will be three workshops: an initial planning workshop, a mid-term review workshop, and a final workshop. These will be attended by donors, lead organisations from the developing countries involved, and resource persons on *nssd*s.

Publications and dissemination of outputs

An issues paper on challenges for *nssd*s (this paper), a status report and dialogue report for each country/region involved, and an overall synthesis report will be published through IIED. A sourcebook (bringing together the main issues and lessons from these reports) and guidelines for donors will be published by the OECD DAC Secretariat.

International coordination and technical support

The Task Force has engaged IIED to facilitate and coordinate at the international level the implementation of the dialogues and to identify and synthesis lessons from three parallel strategy learning processes in Ghana, Namibia and Pakistan. IIED weill provide assistance in planning the approach, tracking progress (ensuring adherence to the timetable and agreed approach), reviewing and editing mid-term and final reports, drawing out generic and country-specific lessons, developing an initial draft of DAC policy guidance and a draft sourcebook, and networking, liaison and administrative support. IIED will also be responsible for convening three workshops

<u>The project is being implemented through four phases</u>

(a) **Phase 1**: (October 1999 - February 2000). ***Preparation****:* identification of lead teams (5 in-country and 1 regional); securing commitment of government and key stakeholders in the country/region for dialogues; establishing Steering Committees in countries/regions; preparation of an issues paper (by IIED) highlighting key *nssd* challenges; establishment of a document collection on strategic planning; convening an initial planning workshop, developing ToRs for the lead institutions and identifying in-country/regional steering committees.

(b) **Phase 2** (March - April 2000). ***Status reviews****:* will be conducted by the lead teams using a topic guide (to prompt discussion) developed by the DAC WP/ENV Task Force. IIED will provide support for planning the approach for the status reviews; reviewing and editing status reports; and information sharing on emerging nature of dialogues.

(c) **Phase 3** (May - October 2000). ***Dialogues****:* This phase will commence with a mid-term review workshop to consider the status reports and to plan and agree the nature of the dialogues. On the basis of the lessons arising from Phase 2, the final outputs of the initiative and mechanisms for their production and dissemination will be further defined at this stage. A progress report will be prepared and fed into the June 2000 meeting of the DAC WP/ENV.

Each dialogue will be organised by the lead institutions, and will be based mainly on stakeholder consultations, and a 2/3-day round table attended by a wide range of stakeholders

and donors, possibly with feeder events.

(d) **Phase 4** (November 2000 - February 2001). ***Drafting of Guidance***: involving synthesis by IIED, in consultation with lead organisations, of individual dialogue final reports in the form of an overview report drawing out common themes and lessons. A final workshop will review the results, develop an initial draft of policy guidance, and consider the possible contents and format of a sourcebook.

2: Sustainable Development and Strategies to Reach this Goal

In preparing to launch the DAC/WP/ENV project on national strategies for sustainable development, it has become evident that there is some uncertainty about what constitutes such a strategy. In order to discuss this, we must first consider what we mean by sustainable development.

2.1 Is there really an understanding of what sustainable development is all about ?

There is an ever-growing volume of literature on sustainable development. The most well-known international reports on the subject are those of the World Commission on Environment and Development (the Brundtland Commission) (WCED, 1987) and Agenda 21 (UNCED, 1992). These reflect political consensus and are therefore necessarily rather general and open-ended. Each year, numerous institutions publish shelves full of academic papers, reports, books and analytical reviews that deal with all aspects of sustainable development in greater detail. These tend to reflect the specifics of certain sectors, stakeholders and countries and therefore differ considerably. The rhetoric about sustainable development is becoming omnipresent with weighty speeches given at UN-sponsored and other international conferences and at national and local events, and with politicians literally promising 'the earth' and making all kinds of commitments to a sustainable future. The term 'sustainable development' seems to jump from every page and trips off the tongue with increasing ease.

But despite this burgeoning use of the term, it is becoming evident that most stakeholders (apart perhaps from a small number of enthusiasts) have not fully grasped what it is potentially all about. Sustainable development is still seen as an environmental issue (wrapped in the ribbons of international accords). This is well illustrated by the fact that these sustainable development conventions are usually made the responsibility of environment ministries and departments – amongst the weakest and least influential in government. Sustainable development is not seen as an important goal uniting government, civil society and market players. This is one reason why so many attempts to develop sustainable development strategies (or at least their precursors such as conservation strategies and environmental action plans) have not been taken seriously by other government departments. It also explains why it is only the 'environmental' precursors which are considered when undertaking an *nssd* as opposed to, for example, poverty alleviation strategies. Sustainable development is not yet embedded at the core of government thinking and action. This is one of the key challenges to developing and implementing any national strategy for sustainable development and is an issue we shall return to.

2.1.1 Defining sustainable development

If we are to consider the challenges that face those tasked with developing and implementing a national strategy for sustainable development, it is vitally important to restate what we mean by sustainable development. It is, of course, much easier to pinpoint what constitutes unsustainable development (for example, that leading to increased poverty, the depletion of natural resources, pollution or growing indebtedness) than to define what might constitute sustainable development. The issue of sustainable development is explored in some detail in an article "What is sustainable development ?" on the project website and CD Rom.

Many of the ideas that are now embedded in the idea of sustainable development have been around for a long time – from as long ago as the work of Malthus on population growth in the late 1700s. But the concept appears really to have emerged during debate in the early 1970s

following of a range of key publications drawing attention to man's over-exploitation of the environment, focusing on environmental constraints to development objectives, and examining the inextricable links between environment and development.

Barbier (1987) distinguishes two strands of debate at this time about economic development: one focusing on basic needs with emphasis on helping the poor; the other stressing that real development was impossible without consideration of the environment and without taking into account local social and cultural values and enabling stakeholder participation.

The following statement from the World Conservation Strategy (IUCN/WWF/UNEP, 1980) appears to be the first actual attempt to define sustainable development:

> "For development to be sustainable, it must take account of social and ecological factors, as well as economic ones; of the living and non-living resource base; and of the long-term as well as the short-term advantages and disadvantages of alternative action"

The World Conservation Strategy was frequently criticised for being concerned mainly with ecological sustainability rather than sustainable development *per se*. The most universally quoted definition is that produced in 1987 by the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), otherwise known as the Brundtland Commission:

> "Economic and social development that meets the needs of the current generation without undermining the ability of future generations to meet their own needs".

Box 2.1 offers an interpretation of what this means.

Box 2.1: Interpreting the Brundtland Definition

A commitment to meet the needs of present and future generations has various implications. "Meeting the needs of the present" means satisfying:

- *Economic needs* – including access to assets providing an adequate livelihood or productive economic activity; also economic security when unemployed, ill, disabled or otherwise unable to secure a livelihood.
- *Social, cultural and health needs* - including a shelter which is healthy, safe, affordable and secure, within a neighbourhood with provision for piped water, drainage, transport, health care, education and child development, and protection from environmental hazards.
- *Political needs* - including freedom to participate in national and local politics and in decisions regarding management and development of one's home and neighbourhood, within a broader framework which ensures respect for civil and political rights and the implementation of environmental legislation.

Meeting such needs "without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" means:

- *Minimising use or waste of non-renewable resources* - including minimising the consumption of fossil fuels and substituting with renewable sources where feasible. Also, minimising the waste of scarce mineral resources (reduce use, re-use, recycle, reclaim).
- *Sustainable use of renewable resources* - including using freshwater, soils and forests in ways that ensure a natural rate of recharge.
- *Keeping within the absorptive capacity of local and global sinks for wastes* – including the

capacity of rivers to break down biodegradable wastes as well as the capacity of global environmental systems, such as climate, to absorb greenhouse gases.

At present, these 'preconditions' are rarely being met. As a result, the world appears to be locked into a number of downward trends, which are moving away from, rather than toward, sustainability. The roots of this decline are many, but can be clustered into two broad groups: *market failures*, where economic transactions fail to take account of social or environmental costs, and *policy failures*, where governments inadvertently encourage environmental degradation or social problems. The issue is thus not one of *whether* governments should intervene to steer development towards sustainability, but *how*.

Following the publication of the Brundtland report, there was a rapid escalation of alternative definitions of sustainable development and lists are given by several authors (e.g. Pezzey 1989, Pearce *et al*. 1990, and Rees 1989). Mitlin (1992) notes that, in general, definitions involve two components:

- the meaning of development (i.e. what are the main goals of development: economic growth, basic needs, rights, etc.);

- the conditions necessary for sustainability.

Despite the wealth of references to Brundtland's political consensus, it is not supported by professional consensus. As Banuri (1999) observes, "there is considerable professional disagreement about this definition, mostly on how to put the idea of sustainable development into operation, but also to do with questions of definition and on its claims to synthesis".

Sustainable development is perhaps best seen as aspirational goal, now endorsed by governments, business and civil society.

> "Rather than focusing on economic growth in isolation, sustainable development requires the integration of the social, economic and environmental dimensions in corporate and public decision-making, within a governance framework that ensures full participation and accountability" (IIED 1999)

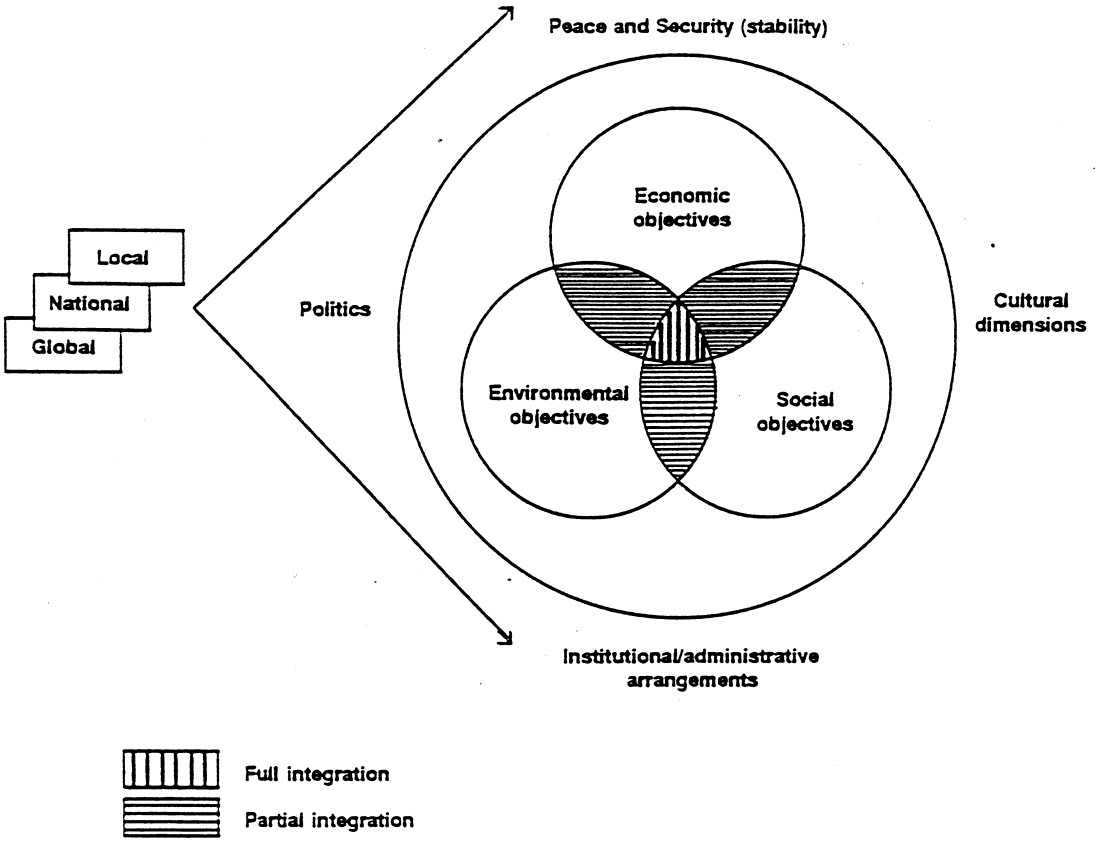
It is now widely agreed (at least amongst those promoting and studying the concept) that there are three pillars to sustainable development:

- *Economy*: The creation of wealth and livelihoods;
- *Society*: The elimination of poverty and improvement of quality of life;
- *Environment* The enhancement of natural resources for future generations.

The relationship between these triple objectives is commonly illustrated by three overlapping rings (see Figure 2.1). Traditionally, societies have attempted to set social, economic and environmental goals, but often in isolation from one another. Thus, nature conservation targets have been set without regard to the goals for economic growth or poverty reduction. The result has been the creation of short-lived 'green islands' in a sea of unsustainability. Decision-makers are now becoming aware that environmental goals can only be achieved by integrating them into mainstream social and economic policy-making.

Thus, sustainable development will entail integration of these three objectives where possible, and making hard choices and negotiating trade-offs between objectives where integration is not possible. These negotiations will be greatly influenced by factors such as peace and security, prevailing economic interests, political systems, institutional arrangements and cultural norms. Achieving these objectives is essentially a task of transforming governance in

Figure 2.1: The Systems of Sustainable Development



Sustainable development will entail integration of objectives where possible; and making trade-offs between objectives where integration is not possible.

Source: Dalal-Clayton *et al.* (1994)

the public sector, private sector and society more broadly to achieve a more balanced and integrated approach to development. This ensures that it is defined to meet and respect the particular needs and circumstances of individual countries, societies and cultures.

2.2 What is a national strategy for sustainable development ?

2.2.1 Why sustainable development needs a strategic response

Urgency of the issues

When the world's leaders met in June 1997 at the Special Session of the UN General Assembly to review progress since the landmark Earth Summit, the assessment they faced was a sombre one. There had been a significant increase since 1992 in the total number of people living in poverty and huge growth in inequality both within and between countries. There had been continued deterioration in the state of the global environment. Looking ahead, the UN forecasted that "the next quarter century is likely to be characterised by declining standards of living, rising levels of conflict and environmental stress" unless hard choices were made to break these seemingly remorseless trends away from sustainable development (UNDPCSD 1997).

For the last decade or more, there has been growing awareness that moving towards sustainable development will require often deep structural changes in the economy, society, resource management and political life. Policies that subsidised resource depletion and marginalised the poor would have to be curbed. Markets would need to reflect the social and environmental costs or production and consumption. Governments and corporations would also have to become more open and accountable for their actions. Decision-making would have to become more prudent, with extended time-scales to respect the interests of future generations. And power would need to be redistributed to give those countries and communities currently excluded from critical resources and decisions the capacity to negotiate a better deal. In other words, sustainable development would require a strategic response of a quite unprecedented kind.

Need to avoid blueprints

At the Earth Summit in 1992, the governments of the world had progressed some way to meeting this challenge by agreeing, as part of the Agenda 21 action plan, that all countries should introduce a national strategu for sustainable development (*nssd*) (UNCED, 1992). Many governments responded to this call, building on the mainly environment-focused national conservation strategies (NCSs) and national environmental action plans (NEAPs). Five years later, the growing urgency of the global situation led governments to set a target date of 2002 for introducing such strategies in all countries (UNGASS, 1997). And the OECD's new strategy for development cooperation, *Shaping the 21st Century* (OECD-DAC, 1997a), sets a target date of 2005 for such strategies to be in the process of implementation in every country and commits donor agencies to supporting developing countries to introduce these strategies -- a commitment confirmed by the UK, for example, in its White Paper for International Development (DFID, 1997).

Yet, for all this apparent faith in national strategies, little has been done to examine whether these processes have so far had any impact in practice. Nor has there been official guidance on how to develop such strategies or to implement them effectively. Such guidance that does exist implies the generation of entirely new frameworks rather than building on locally tried

and tested decision-making processes. Having set themselves new targets, it is apparent that most governments and donor agencies had given little thought to what to do next. This initiative of the OECD DAC is a timely response to this challenge. There is a general awareness that blueprint strategies across the world should be avoided. This approach has not worked in the past, failing to recognise the imperative of fine-tuning strategies to the diverse conditions that exist across the world. Today, adopting a blueprint model would be even more irrelevant and positively counter-productive as nations, industries and citizens across the world struggle to cope with the implications of globalisation.

Dealing with change – locally and internationally

It is no longer possible to view strategies for sustainable development as somehow focused solely on the social, economic and environmental conditions within a nation's borders. In an increasingly liberalised global economy, trade and investment flows impinge critically on a country's resources and its ability to manage them fairly and sustainably: this particularly affects poor countries faced with unequal terms of trade, a high ratio of trade to national income, and large debt burdens.

International rules for trade, aid, investment, intellectual property and the environment now set the frame of reference within which national sustainable development strategies can be conceived. And the worldwide shift to market-based approaches to the economy, exemplified in structural adjustment programmes, along with democratic styles of governance requiring popular participation at every level of decision-making, require a rethinking of the traditional planning process, still resounding with the echoes of the corporatist 1970s and 1980s.

But it is not just that the global context within which nations develop strategies that has been transformed in recent years: most governments have been faced with a combination of intensifying obligations to sustainable development and diminishing resources at local levels. There are huge pressures for 'localisation' as well as globalisation. All this is leading to a syndrome of 'policy inflation and capacity collapse'. It is no surprise therefore that those involved in sustainable development are desperately overworked.

This means that the strategic analysis, debate and action so essential for sustainable development has to be done differently than in the past. It has to be smarter and more cost-effective, politically appealing and economically viable - thus better targeted and more responsive to real needs locally, while enabling countries to contribute better to international decisions.

2.2.2 Defining a national strategy for sustainable development

It is clear that sustainable development demands a long-term view, addressing issues such as economic inequality and poverty, social instability and environmental degradation. It means providing opportunities to all stakeholders (including poor and marginalised people) for meaningful participation in the decisions that affect their livelihoods, and helping to build capacity to enable such participation. It is the responsibility of governments to provide the right political, institutional, legislative and economic framework to address these and a wide range of related issues.

Therefore, in this paper, a national strategy for sustainable development (*nssd*) is taken to mean a process or system (whatever its construct) that puts in place the strategic framework and activities that provide a response to these challenges.

In a recent paper, IIED has re-examined the experience of strategies to date, considering why recommendations of past reviews of *nssd*s have not been addressed or implemented, drawing

out some key lessons and identifying a range of challenges (Dalal-Clayton *et.al*.1998). We explore some of these challenges later. The paper also argues for a new focus and approach which places less emphasis on the production of a strategy document and focuses on processes or continuing systems which can facilitate strategic analysis, debate and action. It suggests that such an approach should be more cost-effective, politically appealing and economically viable, and respond to real needs locally, while enabling countries to contribute better to international decisions.

Recognising this need, and in response to pressure from some donors to clarify the DAC target on *nssd*s, the DAC High Level Meeting endorsed the following definition of an *nssd* in May 1999:

> ***"A strategic and participatory process of analysis, debate, capacity strengthening, planning and action towards sustainable development."***

This definition implies that an *nssd* should be seen as a process or mechanism that can:

- Enable better communication and informed debate amongst stakeholders;
- Seek to build consensus about environmental, social and economic objectives, and allow for negotiating trade-offs where consensus cannot be achieved;
- Improve existing strategic planning processes;
- Facilitate integration and coherence between these processes and provide the missing elements;
- Facilitate improved ways of working;
- Lead to more effective action in building towards sustainable development;
- Review and continually improve the approach.

In an ideal world, an *nssd* could be seen as an umbrella for all strategic planning. As such, it could provide a broad vision of the development objectives and directions for the nation over a particular time period, and a framework within which sector policies, plans and supporting legislation, procedures and actions could be developed, reviewed and harmonised[1]. But, for many countries, a new umbrella initiative will not be a realistic option and would serve only to add to the plethora of existing policies and action plans. Here, the *nssd* approach would usually seek to build synergy and coherence between them, identifying gaps and prioritising further actions.

Thus, unless a country decides otherwise, an *nssd* should not be viewed as a completely new planning process to be conducted from the beginning. Rather, we need to recognise that in an individual country there will be a range of initiatives that may have been taken in response to commitments entered into at the Rio Earth Summit (UNCED) or as part of commitments to international treaties and conventions and that these may be regarded in that country, individually or collectively, as the *nssd*. Box 2.2 sets out a range of such strategic planning processes that individual countries may be engaged in. But the challenge is: to gain clarification on what initiative(s) make up the *nssd*; and then to identify what improvements need to be made to these initiatives – or developed between them such as umbrella frameworks, systems for participation and national sustainable development forums – so that they meet the (above) definition of an *nssd*.

[1] Some countries have already developed such broad visions (e.g. Ghana Vision 2020) although they still tend to deal inadequately with the links between environment, social and economic issues.

Box 2.2: Strategic Planning Processes for Sustainable Development

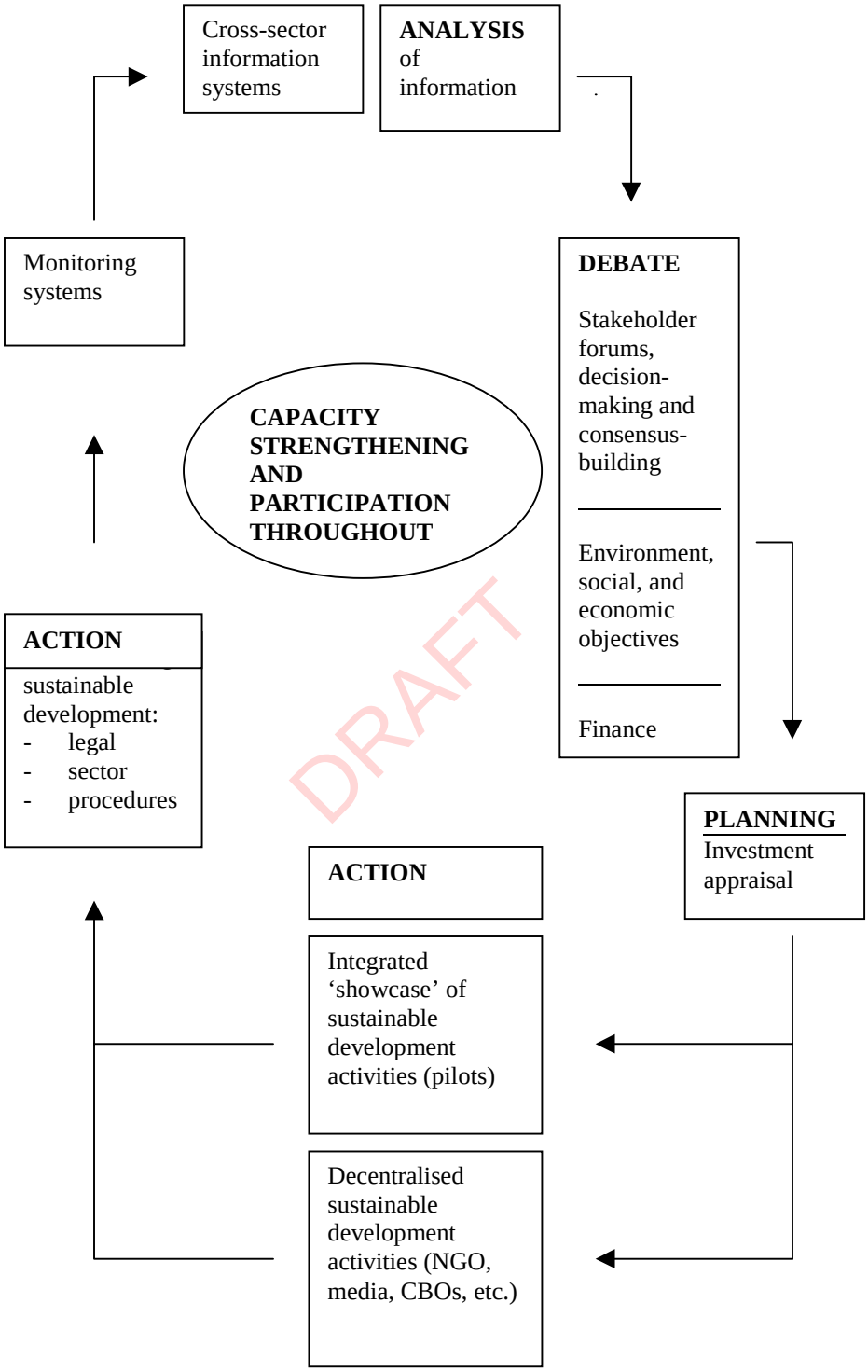
Over the last 15 years, countries have responded to the challenge of planning strategically for sustainable development in different ways. For example:

- Some countries built on earlier or existing processes such as national conservation strategies (NCSs) and national forestry action plans (NFAPs).
- Others developed national environmental action plans (NEAPs), usually with World Bank support.
- To date, very few countries have set out to prepare something actually labelled as a national strategy for sustainable development.
- More recently, there has been a trend to sub-nationalise such approaches with attention being given to provincial strategies and plans and more local processes such as district environmental action plans (DEAPs) and Local Agenda 21s, usually at the city level.
- Some countries have prepared National Agenda 21s and others have developed national "visions" for the future – usually for a generation ahead.
- In addition, under the Rio conventions (Climate, Biodiversity, Climate), countries are required to develop national action plans.
- A recent initiative is the Comprehensive Development Framework (CDF), introduced by the World Bank in October 1998 as a concept for an holistic approach to development, and proposed in January 1999 to be piloted in a number of countries.
- Another key initiative being promoted by the IMF/World Bank in a number of Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) is the development of Poverty Reduction Strategies as a vehicle for debt relief.
- Apart from all of this, all developing countries undertake national development planning and sector policy-making and planning and many other initiatives.

Many governments may see any one of these individual strategies/plans or the aggregate of several or even all of them as representing the country's response to the imperative to develop a national strategy for sustainable development. But such documents have usually focused on sectoral issues or on mainstreaming the environment into national development planning. Very few countries have attempted to integrate all the dimensions of sustainable development (environment, social issues, economic aspects, governance, etc.) and as such, very few of these documents– on their own - can properly be considered as a strategy for sustainable development. Nevertheless, all of these plans and strategies provide key ingredients for an *nssd*. But there remains a need for connectivity and synergy between them, for instituting enduring processes of debate amongst stakeholders on the key dimensions of sustainable development in the country, for building consensus (where possible) on development options and for setting priorities for action.

Most countries will already have in place some of the elements (individual boxes) shown in Figure 2.2; others will have elements of the whole system or cycle, e.g. a national conservation strategy). An *nssd* will identify, strengthen, harmonise and support them, and provide the links.

Figure 2.2: Suggested elements of the cycle of developing and implementing a national strategy for sustainable development



3: Five key problems with past approaches

Analysis of experience to date in developing and implementing strategies reveals five main lessons of relevance to developing countries (Dalal-Clayton *et al*. 1998):

- Most *nssd*s have continued to be environment-driven, rather than encompassing sustainable development (as defined in section 2.1.1); and sector-based strategies have been little concerned with environmental or sustainable development dimensions.
- The focus has often been bureaucratic, focused on a document rather than a process of change.
- There has been a lack of consideration given to future needs.
- Participation has been weak and as a result, strategies have been poorly linked to real development trends.
- The donor role has been ambiguous: providing resources, but often dominating the process.

i. Environment-driven

To date, almost all strategy initiatives which countries have cited as their response to the challenge of developing an *nssd* have been coordinated or undertaken by environment ministries and departments. This has immediately characterised the process as being preoccupied with environmental issues. It also places responsibility for the strategy in a ministry which is usually weak and of low influence within the government.

Almost without exception, sector-based strategies are pre-occupied with their own areas of responsibility and pay inadequate attention to the environmental dimensions and have almost no consideration of the links with other sectors and the broader concerns of sustainable development.

ii. Bureaucratic focus

Approaches to date have been dominated by environment officials and experts preparing papers and drafting chapters of a strategy document or action plan, workshops (again often restricted to officials and experts) and weak inputs from across government, political parties, the private and business sectors, NGOs and other interests, or from the public. The emphasis has usually been placed on delivering a document (often in a limited time). This has meant both rather sketchy analysis – or an unchallenged repeat of previous analyses - and an inadequate process of building consensus on the key issues and possible solutions or ways forward. As a result, many of the actions recommended in strategy documents have remained unimplemented.

iii. Ignoring future needs

Virtually all strategy processes have based their policy recommendations on an assessment of past and current trends. Few have generated scenarios which consider environmental and developmental goals and conditions in the future and develop policies that respond to the challenges, blind spots and priorities identified in these scenarios. In effect, most strategies continue to respond to historical problems rather than the issues in a rapidly changing world. At best, some strategies have set environmental targets for the future (e.g. reduced pollution levels), but such targets have been based on present day problems. In addition, past strategies have generally failed to deal with issues such as risk and uncertainty which, for example, would have led to them including approaches to ‘climate change proofing’.

iv. Weak participation and links to real development

Few strategies have yet been adequately participatory. Although many countries are struggling with this issue by trying to involve as many stakeholders as possible, civil society participation is not always easy to achieve; and in most countries there has been little effective involvement of the private sector. Equally, there are usually a multitude of political, market and civil society processes which are *not* included in the strategy which turn out to be highly significant for (or against) sustainable development. Thus, few if any countries have made sustainable development the centrepiece of their long-term planning exercises: this means shifting the focus to ensuring that sustainable development is contained in the strategies that count, and not just those produced by the environment ministry.

v. An ambiguous donor role

The pressure for strategies in developing countries has often come from donors as a requirement for the release of aid or to generate a menu of projects from which they can choose. Seldom have such strategies been prepared as a result of a domestically-driven agenda or a general concern about broader international obligations and pressures other than aid. Frequently there has been little conviction in their utility. In principle, donor agencies now recognise that this needs to change. For example, the OECD's Principles for Capacity Development in Environment (CDE) stress the importance of strategies which provide a framework for donor coordination (OECD-DAC, 1997b). Some development assistance agencies - such as the EC and SIDA - have also tried to evaluate how their aid portfolios support sustainable development through the hosting of open, participatory round table exercises with developing country partners. The OECD/DAC initiative that this paper is supporting is an important step in defining what role donors can play.

3.1 Need for a new approach

It is no surprise, therefore, that strategies for sustainable development are still seen as internationally-generated precepts which seldom exert much influence on the key decision-making processes and notably on political and business development processes. Relatively little advance has been made in providing lessons for better and more effective approaches. Over the last few years, numerous conferences, workshops and reviews have assessed strategies and made recommendations. But they tend to repeat basic conclusions about best practice which have been well accepted for several years, but are not practised in reality - for example, the need to be holistic, integrated, cyclical and participatory. Few of their recommendations have been addressed or implemented: the various reasons for this are suggested in Box 2.3.

In conclusion, there is now a need to shift from a focus on fine-tuning internationally-generated national strategies for sustainable development, or their equivalents, to a richer mix of effective processes of *strategic analysis, debate and action* for sustainable development, to move towards the definition of an *nssd* given in section 2.2.2.

Box 2.3: Why Recommendations of Past Reviews have not been Addressed or Implemented

Not Addressed:

- The key players involved in developing *nssd*s have had no 'handle' on the pros and cons of market issues/forces as a means of achieving sustainable development; or on the politics that surround decision-making;
- Lack of institutional memories (within government departments and in donor agencies);
- Staff turnover - with loss of valuable experience of individuals;
- *Nssd*s in developing countries were seldom, if ever, designed to be continuing (cycling) processes, and therefore mainly ended with the completion of a strategy document and set of project proposals;
- *Nssd*s seldom fitted with the resources (financial, skills, etc.) available;
- Ownership of most *nssd* processes was perceived to be, or was in practice, outside the country concerned;
- *Nssd* fragmentation, particularly through identifying fundable individual projects which were often 'cherry-picked' by donors, leaving important strategy elements unfunded;
- *Nssd* recommendations were often flawed due to a lack of or inadequate ground-truthing;
- *Nssd*s often set no priorities and gave no guidance to assist prioritisation.

Not Implemented:

- *Nssd*s have not matched the level of institutional capacity in individual countries - they have often been too comprehensive/complex for the prevailing institutional climate;
- No clear targets for communication and advocacy (lack of communications strategy);
- Some review documents have been too generic for decision-makers (lacking a clear "hook");
- Some reviews have been very descriptive with too little analysis;
- Reviews have been too focused on environmental issues;
- Lack of indicators;
- Lack of ownership within countries/agencies - and thus reviews perceived as the opinion of their authors;
- Need to look at all policies (i.e. is a NEAP the right tool ?) and to include countries with no NEAP when undertaking a review;
- Reviews have not asked if NSDSs/NEAPs have been effective;
- Reviews have not adequately addressed how to incorporate NSDS/NEAP outputs into other policy processes;
- Reviews have not adequately examined situations where people have been motivated to change (i.e. determining the effective points of entry);
- Reviews have not adequately addressed the issue of NSDS teams having capacity to address inter-related issues; and
- Lack of a follow up by IIED/IUCN to their 1994 Strategies Handbook.;

Source: Dalal-Clayton *et al*. (1998)

4: Some continuing challenges

4.1 An *nssd* doesn't necessarily mean something new

We have already argued in section 2 that sustainable development requires a strategic approach and that such an approach should not necessarily emphasise the production of a strategy document. Being strategic – in contrast –may actually mean promoting and building on processes (whatever they are) which can facilitate strategic analysis, debate and action that makes progress towards sustainable development. This need is well recognised in the definition of an *nssd* endorsed by the High Level DAC (see section 2.2.2).

But there is still a widespread concern that an *nssd* necessitates embarking on a completely new planning process to be conducted from the beginning (i.e. undertaking all of the elements and steps shown in Figure 2.2), and this appears to be an impediment to progress. If an *nssd* did have this implication, it would be a legitimate worry given the plethora of existing domestic national planning processes as well as those required under international agreements (e.g. the Rio conventions) and others being promoted by multilateral development banks (e.g. Poverty Reduction Strategies (PRS) by the IMF, and Comprehensive Development Frameworks (CDFs) by the World Bank) – many of which overlap and all of which absorb the time and skills of civil servants (as well as others) and divert them from dealing with their routine tasks.

There is, therefore, a serious challenge to inform and convince people (in government departments, multilteral organisations; aid agencies and other bodies) that an *nssd* would only occasionally need to be seen as a new process (an individual country should decide for itself if it should be). Rather, to repeat ourselves (see section 2.2.2), an *nssd* would seek to set in place, and build support for, mechanisms that can build synergy and coherence between existing strategic planning processes (e.g. identifying where existing strategies are in conflict with each other and seeking to smooth the differences), identifying gaps and prioritising further actions. The full set of desirable mechanisms is currently missing in all countries - the main reason why a strategic response to sustainable development is still lacking. This means that it is vital for any *nssd* process to be established so that it works in close cooperation and harmony with existing strategies (be they sectoral, national visions, convention-related plans, PRS, CDF, NEAPs or whatever) – helpfully providing lubrication and linkages.

4.2 Political and stakeholder support

Many past strategic planning processes have made little effective progress towards sustainable development. They lacked genuine committed support amongst politicians, key and influential government ministries such as those responsible for finance and national planning, and more broadly amongst stakeholders in the private sector and civil society. It is now increasingly understood that to achieve balance (where possible) and trade-offs (where balance is not possible) between a nation's social, economic and environmental objectives, it is necessary for the so-called development triad (the public sector, private sector and civil society) to work together. For such a partnership approach to be successful, new governance structures may be needed.

Thus, a major challenge is to build support and commitment from key stakeholders to engage in processes that offer a chance to identify the challenges of sustainable development, discuss the issues and build consensus for the necessary actions. An *nssd* should be promoted as a seeking to provide mechanisms for facilitating just this.

4.3 'Ownership' and stakeholder participation

poor participation by development triad stakeholders has led to a lack of ownership within the country of the aims, objectives, processes and final outputs. This is a contributing factor to the poor record of implementation of past strategies. As we have previously noted, so many strategies have been no more than documents which have merely sat on shelves.

There is a balance to be struck between an *nssd* and 'participation'. It is all too easy to over-emphasise the former. This is because ensuring and facilitating participation (not just consultation) is perhaps the most difficult challenge facing those responsible for managing an *nssd* process. Participation can be difficult when it is not an established practice - some governments may find it difficult to open up a process and allow others to have an influence over it; while other stakeholders may not be accustomed to participating. There are many challenges to participation in *nssd*s, for example:

- It is often difficult to engage the private sector in *nssd*s, and there can be high suspicion between the different stakeholders.
- There is a need to strengthen the involvement of political actors and parties in *nssd*s.
- Cross-sectoral integration is often hindered by the tendency of government departments to protect their sectoral 'turf'.

Approaches to participation in the *nssd*s process should create opportunities for negotiation between stakeholders, and acknowledge sensitive issues of inequalities in political or economic power. Participation can reveal expectations and needs; provide a forum for those who do not traditionally have a voice; raise the profile of key issues; elevate local issues to the national level; help to overcome government inefficiencies; and reawaken and expand democratic processes.

Some useful ideas on methods and approaches to participation are given in Bass *et al*. (1995). A key starting point will be a thorough stakeholder analysis.

One area where progress could be made is in building bridges between national and local levels. Most current strategies are still controlled by central government institutions and experts, with occasional participation of NGOs. However, the Local Agenda 21 movement has achieved considerable momentum amongst local authorities, citizens' groups, NGOs and businesses. However, there is often little linkage between the efforts at national and local levels. In developing countries, there is now considerable experience of participatory development activities at local levels, but national strategies have yet to find ways to adequately and effectively interface with the existing local experience. There continues to be a lack of trust and dialogue between central governments and local communities in a context of advancing decentralisation in many countries. Bridging this national-local divide is a major challenge for *nssd*s.

4.4 Capacity

Engagement in an *nssd* process will require a wide range of skills and capacities. For example, those managing the process will require skills in facilitation and diplomacy - and endless patience. Those undertaking strategic analysis will need to understand the linkages between disciplines (environmental. social, economic) and sectors, as well as vertical interactions (e.g. between international, regional, national, district and local levels) including cross-border issues. Others will need to be concerned with institutional, legislative and administrative dimensions of development.

The necessary skills and capacties are usually in short supply in developing countries, and those which exist are usually already heavily committed and overstretched. Capacity-building and empowerment should be critical components of *nssd* processes.

Institutions and individuals engaging in debate will need to have access to and understand key information important to the issue(s) being discussed. Many stakeholders will be able to engage as part of their existing roles and responsibilities (i.e. through their existing jobs). Others will need to take time from their livelihood activities (e.g. those in civil society and particularly those from local communities) and this has a cost implication – so ways of compensating for this or of providing assitance may need to be found if they are to be enabled to participate fully and effectively.

Future approaches will need to redress the 'policy inflation/capacity collapse' problem by emphasizing capacity development for the various *nssd* processes, notably

- information generation;
- debate;
- analysis, especially cross-sectoral (e.g. for assessing impacts);
- valuation;
- adaptive decision-making;
- conflict resolution; and
- consensus-building.

Such improvements in capacity should suit particular forms of political and institutional environment and be applied individually or in aggregate.

It is important to note that the capacity to act strategically is more important than the formal process of producing a strategy document. This necessitates quick reflexes for decision-making, and flexible donor support, characteristics which are not facilitated by current planning frameworks and mentalities.

4.5 Scoping the *nssd* – dealing with key areas of change

The real challenge is to seek a new focus: shifting from the framework of formal strategies as such to the broader issue of *improving decision-making processes in a time of rapid change.* Figure 4.1 loosely illustrates three things:

(i) There is an immense and fluctuating arena of change, including: major trends of globalisation, privatisation and decentralisation; significant changes in the expectations of stakeholders; and huge swings in all sorts of systems from markets to the global climate (see Box 4.1).

(ii) There are existing policy-making processes and other decision-making processes such as the market) which have been able, *to some extent only*, to keep track of change and to make appropriate responses. These responses will vary from ignoring change, to adapting, to actively trying to influence the change process itself. Many of these

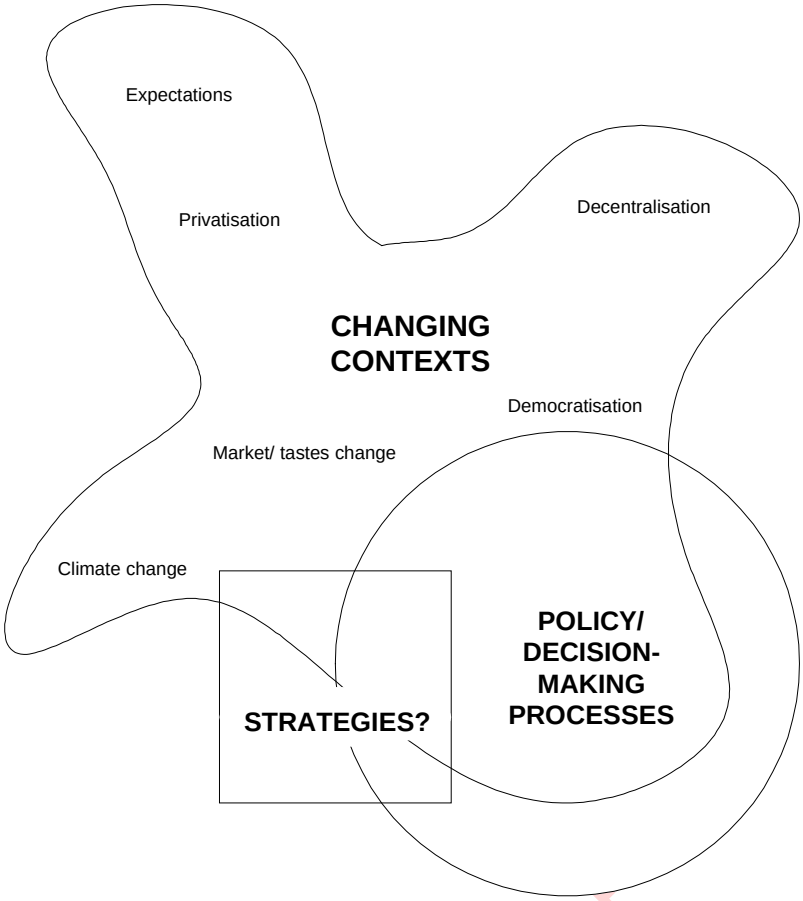


Figure 4.1: Formal strategies in context 1

Box 4.1: The Challenge of Globalisation for Strategy-Making

The process of globalisation has been driven by a variety of factors: trade liberalisation, increasing foreign investment, falling costs of communication, rapid technological innovation, the spread of economic reform programmes and the proliferation of multilateral institutions and agreements. But the impacts of globalisation have been weakly addressed in national strategies for sustainable development so far. Yet globalisation has profound implications for sustainable development in developing countries and there is an urgent need for a new approach to the international dimension of national strategies.

Trade and investment provide a critical source of capital for driving economic growth in developing countries, and are becoming increasingly important with the decline in aid flows. Increased trade and investment in developing countries could have a significant impact on the environment if increased productive activity -- such as mineral extraction and new manufacturing processes -- is not accompanied by robust social and environmental controls. Inequalities within developing countries could also widen as poor people find themselves less able to exploit new economic opportunities and become more vulnerable to a loss of access to resources and environmental degradation associated with privatisation and industrialisation.

Steering globalisation towards sustainable development depends on the capacity of governments to stimulate and regulate market access arrangements that prevent environmental degradation and ensure that benefits are widely distributed. Critical policy areas include:

- **Structural Adjustment**: Stabilisation and adjustment can exacerbate unsustainable use of natural resources and environmental degradation due to weak institutional capacity and regulatory frameworks and lack of clear tenure over resources. In many cases, the poor are the worst affected by these impacts. This remains a central issue for national strategies for sustainable development.

- **Trade:** Export-led development is now regarded as a major route to prosperity for poor nations, but the least developed countries still stand to lose out from the Uruguay Round of trade reforms. Furthermore, the wider implications for resource use and sustainable development of trade liberalisation have yet to be fully assessed. Strategic analysis is required to enable countries to understand the wider implications and use these to negotiate countervailing measures.

- **Foreign Investment:** Recent OECD negotiations for a Multilateral Agreement on Investment have highlighted the need for developing country governments to take a strategic perspective on the how to balance the need for a secure investment regime to attract and retain foreign capital with mechanisms to encourage corporate responsibility for social and environmental performance.

- **Development Assistance:** Aid levels are now at their lowest levels for 25 years with little sign of reversal. This stagnation means that strategies for sustainable development are critical for deciding priorities for donor support and providing the framework for donor coordination.

- **Policy Coherence:** The long-term prospects for sustainable development in poor nations are often highly dependent on decisions in other countries, for example, on agriculture and fisheries policies. Sustainable development strategies could help to identify the costs of policy incoherence in other countries as a first step to policy reform.

National sustainable development strategies provide an opportunity for developing countries to anticipate the adverse social and environmental effects of globalisation and benefit from its advantages. Addressing the international dimension in national strategies will require greater dialogue and partnership at two levels: *internally*, between central government ministries, the private sector, local authorities and communities to identify global impacts; and *externally*, with foreign governments, corporations and NGOs to negotiate new deals for sustainable development.

processes will be long-standing, e.g. development planning mechanisms and traditional village governance.

(iii) Finally, there are the recent formal strategies that have been adopted a the response to the call for a sustainable development strategy in many countries - NCSs, NEAPs, NSDSs, etc. These have been better able to deal with some aspects of change than the above decision-making processes, but not with others. For example, they have been quite good at handling environmental matters, but less so social and economic matters. Furthermore, these strategies have only partially incorporated existing decision-making processes (development planning and budgetary processes have often been excluded). And there is the need to ensure synergy between related national plans for biodiversity, climate, desertification, forestry - this challenge has also been identified by UNDP (1997) in its report on an expert meeting in Israel on synergies in national implementation of the Rio agreements.

The implication is that a better exploration of the arena of change is required, and of the role of all key policy- and other decision-making - processes (including strategies) in dealing with change. If we remain confined to an examination of a particular strategy's efficiency, we may *both* lose sight of areas of change in which they have not yet been effective, *and* ignore other processes that might be more efficient and can be incorporated in strategic approaches in future. Furthermore, we might make the mistake of attributing progress to a strategy alone, as opposed to other processes that have been going on in parallel.

A real challenge will be to explore strategic approaches around ingredients that can be seen to have worked (‘*practices that work’*) for the particular state of institutional development in any given country. For example, existing forms of participation can readily be employed, but a more complex or comprehensive approach to participation might be inappropriate at present. Information on this should surface through stakeholder dialogues at all levels and be agreed - to the extent possible - by consensus.

Further perceived challenges can be identified from international experience in developing and implementing *nssd*s over the last decade (see Annex 1). Many of these perceptions need to be refined and others identified and addressed.

Annex 1:

Challenges for More Effective Strategic Analysis, Debate and Action for Sustainable Development

A number of perceived challenges were identified during a workshop held at IIED in November 1997.

(a) ***Scoping of Need*** - a needs assessment is required which:

- provides a baseline assessment of conditions and needs at national to local levels;
- identifies available skills & training needs;
- identifies the pre-conditions for a strategy process; and
- enables the bureaucracy to look at the 'big picture' rather than its own domain.

(b) ***Conceptual Framework*** - this should:

- provide a strategy design which reflects the needs assessment;
- ensure clear relationship between objectives and implementation;
- makes sure that the strategy process is integrated into macro- and micro-economic framework(s);
- ensures the strategy process adapts and builds of existing plans and strategies for coherence; and is synergistic with other on-going strategic planning processes;
- ensures that the strategy process is cyclical (not a one-off project), is not too product-oriented, and sets priorities.

(c) ***Process***

(i) Communications strategy is required which:

- captures and systematically shares experiences through networks;
- seeks to sensitize government and raise awareness levels;
- ensures written outputs are easy to read and accessible to all;
- provides for communication with all interested and affected parties; and
- ensures the strategy is an iterative and learning process.

(ii) Participation (stakeholders) - the strategy process needs to be:

- truly participatory involving as many stakeholders as possible;
- build alliances and partnerships;
- bring stakeholders on board from the beginning;
- improve environmental management at the sub-national and local level; and there is a need to
- develop indicators for effective and relevant participation.

(d) ***Analytical and Policy Content*** **-** strategies need to***:***

- address the poverty and social agenda;
- pay more attention to changing consumption and production patterns;

- involve better use of economic analysis;
- integrate gender issues in their analysis and development.
- provide for a link between the needs of the Rio Conventions; and
- provide for greater coherence with international policies, e.g. trade, investment, aid, etc;

(e) ***Institutional Arrangements/Cross-Sector Linkages -*** *nssd* processes should address both horizontal (H) and vertical (V) linkages, and:

- be integrated with other decision-making and planning and policy processes [H];
- offer a programme approach to avoid fragmentation of the process and implementation [V +H];
- put in place support systems through decentralisation processes and extension processes [V];
- be developed by strategy teams which take a broader vision [V + H];
- manage co-ordination at all levels [H];
- bridge between levels [V] ;
- address sub-regional environmental problems [V];
- manage/address global issues in national context [V]; and
- focus locally and on ground strategies in local realities [V].

(f) ***Resources (Funding + Human resources) -*** there is a need to*:*

- avoid heavy reliance on external funding (need to ensure long-term sustainability of process and implementation);
- develop appropriate skills for strategy management, development and implementation
- deal with problems of high staff turn-over and motivation; and
- assess value-added and opportunity costs for strategic processes.

(g) ***Political Considerations/Issues*** - strategies need to:

- be inspiring for all, and particularly for national leaders;
- generate domestic political will and government buy-in to the process;
- mobilise public support;
- build new alliances and constituencies; and
- develop mechanisms for resolving conflicts with vested interests.

(h) ***Donor issues:*** - strategies need to:

- Provide a framework within which donors' contributions can be co-ordinated
- Identify precise areas where donors can help the process;
- Include mechanisms for minimising donor-driven processes;
- Recognise the reality of donor conditionality; and
- Stimulate donors to take a longer term and more flexible approach.

(i) ***Learning (including Monitoring & Evaluation -*** there is a need for*:*

- Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems for strategies including clear performance goals and targets, and indicators for sound environmental management;

- Mechanisms for M&E to trigger change or adjustment of strategy process and implementation;
- Measure impact (what works, what doesn't);
- Link to pilot demonstration(s) for action and learning;
- Strong monitoring of performance capacity; and
- Effective M&E for learning from implementation.

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