Sustainable Development in the 21st Century (SD21)

National Institutions for Sustainable Development

A preliminary review of the institutional literature

October 2012

DRAFT

Acknowledgement

Contents

1. Introduction

1.1 Context, objectives, and methodology

This report is part of the "Sustainable development in the 21st century" (SD21) project[1], an undertaking of the Division for Sustainable Development of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) funded by the European Commission - Directorate-General for Environment, aiming to construct a coherent vision of sustainable development in the 21st century as an analytical input to the Rio+20 Conference[2].

The project was built around a series of studies[3] covering the following topics: assessment of progress since the Earth Summit, emerging issues, long-term sustainable development scenarios, tools for managing sustainable economies, national and international institutions for sustainable development, and sector assessments. These studies informed a synthesis report titled "Sustainable development in the 21st century" (SD21).

Institutional issues at all levels constituted a strong component in the terms of reference of all the reports under the project. The basic questions underlying the treatment of institutional issues were: (1) in the long term, what institutions are needed to support sustainable societies? (2) in the medium term, what institutional reforms can accelerate the transition to sustainable development?

No separate original study on national institutions for sustainable development was carried out, although it became clear during the project that a short, preliminary review focusing on institutions at the national level might be useful in its own right. This is because: (i) a discussion on international institutions for sustainable development would develop on its own due to this topic being selected as one of the two themes of the Rio+20 Conference, while the national level might remain a gap to fill; and (ii) institutions are better addressed in the context of the goals, policies and actors they are meant to serve.

What does "national institutions for sustainable development" mean? How much do we know about the evolution of such institutions – formal and informal - at the national and subnational level since the Earth Summit in 1992? These are the questions this report seeks to address. Much of the text is extracted directly from the relevant SD21 studies and other selected institutional sources. Whenever possible, sources for the statements are mentioned. If not, the authors apologize in advance for failing to do so. While the report does not pretend to any kind of exhaustiveness, it may be of help to interested readers for two primary reasons:

- It provides an introduction and a basic framework for the understanding of national institutions for sustainable development, serving as a starting point for interested readers to access more detailed studies on specific institutions and processes;

- It serves as a depository for some of the institutional memory that remains on how the institutions have evolved since the Earth Summit, including both formal and informal rules underlying the implementation of sustainable development at national and local levels.

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[1] https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/resources/sd21
[2] The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD, a.k.a. Rio+20) took place in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in June 2012. http://www.uncsd2012.org/
[3] See the SD21 project reports page, http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/index.php?menu=1362

1.2 Defining national institutions for sustainable development

Major milestone outcomes of sustainable development, such as the Rio Declaration, Agenda 21 and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (JPOI), sought to promote the idea that sustainable development should be an adaptive learning process that is implemented coherently within a multi-level institutional structure. Although specifics may vary, all major internationally agreed documents on sustainable development since the Earth Summit emphasized general features that institutions for sustainable development should have[5]:

- Address the economic, social and environmental dimensions in a balanced manner;
- Adopt integrated planning across sectors as much as possible (integrated planning, *horizontal coordination, coherence/ consistency*);
- Consider the interests of future generations;
- Strive to meaningfully engage all relevant stakeholders in decision-making processes, maintaining an effective balance between top-down and bottom-up processes (*participation*);
- Strive to improve access to information and access to justice.

In addition to these, Agenda 21 also identified institutions and processes for the production of information necessary to fulfill the above objectives.

The concept of institutions for sustainable development is much broader than that of institutions dedicated to sustainable development (for example, national sustainable development councils or local Agenda 21). Indeed, most of the challenges at the local and national level pertain to the mainstreaming of sustainable development thinking and principles into the daily routine of sectoral institutions or other institutions that were not specifically created to address or implement sustainable development.[6] It is therefore useful to draw a distinction between those two types of institutions.

Table 1 below has presented a basic way of organizing information on institutions for sustainable development. The numbers in the cells correspond to the references listed at the end of this report in the "Selected references" section. Interested readers are encouraged to consult them for further details.

This report will guide readers through various institutional arrangements that contribute to the above mentioned features at the national level. Chapter 2 covers national institutions designed to promote integrated planning; Chapter 3 looks at mechanisms for participation; Chapter 4 focuses on access to information and access to justice; Chapter 5 reviews institutions that attend to the interests of future generations; Chapter 6 addresses institutions and processes for the production of information; and finally Chapter 7 ends with standards and norms for broader societal goals.

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[5] The distinction between these features is not always obvious, and sometimes makes little sense. For example, participation and integrated planning are ideally closely combined in processes like Local Agenda 21.

[6] On this, see for example Natural Resources Forum, 2012, 36(1), special issue on institutions for sustainable development.

Table 1. A basic way of classifying national institutions for sustainable development

	National institutions created specifically for sustainable development	**National institutions geared towards sustainable development**
Strategies and integrated planning	National Sustainable Development Strategies (NSDSs)	Sectoral /cross-sectoral strategies; Sustainable development integrated in poverty reduction strategies or national development plans; Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)
	[7] Principles 3 & 4, [8] Chapter 8, [9], [10], [11], [12], [13], [14], [15], [16], [17], [18], [19], [20], [21], [22], [23], [24], [25], [26], [27], [28]	
	Local Agenda 21	Local Climate Strategy Participatory budgeting
	[8] Chapter 28 & 38, [33], [34], [35], [36], [37] ,[38]	
Horizontal coordination, participation	National Councils for Sustainable Development (NCSDs) / inter-ministerial coordination mechanisms	Sustainable development under national economic and social council
	[8] Chapters 8, 23-32 & 38, [29],[30], [31], [32], [46]	
Access to information and access to justice	Aarhus Convention reflected in national law	Freedom of information laws; Environmental labeling of products; Etc.
	[5], [7] Principle 10, [8] Chapters 4, 8 & 40, [50]	
Production of SD-relevant information	Environmental statistics; SD indicators	beyond GDP
	[7] Principle 3, [8] Chapter 8 & 40, [39], [41], [42], [43], [45], [46], [47]	*[40], [44]*
Rights of future generations	Ombudsman / Commissioner for future generations	Rights of future generations included in national law
	[7] Principle 3, [8] Chapter 2, [49], [52], [53]	*[7] Principle 3*
Broader societal goals	Standards and norms, e.g. ISO 26000	Inclusion of sustainable development principles (e.g. Rio Principles or similar) in national constitution and law.
	[51]	*[7] all chapters*

Source: Author's elaboration.
Note: Numbers in brackets refer to the references listed at the end of this report.

2. Integrated Planning

2.1 National Sustainable Development Strategies (NSDSs)

Institutionally, government administrations are typically organized into sectoral or functional ministries and departments. This system works reasonably well until it encounters something very broad and highly integrated in nature, such as sustainable development. The system tackles the parts that are identifiable to each ministry and then each ministry tackles the symptom as a problem in, and of, itself. This is the so-called "administrative trap", which leads to the fact that integration and coordination are always high on the agenda of sustainable development. National Sustainable Development Strategies (NSDSs) represent the efforts from governments trying to integrate the economic, social and environmental dimensions at the very beginning of the management cycle, the strategic planning stage, with a hope to avoid the administrative trap as much as possible (SD21, 2012).

2.1.1 Timeline of NSDSs

1992 – United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED)

National Sustainable Development Strategy (NSDS) was proposed in Agenda 21 as a way to integrate economic, social and environmental objectives into a strategically focused blueprint for action.[8]

1997 – Special Session of the UN GA on the review of Agenda 21 (Rio+5)

The Special Session of the UN General Assembly on the review of Agenda 21 reaffirmed the importance of NSDSs in enhancing and linking priorities in social, economic and environmental policies and established a target year of 2002 for all countries to formulate and elaborate their NSDSs.[9]

2002 – World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD)

As of 2002, based on the national reports received from governments, only about 85 countries had developed some kind of national strategies, and the nature and effectiveness of these strategies varied considerably from country to country [10]. The Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (JPOI) recommitted governments to "*take immediate steps to make progress in the formulation and elaboration of national strategies for sustainable development and begin their implementation by 2005*"[11].

Europe stood out in the implementation of NSDSs among all regions. According to Niestroy (2012), WSSD was a major trigger for national SD strategies in Europe. Austria, Denmark, France, Germany, Czech Republic, Netherlands, Portugal, Hungary, Sweden, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Luxemburg were all developing their NSDSs around that period of time.

2005 – Expert Group Meeting on reviewing NSDSs

UN DESA organized an expert group meeting on reviewing NSDSs in 2005. According to the background paper (George and Kirkpatrick, 2006), by 2004, Australia, Canada, Japan, most EU

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[8] Agenda 21, [2], para 8.7.
[9] Programme of Action for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21, [3], para 24.
[10] Secretary General's Agenda 21 Review 2002, [6], p.149.
[11] Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, [4], Chapter XI, para 162(b)

countries had implemented a recognized NSDS, along with some developing countries, but most countries had not, including several high income ones. Some were developing a NSDS, but most reported that only components of sustainable development were in place.

2010 – Preparations for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD/Rio+20)

The latest updated global map of NSDSs was published by UN DESA in 2010 (UN DESA, 2010). Based on the UN DESA Global Map of NSDS, by 2009, the number of implemented NSDSs had risen to 106, with a further 13 under development.

Table 2. Status of NSDSs by region

Regions	Europe	Americas	Asia	Africa	Oceania
Availability of NSDS information	88%	62%	64%	55%	64%
% NSDS implementation	77%	46%	57%	40%	64%

Source: UN DESA (2010)

Figure 1. The global picture of NSDSs (2010)
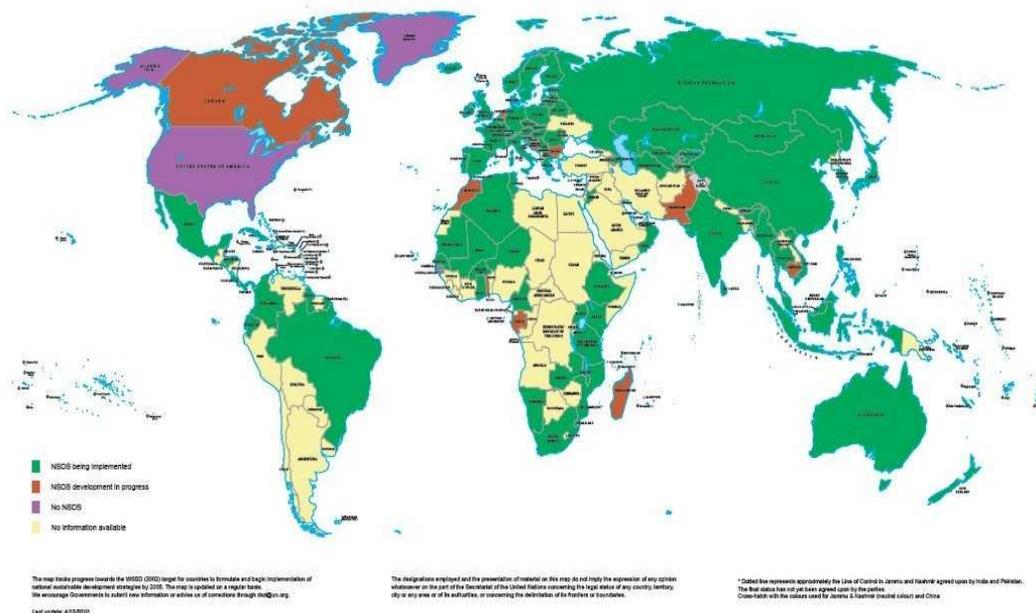
Source: UN DESA (http://www.un.org/esa/dsd/dsd_aofw_nsds/nsds_pdfs/NSDS_map.pdf)

In 2011 UNECA published a review of NSDSs in Africa, based on sixteen countries (UNECA, 2011). Also in 2011, the Institut de l'énergie et de l'environnement de la Francophonie (IEPF) published a study on governance of sustainable development in francophone countries (IEPF, 2011a, 2011b).

2.1.2 Principles of NSDSs

While preparing for the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), the Guidance in Preparing a National Sustainable Development Strategy (UN DESA, 2002) was published. It defined National Sustainable Development Strategy (NSDS) as "*a coordinated, participatory and iterative process of thoughts and actions to achieve economic, environmental and social objectives in a balanced and integrative manner*". Most importantly, NSDS is a call for an institutional change. It aims at a transition from the traditional static putting-a-plan-on-paper exercise towards the

establishment of "*an adaptive system that can continuously improve*" (Dalal-Clayton and Bass, 2002). It should be a process which "*encompasses situation analysis, formulation of policies and action plans, implementation, monitoring and regular review. It is a cyclical and interactive process of planning, participation and action in which the emphasis is on managing progress towards sustainability goals rather than producing a 'plan' as an end product.*" (UN DESA, 2002).

The Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of OECD also developed a set of guiding principles for NSDSs. George and Kirkpatrick (2006) compared the UN DESA principles with the OECD principles (see Table 3) and concluded that the former was developed to fit all countries, while the latter was developed mainly for developed countries (OECD/DAC, 2001). But the essence of the two set of principles are very similar in nature. The resource book (Dalal-Clayton and Bass, 2002) prepared by the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) in collaboration with OECD and several other partners provided in-depth information on processes and methodologies of NSDSs.

Table 3. National Sustainable Development Strategy (NSDS) Principles

Core Principles	OECD Principles	UN Principles
A. Integration of economic, social, and environmental objectives.	Comprehensive and integrated. People-centered.	Integration and balanced across sectors and territories.
B. Participation and consensus.	Consensus on long-term vision. Effective participation.	Shared strategic and pragmatic vision. Link the short to the medium and long terms. Ensure continuity of the strategy development process. Participatory and the widest possible participation ensured.
C. Country ownership and commitment	Country led and nationally owned. High-level government commitment and influential lead institutions.	Nationally owned and country-driven process. Strong political commitment at the national and local levels. Spearheaded by a strong institution.
D. Comprehensive and coordinated policy process.	Based on comprehensive and reliable analysis. Building on existing processes and strategies. Link national and local levels	Anchor the strategy process in sound technical analysis. Build on existing processes and strategies. Link national and local priorities and actions.
E. Targeting, resourcing, and monitoring	Targeted with clear budgetary priorities; Incorporate monitoring, learning, and improvements; Develop and build on existing capacity.	Set realistic but flexible targets. Coherence between budget and strategy priorities; Build mechanisms for monitoring follow-up, evaluation, and feedback.

Source: George and Kirkpatrick (2006).

2.1.3 Different approaches for NSDSs

Given that institutional arrangements, capacities and development priorities differ across countries, NSDSs need to "*be worked out in the light of country-specific conditions to ensure that integrated approaches are effective and cost-efficient*".[12] Based on an in-depth research conducted for 19 countries, Swanson et.al. (2004) observed four types of approaches amongst the countries studied.

1) Comprehensive, multi-dimensional SD strategies

This refers to a single process that comprehensively covers the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. This is most commonly found as a compilation of existing economic, social and environmental strategies and policy initiatives for presentation at WSSD

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[12] Programme of Action for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21, [3], para 24.

(Swanson et. al., 2004). Countries like the UK, Canada and the EU in the North, along with El Salvador and the Philippines in the South were described as having well coordinated and iterative NSDSs (IIED, 2009). The United Kingdom was highlighted as a good example, where a single framework strategy was created that provided a long-term perspective of the key SD challenges facing the country and presented options for addressing priority issue areas (Swanson et.al., 2004).

2) Cross-sectoral SD strategies relating to specific dimensions of SD

This refers to the type of strategy that "spans multiple sectors and covers one or two dimensions of sustainable development, e.g. national environmental management plans or poverty reduction strategy papers (PRSPs)" (Swanson et.al., 2004). This approach is observed in many low-income countries, where poverty eradication and economic growth are the pressing concerns.

According to UNDP-UNEP PEI,[13] during the 1990s, PRSPs unequivocally failed to sufficiently address the environment's contribution to poverty reduction. In 2002 the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (JPOI) explicitly stated in paragraph 162(b) that "*where applicable, (NSDSs) could be formulated as poverty reduction strategies that integrate economic, social and environmental aspects of sustainable development",* and *"should be pursued in accordance with each country's national priorities*". However, according to many observers PRSPs remain an inadequate alternative for the far-reaching and integrated NSDS Agenda 21 advocated (SD21, 2012).

3) Sectoral SD strategies

This approach refers to strategies that incorporate economic, social and environmental dimensions but only focus on specific sectors. Among the 19 countries studied by Swanson et al. (2004), Canada was the only one adopting this approach. Canada assigned responsibility for sustainable development to individual government departments and agencies that were responsible for specific sectors. They were responsible for identifying issues of relevance to their mandate, and for producing sector-focused policies, regulations and other instruments for specific sustainable development objectives. The case study also pointed out the disadvantage of this approach, the co-ordination among departmental strategies. But it concluded that "*despite the difficulties in co-ordination, the overall process has fostered deep learning within the government, particularly with respect to raising the overall awareness of sustainable development within each of the 29 departments*." (Swanson et.al, 2004)

4) SD integration into existing national development strategies

Another approach identified in the Swanson et al. (2004) case study is the integration of sustainable development into existing national development strategies, rather than sustainable development being operated as a separate strategy process parallel to the national expenditure and revenue-generating process. Such an approach is advocated based on the reality that "*most NSDSs simply remain at the periphery of government decision-making, until finance ministries or departments play a central role in the SD strategy process to make sure fiscal priority setting and national expenditure and revenue generation are fully integrated with SD*." (Swanson et.al., 2004).

A working example identified in Swanson et.al. (2004) is Mexico, where a conceptual framework of sustainable development was integrated directly into the existing national development planning document and process. The 2001-2006 plan, for example, contained both short- and long- term visions and served as the source document for all sectoral programmes, which then included specific goals for achieving sustainable development that were relevant to their mandates.

The "competition" between NSDSs and other strategy documents is not limited to the case of PRSPs or to developing countries. In Europe, sustainable development is pursued with not one but two

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[13] Guidance Note: Mainstreaming Poverty-Environment Linkages into National Development Planning, [24], p.3

overarching strategies, i.e., the so-called Lisbon and SD strategies. While the Lisbon Strategy is a genuinely European response to global economic and social pressures, SD strategies are national efforts corresponding with international guidance to better coordinate and integrate economic, social and, in particular, environmental policies. In practice, the Lisbon strategy has tended to occupy the limelight. A recent study (Steurer et al., 2010) explored the vertical coordination and coherence of the two pan-European strategies. The paper concluded that the influence international organizations such as the UN and the OECD have on national policy-making in Europe must not be underestimated.

2.2 Strategic planning at the local level

Similar to what NSDSs tried to accomplish at the national level, Local Agenda 21 (LA21) called for integrated thinking from the strategic planning stage. During the process of ICLEI's LA21 Model Communities Programme,[14] seven guiding principles were defined as the framework for evaluation of the implementation of LA21 (see Box 1). They could be seen as the general guidelines for LA21 strategic planning.

Box 1. Seven Guiding Principles of SD Planning for LA21

<div style="border:1px solid">

Partnerships
Alliances among all stakeholders/partners are established for collective responsibility, decision-making and planning.
Participation and Transparency
All major sectors of society are directly involved in sustainable development planning, and all information that relates to the LA 21 planning process is easily available.
Systemic Approach
Solutions address underlying causes and whole systems
Concern for the Future
Sustainable development plans and actions address short and long-term trends and needs.
Accountability
All stakeholders/partners are accountable for their actions.
Equity and Justice
Economic development must be equitable, environmentally sound and socially just.
Ecological Limits
All communities must learn to live within the earth's carrying capacity.

Source: www.iclei.org

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3. Participation

The Rio agreements contain recommendations supporting participatory and multi-stakeholder approaches for development, so that broad public participation can help improve policy formulation and implementation.

There are different levels of participation in decision-making. A useful academic model for assessing the nature and degree of citizen participation in decision-making was developed in the 1960s by Sherry Arnstein (Arnstein, 1969). The "Ladder of Participation" distinguishes eight levels of participation, as shown below.

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[14] ICLEI launched the Local Agenda 21 Model Communities Programme (LA21 MCP) in 1994. It was an international action research programme on sustainable development planning, a four-year partnership with fourteen municipalities in twelve countries around the world. The goal was to jointly design, document and evaluate local strategic planning processes for sustainable development.

Figure 2. Ladder of Participation
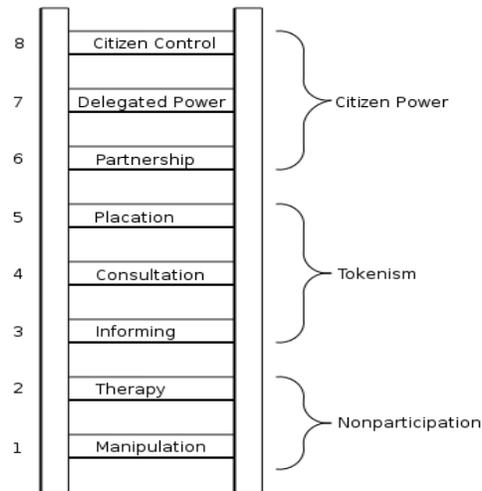
Source: SD21 (2012), based on Arnstein (1969)

At the international level for example, prior to UNCED, most of the involvement of non-state actors in international governance was limited to "*informing*" and "*consultation*", and in a few cases "*placation*". After UNCED, progress was made in this regard. (SD21, 2012)

Agenda 21 called for "*the commitment and genuine involvement of all social groups*" and brought in the structure of nine Major Groups for multi-stakeholder participation, namely, Women, Children & Youth, Indigenous People, Non-governmental Organizations, Local Authorities, Workers & Trade Unions, Business & Industry, Scientific & Technological Communities, and Farmers (ch. 23). Participation of Major Groups in the inter-governmental process has since increased both at the 'observer' level and as active stakeholders offering submissions and interventions in formal UN proceedings. The Major Groups mechanism, as a functioning example from the UN context, has been very helpful to national processes, particularly to countries that are interested in having a reference of the many types of stakeholders to be engaged.

3.1 National Councils for Sustainable Development (NCSDs)

National Councils for Sustainable Development (NCSDs) are essentially national SD coordination mechanisms that bring different stakeholders together to generate broad-based partnerships, to institutionalize participatory processes in national sustainable development decision-making.

3.1.1 Timeline of NCSDs

1992 – United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED)

Chapter 8 of the Agenda 21 stated that "*governments should adopt a national strategy for sustainable development with the widest possible participation",* and it further encouraged countries to develop or improve "*mechanisms to facilitate the involvement of concerned individuals, groups and organizations in decision-making at all levels*". Chapter 37, again, stressed the need to build up national consensus for implementing Agenda 21.

According to Busch and Jörgens (2009), the first countries that established NCSD were Australia and Singapore (1990) and Mauritius (1991). The establishment of the UN Commission for Sustainable Development (UNCSD) possibly accelerated the proliferation of national SDCs, as it provided national governments with a model for how to create institutions for SD.

According to Niestroy (2012), early movers to create such national mechanisms in Europe were Belgium, Finland and the UK, beginning in 1993, followed by Portugal, Ireland and Germany.

1997 – Special Session of the UN GA on the review of Agenda 21 (Rio+5)

As of 1997, the success of NCSDs in integrating SD into decision-making varied from countries to country depending on their mandate, composition and character – some focused only on environmental issues, while others were government co-ordinating bodies without broad representation from other sectors (The Earth Council, 1997). The Earth Council convened a Rio+5 Forum in March 1997 for a five-year review of progress after the Rio Earth Summit. Around 140 NCSD representatives from 76 countries reached a consensus document entitled "A Vision and Practical Measures for National Councils as Effective Mechanisms for Sustainable Development" (The Earth Council, 1997), which reflected a common vision on the role and structure of NCSDs.

According to Busch and Jörgens (2009), there were 80 national councils being established between 1990 and 2000. The authors also found out that NCSD spread more to developing countries than to developed countries, with Latin America and the Caribbean establishing the highest number of SDCs over the longest period of time, compared to other regions (see Graph 2).

In the UK, the 1999 NSDS saw the establishment of an independent Sustainable Development Commission (SDC) comprised of representatives from academic, scientific, business and NGO backgrounds, performing an official watchdog function, scrutinising the government's progress on implementing its sustainable development strategy.[15]

2002 – The World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD)

In the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (JPOI), under Chapter XI (Strengthening institutional frameworks for sustainable development at the national level), member States reaffirmed their commitment to SDCs by stating that countries should "*further promote the establishment or enhancement of sustainable development councils and/or coordination structures at the national level, including at the local level, in order to provide a high-level focus on sustainable development policies. In that context, multi-stakeholder participation should be promoted.*" The countries present at the WSSD agreed to have operational Councils in all countries by 2005.

Post 2002

According to Niestroy (2012), after the WSSD in 2002 no data has been collected globally on NCSDs, at least not on a systematic basis. However, there have been qualitative analyses of experiences outside Europe. In Africa, the UN Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) undertook a review of the continent's NCSDs in 2005, revealing that whilst most countries possessed NCSDs in some shape or form, the vast majority fell short in effectively addressing the three dimensions of sustainable development (environmental, economic and social) in a 'holistic and integrated manner'.[16]

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[15] http://www.sd-commission.org.uk/pages/our-role.html
[16] UNECA (2005), [32].

Figure 3. The Global Proliferation of SD Councils/ Commissions
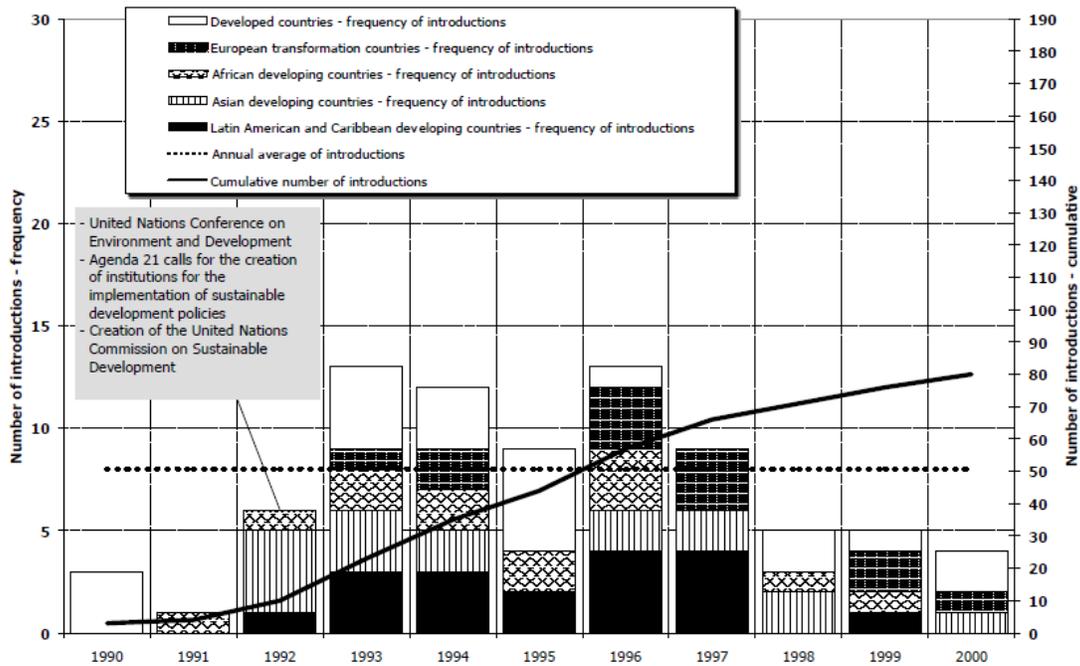
Source: Busch and Jörgens (2009), p.126

Niestroy (2012) found that in Europe, there are currently around 30 councils from 15 European countries -- around 25 advisory councils active in Europe on SD and/or environmental policies, plus a number of other councils in related policy fields like energy, transport and agriculture -- that cooperate with the purpose of sharing knowledge, experience and national views on relevant policies and instruments, as well as giving selected advice on policy developments at the EU level. The European network of NCSDs involves around 400 key senior actors from academia, civil society/NGOs, stakeholder organizations and the private sector. Niestroy (2012) also noted that there has been a slow-down of SD strategies and roll-backs with council terminations and mergers recently. The UK Sustainable Development Commission was closed down on 31 March 2011.

3.1.2 The Role of NCSDs

According to Niestroy (2007), there are three basic functions and activities of NCSDs.

1. Giving policy advice:
   - advice of CSOs/stakeholders/experts to government
   - comments on government proposals/SDS.

2. Acting as "agent"/intermediary/facilitator between and amongst stakeholders (governments, business and civil society)
   - agenda setting
   - joint advice/ think-tank
   - mutual learning /capacity building
   - dialogue with government

3. Communicating with multipliers and into a wider civil society for:
   - awareness raising

- broadening the knowledge base
- stimulating involvement via council members, by conferences/media and by stimulating/fostering projects.

The political tradition of the country and the attitude of government regarding stakeholder involvement have been found to be key determinants of the role and functions of SD councils. In general, The more independent the council is, the more 'advisory' role it plays. Conversely, the more dominated by the government, the more 'communication platform' role the council plays. Niestroy (2007) summarized different types and capacities of SD councils and similar bodies based on experiences in Europe, which gives an overview of the various functions and institutional arrangements (see Table 4).

3.2 Local Agenda 21(LA21)

Chapter 28 of the Agenda 21 acknowledged the importance of local authorities in advancing sustainable development:

"*Because so many of the problems and solutions being addressed by Agenda 21 have their roots in local activities, the participation and cooperation of local authorities will be a determining factor in fulfilling its objectives. Local authorities construct, operate and maintain economic, social and environmental infrastructure, oversee planning processes, establish local environmental policies and regulations, and assist implementing national and sub-national environmental policies. As the level of the governance closest to the people, they play a vital role in educating, mobilizing and responding to the public to promote sustainable development." (Agenda 21, para 28.1)*

Agenda 21 also recognized the importance of participation in the process of translating sustainable development in planning and action at the local level:

"*Each local authority should enter into a dialogue with its citizens, local organizations and private enterprises and adopt a Local Agenda 21. Through consultation and consensus-building, local authorities would learn from citizens and from local, civic, community, business and industrial organizations and acquire the information needed for formulating the best strategies. The process of consultation would increase household awareness of sustainable development issues. Local authority programmes, policies, laws and regulations to achieve Agenda 21 objectives would be assessed and modified, based on local programmes adopted. Strategies could also be used in supporting proposals for local, national, regional and international funding." (Agenda 21, para 28.3)*

Agenda 21 established the target that "*By 1996, most local authorities in each country should have undertaken a consultative process with their populations and achieved a consensus on 'a local Agenda 21' for the community."(Agenda 21, para 28.2.(a))*

Table 4. Types and capacities of SD councils and similar bodies

Type	Government Body		Independent and (advisory) council			
Chair	PM (or Minister)		(Minister)	Independent		
Characteristics Capacity	Government coordination body with some stakeholder involvement	Government-led / dominated coordination body / dialogue platform	Stakeholder / expert council	Stakeholder / expert council, with a few government representatives as members or observers	Stakeholder / expert council	Stakeholder / expert council, with watchdog/ strong monitoring capacity
Coordination of government departments	• • •	• • •	--	--	--	--
Address government in the council itself	• •	• • •	• • •	• •	•	•
1. Advice of CSOs/ stakeholders to government, comments on government proposals / SDS	• (no joint advice)	• • (no joint advice)	• • •	• • •	• • •	• • •
2. Agent/ intermediary / facilitator: Stakeholder Dialogue	--	•	• •	• • •	• • •	• • •
- agenda setting	--	•	• •	• • •	• • •	• • •
- joint advice / think-tank	--	--	• • • (in working groups)	• • •	• • •	• • •
- mutual learning / capacity building	--	•	• • • (in working groups)	• • •	• • •	• • •
3 Communicating with multipliers and into a wider civil society						
- via council members, by conferences/media	--	• •	• • •	• • •	• • •	• • •
- by stimulating/ fostering projects	--	(•)	(• •)	(• • •)	(• • •)	• •
	(Slovakia)	Croatia,, Finland	Spain, Sweden	Belgium, Ireland, Netherlands, Portugal	Austria, Germany, France, Hungary, Netherlands / Catalonia, Flanders	UK (terminated in 2011)

Source: Niestroy (2007), Niestroy (2012)

Legend: • • •: primary capacity ; • •: side capacity / applied to a lesser extent; •: Indirect capacity or done in addition to core tasks; ( ): some do, some do less.

3.2.1 Status of implementation of LA21s

Two global surveys of the status of Local Agenda 21 were made by UNCSD and ICLEI before the major SD summits. The first Local Agenda 21 Survey report was published for Rio+5 in 1997 (ICLEI & UNDPCSD, 1997) and the results of the Second Local Agenda 21 Survey were made available in the preparatory process for the Johannesburg Summit (WSSD) in 2002 (UN DESA, 2002). Both studies collected quantitative data from local authority associations and institutions, as well as qualitative data directly from local governments (ICLEI, 2002).

According to these surveys, by 1996, more than 1,800 local governments in 64 countries had undertaken Local Agenda 21 processes (ICLEI & UNDPCSD, 1997). By 2002, 6,416 local authorities in 113 countries were found involved in LA21 activities. Stakeholder groups were involved in 73% of LA21s. 61% of municipalities with LA21s had developed Local Action Plans. LA21 processes had been formally integrated into the municipal system in 59% of local governments (ICLEI, 2002). No global survey of LA21 seems to have happened since 2002.

3.2.2 Challenges in implementation of LA21s

Similar to what has happened at the national level, the nature of participation at the local level has varied depending on the national political context. Citizens may be invited to approve ideas formulated by local authorities, to present their own ideas, or to participate in deliberations for co-production of knowledge and consensus building. Lawrence (1998) pointed out that LA21 "*calls for involvement, empowerment and devolution of power that planning is primarily a political activity that relies upon science and planning techniques*", rather than being primarily technical with political consequences. And "*as the shift from 'top down', the "top" being institutions of government or community elite, to 'bottom up' planning and decision-making occurs, institutional risk can also increase*".

According to the same author, in countries like the United Kingdom, local authorities have made great strides toward completing and using LA21 as an education, planning and priority setting tool. However, the LA21 process also faces challenges of vertical integration. Successful vertical integration requires that local authorities understand the national vision and the upstream impacts of their local activities. It also requires decentralization policies to be accompanied with all the political, legal and financial support that local authorities needed for implementation. Lack of financial support and national government political support were identified as the key obstacles to greater success of LA21 (ICLEI, 2002). In some cases, LA21 is seen as an attack on the power of the nation-state. In such cases, particularly when local authorities are dependent upon threatened nation-state resources and/or permission to enact new initiatives, it was found that LA21s are not happening or are happening only "as theatre" (Lawrence, 1998). Voisey et. al. (1996), too, pointed out that it is the domestic political context, nationally and locally, which in the main determines the speed and nature of response to LA21.

According to the detailed review of the implementation of Agenda 21 done by Stakeholder Forum for the SD21 project, the last decade and especially the last five years have seen a growing focus on climate change in governance for sustainability on all spatial levels. This trend is clearly visible in local political contexts, where many local authorities are predominantly dealing with climate issues in their work for sustainable development. One driver for this is the international community's increased interest in the climate agenda, which has made more funding available for local activities on climate change. Some local authorities have simply changed the name of their Local Agenda 21 programme to instead 'Local Climate Strategy' (SD21, 2012).

4. Access to information and access to justice[18]

Access to information and to justice are core principles of sustainable development, reflected in particular in Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration, which states: "*At the national level, each individual shall have appropriate access to information concerning the environment that is held by public authorities, including information on hazardous materials and activities in their communities, and the opportunity to participate in decision-making processes. States shall facilitate and encourage public awareness and participation by making information widely available.*" *(Rio Declaration, Principle 10).* This was the first internationally agreed commitment that recognized the rights of people to hold their governments accountable.

There have been many examples in which States have worked towards these values and aspirations in the two decades after Rio. On the national level, over 80 Governments across the World have enacted laws that provide their citizens with improved access to information on environmental matters, and the vast majority of these have been introduced during the last decade (De Silva, 2010). From international legal instruments to national environmental courts, there are mechanisms and processes through which civil society can engage actively in environmental decision-making, and seek legal redress on environmental matters. There are also many initiatives promoting legal and political reform to further enhance the implementation of Principle 10 'on the ground'. In countries such as the UK, procedures exist that govern the free release of information so that matters of public interest are transparent and accessible to all, often upon request from civil society groups, NGOs or individuals.

An important institutional enhancement that improved availability and usage of information is the 1998 UNECE Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention). Its impact is particularly obvious within the European Union. The Convention has been ratified by 44 primarily European countries. It led to significant strengthening of Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) legislation and the creation of an EU Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Directive in 2001. The common principle of both Directives is to ensure that plans, programmes and projects likely to have significant effects on the environment are made subject to an environmental assessment prior to their approval or authorisation. Consultation with the public is a key feature of environmental assessment procedures.[19]

There remains a gap, however, between the aspirations of the Principle and its realization. In many countries, significant barriers to transparency and access to information persist. Situations still abound in which individuals and communities are not involved or consulted in the decision-making process, and cannot gain access to fair, timely, affordable justice. There are examples where effective partnerships have been established to build relationships between civil society and governments to enable full participation in the democratic process, but much work remains for this to be widespread and effective across the world. (SD21, 2011, ch. 10).

5. Rights of future generations

The notion of *intergenerational equity* is one of the core principles of sustainable development. It is enunciated in Rio Principle 3, in addition to being part of the most common definition of sustainable development, the one used by the Bruntland report in 1987.

How to represent the rights of future generations in institutions has been addressed in a number of different ways across countries. In many countries, the rights of future generations are enshrined in

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[18] The text in this section is almost entirely based on the Detailed Review of Implementation of the Rio Principles and Agenda 21 (SD21, 2011, 2012), references [7] and [8] herein.
[19] http://ec.europa.eu/environment/eia/home.htm

constitutions, the law, and in institutions. For a sample of examples of how this has been done, see Bradford (unknown date).

An institution that has recently attracted much attention is that of commissioner, or ombudsman, for future generations. Such an institution has existed in several countries, including Hungary. Canada has a Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development. Mirroring to some extent the various levels of influence that NCSDs have, the powers of intervention and influence of these commissioners vary across countries (for a description see SEHN, 2008, and Göpel, 2011).

6. Institutions and processes for the production of information for sustainable development

Chapter 40 of Agenda 21 specifically focused on the topic of "Information for Decision Making" and identified two programme areas for the empowerment of people to make sound judgments at their respective levels: (a) Bridging the data gap; (b) Improving information availability. Agenda 21 proposed six areas of activities in this regard[20] and much progress has taken place.

6.1 Sustainable development indicators

Although there is currently no single universally accepted measurement metric, the United Nations, European Union as well as OECD have all made progress in the development of sustainable development indicators. Sustainable development indicator frameworks have sought to balance international and national exigencies, facilitating global assessment and analysis without compromising the capacity of countries to carry out national assessments.

1) United Nations

The United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) finalized the third, revised set of CSD indicators in 2007, based on the previous two (1996 and 2001) editions, which have been developed, improved and extensively tested as part of the implementation of the Work Programme on Indicators of Sustainable Development adopted by the CSD at its third session in 1995 and presented to the CSD in 2001. This third set of indicators consists of 50 core indicators, alongside 46 additional indicators intended to allow a "*more comprehensive and differentiated assessment of sustainable development*" where data are available (UN DESA 2007, p.7, 9). The indicators are grouped into a series of themes and sub-themes, and are designed to allow countries to track progress towards nationally-defined goals (UN DESA, 2007, p.22).

2) European Union

The European Union worked alongside the UN Work Programme on Indicators of Sustainable Development and published its own indicator sets in 1997 and 2001 (Eurostat, 2009, p.33). An EU-oriented indicator set was proposed following the adoption of the EU Sustainable Development Strategy in 2001, and was endorsed by the European Commission in 2005 (Eurostat, 2009). Since then, a series of minor revisions have resulted in the existing indicator set, comprising 11 headline

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[20] As stated in Chapter 40, Information for Decision-Making, Agenda 21, the six areas of activities are: 1) development of indicators of sustainable development; 2) promotion of global use of indicators of sustainable development; 3) improvement of data collection and use; 4) improvement of methods of data assessment and analysis; 5) establishment of a comprehensive information framework; 6) strengthening of the capacity for traditional information.

indicators across 10 themes, and over 100 indicators in total.[21] The existing set also describes indicators either in development or as yet undeveloped, and the suitability of the indicator set in the context of emerging environmental concerns is constantly reviewed (Eurostat, 2009, p.35).

3) OECD

The OECD has cooperated with UNCSD, the EU and other international organizations to develop its own environmental indicators (OECD 2008, p.34). Notably, the OECD has focused on developing multiple sets of indicators, each appropriate to a specific context. The Core Environmental Indicators, designed to track 'environmental progress and performance', comprise about 50 individual indicators; separate indicator sets adapted in part from the core set aim at informing the public, promoting integration and monitoring progress towards sustainable development (OECD 2008, p.35).

6.2 Integrated national accounting framework

The United Nations Statistical Commission has developed the System of Integrated Environmental and Economic Accounting (SEEA) with the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the European Commission and OECD. It represents the most significant attempt to integrate national accounting and environmental indicators, aiming at the creation of a system of satellite accounts which express information on environmental sustainability in both monetary and physical terms (UN DESA, 2007). Work is currently under way to elevate the SEEA from the 'manual of best practices' published in 2003 to an international accounting standard equivalent to the System of National Accounts (SNA).[22] It seeks to establish a framework in which an integrated, globally coordinated programme of assessment and analysis can take place. The CSD indicators are linked to the SEEA through the adoption of increasingly uniform classifications and definitions, and the inclusion of sectoral breakdowns appropriate to the SEEA's composition (UN DESA, 2007, p.42)

6.3 Measurement beyond GDP

Traditionally, Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has been used as the proxy indicator of human development and well-being. However, its focus on current economic activities, its lack of longer term perspective and its negligence of natural capital and social assets have been causing more and more criticism, first from the academic world but with increasing recognition of the issue in the political sphere. For example, a report commissioned in 2008 by President Sarkozy of France (Stiglitz et al., 2009) offered a critical analysis of the use of GDP in defining and measuring well-being and progress in society. In relation to future generations, the report stated that "*a shift of emphasis from a "production-oriented" measurement system to one "focused on the well-being of current and future generations, i.e. toward broader measures of social progress*" will be needed.

The report focused broadly on indicators of social progress, challenging GDP as the primary indicator, but it also highlighted the importance of measuring environmental conditions in conjunction with other social and economic indicators and argues that investment is needed to develop these so that they can effectively guide policy-making processes.

In the academic world, the ecological economics community has been involved in the development of indicators that can complement GDP in a number of ways, including for example ISEW/ GPI (see Neumayer, 2010, 152-163). The development of more inclusive well-being measurement frameworks has also received increasing attention.

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[21] Eurostat Sustainable Development Indicators, available at:
http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/sdi/indicators.
[22] SEEA brochure, available at http://unstats.un.org/unsd/envaccounting/Brochure.pdf, p. 1.

6.4 Strengthening of traditional information

It was well recognized in Agenda 21 that traditional and indigenous knowledge should be protected, enhanced and utilized, and that indigenous people and local communities should be respected and be allowed to participate in sustainable development governance. The article 8(j) of the Convention on Biological Diversity called for countries to "*respect, preserve and maintain knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous and local communities embodying traditional lifestyles*" relevant for biodiversity, and promote the application of traditional information in wider contexts whilst sharing equitably its benefits.[23] Since its first meeting in 2000, the Working Group on Article 8(j) has taken several steps in this direction, including through '*the development of guidelines for the conduct of cultural, environmental and social impact assessments*' (the Akwé:Kon Voluntary Guidelines), and '*the development of the elements of an ethical code of conduct to ensure respect for the cultural and intellectual heritage of indigenous and local communities*'.

6.5 Improving availability of information

Agenda 21 recognized that while a wealth of information about sustainable development could be available, it was often difficult to find the required information promptly and at an appropriate level of aggregation. (Agenda 21, Chapter 40). Moreover, in many countries data were not accessible even where available, due to associated costs or lack of technology. Institutional capacity and technological capacity are two key areas of concern closely related to the availability of information.

The decades after Agenda 21 saw exponential growth of information technology. The internet has become an integral part of data collection, information sharing and it contributes immensely to public awareness raising, capacity-building as well as the enhancement of public participation in decision-making process at all levels of sustainable development governance.

6.6 Standards and methods for handling information

The Compendium of Environmental Data published by the OECD functions to harmonize information about the environment at the international level, and provides the basic data sets for OECD indicator programmes (OECD, 2006, p.6). The data included in the Compendium is the product of SIREN (OECD System of Information on Resources and the Environment), a global scheme of data collection on resources and the environment (OECD 2006, p.7). However, a key difficulty is that classifications, definitions and measurement methods vary from one country to another, rendering inter-country comparison potentially problematic (OECD 2006, p.8). For this reason, work carried out in the implementation of the OECD's Collaborative Plan of Action on Environmental Data Quality currently focuses upon 'coherence among countries', in an attempt to facilitate global harmonization (OECD 2012, p.33).

Central to the ongoing development of the Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics developed by the UN is the attempt to generate '*a set of consistent definitions, classifications, variables, tabulations and indicators*', and thereby facilitate the harmonized exchange of data (UN ECOSOC, 2010, p.3). Connectively, the Integrated Recommendations for Water Statistics represent an attempt to determine the statistical units of the environment for water and how they should be measured (UN DESA, 2012). The manner in which spatial and temporal information should be included is also specified (UN DESA, 2012, p.52).

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[23] Article 8(j), Convention for Biodiversity, http://www.cbd.int/convention/articles/?a=cbd-08.

7. Institutions for experience-sharing and support

Institutions for experience-sharing and support among national and local institutions are often, strictly speaking, better classified with international institutions. However, we mention a few of them here due to their relevance to national institutions themselves.

7.1 Sharing of experience on NSDSs

Member States are facing a number of common challenges in preparing, implementing and reviewing their national sustainable development strategies. These relate to adopting appropriate institutional and procedural arrangements, creating a sense of ownership by the target groups, securing international collaboration, prioritizing and concretizing actions, formulating a coherent vision and agreeing on a path for long term development. (IEEP, 2006).

Over the years, a number of processes to share information, experiences, knowledge and practices about national strategies for sustainable development have been tested. These arrangements have appeared under different names that reflect both political circumstances and the degree of formality of these sharing mechanisms, from peer review (a more formal process by which peer countries review and advise on another country's strategy) to knowledge sharing (a more informal exchange with less stringent political connotations) to guidelines and knowledge exchanges events.[24] [25] One of the reasons for this variety of terms is the political sensitivity that is attached to concept of "peer review"– for example, in the case of the OECD Environmental Performance Review Programme, it can mean a formal review processes where member countries have to "open their books" to others and the results of the reviews are made public.

In 2002 at the World Summit on Sustainable Development the European Union raised a proposal to develop a system for experience-sharing on NSDSs among countries. This idea was later adopted by the European Commission in its proposal for a revised EU SDS, which called for member states to "*undertake a light peer review process, focusing on specific themes, and in particular, seeking to identify examples of good policies and practices that could be implemented by all*." (Pagani, 2002, p.14). In June 2006, in the updated EU SDS the peer review mechanism was further clarified as voluntary and given the following guidelines:

- Peer review should involve officials and stakeholders from other MS and, where appropriate, international observers;
- Peer reviews should focus either on the strategies as a whole or on specific themes;
- They should also serve to identify examples of good policies and practices;
- Peer reviews could be supported by scientific evidence through external evaluation.

According to Gjoksi, Sedlacko and Berger (2010), peer reviews have been conducted in four countries, in France (2005), Norway (2006), the Netherlands (2006) and Germany (2009). Countries members of the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie (OIF) have engaged in peer-reviews of NSDSs, most recently in the context of the preparations for Rio+20 (IEPF, 2011a).

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[24] A peer review is described as "the systematic examination and assessment of the performance of a state by other states, with the ultimate goal of helping the reviewed state improve its policy making, adopt best practices, and comply with established standards and principles (Pagani, 2002).

[25] The differences between the various terms used to describe this kind of activites is not fixed. For example, in the French-speaking context, it is customary to refer to them as "*revue par les pairs*", which translates into "peer review", even though the degree of formality and political status of these activities may differ from one exercise to another.

The UN Division for Sustainable Development was involved in a number of shared learning activities with different groups of countries. The Government of the Republic of Korea in collaboration with the United Nations Division for Sustainable Development, organized a Shared Learning and Review of the National Strategy for Sustainable Development (NSSD) of the Republic of Korea, with the participation of government experts from China, India, Japan, Malaysia, Mongolia, Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam, as well as a number of international organizations (UNDSD, 2004, 2008). Knowledge exchange workshops were organized with France and other European countries (2005) and Pacific Island States (2006). In 2004 and 2005, the BRICS countries and Germany engaged in a similar exercise with a focus on technical dialogues with multistakeholder participation among their members (GTZ, 2005).

7.2 ISO standards

The standards developed by the International Standard Organization (ISO) are essentially mechanisms for sharing best practices, built on the network of national standards institutes of 163 countries and expertise from both the public and the private sector. The scope of ISO's standards is increasing in response to demand from the international community. New standards are being published or developed seeking to address challenging issues such as social responsibility, information and societal security, response to climate change, energy efficiency and renewable resources, sustainable building design and operation, fair and transparent contract procurement, water services, nanotechnologies, intelligent transport systems, food safety management and health informatics (ISO, 2012).

The standards are mostly initiated by the non-government sector and developed in a multi-stakeholder environment, i.e. in close collaboration with regulators at different levels and representatives of different stakeholder groups. They are not mandatory, but provide practical guidance or requirements to businesses within the context of their daily operations. Table 5 below gives a few examples of ISO standards relevant to sustainable development.

Table 5. Examples of ISO standards relevant to sustainable development

Standard	Topic addressed	Description
ISO 26000	Social Responsibility	Developed with the engagement of experts from 99 countries, the majority from developing economies, and more than 40 international organizations, ISO26000 provides guidance on social responsibility and enables organizations of all types to progress in all three dimensions of sustainable development – environmental, economic and social.
The ISO 14000 family of 28 standards, including ISO 14001 for environmental management systems (EMS) and standards addressing specific issues such as life cycle analysis, environmental labelling and greenhouse gases (ISO14064:2006 & ISO14065:2007)	Environmental management	As one of the concrete results following on from the UNCED conference in 1992, the ISO 14000 family provides a framework for organizations large and small, in manufacturing and services, in public and private sectors, in industrialized, developing and transition economies, to: - minimize harmful effects on the environment caused by their activities; - meet regulatory requirements; - achieve continual improvement of their environmental performance; - improve business performance through more efficient use of resources.
From ISO 9001 to ISO 14001, to other standards addressing specific sectors and issues.	Management standards	The management standards are widely used to establish confidence between business partners, especially in global supply chains and procurement contract negotiations. Management systems for specific needs include: information security (ISO/IEC 27001), food safety (ISO22000), supply chain security (ISO28000), energy management (ISO50001), road traffic safety management (ISO39001).

Source: author's compilation, based on information from www.iso.org.

Private standards (or non-governmental standards) have also gained an increasing importance in many areas, for example food and agriculture.

7.3 Collaboration among local authorities

Agenda 21 promotes increased collaboration between local authorities. This has been achieved through several types of arrangements.

Issue-based networks of cities

Network of cities sharing interest and wanting to show leadership on specific issues have proliferated in the last two decades. For example, C40 was created as a group of cities wanting to lead on climate change. Other groups exist in areas related to sustainability.

Local development assistance and funding arrangements

In recent years there has been a decentralization trend in development cooperation, with a growing number of local authorities providing financial support to counterparts in lower income countries around the world. Local governments do not usually call themselves donors but rather partners for development, and the receiving partner commonly takes full ownership of the project in line with their local development strategy. A pioneer in this context is Barcelona. Since 1994 there has been a decision to use 0.7% of Barcelona's municipal budget for development cooperation. (Smith, 2011)

Associations of local authorities

Many local authorities have joined together in national or international local government organizations (LGOs). The United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) has members in more than 100 countries in all world regions. It brings together the individual cities and national associations of local governments.[26] While not created with the purpose of working for sustainable development, UCLG has followed the trend of mainstreamed interest in sustainability among its members.[27] ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability is an international association of local authorities that has played a critical role in conceptualizing, advocating, monitoring and supporting local authorities in their work for local sustainability.

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[26] See SD21 (2012), review of chapter 34.
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