

Ministry of Ecology and Sustainable Development,
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
France

In association with the governments of
Belgium, Ghana, Mauritius and the United Kingdom

***The French National Strategy for
Sustainable Development:
Report on a Peer Review and Shared
Learning Process***

Facilitated by
The International Institute for Environment and Development

24 March 2005

Note on the content of this report

The recommendations on the French National Sustainable Development Strategy (NSDS) agreed by peer participants at a peer review/shared learning workshop February 2005 are given in full in the Executive Summary and in boxes in Chapters 3 – 6.

The remaining text of this final report has been prepared by Dr Barry Dalal-Clayton of the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) and revised to incorporate edits suggested by the peers as well as a number of boxes on aspects of the peers' own country experiences with NSDS.

Chapter 2 draws from international experience of NSDS and is included to provide a contextual background for Chapters 3-6.

PREFACE

There can be no sustainable development unless global governance is combined with national responsibilities. No country can hope to contribute on its own, but nothing will be achieved unless each country first makes a firm commitment on its home ground.

France intends to promote to the international community the need for accountability and solidarity in respect of future generations. We wanted to respond to this need by first enshrining the environment in our Constitution as a basic right and ensuring that we have a national sustainable development strategy.

Since the road to sustainable development is not marked out in advance, we must build on mutual experience and comparative assessments, within a process of continuous improvement. This is why, in Johannesburg, our President Jacques Chirac suggested that our country's efforts in favour of sustainable development should be the first to be subjected to peer review.

Four countries have agreed to provide us with their expertise: Belgium, Ghana, Mauritius and the UK. The United Nations Secretariat, the European Commission and the International Organisation of Francophonie have also contributed. I should like to thank them, as it must be said that common concepts and a shared vision are not a natural outcome of the diversity of our cultures and respective approaches.

Also grateful thanks to the International Institute for Environment and Development, which provided us with its competence and experience in a new and difficult exercise.

This peer review, carried out on a friendly basis but without showing any favour, should strengthen our commitment, while helping us to correct weaknesses in implementing our strategy.

However efficient it may be in carrying out sectoral policies, our administrative set-up is still having trouble grasping the cross-cutting nature of sustainable development and accepting the demands of genuine civil society participation.

As it makes the following recommendations its own, the French State will find a way to enhance its exemplary nature, combine its efficiency with that of the other stakeholders and establish itself as both partner and strategist in sustainable development.

Christian Brodhag

Inter-Ministerial Delegate
on Sustainable Development

4 April 2005

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

In his speech at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002, the President of the French Republic, M. Jacques Chirac, made a commitment that France would be prepared to submit its National Strategy for Sustainable Development (NSDS) to be 'peer reviewed' by other countries, following the proposal by the European Union to develop such a system in order to promote the sharing of experience.

As a follow up, a project was initiated in 2004 by the French Ministère de l'Ecologie et du Développement Durable (Ministry of Ecology and Sustainable Development) and the Ministère des Affaires Etrangères (Ministry of Foreign Affairs). The project aimed to develop and test a methodology for 'peer review' of NSDSs, using the French NSDS as an experimental case. The International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) was engaged to help develop the methodology and facilitate the process.

A technical workshop, held in Paris, on 8-9 November brought together government representatives from four partner countries (Belgium, Ghana, Mauritius and the UK) and from the UN Department for Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) and the European Commission (EC - DG Environment), and a range of actors who had been involved in developing and implementing the French NSDS. This workshop considered approaches to undertaking a peer review/shared learning process. It agreed an approach which was then followed and tested on an experimental basis during the French process. It also suggested how the process might be improved for application in future cases.

A peer review/shared learning workshop was then held in Paris on 7-11 February 2005. The peers included two representatives (one from government, one from civil society) from each of the four peer partner countries. Participants included representatives from UN DESA, the EC, the International Organisation of Francophonie, and 35 individuals from government departments/agencies and civil society (see Annex 1).

The workshop involved French participants providing answers and commentary related to a set of key questions and the peer countries sharing their own experiences. The questions were set by the peers, based on a Background Report prepared by IIED following analysis of a questionnaire and structured interviews with key actors. The questions were grouped under four strategy components: process, content, outcomes, and monitoring and indicators. The peers then agreed their recommendations structured in the same way (see below). Participants also offered suggestions on how the peer review/shared learning methodology could be improved in the future and these have been incorporated in an updated methodology paper.

The aim throughout has been to demonstrate that a peer review/shared learning process has common benefits for the involved countries and also for the international community. The experience and results of testing this experimental approach will be presented at the next meeting of the Commission for Sustainable Development (CSD) in New York in April 2005. The hope is that the approach will be found to have generic value that can be used (and developed further) by other countries through similar exercises, and that such an approach will be of help to countries as they seek to meet the UN target on NSDS¹ set out in the WSSD Plan of Implementation (§ 145).

¹ Take immediate steps to make progress in the formulation and elaboration of national strategies for sustainable development and begin their implementation by 2005.

Recommendations

The recommendations of the peers are presented in four sections:

- Process;
- Content;
- Implementation & Outcomes; and
- Monitoring and indicators.

Other perspectives on the NSDS from those interviewed which might also be considered when considering next steps are reflected in the updated background report.

(A) PROCESS

1. Empower public servants both at senior and operational levels to champion the integration of sustainable development into their activities

- 1.1 The Prime Minister should give more power to Senior Officials for Sustainable Development within their ministerial departments. These officials should be at a level and position in their respective ministries where they can influence decision-making. They should have common terms of reference which should include dedicated time and be part of their job objectives.
- 1.2 The sustainable development message should be cascaded by Senior Officials for Sustainable Development to the operational level (as has been done in education, through Prefects, and ambassadors).

2. Improve the quality of the process by investing more time and resources to plan the next review and future iterations, including implementation of the NSDS, in the following ways:

- 2.1 The Government should invest more heavily in planning for developing, implementing and reviewing the strategy. This should be done jointly with stakeholders. If there is a short timescale for the process, this should be discussed with stakeholders and the trade-off between time and quality understood by both sides.
- 2.2 This strategy planning process should take into account different decision processes and different resource levels in Government and civil society.
- 2.3 The Government should use stakeholder analysis to ensure that the expectations and aspirations of all stakeholders are evident at the beginning.
- 2.4 The NSDS process should be seen as cyclical and one that leads to continuous improvement.

3. Clarify the role of the National Council for Sustainable Development, and the relationship between and respective roles of the Council and the Government by the following means:

- 3.1 The Government and National Council for Sustainable Development should jointly consider how to put the Council on a more formal, long-term basis while retaining its independence.

- 3.2 Put in place good contacts between the Council and civil servants (particular Senior Officials responsible for Sustainable Development) as well as Ministers, and arrangements for integration, including through dialogue and joint meetings rather than parallel processes.
 - 3.3 The Government and the Council should agree a clear role for the Council in the implementation phase of the NSDS.
 - 3.4 The National Council for Sustainable Development and other stakeholder groups should act in a proactive role, not a reactive one, and should develop the capacity to submit proposals at the beginning of consultation.
 - 3.5 Ensure that the remit of the National Council for Sustainable Development covers both key themes and actors.
- 4. Ensure that the NSDS is fully institutionalised so that the progress of sustainable development in France is not vulnerable to political change, through the following means:**
- 4.1 Establish an iterative process including measures to ensure the review of the strategy takes place within a clear timeframe (possibly considering the Belgian model which has a legislative requirement for strategy review).
 - 4.2 The Government and civil society should inform and sensitise parliamentarians and the electorate on sustainable development themes and processes.
- 5. Put in place a more participatory process next time, adopting a dialogue model rather than one of consultation, through the following:**
- 5.1 The Government should give feedback, in writing, to participants at all stages in the process, and particularly to the National Council for Sustainable Development.
 - 5.2 Participatory processes are more resource intensive than non-participative ones: the Government should therefore ensure that investment of financial and other resources is adequate; and the National Council for Sustainable Development should mobilise additional resources from other sources to this end.
 - 5.3 Partnerships should not be limited to participation through the National Council for Sustainable Development; they should be expanded to the general public (eg through public hearings). They should adopt multiple methods to enable effective dialogue such as a committee of groups, individual groups, and directly with the public. France should adopt the UN approach of engaging with major groups as identified in Agenda 21.
 - 5.4 The Government should ensure participation of all Local Authority institutions in strategy planning, implementation and monitoring processes.

(B) CONTENTS

6. The government should ensure that the NSDS expresses a clear and compelling vision of sustainable development for the country (with a general sense of direction and how to get there), and a fuller assessment of the extent to which sustainability is already in place in the country.

- 6.1 Identification of key strategy topics should be based on international commitments (eg conventions, multi-lateral agreements), a national vision of sustainable development, analysis of stakeholder interests and wishes, and evidence that the NSDS has ensured the integration of the three pillars of sustainable development (environment, social and economic) in a balanced way.
- 6.2 The Millennium Development Goals should be incorporated into the NSDS.
- 6.3 For each action and commitment, three key elements need to be identified: timeframe, actors and means of implementation.
- 6.4 A cross cutting approach should be used to ensure that the NSDS clearly integrates the three pillars of sustainable development. In particular, it should better integrate social issues throughout and reflect agreed EU priorities (e.g. ageing, poverty, health) and provide for an interface between social and environmental needs.

7. The process of systematic integration should be taken further in future iterations of the strategy, e.g. through using strategic tools such as:

- 7.1 Strategic environmental assessment (SEA) and sustainability assessment;
- 7.2 Integration of sustainable development considerations into all State reforms such as the LOLF (*Loi organique relative aux lois de finance* - organic law on budget) process;
- 7.3 Institutional reforms; and
- 7.4 A further adaptation of fiscal structures.

8. The NSDS should promote sustainable development partnerships with developing countries.

9. The external dimension of the domestic sustainable development strategy should be taken into account, including footprint issues/cross border aspects, etc.

(C) IMPLEMENTATION AND OUTCOMES

10. Ensure consistent and coherent implementation at the national level.

- 10.1 The Inter-Ministerial Committee on Sustainable Development should ensure and be accountable for consistency between the NSDS and Governmental decisions and actions.
- 10.2 All ministries, and especially the Ministry of Interior, should ensure consistency between the NSDS and actions taken at the level of Regions and Departements, and between Regions and Departements, and share good practice.

10.3 The next, revised strategy should facilitate implementation through establishing policy instruments to meet international goals for changing unsustainable consumption and production patterns, for example, through product standards, economic (tax reforms) and social sensitisation.

11. Ensure consistent and coherent implementation among national, regional and local authorities

- 11.1 The Government should ensure that PASER/PASED and other local “deconcentration” (administrative decentralisation²) instruments, incorporate sustainable development goals and are consistent with NSDS objectives and commitments.
- 11.2 The Government should use contracting procedures (e.g., “Contrats de Plan”) between State and Local Authorities as a vehicle to promote sustainable development at the local level.
- 11.3 Local Authorities, the Government and specialized organizations must jointly define criteria for Local Agenda 21 (content and quality) in dialogue with civil society; and, in doing so, take note of international good practice in this area.

(D) MONITORING AND INDICATORS

12. A system of sustainable development indicators should be developed with a stronger mobilization and communication potential, rooted in more common ownership and better prioritised at all levels.

- 12.1 Develop sustainable development indicators for the general public that have a strong communication dimension, are readable and easy to understand. They should provide information about the state of sustainable development, reflect priorities and help to mobilize citizens’ own contributions to sustainable development.
- 12.2 Develop state indicators of sustainable development that have common ownership to promote collective engagement towards sustainable development, and ensure that the contribution of the National Council for Sustainable Development and other stakeholders is better anticipated, organized and responded to by the government.
- 12.3 Develop priority (headline) indicators linked to the NSDS priorities to show clearly whether the country is moving towards sustainable development.
- 12.4 Develop indicators that track qualitative changes and institutional processes.
- 12.5 Develop indicators of cultural change such as social cohesion and traditional knowledge.
- 12.6 Develop new data systems to measure sustainable development that are dynamic, forward-looking (“prospective”) and inter-generational. For this purpose, mobilise all available information sources (statistical offices, university research and other public custodians of data).
- 12.7 Facilitate coherence in sustainable development policy formulation at all decision-making levels, from national to local, by making available information at these levels

² ie representation of the State at regional and more local levels.

through adequate data collection and indicators.

13. Ensure effective monitoring of the progress of sustainable development which addresses the main global challenges and risks, by sharing information with stakeholders and encouraging cooperation in achieving NSDS objectives.

- 13.1 International commitments (including the Millennium Development Goals) should be translated into objectives and policies with targets that can be monitored within a clear timeframe.
- 13.2 The views of the National Assembly and the Senate on the two monitoring Reports to be submitted to them should be published and considered by the National Council for Sustainable Development and other actors.
- 13.3 Improve the quality of the monitoring process by linking the NSDS objectives and actions and the State indicators of sustainable development so that they are coherent.
- 13.4 Progress measures should be used to support a learning process to improve implementation of the current NSDS and to inform the development of the next NSDS. There is also a need for a political approach: the whole Government has to understand the progress measures and move them forward.

Chapter 1

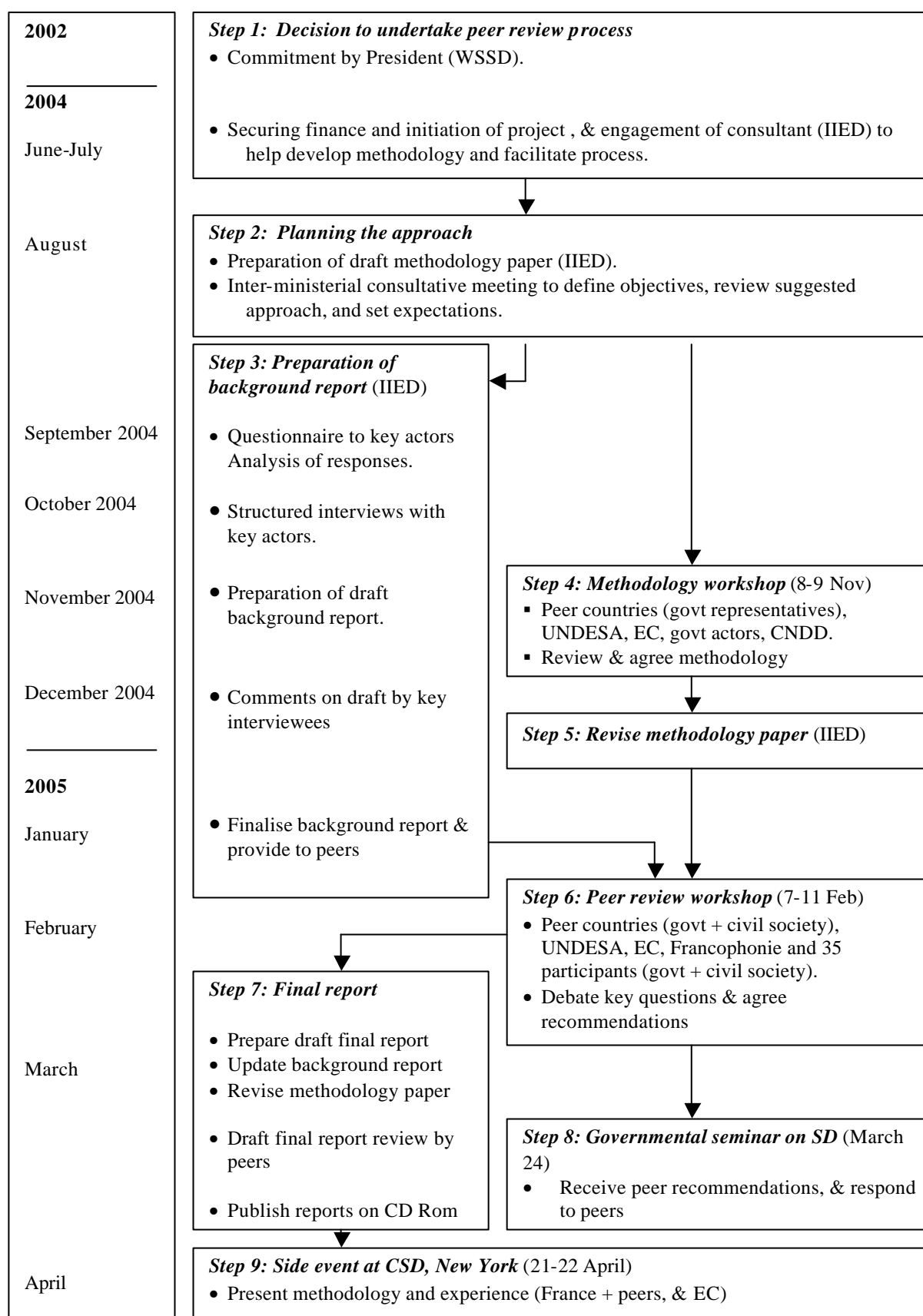
INTRODUCTION TO PROCESS AND METHODOLOGY

At the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002, the President of the French Republic, M. Jacques Chirac, committed France to submit its National Strategy for Sustainable Development (NSDS) to a 'peer review' process. The French Ministère de l'Écologie et du Développement Durable (Ministry of Ecology and Sustainable Development) and the Ministère des Affaires Étrangères (Ministry of Foreign Affairs) initiated planning for this project in mid 2004 and the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) was engaged to help develop a methodology and provide facilitation. Belgium, Ghana, Mauritius and the UK were asked to become partners in the initiative as peer countries.

The steps followed in this experimental approach were necessarily a blend of methodology development and test application of the approach (as illustrated in Figure 1). But in future applications, the methodology development steps (particularly a methodology workshop) would not be necessary. The four key steps involved:

- *Preparing a background report.* A questionnaire was circulated to a range of key government and civil society actors (see Appendix 1 of background report). Structured interviews were then undertaken with these key actors using a list of key questions (see Appendix 2 of background report) and supplementary questions arising from analysis of questionnaire responses. Based on the responses and review of a range of NSDS and related documentation, a draft report was prepared and revised based on feedback from interviewees. This background report was provided as a baseline resource to the peers.
- *Methodology workshop* for the peers and French actors to agree on a first version of the methodology for testing. During this workshop, the peers decided that the approach should focus on four key strategy components: *process, content, outcomes, and monitoring and indicators*. For consistency and to provide a continuing framework for the methodology, these components were also used as the structure for the background report – completed after the methodology workshop - and for focusing the main questions to be addressed during the subsequent peer review workshop and the resulting recommendations made by the peer countries.
- *Peer review workshop* (one week) involving the four peer countries (one representative from government; one from civil society); representatives from UN DESA the EC; the International Organisation of Francophonie; and 35 French participants from government and civil society. French participants provided answers and commentary related to a set of key questions set by the peers (based on the background report and other documents) and the peer countries shared their own experiences. A day was set aside for the peers to discuss their conclusions and agree their recommendations.
- *Revision of the methodology:* Based on lessons learned during the French process, participants in the peer review workshop also offered suggestions on how the peer review/shared learning methodology could be improved in the future. These have been incorporated in an updated methodology paper which sets out a “generic methodology”. It provides an options-based approach that countries can tailor according to the stage of strategy development or implementation that they have reached and depending on the country circumstances and particular needs. In the case of France the peer partners were asked to provide recommendations for further improvement of the French NSDS.

Figure 1: Steps in the French NSDS peer review project



Chapter 2

BACKGROUND AND KEY CHALLENGES FOR NATIONAL STRATEGIES FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT³

2.1 International commitments to NSDS

In June 1992, Agenda 21 called for all countries to develop national sustainable development strategies (NSDSs) (UNCED, 1992). These are intended to translate the ideas and commitments of the UN Earth Summit held in Rio de Janeiro into concrete policies and actions. Agenda 21 recognised that key decisions are needed at the national level, and should be made by governments and other stakeholders together. It believed that the huge agenda inherent in sustainable development needed an orderly approach – a ‘strategy’.

In 1997, the UN Special Session (Rio+5) reviewed progress five years after the Earth Summit. Delegates were concerned about continued environmental deterioration, and social and economic marginalisation. There had been success stories, but they were fragmented, or they had caused other problems. Sustainable development as a mainstream process of societal transformation remained elusive. Strategic policy and institutional changes were still required. The Rio+5 assessment led governments to set a target of 2002 for *introducing* national sustainable development strategies.

In November 2001, a UN International Forum on National Strategies for Sustainable Development was held in Ghana in preparation for the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD). The participants elaborated guidance on the process of developing and implementing NSDSs. This guidance (UN DESA 2002b) was presented in January 2002 to PrepCom2 for the WSSD. It emphasises multi-stakeholder processes, continuous learning and improvement, and effective mechanisms for co-ordinating strategic planning.

In 2000, at the Millennium UN summit, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) agreed by world leaders include one to ‘integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes and to reverse the loss of environmental resources’ (UNGA 2001, Goal 7, target 9)³. NSDS processes offer an effective mechanism to achieving this particular goal and, conversely, an NSDS needs to find ways to address the different MDG goals and targets.

In August-September 2002, at the Johannesburg WSSD, governments again committed themselves to *developing* NSDSs, agreeing in the Plan of Implementation “to take immediate steps to make progress in the formulation and elaboration of national strategies for sustainable development and begin their implementation by 2005” (Paragraph 145b).

2.2 Learning from NSDS experience at the national level

There have been some valuable lessons from earlier approaches to develop sustainable development strategies during the 1980s and also during the 1990s. However the main success of these pioneering strategies has not been in their implementation, but rather in their role in improving awareness of sustainable development issues amongst a wide range of stakeholders; in developing sustainable development pilot projects; in setting up

³ This chapter draws from a synthesis of experience and lessons on good practice with NSDS (see Dala-Clayton *et al.*, 2002)

environmental authorities where these were missing; and in co-coordinating/integrating authorities and fora concerned with sustainable development.

It is now generally accepted that an NSDS should improve the integration of social and environmental objectives into key economic development processes. Simultaneously, an NSDS should be a set of locally driven, continuing processes responding to global commitments. The logic behind the NSDS approach is illustrated in Figure 1.

Establishing a new or stand-alone strategic planning process would rarely be recommended. The main source of learning for a strategy is the review and evaluation of past strategies. Past experience even suggests that, in circumstances of continuing and increasing change, effective strategies require systematic and iterative processes of learning and doing. The more recent sustainable development strategies introduced in some countries during the 1990s do not have discrete beginnings or ends. 'Strategy' is increasingly being used to imply an iterative, learning and continuous improvement framework or system to develop and achieve a shared vision, rather than one-off exercises (see Figure 2).

2.3 Common guidelines for a learning system

To steer the development of such a system, UNDESA has proposed a set of guideline principles for NSDS that can be summarised as (UN DESA 2001a,b):

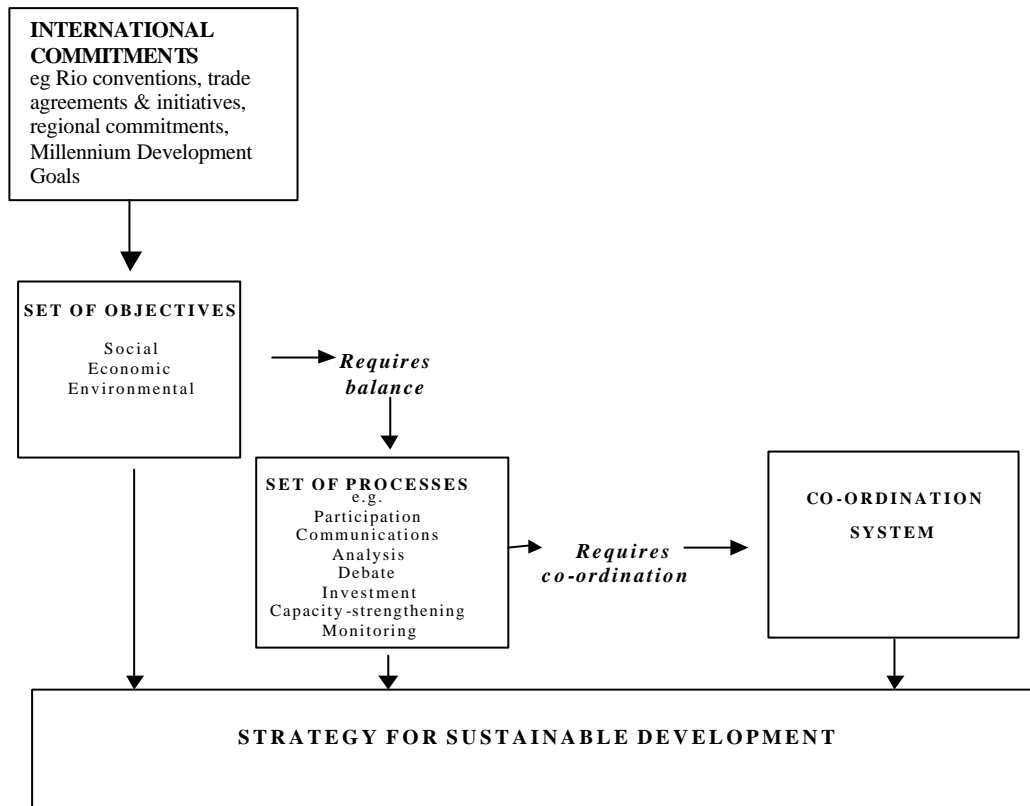
- Integration of economic, social and environmental objectives responding to global commitments;
- Coordination and balance between sector and thematic strategies and decentralised levels, and across generations;
- Broad participation, effective partnerships, transparency and accountability;
- Country ownership, shared vision with a clear timeframe on which stakeholders agree, commitment and continuous improvement;
- Developing capacity and an enabling environment, building on existing knowledge and processes;
- Focus on priorities, outcomes and coherent means of implementation;
- Linkage with budget and investment processes;
- Continuous monitoring and evaluation.

These guidelines and characteristics have provided the baseline for the peer review/shared learning methodology (see methodology paper), enabling key questions to be asked concerning how far a country has progressed in terms of satisfying each principle.

Putting an NSDS into operation would, in practice, most likely consist of using promising, existing processes as entry points, and strengthening them in terms of the key guideline principles listed above. NSDSs are demand-driven processes combining bottom-up to top-down actions.

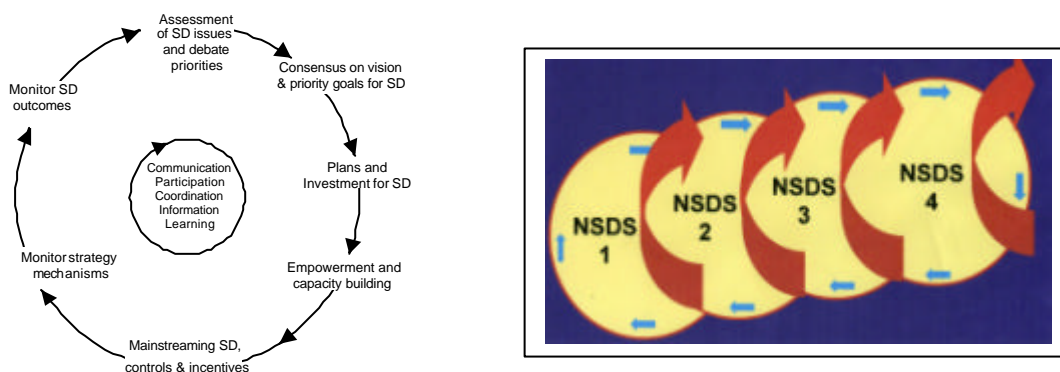
The challenges of providing effective management of this combination of principles are now more clearly seen to be about institutional change – about generating awareness, reaching consensus on values, building commitment, creating an environment with the right incentives, working on shared tasks – and doing so at a pace with which stakeholders can cope. The means to do this are participation, analysis, debate, experiment, prioritisation, transparency, monitoring, accountability and review. All countries will have some elements of these systems within existing strategic planning mechanisms. The challenge is to find them, bring them together in an integrated system and strengthen them in a coordinated and coherent manner.

Figure 1: Rationale for a systematic approach to sustainable development strategies



Note: This figure might suggest that a sustainable development strategy involves a linear sequence of steps. In practice, strategies need to follow a cyclical, continuous improvement approach with monitoring and evaluation of the processes and outcomes; enabling, renewed debate on key issues and needs; review of the national development vision; and adjustment of actions – as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2: The continuous improvement approach to sustainable development strategies



Note: The left figure might suggest that the overall process involves a rigid sequence of steps. However, in practice, these are on-going and necessarily overlap (as in the right figure). Key features of the central tasks are stakeholder identification, strengthening capacity, collaboration and outreach.

An NSDS can best be seen as a set of co-coordinated mechanisms and processes to implement the above principles and help society work towards sustainable development – but not as ‘master plans’ which will get out of date. This will help improve convergence between existing policies, strategies and plans, avoid duplication, confusion and straining capacity and resources. The guidance on NSDS provided by the UN (UNDESA 2002b) provide a timely and effective way forward at national to local levels. They offer a ‘fitness for sustainable development’ diagnostic and a ‘gap analysis’ to identify processes and mechanisms that are missing. Because national strategies are now understood as being based on “what works” from government, civil society and private sector sources, they should be able to spur countries on to real institutional change by clarifying the issue as one of ‘identify and scale up’ rather than ‘start again’.

2.4 The challenge of multiple strategies

Most developed and developing countries now have some form of national strategy for sustainable development (NSDS) in place or in progress. UN DESA provides an annual map of the state of play based on national reports to the Commission for Sustainable Development. (Figure 3 shows the latest edition). Many strategies tend not to address the whole scope of sustainable development, but focus only on environmental or (increasingly) poverty issues.

Reviewing the state of play also reveals that even the largest countries today are facing a form of ‘policy inflation’ through the sequential performance of multiple strategy exercises. In brief, these include:

For poverty alleviation. Poverty Reduction Strategies (PRSs) are the predominant approach, promoted by the World Bank (as part of requirements for securing debt relief). Many bilateral development agencies have accorded Poverty Reduction Strategies Papers (PRSPs) a central place in their support to developing countries.

For environmental conservation. The global Conventions that resulted from the 1992 Earth Summit each demand some form of national response. The predominant frameworks include National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans under the Convention on Biological Diversity, National Communications under the Framework Convention on Climate Change, National Action Plans under the Convention to Combat Desertification, and National Forest Programmes to implement the Proposals for Action by the Inter-Governmental Panel on Forests. In some countries, frameworks that were developed in the 1980s and early 1990s – National Environmental Action Plans (NEAPs) and National Conservation Strategies – are still in operation.

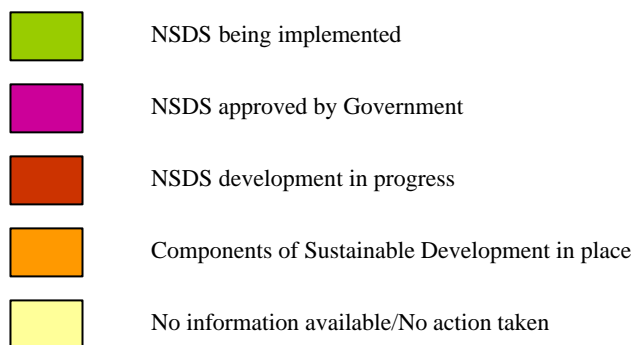
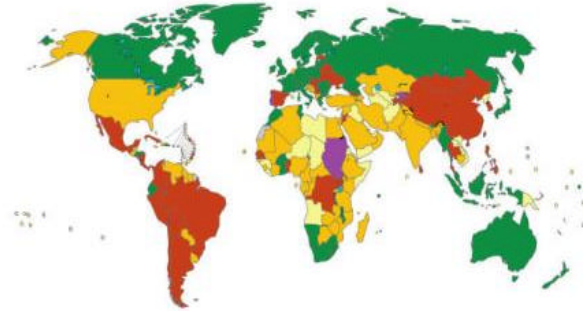
For an integrated approach to sustainable development. Three recognised frameworks are predominant, and one ‘organic’ option has emerged in practice:

- At local level, *Local Agenda 21s* have been developed in thousands of local districts or municipalities, as means to put Agenda 21 into action. Some of these have led to significant innovation and changed behaviour.
- The national-level equivalent is the *National Sustainable Development Strategy (NSDS)*
- In 1999, the World Bank introduced the concept of the *Comprehensive Development Frameworks (CDF)* as means to ensure integrated development. But this approach has now been largely subsumed under the international focus on PRSPs

Figure 3

**National Sustainable Development Strategies:
The Global Picture 2004**

February, 2005
Division for Sustainable Development
UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs



- Other integrated approaches to sustainable development have developed more organically, most notably the evolution of those environmental strategies (for example, Pakistan) which have progressively had to deal with social and economic issues during implementation, or through the evolution of national development plans, which have had to face up to pressing social and environmental concerns (as in Thailand).

Experience in many countries indicates that there continue to be a number of common challenges to national strategies. But the transition to sustainable development clearly requires a coordinated, structured (i.e. strategic) response that deals with priorities, that can manage complexity and uncertainties, and that encourages innovation.

2.5 Key components for reviewing and learning about an NSDS: process, content, outcomes, and monitoring

The continuous cycle shown in Figure 2 implies an iterative process in which lessons learned from developing and then implementing an NSDS, gathered particularly through continuous monitoring and evaluation, are fed back into strategy review and revision. This perspective suggests four key components that can be used as a framework for reviewing and learning about a strategy: process, content, outcomes, and monitoring. Chapters 3 – 6 are concerned, in turn, with each of these components, providing the findings resulting from the peer review/shared learning workshop and the peers' conclusions and recommendations. The Background Report on the French NSDS is similarly structured to facilitate access to key information.

Process: Chapter 3 is concerned with the actual process through which the strategy was developed and the roles and contributions of the key actors.

Content: Chapter 4 addresses the structure and content of the French NSDS and the main themes and issues addressed and proposed actions.

Outcomes: Chapter 5 examines what has resulted over the last 18 months of implementing the NSDS, particularly the actions and initiatives undertaken and their results in terms of fostering sustainable development.

Monitoring: Chapter 6 deals with the steps taken to monitor implementation of the NSDS and the indicators established to monitor both the state of sustainable development in France and implementing strategy actions.

Chapter 3

PROCESS OF DEVELOPING THE FRENCH NSDS

The process of developing the NSDS is set out in the revised background report.

The peers were impressed with the progress made in France in developing its NSDS. In particular, it was noted that there was strong *political commitment* flowing from the speech of the President, M. Jacques Chirac, to the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002 and in his election manifesto. This was translated into *institutional commitment* with the re-focusing of the Ministry of Environment and Regional Planning as the Ministry of Ecology and Sustainable Development and the appointment of Senior Officials responsible for Sustainable Development in all ministries. The committee of Senior Officials for Sustainable Development appears to be working well, and several ministries have clearly started to implement sustainable development actions within their administrations. But the peers noted that other Senior Officials have faced considerable challenges in promoting awareness and interest in pursuing a sustainable development agenda in their ministries. Their role and functions need strengthening.

Recommendations

1. Empower public servants both at senior and operational levels to champion the integration of sustainable development into their activities

- 1.1 The Prime Minister should give more power to Senior Officials for Sustainable Development within their ministerial departments. These officials should be at a level and position in their respective ministries where they can influence decision-making. They should have common terms of reference which should include dedicated time and be part of their job objectives.
- 1.2 The sustainable development message should be cascaded by Senior Officials for Sustainable Development to the operational level (as has been done in education, through Prefects, and ambassadors).

State-level commitment was demonstrated by the decisions of the Government seminar of sustainable development in 2002 to develop an NSDS and establish the National Council for Sustainable Development (CNDD) as an interface of the government to take into account the views of civil society and to carry on work undertaken by the French Committee for WSSD and the French Commission for Sustainable Development. Many countries have established similar forums – some as quasi-autonomous institutions of government, others fully independent (see Box 3.1 for experience in the peer countries).

Further indications of pursuing an *iterative process* are demonstrated by the fact the NSDS built on ideas and suggestions first articulated in an earlier (but not adopted) sustainable development strategy in 1997, further articulated in work undertaken by the Ministry of Environment in 2001, and suggestions developed as part of a report prepared in 2002 by the French Committee for the World Summit on Sustainable Development.

Box 3.1: National forums for Sustainable Development in peer countries

In **Belgium** the Federal Council for Sustainable Development (FCSD) is an official advisory body, composed of representatives of the major social groups and stakeholders. It advises the Federal Government on draft sustainable development plans and other policy proposals (see Box 3.7)

In **Ghana**, the National Committee on Sustainable Development (NCSD) is an all-embracing forum with representatives from government, NGOs, the private sector and civil society to address sustainable development.

In the **UK**, the independent Sustainable Development Commission functions as a 'critical friend' of the government with regard to its efforts to promote sustainable development and is to be given new responsibilities to report on progress in implementing the new (2005) UK NSDS (see Box 5.1).

Box 3.2: Building on previous strategic planning initiatives in Ghana

Ghana has a long history of development planning dating back to the colonial days. Three approaches to strategic planning for sustainable development are currently being followed:

- long-term development strategies that incorporate all dimensions of sustainable development;
- a cross-sectoral approach, reflected in the National Environmental Action Plan (NEAP) and the Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy (GPRS). The latter built on a number of earlier strategic planning initiatives:
 - Human Development Strategy (1991);
 - National Development Policy Framework (1994) – a 25 year development perspective;
 - Vision 2020: the First Step (1995) – a five-year policy statement; later developed into the First Medium Term Development Plan (1996-2000);and
 - an Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (2000) – limited in scope.
- sector strategies, which cover the economic, social and environmental, and institutional dimensions of sustainability.

The decentralization programme has provided consistency in the planning process at all levels - national, regional and district levels.

Box 3.3: No single NSDS yet in Mauritius

Mauritius has no dedicated single strategy for sustainable development. Rather it is moving forward by taking a series of actions in various sectors: to protect the atmosphere, conserve biodiversity, promote sustainable agriculture, manage waste, and manage both fresh water and the marine environment (see Box 3.6). Regarding the latter, following stakeholder consultations, the Government decided to ban sand extraction from the coast lagoon from October 2001, to prevent further irreversible effects on the marine environment. A sustainable lagoon management strategy was developed after a complete assessment of all economic, social and ecological impacts of this decision. Compensation was paid to former sand miners and boat owners, and social measures proposed for their redeployment. In other fields and appropriate training given. Ecological monitoring shows that some ecosystem recovery has started but full recovery is likely to take another 10-15 years.

The peers welcome this *cyclical approach* and recommend that it be continued with a continuous process to review strategy progress and outcomes and periodic revision through an improved process. International agreements and accepted good practice place a strong emphasis on the need for broad stakeholder participation in NSDSs and investing adequate time and effort in planning such processes. The more successful and enduring strategies have been those where time was taken to assess the situation, plan the process, and build consensus amongst stakeholders on the strategy steps, the means and scheduling of engagement, and roles and responsibilities.

Recommendations

2. *Improve the quality of the process by investing more time and resources to plan the next review and future iterations, including implementation of the NSDS, in the following ways:*

- 2.1 The Government should invest more heavily in planning for developing, implementing and reviewing the strategy. This should be done jointly with stakeholders. If there is a short timescale for the process, this should be discussed with stakeholders and the trade-off between time and quality understood by both sides.
- 2.2 This strategy planning process should take into account different decision processes and different resource levels in Government and civil society.
- 2.3 The Government should use stakeholder analysis to ensure that the expectations and aspirations of all stakeholders are evident at the beginning.
- 2.4 The NSDS process should be seen as cyclical and one that leads to continuous improvement.

The strategy was developed within a relatively short time period (November 2002 – June 2003). Given this constraint, all those who contributed worked extremely hard on the comprehensive coverage achieved by the strategy document. The process followed two tracks with Government working groups addressing seven key themes, and CNDD working groups *working in parallel* on broadly similar themes. The peers were impressed by the thoroughness of the efforts of the civil society contribution, particularly given their work is voluntary, and recognise the difficulties faced in meeting Government deadlines. The input from the CNDD side was delivered to the government on schedule in late April 2003. However, given the delivery deadline set by the Government seminar, by this time the format and content of the strategy was already largely set by the government. Identifying opportunities and establishing mechanisms for more structured and effective integration between the two processes will clearly benefit the process in the future. The peers noted some criticism that there had been a lack of response from the government to contributions and suggestions submitted by civil society through CNDD and that information on how such inputs had been used. Experience shows that stakeholders are likely to become more engaged in a strategy and that broader ‘ownership’ is more likely to flow where there is more good *feedback, good communication and transparency*.

Whilst there is a clear and formal role (backed by a prime Ministerial Decree) for the CNDD in contributing to the development of the NSDS, its role in implementation is somewhat unclear. Experience shows, that an NSDS can only be really successful if the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders are clearly established.

Recommendations

3. ***Clarify the role of the National Council for Sustainable Development, and the relationship between and respective roles of the Council and the Government by the following means:***
 - 3.1 The Government and National Council for Sustainable Development should jointly consider how to put the Council on a more formal, long-term basis while retaining its independence.
 - 3.2 Put in place good contacts between the Council and civil servants (particular Senior Officials responsible for Sustainable Development) as well as Ministers, and arrangements for integration, including through dialogue and joint meetings rather than parallel processes.
 - 3.3 The Government and the Council should agree a clear role for the Council in the implementation phase of the NSDS.
 - 3.4 The National Council for Sustainable Development and other stakeholder groups should act in a proactive role, not a reactive one, and should develop the capacity to submit proposals at the beginning of consultation.
 - 3.5 Ensure that the remit of the National Council for Sustainable Development covers both key themes and actors.

There appears to have been little involvement of parliamentarians in the process to develop and debate the strategy. International experience suggests that their engagement can add perspective and considerable value to a strategy, particularly if organised in such a way that it seeks cross-party consensus. This has the added value of helping to ***maintain commitment and momentum beyond elections and changes of government***. The experience of Ghana (Box 3.4) shows how a strategy can fail to survive such governmental change.

Box 3.4: Ghana's Vision-2020 experience

Ghana-Vision 2020 (completed in 1994) was seen as an umbrella process, providing a broad vision of long-term development goals. It enjoyed strong political support in that then President and ruling party initiated it. When the National Development Policy Framework (NDPF) - the precursor of Vision 2020 - was being formulated, political parties were not allowed. They emerged in 1992 but there was a failure to then involve them adequately in shaping the Vision 2020 process and to seek their views and concurrence on key issues. As a consequence, they showed no affinity for Vision-2020 which became regarded within certain political circles as the policy of the then government.

It was therefore not surprising that when the government changed in 2000, it de-emphasised Vision 2020 as a framework for formulating economic policies as well as the goal to achieve middle-income status by 2020. It reasoned that this goal could not be achieved in the planned timeframe, given the major slippages in achieving targets under the First Medium-Term Development Plan (1995-2000). In its place, an alternative vision was proclaimed – to develop Ghana into a major agro-industrial nation by 2010, propelled by a “golden age of business”.

Equally, awareness of sustainable development issues and challenges amongst the general public, and their engagement in the process, is critical if the strategy is to be implemented effectively. It is at the local and individual level that decisions on many actions are taken that, cumulatively, determine progress towards the aims of sustainable development. More needs to be done to raise such public awareness and enable their engagement in the strategy process.

Recommendations

4. *Ensure that the NSDS is fully institutionalised so that the progress of sustainable development in France is not vulnerable to political change, through the following means:*

- 4.1 Establish an iterative process including measures to ensure the review of the strategy takes place within a clear timeframe (possibly considering the Belgian model which has a legislative requirement for strategy review).
- 4.2 The Government and civil society should inform and sensitise parliamentarians and the electorate on sustainable development themes and processes.

Effective *stakeholder participation* is recognised as a key factor that will determine the success of a strategy. Stakeholders need to be identified. A useful framework for this is the 'major group' structure used by the UN. But there is also a need to define better the respective roles of the government, civil society and private sector in national processes as well as international negotiations concerning sustainable development. Mechanisms for their effective participation need to be developed. For example, civil society often needs to be enabled to prepare properly for meetings (governments and the private sector can do this as part of their jobs), and supported financially. In developing the recent UK NSDS, a range of approaches to engage stakeholders was used (Box 3.5). Similarly, in Mauritius, public consultation mechanisms have been established for various initiatives (Box 3.6).

Box 3.5: UK use of consultation and participation methods

In its review of the 1999 sustainable development strategy '*A Better Quality of Life*', the UK set out to focus more strongly on delivery of sustainable development. Recognising that a strategy is more likely to be successfully delivered if there is a participative process for its creation, there was a desire to harness a wide range of views, and to involve many of those who would be delivering the strategy, in particular from local and regional levels in the UK.

A range of ways in which people and organisations could have an input to the strategy were put in place, including:

- website-based consultation around 40 questions. The website was open for three months, and a summary of responses was provided for further comment half-way through the process. Over half of those responding chose to do so online, and this method of responding attracted many new participants;
- each Region was asked to convene a panel of key actors and to hold discussions and report back to Government;
- key NGO stakeholders were asked to host seminars on subjects of their own choosing based on the consultation paper prepared by the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), and DEFRA provided a small financial contribution to the events. There was a good response, and DEFRA was able to put organisations in touch with others with similar interests to run joint events. The reports of the 23 events were fed into the strategy review; and
- special packs were prepared to help discussions at community level. 240 community leaders and volunteers were trained in facilitating discussions on sustainable development, and 176 community groups made an input to the strategy review.

It is proposed to continue to use innovative ways of engaging stakeholders through the implementation phase.

Box 3.6: Examples of public consultation in Mauritius

Environmental Protection (Amendment) Bill

Since its adoption in 1991, the Environment Protection Act has been amended on various occasions. The first draft of a further amendment Bill was submitted to Parliament in June 2001. It was made available (in hard copy on request, and on the website) of the Ministry of Environment) for public comment and suggestions. Some 70 organizations and individuals responded and all comments and suggestions were compiled and tabulated according to the sections of the Act. The draft Bill together with an Introductory Note about the proposed changes in the law were sent to a range of major stakeholders for their views, comments and suggestions (eg MPs, ministries and agencies, private sector, consultants, NGOs, consumer associations, the media).

A one-day seminar was then organised with 100 participants from major stakeholders to discuss and streamline the written comments received. These and the suggestions made during the workshop were compiled and examined by a committee within the Ministry of Environment. Several suggestions made during the above consultative process, particularly on the transparency and public participation in the EIA procedure, were incorporated into a new draft amendment Bill, submitted for Cabinet approval in May 2002 before being adopted by Parliament.

The national network for sustainable development

Under the above Act, a National Network for Sustainable Development has been established as an “enabling platform” and forum for consultation and discussion on issues related particularly to sustainable development and environmental management. It comprises representatives of Ministries, the Private Sector, the Civil Society and all NGOs registered with the Ministry of Environment and the National Development Unit.

Integrated Coastal Zone Management Committee

The Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) Committee has been established as a platform for widespread consultation on managing the coastal zone in an integrated and holistic manner. It comprises members from all governmental institutions, as well as NGO’s, parastatals and private organisations.

The terms ‘consultation’ and ‘participation’ are frequently used interchangeably. Consultation is only one form of participation. Participation needs to ensure the engagement of actors both ‘horizontally’ (with links between sectors/resources/communities) and ‘vertically’ (with links between national and local interests)

However, a participatory approach is rarely associated with quick decisions. Participation along with ensuring a cyclical approach (i.e. periodic revision and adjustment to take account of learning from implementation and feedback from monitoring and policy evaluation – rather a one-off effort) are two key, linked requirements for effective strategies for sustainable development. In effect, a successful strategy is one in which the capacity is built up to think and work strategically, as a product of all appropriate groups in interaction. Successful strategies and policies have tended to evolve over time. Rarely have they been integrated deliberately in a single, supreme planning effort (although sometimes, perhaps, they should be). Indeed, deliberate strategic planning has always been difficult. Transformations in development patterns can be made through incremental responses to general economic and societal trends, political awareness and public opinion. Hence there is now a focus on NSDS as a *set of continuing mechanisms that keep sustainable development on the national agenda and are able to deal with change.*

The need for the “widest possible participation” in working towards sustainable development is noted in a number of chapters of Agenda 21, although there is little clarity about how to assure it. This is a tremendous challenge, without precedent. The requirements for participation are likely to depend on the scope and goals of the strategy, as well as on political and social circumstances. A balance needs to be struck between involving as wide a range of participants as possible to forge a broad-based and durable consensus, and avoiding overloading the facilitating and managerial capacities of those who are organising the strategy process.

Recommendations

5. Put in place a more participatory process next time, adopting a dialogue model rather than one of consultation, through the following:

- 5.1 The Government should give feedback, in writing, to participants at all stages in the process, and particularly to the National Council for Sustainable Development.
- 5.2 Participatory processes are more resource intensive than non-participative ones: the Government should therefore ensure that investment of financial and other resources is adequate; and the National Council for Sustainable Development should mobilise additional resources from other sources to this end.
- 5.3 Partnerships should not be limited to participation through the National Council for Sustainable Development; they should be expanded to the general public (eg through public hearings). They should adopt multiple methods to enable effective dialogue such as a committee of groups, individual groups, and directly with the public. France should adopt the UN approach of engaging with major groups as identified in Agenda 21.
- 5.4 The Government should ensure participation of all Local Authority institutions in strategy planning, implementation and monitoring processes

Box 3.7: Coordinating sustainable development policy in Belgium

The Act of 5 May 1997 on the *Co-ordination of the Federal Sustainable Development Policy* established a strategic process of consecutive rounds of reporting, planning, consulting, implementing, and monitoring. The aim is to develop measures at the federal level to implement the objective of sustainable development. The Belgian *Federal Strategy for Sustainable Development* (FSSD), which is not yet a *national* strategy, is based on the following instruments:

- **Federal reports on sustainable development:** Every two years, a report is published that reviews the situation (using indicators), evaluates the implementation of the sustainable development policy (previous plans), and sets out foresight based on various scenarios (for the next plans). The report is prepared by the cross-disciplinary Task Force on Sustainable Development (TFSD) and published under the authority of the Federal Planning Bureau (FPB) (a public agency).
- **Federal plans for sustainable development (FPSD):** Every four years, based on the above reports, a draft plan is issued by the Inter-departmental Commission for Sustainable Development (ICSD). After extensive public consultation, the plan is amended as necessary and finally submitted to the Council of Ministers for political approval. The plan aims to promote the effectiveness and internal coherence of Government policy with respect to sustainable development.
- **Reports of the federal administrations and the ICSD:** Every year, the federal administration reports to the ICSD on progress in implementing the Federal Plan for Sustainable Development.

- ***The Federal Council for Sustainable Development (FCSD)*** (see Box 3.1). The 1997 Act requires the federal government to justify where the final FPSD diverges from the advice given by the FCSD. In this way, the Act indicates the importance given to the opinion of civil society in the context of the Federal Plan.

Chapter 4

STRATEGY CONTENT

General international experience and guidance suggests that an NSDS should contain the following main elements:

- a formulation of the goals and principles of sustainable development and the vision of a sustainable national society;
- an assessment of the present situation in the country and how far it is already sustainable or where it falls short or is travelling in the wrong direction;
- in the light of the above, identification of the main changes that will need to be undertaken by the different actors in society;
- identification of the main policies and interventions that will need to be put in place to bring about the changes above.

The French SDS contains many of the above elements. But it appeared to the peer group that it could have done more to present a clear and compelling *vision of sustainable development* - of the sustainable society that is aspired to. The peers and others felt that whilst there is a vision for each thematic programme in the strategy, the strategy would benefit from a better outline of an overall vision to provide direction for both the government and broader society, as well as a fuller assessment of the extent to which sustainability is already in place in France. Such an assessment might have given a clearer view of the areas in which there are serious problems at present and in which the priorities for change might be identified. In a future iteration of the strategy it might be helpful to start with such an assessment so as to guide the policy prioritisation process more systematically.

The NSDS adopted on 3 June 2003 extends, with detailed action programmes, the short-term measures agreed at the Governmental Seminar in November 2002. According to the first annual report on NSDS implementation, the NSDS “establishes an intervention framework to take into account long-term and global effects resulting from economic development and individual behaviour. It directs the governmental action for the next five years and fixes objectives to every minister”.

The NSDS text focuses on the three key pillars of sustainable development: economic, social and environmental. These are recognised internationally as the basis for a genuine NSDS. Many countries also address additional pillars which are domestically important. For example, the French strategy includes ‘culture’ as a fourth dimension. But the key function of an NSDS is to *integrate objectives* relating to the three core pillars and, where such integration proves difficult or impossible, to provide mechanisms to negotiate trade-offs.

Participants in the peer review workshop pointed out that France has experience over the past 20 years of integrating environmental and economic issues, but that it has proved less easy to integrate the social concerns. The ‘social’ appears to be focusing on salary differentials, equity concerns, exclusions, etc. At the European level, the European sustainable development strategy has specifically attempted to address a number of other important socio-economic issues including ageing, poverty, health and education. In future iterations of the French strategy it would be useful to address some of these and other social issues in more depth. The peers also felt that in reviewing and revising the strategy, it would help to place more emphasis on integrating the three pillars both in terms of analysis and balancing objectives. This is made much easier when there is a clear vision of sustainable development for a country.

The peer group was particularly interested to explore with their French partners the means by which cross-cutting issues could be addressed, and the way in which generic approaches and policies could be used to advance sustainability. They were impressed with the way in which sustainable development has begun to be integrated into the general approach of the Ministry of Economics, Finance and Industry, and hence into cross sectoral policies on budgetary allocations, procurement policies, utilisation of energy and other resources, and to some extent into fiscal policies. But they thought that this process of systematic integration could be taken further in future iterations with the further development and application of such instruments as strategic impacts assessment, integration of sustainable development considerations into the LOLF process, and further adaptation of fiscal structures and balance.

The peer group was interested to explore how far the strategy was being effective in bringing about changes in the whole range of Government policies and actions in a more sustainable direction. The general view was that it is not possible to separate the influence of the strategy as such from the more general drive towards sustainability initiated by the President and Prime Minister and driven forwards through a variety of channels. It is clear that this strong political impetus has brought about a number of significant changes in specific policy areas such as agriculture, energy, procurement policy, more efficient transport modes, etc. It appeared that this driver of political momentum was probably the most effective initial impetus, but it was thought that the strategy and the kind of systematic reorientation of expectations, objectives and methodologies that the strategy had put in place would be very effective in consolidating and entrenching the sustainability approach.

In order for the role and function of an NSDS to be fully evident to all actors, many countries are finding it helps to place development objectives and planned actions in the *broader context* of existing policies and commitments, and in relation to regional agreements and strategies. The peer group noted that France has long been an active and progressive force in international debates on sustainable development issues, and takes very seriously its obligation to carry through domestically the obligations it undertakes in international and European settings. The whole process of international and European policy-making in this area therefore operates as a continuous and highly effective form of high-level peer review and stimulus to maintain France's position at the forefront of sustainable development aspiration and achievement. At the international level, obligations under the Kyoto Protocol are currently the most conspicuous example.

At the European level, the forthcoming proposals from the European Commission on the review of the European Sustainable Development Strategy should provide the opportunity of assessing how French and European policies and strategies on sustainable development can be most mutually supportive. In this regard, the next French NSDS could make more clear its links with Europe-wide commitments set out in the EU sustainable development strategy. Equally the next EU strategy will need to build much more explicitly on the themes and foci of the NSDSs of member states. Also of great importance is the need to situate an NSDS in the context of international undertakings on sustainable development agreed under multilateral agreements and conventions, and in relation to the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) agreed at the UN Millennium Summit and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation agreed at WSSD in 2002.

France is one of the leading donor countries in terms of international co-operation, and has made some progress in recent years in incorporating sustainability amongst its main objectives for development assistance. There is probably more that could be done in this direction but it depends critically on partnership with the developing countries themselves and the extent to which sustainable development has become embedded in their own development priorities.

The French strategy is based around a number of themes or strategic axes and 10 action programmes with objectives and 500 actions. The peers noted views that this made the strategy complex and difficult for the general public to understand. Communication is better achieved when strategies are expressed as short, clear, explanatory documents with key messages. These help to raise public awareness and buy-in.

To give practical expression to such a comprehensive and complex strategy requires that the timeframe for implementing its many aspects needs to be clear to all actors (eg establishing, reorganising institutional structures, modifying or introducing new legislation or rules, building partnerships, implementing agreed actions). And the roles and responsibilities of different actors to implement these changes and actions must be clear as well as the means to achieve them. If these factors are not adequately addressed by the strategy, then it is likely to be ineffective or only partially put into operation.

Recommendations

6. *The government should ensure that the NSDS expresses a clear and compelling vision of sustainable development for the country (with a general sense of direction and how to get there), and a fuller assessment of the extent to which sustainability is already in place in the country.*

6.1 Identification of key strategy topics should be based on international commitments (eg conventions, multi-lateral agreements), a national vision of sustainable development, analysis of stakeholder interests and wishes, and evidence that the NSDS has ensured the integration of the three pillars of sustainable development (environment, social and economic) in a balanced way.

6.2 The Millennium Development Goals should be incorporated into the NSDS.

6.3 For each action and commitment, three key elements need to be identified: timeframe, actors and means of implementation.

6.4 A cross cutting approach should be used to ensure that the NSDS clearly integrates the three pillars of sustainable development. In particular, it should better integrate social issues throughout and reflect agreed EU priorities (e.g. ageing, poverty, health) and provide for an interface between social and environmental needs.

Furthermore, an NSDS needs to provide leadership and direction for sustainable development. But in doing so, the multiple views on sustainable development of stakeholders need to be taken into account. 'Space' need to be provided for these to be expressed and for dialogue and building consensus on needs and priorities through participatory processes, taking into account analyses and assessments of sustainable development trends.

The peers felt that the next French NSDS would benefit from a fuller exploration of the broad context. Also, the links between different strategy themes, axes and programmes and between the NSDS and other policies, plans (at national to local levels) and reform processes, and the impacts of policies and actions on each other and externally (ie beyond France), all need to be explored.

The peers were impressed by the growing number of Local Agenda 21 (LA21) initiatives in France. Many countries have recognised the need to build on or integrate the rich experience of LA21s in developing and implementing their NSDSs. Certainly more can be done in

France and the peers welcomed the commitment in the NSDS to develop 500 LA21s within 5 years. Consideration will need to be given to how this target will be met and to clarifying the roles of Government, Prefects, Local Authorities and other stakeholders in this regard.

One of the recognised principles of a good NSDS is that it is closely integrated with the main vehicle of economic development policy and associated plans, and particularly with the budget process. In developing the NSDS, the government stressed that sustainable development must be integrated in every public policy, and the objective of the NSDS is to specify the priorities of this integration, within a 5 year agenda. The strategy is not intended as an additional policy. Therefore the government deliberately made no specific linkage to the budget process. It is intended to be a mechanism or '*chapeau*' for steering the actions of different ministries and administrations towards sustainable development, but is not, in general, expected to incur additional costs. But discussions at the peer review workshop explored in some detail how the budget reform process (introducing a new organic law on budget - *Loi organique relative aux lois de finance*) provides a significant opportunity from 2006 to align government around the NSDS and structure the activities and reporting of individual ministries to meet the objectives and targets of the NSDS.

Recommendations

7. *The process of systematic integration should be taken further in future iterations of the strategy, e.g. through using strategic tools such as:*

- 7.1 Strategic environmental assessment (SEA) and sustainability assessment;
- 7.2 Integration of sustainable development considerations into all State reforms such as the LOLF (*Loi organique relative aux lois de finance* - organic law on budget) process;
- 7.3 Institutional reforms; and
- 7.4 A further adaptation of fiscal structures.

Box 4.1: Strategy coherence and coordination: the Belgium situation

The Belgian Federal Government has limited policy competences (areas where it has the right to act as a public authority). Those for environment issues for instance, reside mainly with the Regions. The first Federal Plan for Sustainable Development (FPSD) (2000 -2004) follows the structure of Agenda 21. The second FPSD (2004 -2008) focuses on the six themes of the EU Strategy for Sustainable Development. Improvements are still necessary on the inter-relations between all the existing federal plans. Analysis reveals that 45 % of all measures in the second FPSD in some way reiterate measures from the first plan. There is also a risk of overlap between the FPSDs and existing sectoral or thematic federal policy plans. The second FPSD mentions federal thematic plans but does not contain measures to improve their coherence and co-ordination.

Following further the theme of the external dimension of an NSDS, the policies of developed countries can have great influence on the economies and environments of developing countries. For example, demand for hardwoods and soya products in the North has had a massive impact on the way that tropical forests in some countries are (unsustainably)

exploited and this, in turn, has caused severe environmental (and social) problems. So assessing the 'ecological footprint' of the balance of policies and actions in an NSDS (both domestically and internationally) is important. The World Summit on Sustainable Development sought to promote partnerships to foster sustainable development – between governments, the private sector and civil society organisations, and between North and South. The policies of official development cooperation agencies now emphasise the need to recognise the domestic priorities and sustainable development strategies of developing countries as the basis for assistance. An NSDS provides a mechanism to focus and organise partnerships between actors (both within and between countries) to drive sustainable development.

Recommendations

- 8. The NSDS should promote sustainable development partnerships with developing countries.*
- 9. The external dimension of the domestic sustainable development strategy should be taken into account, including footprint issues/cross border aspects, etc*

Chapter 5

IMPLEMENTATION AND OUTCOMES OF STRATEGY

The peer review workshop was not able to give detailed consideration to the outcomes of the NSDS since implementation has only been underway for 18 months. Institutionalising sustainable development is recognised as a key challenge. In this regard, the various *institutional structures* established during the strategy process appear to be working well. In particular, the creation of Senior Officials for Sustainable Development as promoters and ambassadors for sustainable development in their individual ministries is a model that many countries might find appropriate. And the Permanent Committee of Senior Officials for Sustainable Development, chaired by the new Inter-Ministerial Delegate on Sustainable Development, is reported to be functioning well as a vehicle for exchange, integration and mutual support.

At a higher level, the Government has shown commitment to sustainable development by establishing the Inter-Ministerial Committee on Sustainable Development (CIDD) which approved the NSDS in June 2003. The existence such a high-profile body (in effect the national Cabinet sitting in session to focus on sustainable development) is a step to achieve progress towards sustainable development. Such a body can establish the means to make sure that Government-wide policies, decisions and actions are consistent with the objectives of, and activities undertaken under, the NSDS, and to act transparently to monitor and report on progress in this regard.

Box 5.1: Ensuring the strategy is delivered in the UK

One of the main criticisms of the 1999 UK Strategy – which Government would agree with – was that it did not focus rigorously enough on implementation. In order to improve this, the new strategy ‘*Securing the Future*’, launched in March 2005, includes a chapter devoted specifically to measures designed to strengthen delivery. These include requiring each Government Department to prepare an action plan setting out how it will take forward the commitments in the strategy for which it is responsible, and to report annually against that.

A cross-Departmental Programme Board consisting of senior Government officials will oversee delivery and manage risks, meeting three or four times a year. A major challenge will be to provide the Board with adequate information to assess progress and take corrective action, while avoiding unmanageable levels of detail. And instead of the Government producing its own report on progress, it is proposed to give the independent Sustainable Development Commission (SDC) the role of reporting on progress – to the Prime Minister. The terms of this new role are currently being developed, in partnership with the SDC and all Government Departments, and additional resource will be provided.

Box 5.2: Tracking strategy implementation in Belgium

Each Federal Report on Sustainable Development (FRSD) contains a list of “indicators for sustainable development” describing the situation in Belgium. Each indicator is related to sustainable development commitments and inter-linkages, showing shifts towards, or away, from sustainable development. But it is impossible to describe the outcomes of policy initiatives on the basis of the trends of these sustainable indicators (see Box 6.3). Policy progress measures made in a recent policy evaluation by the Task Force on Sustainable Development (see Box 3.7) show that, over the first three years of implementation, at least 56 % of all measures of the first Federal Plan for Sustainable

Development are being implemented - most of these are still “under preparation” (20 % of all measures) or being executed (32 % of all measures). 32% of all measures are left “without information” on their implementation. Only a few measures (4%) are reported to be not yet implemented. 8% of all measures are in various other categories (eg. obsolete).

One of the main challenges in industrialised economies is to ensure that production and consumption patterns are sustainable. This has become an international goal recognised, for example, in the Plan of Implementation agreed at the World Summit on Sustainable Development. In reviewing and revising the strategy, France will wish to examine appropriate policy instruments to meet this challenge.

Recommendations

10. Ensure consistent and coherent implementation at the national level.

- 10.1 The Inter-Ministerial Committee on Sustainable Development should ensure and be accountable for consistency between the NSDS and Governmental decisions and actions.
- 10.2 All ministries, and especially the Ministry of Interior, should ensure consistency between the NSDS and actions taken at the level of Regions and Departements, and between Regions and Departements, and share good practice.
- 10.3 The next, revised strategy should facilitate implementation through establishing policy instruments to meet international goals for changing unsustainable consumption and production patterns, for example, through product standards, economic (tax reforms) and social sensitisation.

An important principle of NSDSs is to ensure integration and synergy between national and local planning and development (***vertical integration***). It is clear that many initiatives on sustainable development are taking place at sub-national levels – in Regions, Departements and municipalities, some influenced by the NSDS but many more emerging through local processes. The Prefects have a significant role to play in promoting such local approaches and in the implementation of the NSDS in their area, and this is well recognised by the NSDS. It is important, therefore, that these local initiatives (eg Local Agendas 21) and the objectives and actions of the NSDS are aligned with each and are mutually reinforcing. In this respect, the development of State strategic action projects at the regional level (PASER) and Departemental level (PASED) will benefit from ensuring such consistency.

Box 5.3: Examples of integration and coordination in Ghana

There are a number of positive experiences in Ghana related to integration and coordination – necessary for a successful NSDS process:

- efforts to align national policy to budget management through the Medium-Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF);
- using strategic environmental assessment (SEA) to mainstream environmental issues in the Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy (GPRS) – probably the first such applications in Africa;
- increasing cooperation amongst key government agencies such as the Ministry of Environment and Science (MES), the National Development Planning Commission (NDPC), and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

In the process to review and revise the NSDS, it will be important to establish mechanisms for dialogue and cooperation between actors at the local level (Local Authorities, Prefects, the private sector and civil society organisations) and those at the national level (particularly Government) to find ways to engage meaningfully with each other.

It is also accepted that sustainable development will be enhanced where local initiatives are undertaken according to common approaches, where appropriate and possible, to foster synergy and mutual learning.

Recommendations

11. Ensure consistent and coherent implementation among national, regional and local authorities

- 11.1 The Government should ensure that PASER/PASED and other local “deconcentration” (devolution) instruments, incorporate sustainable development goals and are consistent with NSDS objectives and commitments.
- 11.2 The Government should use contracting procedures (e.g., “Contrats de Plan”) between State and Local Authorities as a vehicle to promote sustainable development at the local level.
- 11.3 Local Authorities, the Government and specialized organizations must jointly define criteria for Local Agenda 21 (content and quality) in dialogue with civil society; and, in doing so, take note of international good practice in this area.

In most countries, the general public is becoming increasingly aware of environmental issues, and there are growing demands for safeguard actions. But public understanding of sustainable development remains weak, particularly concerning the concept as the integration of three pillars (environment, social and economic). There is much to be done everywhere to present this concept in a simple, meaningful and engaging way. In taking the NSDS forward, France will need to give attention to these communication issues.

Much can be done to build on the model of the annual week dedicated to sustainable development, introduced in June 2003 by the Ministry of Ecology and Sustainable Development. The peers also welcomed the internal efforts of Government to provide training on sustainable development in individual ministries and to focus on the subject in particular meetings (eg the annual Ambassadors’ conference). In the field of corporate social responsibility, the ORSE⁴ functions well as a forum for the exchange of views amongst different economic actors and interest groups such as companies, trade unions, investors, and NGOs.

⁴ Observatory for Corporate Social Responsibility. ORSE is a member of the CNDD

Box 5.4: Successes and challenges in Ghana

Successes

- Macro-economic stability has been achieved: Fiscal policies are working;
- There has been appreciable reduction in poverty levels by region, gender, trades, etc.
- Ghana has seen a shift towards private sector led growth;
- Governance issues have become a primary national issue, including
 - accountability projects,
 - the rule of law,
 - gender mainstreaming,
 - democracy and popular decision-making, etc.
- There is an effective and workable decentralized form of government. Sectors are able to monitor and evaluate development trends within their areas of concern and to appreciate the inter-relationships between sectors and the cross cutting nature of development issues and poverty as an overarching national concern.
- Every sector strives to attain global targets set out in MDG(s) and Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, and thereby assists to establish generally acceptable national aggregations of these issues for planning purposes.

Main challenges

- Low perception and understanding of sustainable development;
- Little commitment of policy-makers to strategic planning;
- Marginalization of a critical mass of the population in a globalizing world.

Chapter 6

MONITORING AND INDICATORS

It is critical to know that a strategy for sustainable development has been successful and is on the right path. Yet, not only do strategies have multiple objectives, they also include activities that will change over time and so will social, economic and environmental conditions. This presents a considerable challenge for monitoring and evaluation, but one that must be met, since the whole point of a strategic approach is to learn and adapt. The central monitoring and evaluation requirement is, therefore, to track systematically the key variables and processes over time and space and see how they change as a result of strategy activities). To do this requires: measuring and analysing sustainability; monitoring implementation of the strategy; evaluating the results of the strategy; and reporting and dissemination of the findings.

The NSDS provides for two annual reports with two separate sets of indicators on which are required to be submitted to parliament: the state of sustainable development in France; and the state of NSDS implementation.

The peer review workshop discussed the list of 45 indicators on the state of sustainable development in France developed by an inter-ministerial working group and published in August 2004. It was noted that the CNDD had submitted comments on the proposed indicators in response to a ministerial request and civil servants in charge of developing indicators⁵, but was critical of the lack of adequate feedback on their use or on progress with developing the indicators. It will be submitting further comments in 2005.

Internationally, much effort is underway to identify and agree indicators that reflect the integrated nature of sustainable development (ie that integrate the three pillars: environment, social and economic). Much attention has been devoted to seeking a small set – or even a single indicator – that meets this need. But this is proving to be a difficult challenge, especially given that the ‘currency’ or ‘language’ of indicators for the three dimensions cannot readily be merged. Economic indicators are usually expressed in monetary terms and environmental indicators in physical units (eg hectares of forest lost, numbers of species, concentration of pollutants). Social indicators are related to both real life situations (such as unemployment or poverty rates) and human values (influenced by culture, morals, religion, etc.). So it is no surprise that the French set of 45 indicators are similarly compartmentalised and that critics have called for more integrated indicators. It is a real challenge.

Box 6.2: SD Indicators in Ghana

In Ghana, there are increasing efforts to monitor national policies, including the selection and development of indicators. Core indicators have been developed for the Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy. The Ministry of Environment and Science has also identified indicators based on the UNCSD guidelines and methodologies.

‘Hard’ indicators are important to track individual environmental, social or economic trends. Communicating progress on sustainable development *per se* must be done with indicators that indicate whether progress is heading in the right direction (towards or away from

⁵ The recommendations « Vers une empreinte de développement durable » are available in French and English.

sustainability). Experience suggests that the indicators that are likely to be more useful and effective (usable) are those readily understandable, particularly where they can be easily perceived by the general public (ie they have a strong potential to communicate progress). This means that considerable effort needs to be made to engage in broad multi-stakeholder debate (through the CNDD but also by direct engagement with the public) to seek consensus on meaningful indicators that enjoy common support. Where suggestions are submitted, there needs to be a transparent and timely response from Government to indicate how these have been incorporated or not used, and why.

Inevitably a lot of indicators can be generated, and this can give rise to overload and confusion. Some countries have found it useful to identify a small set of priority (headline) indicators to signal the broad directions of change (eg the UK). These can include a mix of quantitative and qualitative measures as well as measures of institutional and cultural changes.

Using indicators places a heavy demand for data, and all existing sources need to be mobilised and marshalled to input and share information.

Box 6.3: Monitoring mechanisms and trends in Belgium

The Belgian Federal Plan for Sustainable Development process established several mechanisms for monitoring. Administrative monitoring is used to check implementation by different government departments. Although important efforts have been made in the recent years, improvements are still necessary in the distribution of responsibilities and in the accessibility and uniformity of reports. An integrated framework is required to interconnect the sustainable development indicators regularly published in the Belgian Federal Report on Sustainable development and to provide a global picture, but this is still to be elaborated. Only partial trends are currently available. Some trends are positive, eg increased life expectancy, emergence of ethical and solidarity investment funds¹, and the development of social economy initiatives. Others are negative, eg increasing pressures on human and natural capital by the consumption of energy and tobacco, transportation, and fisheries.

1: investment funds based on criteria other than monetary profitability

The first annual report on implementation was presented to the Council of Ministers on 1st December 2004. It was noted that the Ministry of Ecology and Sustainable Development has now identified almost 500 actions that it is tracking – a formidable task. The peers were impressed by the progress measures on the state of implementation of the NSDS which are now available on the websites of the Ministry of Ecology and Sustainable Development and the Prime Minister⁶. It is planned to update this every six months. These tables present progress on the actions in each of the action programmes at four levels: not-started, started, on-going and achieved. This is an approach that other countries might find valuable to adopt.

Recommendations

12. A system of sustainable development indicators should be developed with a stronger mobilization and communication potential, rooted in more common ownership and better prioritised at all levels.

12.1 Develop sustainable development indicators for the general public that have a strong

⁶ Available on http://www.ecologie.gouv.fr/article.php3?id_article=3224

communication dimension, are readable and easy to understand. They should provide information about the state of sustainable development, reflect priorities and help to mobilize citizens' own contributions to sustainable development.

- 12.2 Develop State indicators of sustainable development that have common ownership to promote collective engagement towards sustainable development, and ensure that the contribution of the National Council for Sustainable Development and other stakeholders is better anticipated, organized and responded to by the government.
- 12.3 Develop priority (headline) indicators linked to the NSDS priorities to show clearly whether the country is moving towards sustainable development.
- 12.4 Develop indicators that track qualitative changes and institutional processes.
- 12.5 Develop indicators of cultural change such as social cohesion and traditional knowledge.
- 12.6 Develop new data systems to measure sustainable development that are dynamic, forward-looking ("prospective") and inter-generational. For this purpose, mobilise all available information sources (statistical offices, university research and other public custodians of data).
- 12.7 Facilitate coherence in sustainable development policy formulation at all decision-making levels, from national to local, by making available information at these levels through adequate data collection and indicators.

Dialogue between the organs of government and civil society organisations is critical if debate on the direction of sustainable development is to be meaningful and effective. Such dialogue will be enhanced if the views of different actors (including Parliament) on the two annual progress reports are made public.

Recommendations

13. Ensure effective monitoring of the progress of sustainable development which addresses the main global challenges and risks, by sharing information with stakeholders and encouraging cooperation in achieving NSDS objectives.

- 13.1 International commitments (including the Millennium Development Goals) should be translated into objectives and policies with targets that can be monitored within a clear timeframe.
- 13.2 The views of the National Assembly and the Senate on the two monitoring Reports to be submitted to them should be published and considered by the National Council for Sustainable Development and other actors.
- 13.3 Improve the quality of the monitoring process by linking the NSDS objectives and actions and the State indicators of sustainable development so that they are coherent.
- 13.4 Progress measures should be used to support a learning process to improve implementation of the current NSDS and to inform the development of the next NSDS. There is also a need for a political approach: the whole Government has to understand the progress measures and move them forward.

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Sources of information on NSDS

See dedicated strategies website at www.nssd.net. This site [click on links] provides summary information and contact details (including websites wherever possible) for institutions, organisations, agencies and networks known to be actively involved in the field of National Sustainable Development Strategies

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