



# HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

## Issue Briefs

### 5. *From silos to integrated policy making*

#### Introduction

Achieving effective integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development goes beyond merely “aggregating” independently formulated policies across the different domains. It entails taking into account inter-linkages among different areas of policy at the formulation stage. Integration implies that policy-making in any one area takes into account the effects of (and on) policies and outcomes in other sectors and areas. This will help ensure that policy is mutually coherent across the full range of dimensions, and that the effects of policy in one area do not contradict or undermine desired outcomes in others. This also enables to incorporate in sectoral policy-making cross-cutting dimensions that are crucial to achieving sustainable development, such as sustainable consumption and production.

For example, the High-Level Panel on Global Assessment of Resources for Implementing the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 estimates that the total amount required to protect wetlands is approximately US \$33 billion per year on average. The vast majority of this cost is for expenditure required to acquire land and to prevent it being converted to an alternative use. If incentives were put in place to encourage the sustainable use of biodiversity, then it is likely that this pressure to convert habitats would be reduced. In the absence of such conversion pressure, the remaining resource requirements would only be around site management and positive incentives to provide ecosystem services – which in the wetland example, add up to around US \$3 billion per year on average – a number 11 times smaller than the initial estimate of resource needs.

Source: Report of the HP GARISPB, 2013.

Integrated or (“nexus”) approaches, aim to find development paths that consider synergies and trade-offs among sectors. Such approaches are applicable at different levels. At the global level, long-term sustainable development scenarios have consistently shown that approaches based on multiple goals related to the economic, social and environmental dimensions allow for the identification of significant benefits, while highlighting trade-offs that cannot be identified from purely sectoral approaches. At the national level, recent applied research has shown that integrated planning backed by integrated modeling of land, energy and water resources and integrating climate variability not only has the potential to identify solutions and paths that are of greater value to policy-makers, but also exposes important differences in terms of investment requirements and required policies,

compared to traditional sectoral policies. Another area where integrated planning has proven to be a critical tool is urban development. Valuable experience is also being acquired in the application of a nexus approach in transboundary settings where integration and coordination are more complex, and friction and potential conflicts may result from tensions between sectoral objectives.

Insights are emerging from on-going integrated assessments in transboundary river basins. The Alazani/Ganikh Basin, shared by Azerbaijan and Georgia, demonstrates decisive importance of energy policies for protecting ecosystem and water resources from the negative effects of deforestation. Also, modernizing water infrastructure reducing losses would be a helpful step in reducing the pressures on natural resources and would improve the local economy. In the Sava Basin, preliminary findings highlight that the need for irrigation will grow, as will investments in the energy sector. At the same time, extreme weather events and predicted increasing water scarcity pose risks. Furthermore, investments should be made in new land reclamation strategies. All these developments are linked and involve trade-offs, which underlines the importance of an integrated assessment of implications at large as well as of a broad stakeholder involvement.

Cross-sectoral linkages also have implications for the financing of sustainable development objectives, as investments made to achieve a given goal influence the approach, resourcing and effectiveness of the delivery of others. Understanding these inter-linkages and co-dependencies across sustainable development objectives is critical in order to accurately assess investment needs and enhance investment effectiveness.

## *Integration and sustainable development*

Integration and coordination are essential for overall policy coherence. This was recognized early on in the institutional history of sustainable development. Agenda 21 called on Governments to adopt national strategies for sustainable development and harmonize their economic, social and environment policies and plans. In 2002, the Johannesburg Summit underlined the need to establish or strengthen existing authorities and mechanisms necessary for policy-making, coordination and implementation and enforcement of laws. At the Rio+20 Conference in 2012, UN Member States reiterated their commitment to mainstream sustainable development at all levels, and recognized the interlinkages between its three dimensions.

In the context of a universal, people-centred, integrated sustainable development agenda post-2015, it can be expected that integration will be at the center of policy concerns. For example, it has long been recognized that post-conflict recovery needs to be better integrated with development concerns. Similarly, it is becoming increasingly clear that concerns related to climate change mitigation and adaptation have to be better integrated with traditional development concerns, as addressing these concerns in isolation leads to fragmentation, lost synergies, and lack of effectiveness.

Recent reports of the UN Secretary-General showed that the United Nations system is working towards furthering the integration of economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development in its analytical work, operations and programmes, as well as in intergovernmental and interagency policy making and monitoring fora (such as the Standing Committee on Nutrition, and the Committee on World Food Security) to support integrated policymaking at the national, regional and international levels. However, integration is not yet the default mode of operation of the system. Greater efforts are needed at the interagency level, at the level of



organizations, and at the national level.

## Key issues for progress

A “silo mentality” remains entrenched in the overall institutional arrangements at all levels. At the international level, the silo approach persists, as agreements, targets and financial commitments are organized by sector. This sector-oriented approach affects the coverage, coherence and consistency of international public financing frameworks for sustainable development. Overcoming institutional fragmentation and resistance is a difficult task, especially in an environment of tight budgets, limited staff, unreliable funding streams, and shifting donor priorities.

At the national level, policy fragmentation also remains a challenge, as governments are often organized along sectoral lines and effective inter-sectoral structures and coordination arrangements are commonly lacking. A silo approach to planning often combines with inadequate financial resources and limited human and institutional capacities, as well as, in some countries, with uncertainties resulting from conflict or post-conflict situations.

Efforts to mainstream sustainable development into national strategies and their success differ across the board, based on the approach taken and the characteristics, capacity and institutional culture of each country. In general, it has been noted that while the social agenda of the MDGs has been largely mainstreamed into the national strategies, many countries have yet to fully integrate all three dimensions of sustainable development in their national development strategies.

There is, however, a multitude of good practices, as well as guidelines, resource materials, planning models, tools and approaches that national and local governments can use towards integrating sustainable development into their policies and *modi operandi*. For example, in recent years, toolkits on inclusive green growth have been developed for the use of policy-makers at the national level. National studies on the climate- energy- land- water cluster or “nexus” have been conducted in more than 15 countries.

Integrated approaches for climate, land, energy and water aim to balance the productivity and availability of water, energy, and land resources within environmental and economic systems, taking into account climatic constraints. Such approaches often identify innovative paths that avoid costly mistakes stemming from isolated policy making. A pioneering pilot assessment of the climate – land – energy – water – development nexus in Mauritius has demonstrated the practical benefits of integrated analysis for policy making. The assessment of this nexus has helped in identifying possible development paths and strategies that are resilient against adverse climate scenarios for the future, which sector-based strategies could not identify. In a short time, the Mauritius case study has inspired many similar applications in other countries.

Institutional arrangements for sustainable development are key to achieving integrated decision - making and implementation of sustainable development priorities. Experience has shown that a number of factors, applicable to most countries, contribute to success. These include the need to (i) adopt a single national development strategy with sustainable development at its core; (ii) efficiently utilize communication channels between the multiple layers of governance to ensure coherence and coordination through capacity-building, introduction of enhanced technologies, and use of reliable data; (iii) establish robust monitoring, assessing, reporting and accountability mechanisms backed with adequate financial resources to ensure implementation; (iv) enhance existing processes and institutions that have integrated some or all of the dimensions of sustainable development and



use them as examples; (v) encourage participation of stakeholders and take account of their input and experiences, (vi) develop the use of innovative, integrated delivery mechanisms that bring sectors and actors together to achieve common objectives; and (vii) put in place financial instruments and incentives that promote and encourage integrated and people-centred business practices and projects.

Sustainable development councils and similar platforms at the national level, such as platforms to ensure an effective interface between scientists and policy-makers, can be useful mechanisms not only in reporting and measuring progress on sustainable development, but also on ensuring stakeholder involvement both in the process of developing a strategy and implementing it.

## *Guiding questions*

The session will be organized around the following framing questions:

- How can we move towards integrated decision making and policies successfully addressing economic, social and environmental dimensions?
- How can traditional institutional arrangements be reorganized to be more flexible, adaptive, effective and collaborative in order to promote integrated policy and decision making? What can be possible incentives?
- What lessons have been learned from integrated policy making in areas such as climate - energy -water - agriculture and food security, including how well they address poverty issues?

