

**Department of Economic and Social Affairs
Division for Sustainable Development**

REPORT

**Expert Group Meeting on
Reviewing National Sustainable Development Strategies**

New York, USA

10 – 11 October 2005

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Background

1. Agenda 21 calls on countries to adopt National Sustainable Development Strategies that build upon and harmonize existing economic, social and environmental policies and plans at the national level. At the Special Session of the UN General Assembly in 1997, countries adopted 2002 as the target date for the formulation and elaboration of NSDS. The World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in its Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (JPOI) states that all countries should take immediate steps to make progress in the formulation and elaboration of NSDS and begin their implementation by 2005. Most recently, at the 2005 UN World Summit¹, world leaders confirmed their commitment to sustainable development and stressed that “the role of national policies and development strategies cannot be overemphasized in the achievement of sustainable development” (par. 22).

2. The Division for Sustainable Development (DSD) within the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) works to support the efforts of governments to develop, implement and review NSDS. In 2001, DSD convened an International Forum on NSDS in Ghana which adopted a set of recommendations on which basis a Guidance Document² outlining key characteristics of a sound NSDS was prepared. The Guidance Document defined NSDS as: “a coordinated, participatory and iterative process of thoughts and action to achieve economic, environmental and social objectives in a balanced and integrated manner at the national and local levels.”

3. Since 2001, DSD has convened four regional meetings to facilitate understanding of NSDS and related sustainable development indicators, providing a forum for sharing experience among interested countries and organizations. Many countries have made progress toward reaching the 2005 target and are now undergoing various review and assessment exercises. In 2004 DSD participated in a Review of the French National Sustainable Development Strategy, initiated and organized by the Government of France. Both France and the peer countries that participated gave high marks to the utility and effectiveness of this Peer Review process. DSD therefore decided to convene this global Expert Group Meeting to share the methodology of the French Peer Review. The Meeting was held in New York from 10 – 11 October 2005 and was co-organized with the Government of France. Mr. Christian Brodhag, Inter-Ministerial Delegate for Sustainable Development, France and Ms. Mary Pat Silveira, Chief, National Information, Monitoring and Outreach Branch DESA/DSD, co-Chaired the Meeting.

¹ 2005 World Summit: High-level Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly at its Sixtieth Session, United Nations Headquarters, New York, 14 to 16 September 2005. The Outcome of the World Summit may be found in document A/60/L.1.

² Background Paper No. 13 “Guidance in preparing a national sustainable development strategy: Managing sustainable development in the new millennium” presented to the Commission on Sustainable Development acting as the preparatory committee for the World Summit on Sustainable Development, Second preparatory session, 18 January – 8 February 2002.

B. Objectives

4. The objectives of the Expert Group meeting were as follows:
 - a. To share experience and lessons learned from different approaches to NSDS reviews, assessments and shared learning;
 - b. To discuss country interest in peer reviews and shared learning exercises;
 - c. To reflect on how the international community could support such efforts.

4. Participants

5. A list of participants is attached as an Annex to the report.

II. SUMMARY OF DISCUSSIONS

6. The Expert Group Meeting opened with addresses by the two co-chairs. The opening was followed by presentations and discussion of specific review and assessment approaches, work by intergovernmental organizations and recommendations for next steps.

A. Opening session

7. Mr. Christian Brodhag, France, set the stage for discussions with reflections on current NSDS experience, noting the shift in national planning from traditional fixed plans and policies towards operating an adaptive system that continuously improves and adjusts as the country develops. The unique experience of countries requires a flexible review approach with the ability to adapt to specific county circumstances and priorities. There is a need to coordinate global initiatives and multilateral agreements relevant to sustainable development and to take account of processes dealing with public private partnerships, including the Global Compact, Global Reporting Initiative, the Marrakech Process on Production and Consumption Patterns and ISO standard setting such as that related to corporate social responsibility. It is important to involve stakeholders through, e.g. National Councils for Sustainable Development; to improve vertical integration through local Agenda 21 initiatives; to obtain scientific advice for planning; to mainstream environment in all development goals, and to consider the potential and role of the private sector.

8. Ms. Mary Pat Silveria, DSD, welcomed participants, and thanked the Government of France for its strong leadership in promoting the Peer Review process and for its substantive and financial support to the Meeting. She outlined the various approaches to NSDS reviews that are currently being taken, at different points of the strategy cycle and for different purposes, ranging from assessing a country's strategic planning mechanisms, to the shape and content of its strategy, to the strategy's implementation. This diversity and multiplicity of assessment

methodologies for NSDS signals that NSDS are maturing; that they have entered into second and third generations; and that they are more strongly owned by countries than perhaps was the case in the first round. At the same time, and consistent with the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, many countries are reviewing their Poverty Reduction Strategies to ensure the integration of all three pillars of sustainable development and, through this process, to bring them more closely in line with NSDS. A recent meeting organized jointly by the United Nations (DESA/DSD), UNDP, UNEP and the Government of Ghana, from 4-7 October 2005 in Accra, discussed this process. In conclusion, Ms. Silveira emphasized her hope that the meeting would provide a better understanding of the role of assessments and reviews and how they can facilitate achieving sustainable development goals.

B. Presentation of French Peer Review – Shared Learning Methodology and Experience from review countries

9. Mr. Barry Dalal-Clayton, IIED, introduced the options-based methodology piloted by the Government of France with peers from Belgium, Ghana, Mauritius and the United Kingdom. The purpose of the review is to ensure that the Strategy reflects the principles contained in Agenda 21 and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation. The review should be cost-effective, relatively simple and replicable, of relatively short duration, non-judgmental, options-based and geared toward sharing experience and lessons. The methodology allows for tailoring to a country's needs and circumstances, to the stage of NSDS implementation and to the phase of the NSDS cycle. Good preparation is necessary, including sufficient information gathering and analysis and a preliminary consultation among the peers. Representative stakeholders should be involved throughout. At the end of the review process, the peers agree on a set of recommendations for consideration by the focus country in the implementation and possible later revision, as was the case with the French Peer Review.

10. One of the peers involved in the French Review was Ms. Nadine Gouzee, Belgium, who emphasized that all countries that have committed to making progress with NSDS formulation and implementation could benefit from this voluntary learning process, both as the reviewed country and as a peer. Participating as a Peer Reviewer is useful for two main reasons: it allows one to learn more and to use that learning to act as a catalyst for deeper and more constructive dialogue among the SD actors at home. Among other things, a Peer Review assists a country in expressing a clear and compelling vision of sustainable development; in incorporating the Millennium Development Goals into the Strategy; in using strategic tools such as Strategic Environmental Assessments, institutional reform and adaptive fiscal structures; and in promoting partnerships between developed and developing countries. In conclusion, Ms. Gouzee informed participants that, upon their return to Belgium, the two peers from Belgium had recommended to their government that it should carry out a peer review as soon as the national Belgian strategy had been adopted and implementation begun.

11. The two persons from Ghana who had served as peers in the French Peer Review, Mr. Rudolph Kuuzegh and Mr. Seth Vordzorgbe of Ghana, spoke about the status of NSDS development in Ghana and, in this context, of their experience with participating in the French peer review. The second Ghanaian Poverty Reduction Strategy prioritizes macroeconomic

stability, sustained growth and poverty reduction and serves as the country's NSDS. Implementation is expected from early 2006, and a high-level ministerial meeting in November 2005 is expected to discuss the possibility of applying the French peer review methodology to the Ghanaian strategy with support from France. Mr. Kuuzegh and Mr. Vordzorgbe made a number of recommendations to countries who may wish to apply the French peer review methodology. These include, among others: ensuring that questions are chosen that allow peers to contribute with their own experience; streamlining questions to avoid overlap between content and outcome discussions; taking fully into account horizontal links and global concerns; and good preparation by the review country, including the need for it to prepare an internal review and national assessment of the NSDS content prior to the peer review. This would provide a nationally-owned background document and kick-start the review process. The reviews should contribute to generating national or EU guidelines based on best practice and shared learning of experience; not the other way round. In addition, it would be useful if the reviews could generate recommendations also for countries yet to do NSDS, not only for those who have completed their Strategy.

12. During the ensuing discussion, participants agreed that:

- The French peer review experience is significant, generic and flexible, innovative and simple to apply since it makes use of standard assessment tools such as questionnaires, interviews and workshops. It is also broadly applicable and replicable, with value added for most countries;
- The key objective and benefit of a peer review is to share experience and to focus on mutual learning without passing judgment or ranking performance of countries;
- For a Peer Review to be successful, it needs to build on good preparation, including an internal assessment of the Strategy (process and content), mapping of national strategies to assess coherence with the NSDS, and background documentation that reflects the views of both Government and civil society and includes an explanation of the country's administrative organization and its decision-making processes, among other important elements.
- A peer review can serve as a catalyst for countries to learn new methodologies and take lessons home to their own governments; to foster constructive dialogue; to understand obstacles; to identify similarities with and differences from their own strategies; and to influence longer-term thinking and processes;
- A Peer review offers alternative ways of reaching and documenting conclusions and provides an awareness-raising and capacity-development vehicle for improving delivery of sustainable development goals;
- A Peer review can promote partnerships among peers (North-North, South-South and North-South) with North-South partnerships helping to keep developing countries' issues in perspective;
- A Peer review can help guide a country that has no NSDS or is about to embark on an NSDS process, by 'mapping' the building blocks of a Strategy, such as identifying the range of existing strategic planning and decision-making processes that it can be built upon, their complementarities or lack thereof, and what coordination mechanisms exist or might be established;

- A peer review can assist with keeping sustainable development on the agenda of policy-makers.

13. *Participants also highlighted a number of challenges such as:*

- Addressing all important NSDS issues and questions adequately in the available time; Ensuring thorough preparation which will ultimately reduce end-costs but will require financial and human resources from the focus country;
- The extent to which peers can focus adequately on issues of NSDS content (as opposed to process or implementation), since this could be a contentious issue;
- Ensuring that civil society representatives are involved in all stages of the peer review, including the dissemination of outcomes and follow-up;
- Ensuring that consultants serve the peer review process as a whole, and not just the Government;
- Ensuring that the peer review contributes to the development of NSDS guidance for the focus country; and,
- Reaching an agreement on outputs and standards up-front.

C. Other Review Approaches and Methodologies

14. In addition to the French Peer Review, the Expert Group discussed other review methodologies or processes or that have recently been concluded or are currently underway. These included the BRICS+G project, national reviews in Austria and the United Kingdom, the Canadian application of an auditing procedure, and an assessment methodology developed by faculty at the University of Manchester. The session focused on sharing experiences with these different approaches, noting both their impact and their potential usefulness for other countries or groups of countries.

15. *Participants agreed that:*

- There is a diversity and multiplicity of review and assessment approaches, most of which complement each other. The choice of approach depends on the need, purpose and circumstances;
- There is a range of possible entry points for peer reviews, depending on the interests of the country, and the stage in the strategy cycle;
- Peer review approaches can benefit from testing the NSDS against key characteristics as outlined in the OECD³ and UN guidelines⁴ as well as against the Rio Principles⁵;
- The Peer reviews need to align processes at international, regional, national and sub-national levels and consider stakeholder forums such as National Councils for Sustainable Development; local Agenda 21's; provision of scientific advice as a basis for

³ DAC Guidelines: Strategies for Sustainable Development: Guidance for Development Co-operation, OECD, 2001.

⁴ Background Paper No 13, op. cit.

⁵ Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, adopted at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), 3-14 June 1992, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The Declaration contains twenty-seven principles that are commonly referred to as the "Rio Principles."

sound decision-making; building capacity to mainstream environment in development process; and addressing economic issues, particularly through the private sector;

- An NSDS needs to contain proper consideration for the delivery of the strategy and its goals, including through appropriate monitoring and establishment of an action plan with clear targets and time table; and,
- The Peer review may be costly, but costs will vary depending on the scope and options selected. However, some participants felt that the cost of a peer review was likely to be a small fraction of the costs of not reviewing, assessing and adapting a Strategy to reflect its effectiveness, implementation machinery, changing circumstances and needs;

16. Mr. Harald Lossack, Germany, outlined the BRICS+G⁶ process of informal dialogue among countries with economies of increasing importance, including Brazil, China, Germany, India, Russia and South Africa. The closed-door forum, which began in 2004, was not a classical peer review to start with but rather an informal, “technical” exchange to ensure buy-in from all countries involved. He noted that the process was open-ended and organized as a series of round tables with high-level participants from Government and civil society, including business, acting in their personal capacities. Participants considered the process successful for a number of reasons, including the closed format which allowed for discussion of sensitive issues among countries participating as equals. Among the outcomes thus far have been the creation of a tight network to continue dialogue on specific topics, such as governance for NSDS; the elaboration of multilateral co-operation projects, such as the creation of a common handbook for sustainable development; and initiatives related to international negotiations. The BRICS+G dialogue approach is a possible alternative to a Peer Review, although it could also be adapted to a peer review methodology. Overall, there was a high potential for establishing a continuing learning group of partners supporting each other on sustainable development.

17. Ms. Susie Allsop, United Kingdom, introduced the experience of the United Kingdom with its third internal NSDS review. This began in 2003 and was directed toward improving delivery; increasing awareness and building a common purpose, embedding sustainable development more effectively in policy making, involving stakeholders, and providing leadership and vision. The 18 month process was run by a core team from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), with experience across Government. The DEFRA Permanent Secretary chaired a board of the 15 main civil service departments that worked through eight working groups. There was extensive stakeholder consultation on the main themes and objectives of the NSDS, facilitated through local and regional events, workshops and web-based communication to involve a wider audience. One of the outcomes of the review was an enhanced role for the Sustainable Development Commission to act as a “watchdog” and to provide an independent report on the Government’s progress in implementing the Strategy. The review also resulted in a new NSDS with a better balance among social, economic and environmental issues, more focused on delivery, and which will be monitored by a new outcome-based indicator set. Greater emphasis is given to local and regional governance and to the preparation of sustainable development action plans for each government department. There were good results with stakeholder involvement but also challenges. Planning, accurate timing of stakeholder consultations, targeted communication and securing a sense of shared ownership across government departments are all important.

⁶ BRICS+G “A Dialogue on nsds, Sustainability and Growth in Brazil, Russia, China, South Africa and Germany”

18. In the absence of Ms. Ingeborg Fiala from Austria, Dr. Johannes Martin Michael Jänicke, Environmental Policy Research Centre (EPRC), introduced the ongoing Austrian NSDS assessment. He stressed that he could not speak on behalf of the Government of Austria but had been involved in the assessment through EPRC. Further, the Expert Group had at its disposal the written contribution of Ms. Fiala which served as the basis for discussion. The mandate to carry out an external evaluation in autumn 2005 was rooted in the NSDS itself. Austria decided to focus the evaluation on the implementation process and not on the impact because of the time it would take to develop the appropriate indicators for measurement. Particular attention is given to the institutions established for NSDS implementation, the tools and implementation activities specified in the Strategy. The project is being led by a steering group, and the evaluation is based on a scientific study of institutions, instruments, work programmes, progress reports, indicator reports and interviews. Based on these, twenty projects were chosen for a deeper analysis. The evaluation is still underway, and therefore final results are not yet available. These are anticipated for late November 2005.

19. Mr. Clive Frank George, University of Manchester, in his presentation noted the importance of periodic assessment of existing strategic planning systems to measure the extent to which they incorporate the central principles of sustainable development and are consistent with the OECD and UN guidelines for NSDS development. He focused on the need to introduce rigor into reviews and to strengthen the links to operational policy. This approach has been tested by university researchers in Belarus, Croatia, Slovakia and Ukraine.

20. In Canada, the Auditor General Act was amended in 1995 to create the position of Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development within the Office of the Auditor General, and to formally introduce the environment, along with economy and efficiency, as a focus for performance auditing. As explained by Ms. Rebecca Aird, Canada, it was these amendments which also set the legislative requirement for Canada's particular sustainable development strategy approach, in which individual departments and agencies are each responsible for developing their own strategy. One of the legislatively-defined roles of the Commissioner is to monitor progress on sustainable development, and more specifically, to monitor the progress being made through the departmental sustainable development strategies. Over the years the Commissioner has conducted audit work, offered guidance and established expectations in relation to a variety of sustainable development strategy-related issues. Departmental strategies are assessed with respect to quality, implementation, delivery and presence of government-wide direction. Due to the nature of audits, the assessments are non-participatory. Findings from audit work on the departmental sustainable development strategies range broadly, but common systemic problems relate to the clarity and measurability of targets and the linking of actions and outcomes. Over the years, there have been some improvements on these issues. There is also a recognized need for departments to better integrate departmental sustainable development strategies with business planning. While departmental sustainable development strategies have some important merits, there is increasing recognition that their potential is limited by the absence of a comprehensive federal vision and priorities. Based on the Government's own undertakings, the Commissioner has been a strong proponent of development of a federal sustainable development strategy. From an audit perspective, related challenges with respect to the departmental sustainable development strategies are how to assess their collective

significance, how to link action on the strategies and commitments they contain to actual improvements in the state of the environment and other aspects of sustainable development.

21. Ms. Carolle Mathieu, Canada, informed participants of the international work on environmental auditing that takes place through the Working Group on Environmental Auditing (WGEA) of the International Organization of Supreme Audit Institutions (INTOSAI). The WGEA is a forum for exchanging information and expertise on sustainable development and environmental management issues related to national auditing. In addition, guidelines and methodologies are developed for use by members, and surveys are undertaken on the state of play in environmental auditing by supreme (national) audit organizations. Examples include the development of a document, led by the United Kingdom, on the role of supreme auditing institutions in auditing sustainable development commitments of their government, as well as an ongoing project to review the state of member countries' efforts at implementing commitments made at the World Summit on Sustainable Development.

22. Ms. Faouzia Abdoulhalik, Energy and Environment Institute of Francophonie, informed participants of NSDS activities planned for 2006, including capacity-building, training, information and networking among members interested in NSDS, including NSDS reviews. Funds permitting, it was expected that a few member countries would be assisted in the development of their Strategies.

23. No representative of the European Commission was able to participate. On an informal basis, Mr. Joachim Spangenberg, from the Sustainable Europe Research Institute (SERI), introduced a draft assessment and evaluation approach being prepared under the leadership of SERI on the basis of the French peer review methodology. This methodology is intended for possible use by the European Commission for the European Union's member States. The methodology calls for extensive preparatory work by the focus country; stresses self-assessment, public participation and scientific assessment; and outlines sustainability problems in a matrix structure that allows for a fast track assessment of individual components, if desired. It suggests peers from both North and South as well as with different levels of experience.

24. In addition to the formal presentations, a number of participants discussed the situation in their countries, and many indicated that they would benefit from a peer review of their NSDS, not only to improve the strategies, but also to facilitate discussion on the internal processes and engage the interest of both officials and civil society in discussion of progress in priority areas. Most of the participants were also in favor of compiling and sharing information on best practices in good governance in NSDS planning and implementation.

25. *Country representatives outlined national issues including the following:*

26. Mr. Travis Antonio Sinckler, Barbados, explained that Barbados has a sustainable development policy, but it lacks the clarity needed to ensure delivery and to engage the involvement of the Ministry of Finance. Among the critical areas for successful implementation are a sustainable development forum to monitor progress in implementation; demonstration

projects, such as “Sustainable communities”; continuous review of the process by the National Council on Sustainable Development, and strengthened applied research in and for Barbados.

27. Ms. Elena Polyakova, Belarus, noted that Belarus is currently implementing its second NSDS. More exchange of best practice examples in the sharing of responsibility for NSDS delivery between government and non-government parties would be of interest to Belarus.

28. In Burkina Faso, the Poverty Reduction Strategy, which includes the MDG indicators, is being used as the framework as well for the NSDS, explained Mr. Alain Edouard Traoré, Burkina Faso. He expressed interest in the peer review as a tool to facilitate discussion on the internal process and to engage interest groups.

29. Ms. Gyongyver Gyene, Hungary, noted that Hungary is now finalizing its first NSDS. She expressed strong interest in having a peer review in 2006, following stakeholder consultations.

30. In Slovakia, the NSDS was developed in 2001, but the implementation plan was only approved this year, in 2005, according to Ms. Silvia Matusova of Slovakia. To facilitate implementation, the country is planning to move responsibility for the Strategy from the Environment Ministry to a central Government office and to establish an institutional framework for sustainable development expertise. It is also seeking funding from the European Union. Slovakia has a good civil society forum, but it is seeking best practice examples of good governance in NSDS planning and implementation and may be interested in carrying out a peer review.

31. Mr. Trevor Gordon, South Africa, explained that South Africa is participating in the BRICS+G process and has pioneered an approach towards the formulation of a sustainable development implementation plan, including a matrix of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation and the MDG targets, as well as regional commitments. The country is facing challenges in mainstreaming sustainable development in sectoral plans and economic growth strategies, focusing on a bottom-up approach to implementation. It will audit its environmental sector for the first time in 2006. Since 1994, a number of macro-economic and poverty reduction strategies have been developed and implemented, which may be perceived as national sustainable development strategies. An NSDS consultative process has been initiated with several chapters of the document already having been completed.

32. Mr. Joseph Enyimu, Uganda, noted that the country is implementing its third generation Poverty Reduction Strategy. This version contains a result and policy matrix, which will be used for reviewing progress. The government intends to establish a review mechanism where stakeholders take stock of progress annually; these stocktaking exercises could be good opportunities for a peer review.

33. Mr. Ross Andrews, Bermuda (overseas territory of the United Kingdom), explained that Bermuda will finalize its first NSDS by end of 2005. A peer review could be an opportunity to bring external scrutiny to the national process. It would be most relevant for Bermuda in 4-5

years, when it is time to revise the NSDS. In the meantime, Mr. Andrews would be interested in participating in a peer review as a peer.

D. The Role of Intergovernmental Organizations (IGOs)

34. National Sustainable Development Strategies are the responsibility of each State. Methodologies to review NSDS may also rely on multi-State exchanges, such as those discussed in the first sessions of the meeting. In addition, intergovernmental bodies may facilitate NSDS development, review and assessment. This was the subject of the final presentations.

35. *Participants agreed that:*

- Intergovernmental organizations have an important role to play in documenting and providing a forum for sharing experience, lessons learned and good country practices;
- IGOs should continue facilitating and monitoring the development and implementation of NSDS, such as through the provision of pragmatic and flexible guidelines;
- Coordination among aid agencies and donor Governments should be strengthened to facilitate the integration of poverty reduction strategies, sustainable development commitments and the Millennium Development Goals (MDG).

36. *Specific activities highlighted by representatives from IGOs included the following:*

37. Speaking on behalf of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), Ms. Isatou Gaye noted that, as a result of the 2005 World Summit, ECA will advocate MDG-based poverty reduction strategies embedded in viable long-term development strategies such as National Sustainable Development Strategies. Currently, a number of African countries with Poverty Reduction Strategies consider these as sustainable development strategies.

38. Ms. Funke Oyewole from the Global Environmental Facility (GEF) informed the Expert Group that GEF provides support for NSDS in a number of ways, including: National Dialogue Workshops for civil society and government representatives; national capacity-building for self assessment in relation to GEF priority areas; analysis of national level interagency coordination mechanisms and how to maximize access to GEF resources; and capacity-building for national GEF focal points to increase their effectiveness and maximize benefit from GEF resources. The GEF also invites Sustainable Development National Focal Points to participate in the national dialogues to ensure appropriate linkages.

39. The Organization for Economic Coordination and Development (OECD) is fostering a better exchange of experience among States by beginning the process of compiling best practices in NSDS development and implementation. Ms. Candice Stevens, representing OECD, noted that a recently completed draft study of best practices was presented at the annual Meeting of Sustainable Development Experts in Paris, 4-6 October 2005. Focus areas of the assessment were drawn from OECD and United Nations guidelines and included: policy integration, inter-generational time frame, analysis and assessments, indicators and targets, coordination and institutional set-up, local and regional governance, stakeholder participation, monitoring and

evaluation. OECD Member States did not agree on best practice in coordination and institutional set-up. Continued challenges include the development of an OECD core set of sustainable development indicators. In conclusion, she emphasized the need for cooperation among the United Nations, the European Commission and OECD in sharing good practices and agreeing on a common methodology for peer reviews so that they are compatible but conducted in the forum most appropriate for a given review.

40. Ms. Linda Ghanime presented the work of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in supporting NSDS development and implementation through stocktaking; connecting countries to knowledge, experience and resources; providing support for local capacity development, such as capacity for self assessment of implementation of multilateral environmental agreements; and coordinating global and national MDG efforts, taking into account broader national sustainable development priorities. Ms. Ghanime also presented the results of a recent UNDP analysis which revealed a number of key elements for NSDS success in Africa consistent with the UN and OECD Guidelines. Continued challenges are lack of government commitment, coordination and support, in particular concerning the involvement of key ministries of planning and finance; lack of mainstreaming of sustainable development principles into national plans; lack of resources and capacity to implement NSDS; and lack of reliable data and information necessary for monitoring.

41. Mr. Kouassi, Executive Director of the Secretariat for the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) was unfortunately unable to attend the Expert Group Meeting. As a voluntary instrument, the APRM is a self-monitoring mechanism for member States of the African Union that fosters the adoption of good policies and practices that lead to political stability, high economic growth, sustainable development and accelerated sub-regional and continental economic integration. It provides opportunity to share experience, identify needs and assess capacity building requirements, with a core principle of national ownership and leadership by the country under review. The NEPAD has an extensive website [<http://www.nepad.org>] where all requirements for the APRM process can be reviewed, and where tools and guidelines for stakeholders involved in the national processes can be accessed. In 2005, the APRM is expected to complete reviews of Ghana and Rwanda and will thereafter continue preparations for reviews of Kenya, Mauritius, Uganda, Nigeria and Algeria.

E. Next Steps

42. The final session focused on possible follow-up to the Expert Group Meeting.

43. *Participants agreed that:*

- The United Nations, the European Commission and OECD should continue to document and share good country specific practices in NSDS development, implementation and reviews;
- The UN, EU and OECD should seek a common approach to peer reviews with minimum methodological requirements and should provide a forum for shared learning;

- A common approach should be flexible enough to be used at different entry points of a given country's NSDS development and implementation; should allow for involvement of different actors depending on the circumstances; and should reflect the interests and needs of the specific focus country and its peers;
- In planning a Peer Review, the focus country should select its own peers, if it so wishes;
- Criteria for success as well as continued challenges in NSDS development and implementation are often similar for developed and developing countries;
- Best practice cannot be standardized but will necessarily be specific to the country's circumstances, stage of decision-making cycle and implementation.

44. Ms. Candice Stevens, OECD, informed the Meeting that OECD will convene a workshop in Stockholm, Sweden in mid-2006 to discuss modalities and best practices in developing, implementing and reviewing National Sustainable Development Strategies. The UN is expected to facilitate the participation of non-OECD Member States, funds permitting.

45. Ms. Mary Pat Silveira, UNDESA/DSD, informed participants that the Division for Sustainable Development would like to work with countries in organizing NSDS Peer Reviews, on a voluntary basis, as funds permit. The Division will continue cooperation with interested countries and partner intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations in facilitating shared learning, best practice examples and peer review methodologies.

III. CONCLUDING COMMENTS

46. The co-Chairs thanked participants for their participation in the Expert Group Meeting and noted how the peer review represents a unique opportunity for bringing together people to reflect on the way we do business and progress towards sustainable development goals. Ms. Silveria noted that UN DESA/DSD would proceed with its work to facilitate NSDS peer reviews and sharing of experiences taking into account the recommendations and conclusions elaborated at this Expert Group Meeting. She expressed the hope that the fruitful dialogue and sharing of experience would continue long after the Meeting.