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National Sustainable Development Strategies: strengthening the links to operational policy

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Abstract

At the Rio Earth Summit of 1992 it was agreed that all countries should develop a national sustainable development strategy (NSDS), as a key component of implementing the goals of Agenda 21. Progress has been limited. Few countries have established a formal strategy, and those which exist have often been only partially implemented. The paper explores an approach to overcoming the problems, which addresses the need to improve existing strategic planning mechanisms in parallel with introducing new ones. The approach is based on a periodic assessment of existing systems, to measure the extent to which they incorporate NSDS principles, and identify areas to be strengthened. The paper describes an assessment methodology, presents examples of its use, and discusses ways in which current approaches to NSDS may be complemented by continual review and improvement of existing planning processes.

1. Introduction

The main aim of the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development was to integrate environmental considerations more fully into development processes. As one of the key mechanisms for achieving this, it was agreed that each government should adopt a national sustainable development strategy (NSDS), in order to implement the goals of Agenda 21 (UN 1992, paragraph 8.7). Only limited action had been taken by 2002, when the UN World Summit on Sustainable Development urged states to ‘take immediate steps to make progress in the formulation and elaboration of national strategies for sustainable development and begin their implementation by 2005’ (UN 2002, paragraph 162). By 2004, Australia, Canada, Japan, most EU countries had implemented a recognised NSDS, along with some developing countries, but most countries had not, including several high income ones (UN 2004). Some were developing a NSDS, but most reported only that components of sustainable development were in place.

Agenda 21 established that the overall objective a NSDS is not to develop a new strategy document, but ‘to improve or restructure the decision-making process so that consideration of socio-economic and environmental issues is fully integrated and a broader range of public participation assured’ (paragraph 8.3). A strategy for sustainable

development may therefore be taken to comprise a set of processes which seek to integrate the economic, social, and environmental objectives of society. It does not necessarily involve a development plan covering a fixed period of time, nor does it require a separate planning process. Instead, an effective NSDS will be distinguished by adherence to a set of principles for strategic planning and sustainable development, and a coordinated set of measures to ensure their implementation.

The basic principles for NSDS are well established. The OECD Development Assistance Committee has developed a set of principles intended mainly for developing countries, and the UN Department for Economic and Social Affairs has developed similar principles appropriate for all countries (OECD/DAC 2001, UNDESA 2002). Both sets of principles are accompanied by guidance on implementation, and further work by OECD, UNDP and the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) has led to the preparation of a resource book for NSDS, giving in-depth information on possible approaches and methodologies (Dalal-Clayton and Bass 2002).

All of the guidance recommends that a country's NSDS should be developed from its existing strategic planning mechanisms, through a process of continual improvement. The starting point should not be restricted to whatever strategies may already be in place for environmental conservation, but should also include the country's established mechanisms of social and economic planning, which are the main drivers of development, with inadequate integration of environmental factors. The guidance also makes it clear that the strategy should adhere to NSDS principles. In some circumstances, these objectives may conflict with each other. For the process of improvement to be continual, it needs to be built into the country's actual planning mechanisms. To achieve its goals, the improvement process should itself adhere to NSDS principles. However, most countries' strategic planning mechanisms do not comply with the principles, and will not be able to comply until they have been improved.

This chicken and egg problem applies to many of the NSDS principles, for example in relation to participation and consultation. If the NSDS is developed through a highly participatory process (a key NSDS principle), it may be difficult to integrate it into actual strategic planning, unless the existing planning mechanism is already highly participatory. In many countries, both developing and developed, the degree of transparency and participation in operational strategic planning is limited. A requirement to comply with NSDS principles from the beginning of the improvement process may act as a deterrent to even starting it, or result in a strategy document which remains disconnected from the actual planning process. Conversely however, if the principles are not introduced early on, an NSDS initiative may never achieve the desired improvements.

The conversion of a country's existing development strategy process into a sustainable development strategy can only be done slowly. The entire strategic planning mechanism and its associated institutions must be reformed, through a gradual process of continual improvement. At the same time, new institutions and mechanisms must be introduced, through a similarly gradual process. Both tasks need to be undertaken simultaneously,

with the aim of convergence into a national sustainable development strategy that is fully compliant with the OECD and UNDESA principles.

Extensive experience has been gained of developing new institutions and processes for NSDS, and in-depth guidance is presented in the resource resource book (Dalal-Clayton and Bass 2002). However, methods of improving existing processes and institutions towards compliance with NSDS principles are less well established. The following sections of the paper discuss how this aspect of NSDS development may be strengthened.

2. Methodology for assessment of strategic planning processes

Before an improvement process can begin, it is necessary to identify what improvements are needed. A country's existing strategic planning mechanisms need be reviewed, to measure the extent to which they already comply with NSDS principles, and to highlight any shortcomings. The NSDS resource book (Dalal-Clayton and Bass 2002) recommends that, in designing processes and coordination systems for NSDS development, existing processes should first be mapped out, as well as any past ones which can provide important lessons. However, there are no clear benchmarks against which the existing processes might be measured.

Similarly, the monitoring of strategy implementation has tended to focus primarily on the NSDS process itself, rather than on the extent to which existing processes have been reformed. The methodology for NSDS peer review (Dalal-Clayton 2004) provides for the preparation of initial background papers and a consolidated background report, which describes the administrative, governance and decision-making structures in the country, along with various aspects of the strategy development process. This is used as general information for the peer review workshop, but is not intended as an assessment against any set criteria. Rather, the peer review uses a number of set of questions to generate sharing of experience between participating countries, in order to help the country that is being reviewed come to its own conclusions on the adequacy and performance of its NSDS.

In order to strengthen the continual improvement aspect of NSDS development, a sharper focus is needed on the actual performance of operational planning systems, in relation to internationally agreed objectives. In the preparations for the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development, a methodology was developed for assessing countries' existing strategic planning mechanisms, to identify areas that need to be improved in order to comply with NSDS principles (IDPM 2001). The methodology is based on principles of sustainable development and corresponding principles of strategic planning and management, as interpreted for NSDS by OECD and UNDESA. The OECD principles and UN principles are grouped under five core principles, as shown in Table 1. Groups A and B may be regarded as sustainable development principles, while groups C, D and E are more general principles of strategic planning and management.

Table 1. NSDS principles

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

Source: derived from OECD (2001) and UNDESA (2002).

The assessment methodology measures the degree to which national strategic planning processes adhere to the five core principles and the related NSDS principles. A set of criteria has been developed for each of the five principles, to satisfy, as far as possible, the following requirements:

- A limited number of criteria should be applied to each principle, to provide a process that is workable, timely, and cost-effective.
- Each criterion should be framed in a way that allows a qualitative assessment of implementation to be made.
- Each criterion should deal with a distinct aspect of the principle, different from the aspects assessed by other criteria.
- Each criterion should be considered sufficiently important to merit influencing the overall assessment of the relevant principle.
- Each criterion should be useable by assessors who may not possess specialist expertise in strategic planning, but who are familiar with the current issues and policy debate on strategic planning for sustainable development in the national context.

The selection of the criteria was based on a review of a comprehensive range of information sources relating to strategic planning and sustainable development (IDPM 2001). Four key assessment criteria have been defined for each of the five principles, given in Table 2.

Table 2. NSDS assessment criteria.

<p>A. Integration of economic, social, and environmental objectives</p> <p><i>Criterion A1 integration</i></p> <p>Strategic planning in the country is based on a comprehensive and integrated analysis of economic, social, and environmental issues, which clarifies links between the three spheres, resolves conflicts between them where practicable, and negotiates appropriate trade-offs where conflicts remain.</p> <p><i>Criterion A2 social and poverty issues</i></p> <p>Strategic planning in the country integrates poverty eradication, gender issues, and the short-term and long-term needs of disadvantaged and marginalised groups into economic policy.</p> <p><i>Criterion A3 environmental and resource issues</i></p> <p>Strategic planning in the country integrates the maintenance of sustainable levels of resource use and the control of pollution to maintain a healthy environment into economic policy.</p> <p><i>Criterion A4 international commitments</i></p> <p>Measures are in place to ensure compliance with international agreements which the country has entered into, on environmental and social issues.</p> <p>B. Participation and consensus</p> <p><i>Criterion B1 involvement of stakeholders</i></p> <p>The country's processes of strategic planning, implementation, monitoring, and review include the participation of stakeholders, including government, decentralised authorities, elected bodies, nongovernmental and private sector institutions, and marginalised groups.</p> <p><i>Criterion B2 transparency and accountability</i></p> <p>The management of the country's strategic planning processes is transparent, with accountability for decisions made.</p> <p><i>Criterion B3 communication and public awareness</i></p> <p>Measures are taken to increase public awareness of sustainable development, to communicate relevant information, and to encourage the development of stakeholder involvement in the strategic planning process.</p> <p><i>Criterion B4 long-term vision and consensus</i></p> <p>The country's strategic planning processes are based on a long-term vision for the country's development, which is consistent with the country's capabilities, allows for short-term and medium-term necessities, and has wide political and stakeholder support.</p> <p>C. Country ownership and commitment</p> <p><i>Criterion C1 high-level government commitment</i></p> <p>The process of formulating and implementing the national strategy is led by government, with evidence of high-level commitment.</p> <p><i>Criterion C2 broad-based political support</i></p>

The country's strategic planning process has broad-based political support.

Criterion C3 responsibilities for implementation

Responsibility for implementing strategies is clearly assigned to bodies with the appropriate authority.

Criterion C4 coordination with donors

The country's strategic planning process is coordinated with donor programmes.

D. Comprehensive and coordinated policy process

Criterion D1 build on existing processes

The national strategy for sustainable development is based on existing strategic planning processes in the country, with coordination between them, and mechanisms to identify and resolve potential conflicts.

Criterion D2 analysis and information

Strategic planning in the country is based on a comprehensive analysis of the present situation and of forecasted trends and risks, using reliable information on changing environmental, social, and economic conditions.

Criterion D3 realistic goals

The national strategy is based on a realistic analysis of national resources and capacities in the economic, social, and environmental spheres, taking account of external pressures in the three spheres.

Criterion D4 decentralisation

The country's strategic planning processes embrace both national and decentralised levels, with two-way iteration between these levels.

E. Targeting, resourcing, and monitoring

Criterion E1 budgetary provision

The sustainable development strategy is integrated into the budget process, such that plans have the financial resources to achieve their objectives.

Criterion E2 capacity for implementation

The sustainable development strategy includes realistic mechanisms to develop the capacity required to implement it.

Criterion E3 targets and indicators

Targets have been defined for key strategic economic, social, and environmental objectives, with indicators through which they can be monitored.

Criterion E4 monitoring and feedback

Systems are in place for monitoring the implementation of strategies and the achievement of their defined objectives, for recording the results, and for reviewing their effectiveness as strategies for sustainable development, with effective mechanisms for feedback and revision within the planning process.

The outcome of an assessment against the criteria of Table 2 should provide policymakers and other interested parties with a clear indication of the effectiveness of the planning process, so that areas where improvement is needed can be identified. A

qualitative scoring scheme is proposed, with the following alternative scores indicating the extent to which each criterion has been met:

- A: all of the requirements of the criterion are fully met;
- B: all the requirements of the criterion are satisfactorily met, although some further improvements are desirable;
- C: some requirements of the criterion have been satisfactorily or fully met, but others have not yet been satisfactorily met;
- D: few of the requirements of the criterion have, as yet, been satisfactorily met.

In order to assign a score, supplementary guidance questions have been developed for each criterion (IDPM 2001). It is also recommended that the assessment report should provide a brief supporting text which summarises the reasoning and evidence upon which the score for each criterion is based. In addition to giving the scores for each criterion, the conclusions of the assessment should be recorded to provide an overall, qualitative assessment for each principle, based on the scores assigned to each criterion. These conclusions should draw attention to the main areas in which existing processes might be strengthened to improve the effectiveness of the implementation of the principle, as a key component of the process of strategic planning for sustainable development. The results recorded can be used to draw general conclusions as to the effectiveness of the NSDS, and to identify the main areas in which improvements should be sought.

The organisation of the assessment has to take into account the different forms which national strategies will take, and the degree of depth in which a country may wish to undertake its investigations. Some countries may have developed an overarching document which is specifically referred to as a sustainable development strategy, whereas others will have prepared a top-level strategy document under a related initiative (such as a national conservation strategy or a poverty reduction strategy). Some will have no such document. The aim of the assessment is to analyse the country's actual strategic planning processes, taking account of any overarching document of this nature.

A judgement has to be made on how thoroughly the operational planning processes will be investigated. An in-depth study is likely to take many months, and involve extensive consultation (e.g. Hanson et al 2001). At the opposite extreme, a reasonably thorough understanding of planning system performance can be attained by a small team in a short period of time (Dearden 1998, METAP 2001). However, the process of consultation on the findings, reaching agreement between the different stakeholders involved in approving the assessment report, and agreeing on actions to be taken, will take longer.

Guidance on the organisation of an assessment is given in Appendix 1. This covers:

- Establishing a Steering Committee.
- Appointing the assessment team and defining Terms of Reference.
- Defining the assessment approach, outline plan and timescales.
- Developing detailed plans for the assessment.
- Initial desk study and document review.

- Detail documents needed.
- Identification of stakeholders to be involved.
- Techniques for interviews, discussion groups and meetings.
- Obtaining documented and other evidence of performance.
- Confidentiality.
- Preparation and publication of draft findings.
- Consultation meeting/s or workshops.
- Reporting.

Equivalent guidance should be incorporated into a country's own strategic planning process, to provide for periodic review of the effectiveness of the entire planning process as a strategy for sustainable development. If the assessment identifies weaknesses in the country's systems for monitoring the implementation of strategic plans, and for monitoring progress in achieving specific economic, social, and environmental objectives, these will need to be strengthened, as an essential part of the overall strategic planning process. These requirements are covered by criteria E3 and E4 of Table 2.

3. Case studies of applying the methodology

The assessment methodology has been tested informally in independent reviews of national strategic planning in a number of transitional economy countries of Central and Eastern Europe (Cherp et al 2004). Some of the strengths and weaknesses identified in these countries may be common in developing as well as transitional countries, while others may also appear in high income countries.

Belarus

In Belarus, National Strategies of Sustainable Socio-Economic Development (NSSD) have been prepared largely following a traditional socialist planning approach. The NSSD are endorsed at the highest level of the government and are supposed to serve as a legal and planning framework for developing other sectoral and territorial plans and programmes. The first NSSD was published in 1997, covering the period up to 2005. In 2001 the government, supported by UNDP, initiated the process of preparing a new NSSD for the period up to 2020. NSSD-2020 has been developed in several stages. First, a group of national experts prepared an analytical report, closely examining successes and failures of NSSD-1997. Second, guidelines were elaborated for developing NSSD-2020, involving a major participation and capacity-building exercise. The strategy itself was drafted by several dozen national experts, and was endorsed by the government in 2004.

The NSDS assessment criteria were used to review the analytical report and related documents and processes, leading to a number of recommendations (Cherp 2002). As a way to address some of these, a strategic environmental assessment (SEA) of the NSSD was organised, and was also guided by the NSDS assessment methodology as well as by a more traditional SEA approach (Ecodom 2003). The results of these assessments were discussed during several workshops with the experts drafting NSSD-2020, and a number

of improvements were incorporated in NSSD-2020. The findings of a review of the latest draft of NSSD-2020 against the NSDS assessment criteria are summarised in Table 3.

Table 3. Assessment of the Belarus Strategy of Sustainable Socio-Economic Development

<p><i>Principle A</i></p> <p>The most significant analytical drawback continues to be the lack of connection between different sections of the strategy. Direct conflicts and trade-offs between various proposed policies are rarely, if ever, identified. It is also difficult to establish priorities between different proposed measures, often competing for the same scarce human and financial resources. Furthermore, sector-specific or theme-specific sections are poorly integrated with strategic 'visioning' parts of the strategy.</p> <p><i>Principle B</i></p> <p>The role of business circles, academia, and civil society is barely mentioned, thus casting doubt on the breadth of support for the NSSD in society.</p> <p><i>Principle C</i></p> <p>The drafters presume, without clear justification of commitment, that the state, especially central government, will be the key agent in formulating and implementing sustainability policies.</p> <p><i>Principle D</i></p> <p>Many sections of NSSD-2020 are analytically and technically sound and comprehensively address the main elements of sustainable development.</p> <p><i>Principle E</i></p> <p>It is often unclear who will implement the proposed policies and how these will be resourced.</p>
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Source: derived from Cherp et al (2004)

It seems that most of these deficiencies are the result of an 'expert-driven' process of preparing the NSSD, in which individual experts from specialised research or planning institutions draft relevant parts of the strategy. Such a process has few in-built mechanisms to establish priorities, reach consensus on trade-offs, and identify the agents of sustainable development.

Slovakia

The Sustainable Development Strategy of the Slovak Republic was developed by a bottom-up process based on wide-reaching public consultations, and involving over 200 experts coordinated by a 29-member steering committee. The outcomes of the expert group deliberations and workshops provided inputs for the first draft of the strategy, which was followed by an SEA of this draft. A second draft took into account the findings of the SEA and the outcomes of several public hearings and other comments by interested stakeholders. Following consultations with various government agencies, the NSDS was reviewed and endorsed by the government and the parliament. The resulting NSDS was evaluated using the assessment methodology, by reviewing the key documents, and interviewing key actors involved in preparing the strategy (Filcak 2003).

As well as the formal Slovak SDS a number of other strategic planning documents that were clearly relevant to sustainable development were reviewed as part of the assessment. These included the Vision of the Development of Slovakia prepared for the Economic Committee of the Slovak government, and the draft National Development Plan. Both strategic documents were found to have been prepared with much less public participation than the NSDS, and were poorly linked to the NSDS. The Vision used economic growth as the main guiding principle, did not refer to the NSDS, and considered the environment in a separate chapter with no linkages to other chapters. The National Development Plan did not refer substantially to the NSDS except in its environmental chapter, although sustainability and environmental concerns were considered throughout the document. This indicates that the principles of sustainable development in Slovakia are largely accepted in the NSDS, but have yet to make their way into mainstream economic planning. The summary results of the assessment are given in Table 4.

Table 4. Assessment of the Slovak Sustainable Development Strategy

Principles	Criteria and scores				Remarks
	1	2	3	4	
A Integration and sustainability	C	C	C	B	Sectoralised planning with little integration. The environment is still treated as a 'sector' within the responsibility of the Ministry of the Environment The SDS was prepared mainly by 'environmentalists and hence failed to influence economic planning in the country significantly.
B Participation and consensus	B	C	C	C	Treated formally. Lack of publicity and awareness raising hinder effective public participation and stakeholder involvement. Difficulties with involving higher rank officials and experts.
C Ownership and commitment	B	C	C	B	There is significant government involvement and the SDS process has a high level of authority. However, the process is still primarily 'owned' by the Ministry of Environment. Moreover, since the preparation of the SDS was supported by foreign aid, it was primarily accepted by technocratic elite and middle-level officials, while even the Minister of Environment felt not so committed to it.
D Comprehensive and coordinated policy process	C	C	C	B	Goals of the strategy are realistic yet hardly challenging, the document suffers from vague and general formulations. Linkage with other strategic processes is very weak. The document failed to provide 'added value' to other policy processes.
E Targeting, resourcing, and monitoring	D	D	C	C	Budgetary provisions are lacking. Limited progress in monitoring and evaluation of the strategy.

Source: Filcak 2003, Cherp et al 2004

Croatia and Ukraine

Skunca (2002) has used the NSDS assessment methodology to evaluate planning for Integrated Coastal Area Management (ICAM) in Croatia, for a range of physical planning and island development processes at national, regional, and local levels. The principal findings are summarised in Table 5.

Table 5. Assessment of ICAM processes in Croatia

<i>Principle A</i>

Although all types of objectives are referred to in planning documents, there is lack of integration, prioritisation, and identification of conflicts and possible trade-offs.

Principle B

Though participation is viewed as a necessary component of strategic planning, it is still largely considered as a burden and a liability rather than a resource, with many planning documents not being sufficiently transparent and accessible.

Principle D

Vertical integration between sustainability plans at different levels still presents a significant challenge.

Principle E

Targets posed by strategies are often unrealistic.

Source: Skunca 2002, Cherp et al 2004

Kutonova (2003) has undertaken a similar assessment of ICAM processes in Ukraine, using the NSDS assessment criteria to explore the potential for future improvement. A number of recommendations were made, on the basis of the findings summarised in Table 6.

Table 6. Assessment of ICAM processes in Ukraine

Principle A

Insufficient attention to poverty, minority, and gender issues.

Principle B

Poor practice of public participation.

Principle C

Difficulty in achieving political commitment, with low priority for the environment, and frequent government changes.

Source: Kutonova 2003, Cherp et al 2004

4. Potential future developments in the assessment of NSDS implementation

The approach that has been developed and tested in different situations is intended to provide an analytical framework rather than a fixed blueprint or template. It is designed to be adaptable to different national needs, resource constraints and capacities, in such a way that it may be used to strengthen one particular aspect of NSDS development, namely, the continual improvement of existing strategic planning processes.

Challenges in strategic planning for sustainable development that have been revealed in the case study examples include potential tensions between different NSDS principles. For example, tensions arise between the need for political commitment at the national level, and the implementation of principles that have been defined internationally. Similar tensions arise between government ownership and non-government stakeholder participation, and between achieving political support and a transparent process involving wide participation. Reconciling such tensions is a key issue in making an effective NSDS a practical reality in all countries.

A twin-pronged approach is proposed, which addresses the tensions from both directions. First, assistance should continue to be provided with strengthening capacity for implementing NSDS principles, such as, for example, through building mechanisms for stakeholder involvement in participatory decision-making. Second, a process of gradual reform of existing institutions and strategic planning mechanisms should be initiated, which takes advantage of this capacity, and itself encourages its further development. This process of continual improvement should begin with an assessment of what reforms are needed, and continue with ongoing assessments of the progress that has been made.

Agenda 21 and all the subsequent guidance makes it clear that a NSDS should not be a new strategy, but an improvement and/or restructuring of existing decision-making processes, to more fully integrate socio-economic and environmental issues and assure a broader range of public participation. Despite this, NSDS development is still widely regarded as a separate process, distinct from the improvement of existing processes. To change this, governments must go beyond accepting that their existing strategic planning mechanisms are imperfect, to identify the imperfections, and specify the improvements that are needed.

In countries that have already introduced a recognised NSDS, this may be achieved by introducing set criteria for assessing the country's existing administrative, governance and decision-making structures into the peer review process, or any other review process that is in place. Where no review system is in place, one should be introduced, to include an objective assessment of the country's operational mechanisms for strategic planning, their relationship to the NSDS, and progress towards full compliance with NSDS principles.

Countries that have not yet established a recognised NSDS do not need to create a separate strategy, but need only demonstrate to their citizens and the international community that their existing strategic planning mechanisms already comprise an effective NSDS, which is being continually improved to fully meet the commitments of Agenda 21. The proposed assessment methodology would fit this purpose.

5. Conclusions

In this paper we have described a methodology for assessing a country's progress in implementing effective strategic planning processes for sustainable development, and examples of its use in independent reviews.

The application of the NSDS assessment criteria to case study examples demonstrates that the methodology has potential for providing practical advice and recommendations on how to improve both the ongoing planning processes and the general systems for sustainability planning.

The assessment methodology is intended primarily for use by countries themselves, to assess the effectiveness of their strategic planning processes, in pursuit of their own

sustainable development goals and the international commitments they have made. Its design encourages this, by focusing on identifying potential improvements, and on assessing incremental change and progress towards implementing a fully effective national strategy for sustainable development.

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APPENDIX 1. GUIDANCE ON ORGANISATION OF THE ASSESSMENT

1. Aims of the guidance

The guidance given below should ideally be incorporated into a country's strategic planning processes, to provide a regular review of the effectiveness of those processes as a strategy for sustainable development. It may also be used for a one-off assessment.

The guidance is intended to be used by countries to assess the effectiveness of their own national strategies for sustainable development, but may be adapted for use in independent evaluations.

The guidance covers both the arrangements for conducting an assessment, and the analysis and reporting of results. To allow countries to compare their progress with other countries, it is desirable that the results be analysed and presented in the same way for all countries. Apart from this, countries will need to develop an assessment approach that is best suited to their own particular circumstances, making use of the guidance where appropriate.

2. Administration and Activities

i) Organisation

a) Establish a Steering Committee to oversee the assessment, comprising high ranking representatives of those ministries most involved in strategic planning processes. These are likely to include the ministries of finance, planning and environment or their equivalents, together with a representative of the office of the prime minister or president. It may be desirable to include one or more senior academics with relevant experience, to provide specialist guidance.

b) Appoint the assessment team and define its Terms of Reference. The team should be composed of senior experts, and include an economist, an environmental specialist and a social specialist. At least one member of the team, including the team leader if possible, should have experience of conducting assessments or studies of a similar nature. At least one member of the team should have sufficient knowledge of the country's planning processes to be able to identify key contacts representing the most relevant stakeholders in both government and civil society. Terms of Reference should include requirements for reporting to the Steering Committee, and for approval of draft and final reports.

c) Agree the assessment approach and an outline plan with timescales.

d) Develop detailed plans for interviews, group discussions and other aspects of the assessment.

ii) Principal documents for initial desk study

Gather those documents needed to obtain a good overall grasp of the country's strategic planning processes and their practical implementation. These may include:

- National strategy documents, e.g. vision statement, five year plans
- Donor-sponsored strategy documents - PRSP, CDF, NEAP, conservation strategy, etc
- World Bank and other donors' country reports
- Budget policies
- Laws and regulations on development planning and licensing
- Land laws and regulations
- All environmental laws and regulations
- State of the environment reports

iii) Detail documents obtained during assessment

Further documents will need to be collected during the remainder of the assessment (see below). Which documents are needed will become apparent during the assessment. They may include:

- Sectoral development plans
- Local development plans
- Law on local government
- Local by-laws
- National and local planning procedures
- Budget documents
- Economic statistics
- Social statistics and survey data
- Environmental monitoring data

iv) Interviews, discussion groups and meetings

The major part of the assessment will consist of gaining knowledge and understanding of planning processes as they function in practice from a wide variety of stakeholders involved in them. Typical government and civil society stakeholder groups are listed below. The principal vehicles for this research are likely to be:

- interviews with individual stakeholders
- discussion meetings with groups of stakeholders
- attendance at meetings to observe the planning process itself

Interviews and group discussions should be facilitated in such a way as to obtain answers to the questions raised by the assessment criteria. It may be helpful to prepare *questionnaires, protocols or checklists* that will contribute to this. These should not be used too rigorously however, since a great deal of unexpected knowledge can be obtained

from an unconstrained discussion of the subject area. This may be particularly true of group discussions, in which a debate between participants holding contrasting views may be highly revealing. Such discussions will however need to be facilitated, to focus them on issues related to the assessment criteria, and to extract a *consensus view* where this is possible

No such facilitation is necessary or desirable for *attendance at meetings* that are part of the planning process, in which the assessor should only observe.

The *selection of participants* is critical for the validity of the assessment. They should be chosen to cover the full spectrum of relevant planning processes, to be well informed, and to be representative of the full spectrum of stakeholders in both government and civil society, at both national and local level.

Interviews with *donors' country representatives* may be particularly useful in helping to gain an understanding of strategic planning processes, and in identifying other key participants.

Views should be obtained from *senior decision-makers* responsible for political decisions (ministers, governors), and from *officials* responsible for carrying them out. Senior decision-makers and officials should be interviewed individually.

Relevant *national government* departments may include:

- finance
- planning
- economic development
- interior
- local government
- environment
- health
- social affairs
- trade
- industry
- public works
- agriculture
- fisheries
- tourism
- housing
- communications
- international relations

or their equivalents.

Participants at *local government* level should be chosen to cover a similar range of planning issues, and to be representative of all levels of the government structure for major cities, urban and rural areas, and special areas such as industrial cities or free trade zones.

Civil society representatives may include

- industry
- commerce
- finance
- chambers of commerce
- industrial and professional associations
- other components of the private sector
- NGOs covering a wide range of social, environmental and economic issues
- NGO fora
- citizens' groups
- the media
- academics
- research institutions
- consultants

v) Documented and other evidence

During interviews, and to some extent in group discussions, opportunities should be sought to obtain or examine supporting evidence of the views being expressed.

Such evidence may include

- departmental records
- minutes of meetings
- published and unpublished reports
- presidential and ministerial speeches
- numbers and qualifications of staff responsible for discharging defined responsibilities

Confidentiality of unpublished documents to which access is given, and also of verbal information provided by participants, should be respected. This may be done by reporting findings from such sources as evidence identified by the assessment team, without attribution or confidential details.

Further evidence may be sought subsequently. Analysis of differences and conflicts between the statements that various participants have made can be revealing. The conclusions which the assessor may draw from these may need to be checked against whatever evidence might be available.

It may also be valuable to seek evidence through

- field visits
- focus groups
- public meetings

whose aim is to obtain direct information on the actual effects of planning policy on the communities or environmental characteristics which it is expected to influence.

vi) Prepare draft findings and publish for comment

The information gathered should be analysed to produce a draft report which presents the results of the assessment in relation to the criteria, summarises the evidence for these findings, and describes the areas for improvement that have been identified.

This draft report should be made available to all the participants who have contributed, and also made available to the general public. Mechanisms for encouraging, receiving and responding to comments should be defined.

vii) Consultation meeting/s or workshops

Written comments may not be sufficient to gain a full understanding of the points being made, nor to reconcile differences between them. One or more consultation meetings or workshops may therefore be valuable, to allow wide debate on the conclusions drawn from the assessment.

viii) Finalise report

The final report on the assessment should include a description of these later stages of the consultation process and of how their contributions have been taken into account. Its suggested content is given below.

3. Reporting

It is recommended that the assessment report include the following components.

1. *Summary of investigation*
This should describe the methods used, and list the organisations and people involved in consultations.
2. *Presentation of scores*
The results for each of the criteria should be presented in the format described above.
3. *Explanation of scores, with details of improvements needed*
The reasons for the findings should be described, along with the improvements identified as being needed.
4. *Description of evidence for the findings*

All findings of both a positive and negative nature should be supported by a summary of the evidence for them.

The report may include the results of monitoring of the country's sustainable development objectives, for example in relation to poverty reduction or environmental conservation. However, a record of evidence that monitoring and corrective action are taking place within the country's established systems will normally be sufficient.

If regular assessments are undertaken, the report should also include a summary of previous results and a discussion of the progress made.