

Regional workshop on National Sustainable Development Strategies Cairo 12-14 December 2004

Input from UNDP Opening statement

The Rio and Millennium Declarations call for equity through poverty alleviation and environmental sustainability. National Sustainable Development Strategies (NSDS) were first called for at the 1992 UNCED through its program of action for sustainable development – Agenda 21. The conference asked countries to adopt a national strategy for sustainable development to: <<build upon and harmonize the various sectoral economic, social and environmental policies and plans that are operating in the country>>.

Convergence of this sustainable development agenda around national development and budget processes is the most effective route for human development. NSDS offer opportunities to set goals and targets, reconcile global frameworks and local actions, bring coherence, balance and sustainability to the national development agenda and to take on the Millennium Development Goal challenge.

There has been a clear evolution in the approach to NSDS over the last decade. What was once understood as a single, new master plan for sustainable development is accepted to be an umbrella strategy comprising a set of coordinated mechanisms and participatory processes to develop vision and long term goals and targets for development, to coordinate implementation and to review progresses and effectiveness in an iterative learning system.

An NSDS must identify and build on promising, existing processes as entry points, and strengthen and improve them so they are more focused on sustainability, and are more consistent, coherent, and complementary. Implementing NSDS by 2005, so that current losses of environmental resources are effectively reversed by 2015 is an explicit IDG - origins of the MDGs - that was reaffirmed in the WSSD Joint plan of implementation. The challenge for 2005 is to improve convergence around the goals and operational principles behind the various component policies of the NSDS.

Too many NSDS are outdated, marginalized and document-focused with weaknesses in management, coordination and learning of NSDS. There has been a long-lasting confusion of equating the sustainable development strategy with the environmental strategy resulting in little potential for the instrument to drive change on social equity with little or no link to core development policy and budgets.

Embracing the principles of NSDS involves transforming development plans into an iterative continuous learning process, with synchronized time horizons of different instruments, decentralized to the most effective level of governance.

Turning the concept of sustainability into national policies and operational programs requires integrating economic, social and environmental objectives through analysis, negotiation and management of trade-offs for human development. Broad participation, effective partnerships transparency and accountability attuned to context-specific MDG agenda of social equity and environmental sustainability, need to be articulated in development plans frameworks linked to investments and national budget.

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Policy coherence, development effectiveness and efficiency of efforts will greatly benefit on the sustainable development front: environmental sustainability, social equity and sustainability of economic growth.

In all Arab countries, there is a variety of strategic planning approaches at national and decentralised levels, which an NSDS can harmonise and build on.

The Ghana report and resulting guidance outlines is an excellent basis for the 2 days of exchange and discussion on how to best move forward on sustainable development strategies