

**Profiles of Tools and Tactics
for
Environmental Mainstreaming**

No. 8

**NATIONAL SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT
STRATEGY (NSDS)**

A product of the Environmental Mainstreaming Initiative
(www.environmental-mainstreaming.org)

(supported by DFID and Irish Aid)

[DRAFT – FOR COMMENT]

International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED)
3 Endsleigh Street, London, WC1H 0DD
Tel: +44-207-388-2117; Fax: +44-207-388-2826
Email: UserGuide@iied.org
Website: www.iied.org

NATIONAL SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY (NMSDS)

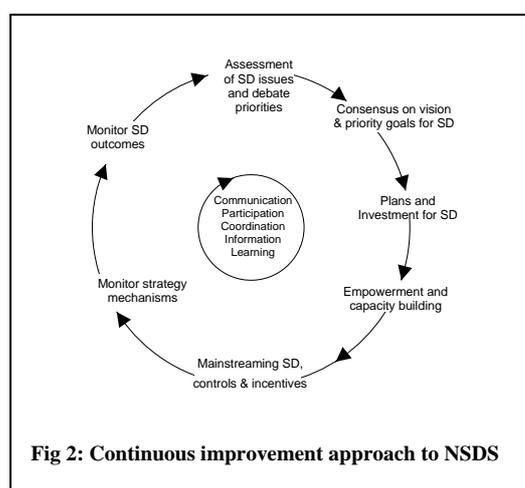
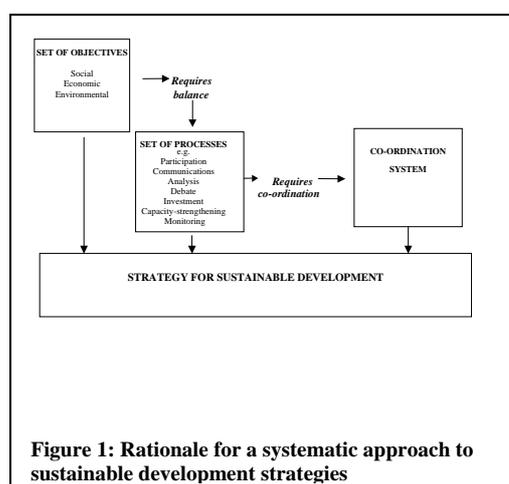
<i>What is an NSDS for?</i>			<i>What issues does an NSDS focus on?</i>	
Policy development	✓	Sets vision and objectives for SD	Environmental	✓
Planning	✓	Provides framework for action plans	Social	✓
Field work			Economic	✓
Investment	✓	Indicates where investment required	Institutional	✓
Assessment				
Monitoring	✓	To track if SD is on track		
Campaigning				

Purpose

An NSDS was once seen as a single, new, master plan for sustainable development. Today there is increasing consensus that it comprises a set of coordinated mechanisms and processes that, together, offer an integrated and participatory system to develop visions, goals and targets for sustainable development, and to coordinate implementation and review (Fig 1).

Rigid, standardised or blueprint approaches are best avoided. Instead, each individual country will need to structure its approach according to its own needs, priorities and resources. Thus, the term NSDS is increasingly being used to imply a continuous (or at least iterative) learning system rather than one-off exercises (Figure 2).

Recognising this challenge, the OECD DAC (2001) defines a NSDS as a *”co-ordinated set of participatory and continuously improving processes of analysis, debate, capacity-strengthening, planning and investment, which integrates the economic, social and environmental objectives of society, seeking trade offs where this is not possible”*.



Background facts

Agenda 21 called on all countries to develop NSDSs to translate the ideas and commitments of the 1992 Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit into concrete policies and actions. Subsequently, the Plan of Implementation agreed at the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) recommitted governments to begin NSDS implementation by 2005. Many countries have now developed NSDSs or similar cross-

cutting strategies and plans. Some of these are in their second or third iterations (eg UK). Others (eg federal countries) have not produced 'national' strategies but have focused on provincial strategies, and some prepare ministry-based strategies (eg Canada). There are also examples of regional strategies (eg for the EU). Progress is monitored by UNDESA as part of the Commission for Sustainable Development process (see: <http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/natlinfo/nsds/nsds.htm>). In many of the poorest countries, the focus is now on poverty reduction strategies. These have tended to pay limited attention to environmental concerns and so are not consistent with a key integration principle for NSDSs (Box 1). Nevertheless, they provide a mechanism that can be built on and improved to develop an effective NSDS. The same can be said for a range of related approaches such as conservation strategies, environmental action plans, strategies and plans related to the Rio conventions (biodiversity, climate, desertification), and new MDG-related strategies.

Box 1: Summarised NSDS principles

OECD DAC (2001) policy guidance sets out key principles for NSDS:

- Integration of economic, social and environmental objectives, and balance across sectors, territories and generations;
- Broad participation, effective partnerships, transparency and accountability;
- Country ownership, shared vision, commitment and continuous improvement;
- Developing capacity and an enabling environment, building on existing knowledge and processes;
- Focus on priorities, outcomes and coherent means of implementation.

Brief description of the main steps involved in application of the tool

Box 2 lists steps needed to scope out and establish a strategy by building on existing mechanisms, and/or initiating new mechanisms if necessary. But the same or similar tasks are then iterative during strategy co-ordination and continuous improvement. In practice many should be pursued in parallel. A useful first step is to undertake an initial *scoping exercise* to identify stakeholders' views on priority issues that need to be addressed. It would involve a preliminary examination of the opportunities for, and challenges of, undertaking the steps in Box 2.

Box 2: Illustrative steps for NSDS

- a) Establish or strengthen a secretariat or coordinating body.
- b) Establish or strengthen a Steering Committee or equivalent multi-stakeholder forum.
- c) Seek or improve high-level political commitment to the strategy.
- d) Secure or confirm a mandate for the strategy.
- e) Identify the stakeholders and seek agreement on their roles.
- f) Ensure broad-based ownership by key ministries and agencies, civil society and the private sector.
- g) Mobilise resources (skills, knowledge, management, legal and institutional support, finance).
- h) Map out the strategy process, taking stock of existing processes and mechanisms:
 - a. Identify the issues covered, vision, goals, and responsibilities.
 - b. Identify mechanisms and processes used by existing strategies.
 - c. Review achievements of these mechanisms in terms of synergies, clashes and gaps, and their outcomes.
 - d. Determine the existence/extent of sectoral policy conflicts and inconsistencies, and the work necessary to resolve them.
 - e. Identify what is required to improve synergies and plug gaps.
- i) Develop or improve coherence and coordination between strategy frameworks at all levels from international to local; and between and within sectors.
- j) Establish or improve the ground rules governing the strategy process:
 - a. Debate and agree how all decisions will be made and agreed, and uncertainty dealt with.
 - b. Co-ordinate means for negotiation of trade-offs and conflict management.

- k) Establish and promote a schedule or broad calendar for the strategy process – determine activities, responsibilities, capabilities and resources needed, and their timing.
- l) Promote the strategy as a unified concept. Possibly publish a ‘prospectus’ for the strategy outlining all the above.
- m) Establish or improve provisions for regular analysis, debate, communication, planning, implementation, monitoring and review; to ensure that all stakeholders are best able to play their part in the strategy. These processes will involve establishing or improving:
 - Means for analysing sustainability, stakeholders, mechanisms and processes, and scenarios
 - Regular stakeholder fora and other means for participation (thematic, national, decentralised and local) to reach and improve consensus on basic vision, goals, principles, system components, pilot activities, targets and responsibilities, and to review progress.
 - Communication and information systems to ensure regular flows of information concerning both the strategy and sustainable development between stakeholders and between fora.
 - Major decision-making arrangements, notably: structures and roles; handling global and local values and risk; means of delivering consensus and handling negotiations; and ways of linking those involved.
 - Implementation services and control mechanisms – means for selecting policy implementation instruments (regulations, incentives and voluntary mechanisms) and applying them.
 - Means for planning investments – tasks involved in making the case to different investment sources, and the criteria that should be used.
 - Monitoring and accountability mechanisms to assess both strategy processes and their results. These will include: developing and reviewing sustainability indicators, baselines, standards and codes of practice; identifying and encouraging innovative processes to promote the culture of action-learning; independent monitoring; and feedback to decision-making.

Source: Modified from OECD DAC (2001)

Expected outputs

- Vision for sustainable development (based on stakeholder consensus), analysis of trends and challenges, integrated set of development objectives and targets, policies, plans, institutional arrangements, legislative framework, action (and investment) plan and monitoring mechanisms.
- A communications and information strategy and system (with products for all appropriate media and audiences).
- Mechanisms for internal coordination (between individuals and institutions within government) and external coordination and communication (between government and other stakeholders).
- Multi-stakeholder structures for dialogue (and sometimes decision-making).
- Mechanisms for negotiation and conflict resolution.

Basic requirements

Data needs: Broad range of environmental, social and economic information on key SD trends at national/local levels (obtained via quantitative measurement or qualitative assessment). Data for tracking agreed indicators.

Time: A thorough and effective NSDS process is likely to take 2-3 years to undertake. Many NSDSs have been prepared in shorter time-frames (often 6-12 months) set by political imperatives, but suffer from poor quality and lack of stakeholder support and buy-in,

Costs: Depend on process adopted. But likely to require at least US\$500,000 to be meaningful and engage stakeholders effectively at all levels.

Skills and capacity; Secretariat or coordinating structure with dedicated staff with range of inter-linked SD experience and skills (environmental, social, economic, institutional, communications, etc)

Case studies

No country has a perfect NSDS that would satisfy all of the principles in Box 1. But many strategies exhibit good practice for some or many of those principles. The case of El Salvador illustrates how a diversity of mechanisms can contribute to the development of an NSDS (Box 3). The UK NSDS is an example of a third-generation strategy with linked sub-national strategies (Box 4)

Box 3: Case study: El Salvador's NSDS

Following the end of civil conflict in 1992, a variety of mechanisms emerged and were used to help develop a NSDS. Different sectors and levels of society debated and promoted a wide range of proposals, mechanisms and initiatives aimed at greater participation and decentralization in order to consolidate democratic processes and generate inclusive, sustainable development (*vision and goals* for the country).

Converging towards a unified objective, a variety of mechanisms were initiated or drawn upon.

- Several institutions/organizations provided channels for *communication and awareness raising*. An advocacy campaign - using consensus documents as a platform – was pursued by the National Association of Private Enterprises (ANEP), together with two prestigious national research institutes: the Salvadoran Fund for Economic and Social Development (FUSADES) and the El Salvador Centre for Democratic Studies (CEDES).
- ANEP drew up the "Entrepreneurs' Manifesto to the Nation" and FUSADES/CEDES presented "The Salvadorian challenge: from peace to sustainable development".
- The NGO Network for Local Development promoted decentralization and local development, laying the groundwork for *participation* mechanisms.
- At the invitation of the country's President, the National Commission on Development promulgated the 'Basis for the National Plan' (a *strategic assessment*).
- Subsequently, the Commission presented "Initial Actions in the National Plan", following extensive consultations with citizens and the participation of numerous national professionals as part of *planning, prioritization and decision-making* mechanisms.
- The "Proposal for a National Strategy for Local Development" (ENDL) was developed and presented by the Social Investment Fund for Local Development (FISDL) and the Consultative Group (formed by other organizations representing civil society and government). This set out a comprehensive and integrated approach to development, including *institutional change management* mechanisms.

Among the numerous processes and proposals formulated, various *coordination mechanisms* can be identified. For example, in 1997, government and donor agencies collaborated in:

- Forming the National Council for Sustainable Development (CNDS), created by decree.
- Supporting amendments to the Law on the Fund for Economic and Social Development (FODES) that allocates 6 per cent of the national budget to municipal development (*financial resources mobilization and allocation*);
- Advocating and supporting the "Proposed Guidelines for a Rural Development Strategy" by the Rural Development Committee (CDR) based on three fundamental pillars: (1) establishment of the basis of development; (2) adoption of policies to benefit rural areas; and (3) co-responsibility of civil society in rural development (*negotiation and conflict management*);
- Backing the citizens' consultative process at the local level under the framework of the National Plan, as well as the establishment of the National Mechanism for Follow Up on the National Plan for Reconstruction and Transformation (*monitoring and accountability*).

Box 4: Case study: UK NSDS

The UK prepared its first NSDS in 1994 followed by a more comprehensive strategy ('A Better Quality of Life') in 1999. Newly devolved administrations in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland subsequently published their own strategies whilst, in England, 8 new Regional Development Agencies developed regional SD frameworks.

This 1999 UK NSDS set out a long-term perspective of SD challenges, with options to address priority issues. It contained a set of 150 SD indicators and a smaller set of 15 Headline Indicators (reported on every year) and annual progress reviews. It also established a Sustainable Development Commission (SDC) (independent appointed advisers and a secretariat), and 'Green Ministers' – responsible for encouraging the use of integrated policy appraisal. SD has become a key theme in annual budget allocation discussions.

A 'traffic lights' system was developed to show how the Headline Indicators are changing:

- **Green:** good - the programme requires refinement and systematic implementation to deliver.
- **Amber/Green:** mixed - aspects will require substantial attention, and some aspects are good.
- **Amber/Red:** problematic - substantial attention with some aspects needing urgent action to deliver;
- **Red:** highly problematic - urgent and decisive action is needed if the programme is to deliver.

In 2005, as part of context setting for a review of the strategy, the annual report looked back more than one year and reviewed progress since the strategy was published. This showed inconsistencies and no systematic follow up or management of the delivery of the 1999 strategy - some actions were not pursued. The SDC also published its own review indicating patchy progress - best on air quality, river water quality and some social issues (especially education and poor housing). Public awareness raising had been less effective than hoped.

The review began in mid 2003 with draft aims set out in a consultation document. A process was initiated to gather initial stakeholder views and organise workshops to identify key themes and establish a set of aims for the review.

- improve delivery of SD outcomes;
- increase awareness of and engagement with SD;
- build a sense of common purpose while supporting devolved, regional and local diversity;
- embed SD more effectively in Government action and policy-making;
- build on what has been achieved, but challenge the government and others to do more;
- be inclusive, involve stakeholders and those responsible for delivery at all levels;
- provide leadership through a clear vision and priorities.

The consultation process was launched in April 2004. It included a web site, events on specific issues, regional and local events, and training of facilitators for discussions in community groups. Responses were evaluated and policy proposals prepared – as an internal government process, led and coordinated by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA). A new draft NSDS (*Securing The Future*) was submitted to Ministers, approved and launched in March 2005.

The new strategy contains a new vision with stronger international and societal dimensions. It is based on five key principles with an explicit focus on environmental limits. It includes four agreed priorities: sustainable consumption and production; climate change; natural resource protection; and sustainable communities. It also contains a more outcome-focused indicator set with commitments to look at new indicators such as well-being.

Four years on, many of the commitments in the 2005 strategy have been met and some expectations have been exceeded – for example the Climate Change Act 2008 that sets legally binding CO₂ reduction targets (see: <http://www.defra.gov.uk/sustainable/government/gov/index.htm>).

Alongside the 2005 strategy, the UK Shared Framework for Sustainable Development announced the joint priorities and understanding of England and the three devolved regions (Scotland, Wales, and

Northern Ireland - each have their own SD strategies). Government departments have all prepared SD Action Plans and the Sustainable Development Commission has been given a stronger remit with responsibility to report on progress on SD in the UK.

Key sources of further information and useful web-links

Dalal-Clayton D.B. and Bass S. (2002): *Sustainable Development Strategies: A Resource Book*. Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, Paris, and United Nations Development Programme, New York. in association with Earthscan Publications, London. pp c.400 (ISBN: 1 85383 947 7] (available at www.nssd.net)

OECD DAC (2001) *The DAC Guidelines: Strategies for Sustainable Development: Guidance for Development Cooperation*, Development Cooperation Committee, OECD, Paris, available] (available at www.nssd.net)

Useful websites

www.nssd.net

http://www.iisd.org/measure/principles/sd/national_sd.asp

<http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/natlinfo/nsds/nsds.htm>