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A Methodology for Assessing the Effectiveness of National Sustainable Development Strategies

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Abstract

At the Rio Earth Summit of 1992, governments undertook to develop and adopt national sustainable development strategies, as a key component of implementing the goals of Agenda 21. Only partial progress was reported at the 2002 World Summit in Johannesburg, with uncertainty in the effectiveness of those strategies which had been introduced. This paper describes a methodology for assessing the extent to which a country may be considered to have implemented an effective sustainable development strategy, with the prime aim of identifying weaknesses that need to be addressed. The methodology concentrates on evaluating those strategic planning processes that are operational in a country, taking into account any existing overall strategy document related to sustainable development, but not relying on it. It is intended to be used in three main ways: independent evaluation; evaluation by government as part of an improvement programme; and, ultimately, within an internationally agreed and verified mechanism for monitoring and accelerating the implementation of sustainable development strategies. To date, the methodology has been tested only in semi-independent evaluations, as described in a companion paper.

1. INTRODUCTION

While it would be premature to herald the arrival of a new development paradigm, it is clear that there is a growing recognition among development practitioners that a fundamental change in approach is needed if the international development goals are to be achieved by the target date of 2015. The late eighties and 1990's saw an expansion of the development agenda to encompass not just economic growth but also concerns for environmental and social issues, which was encapsulated in the concept of sustainable development. The UN Conference on Environment and Development in 1992 (the Rio Earth Summit) committed the international community to achieving the goal of sustainable development and established a set of targets in each of the three dimensions of sustainable development – economic growth, social development, and environmental protection - which were set out in Agenda 21. The conference recognised that to achieve the sustainable development goals of Agenda 21, 'national strategies, plans, policies and processes are crucial' (Agenda 21 para 1.3, UN 1992), and it was agreed that each government should adopt a national sustainable development strategy (NSDS), whose aims should include the implementation of the goals of Agenda 21.

Ten years later, it was evident that progress had been partial, halting, and insufficient to meet these goals. The UN World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) held in Johannesburg in 2002 was convened to assess the progress made towards sustainable development in the decade since the Rio Summit and to discuss the way forward. Acknowledging that Rio had failed to achieve its goal, the 2002 WSSD 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' (WSSD para 162, UN 2002).

Much of the international effort in support of the goal of sustainable development has been devoted to the needs of developing countries, with the recognition that the

elimination of poverty in poor countries will require a pattern of development which balances the need for continued economic growth with social advancement and environmental protection. The limited progress achieved in progressing these objectives, together with the challenge of meeting the 2015 Millennium Development Goals, has led to a fundamental reassessment of development policy and practice. A central component of this new approach is the concern with assessing outcomes and with the development of new development metrics.

This paper describes the development of a methodology and a set of criteria for assessing the effectiveness of national sustainable development strategies. The methodology emphasises the development component of a sustainable development strategy, and is intended for use primarily in developing countries and economies in transition. Many features of the methodology are relevant also to high income countries, but the adaptations needed are not discussed in this paper. The methodology draws therefore, on the lessons and experience of strategic development planning and policy in lower income countries. There are five parts to the paper. Part 2 discusses recent ideas and thinking on the concept of development strategy, which have led to the emergence of a new ‘scaling up’ paradigm for development strategy and policy. Part 3 discusses the principles of strategic planning and sustainable development, on which the methodology is based. Part 4 describes the methodology, and Part 5 presents suggestions for its further development and future application.

2. A ‘SCALING UP’ APPROACH TO DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

A convergence in recent thinking and ideas about development policy and practice, based on the post-Rio development experience, has fostered the emergence of a new approach to development strategy and planning. This emerging consensus has become known as ‘scaling up’ (Picciotto 2002, Stern 2002). Scaling up is an elusive concept, which embraces a range of concepts, all of which are concerned with shifting the existing parameters of development policy. Picciotto defines scaling up as meaning ‘(1) moving to a higher plane (2) assembling resources to increase the size of an object (3) calibrating an activity so that it ‘measures up’ to a given challenge. These definitions emphasise size and scope rather than simply height’. The following components of ‘scaling up’ are of particular importance in the context of sustainable development strategy.

(a) Measurement

The adoption of targets such as the Millennium Development Goals has highlighted the importance of measurement in development policy (Stern 2002). Measurement, or assessment, serves a number of related purposes. First, ex ante assessment provides an evidence-base for better policy formulation and implementation. Second, ex post assessment serves as an instrument for monitoring progress and measuring performance. More generally, it contributes to learning and understanding of what works and why, and in this way contributes to more effective policy. Third, assessment can be an instrument for accountability to stakeholders. Assessment in turn creates the need for indicators, and has stimulated an ongoing debate on the choice of target indicators and measurement techniques (White 2002, UN 2001, World Bank 2000). The use of quantitative and qualitative techniques, the particular indicators to be used, and the relative weight to be attached to each indicator, are strongly contested issues among researchers and practitioners.

(b) Integrated Development

The Rio Earth Summit firmly established the concept of sustainable development strategy as comprising economic, social and environmental components. Practice has largely failed, however, in combining the three ‘pillars’ of sustainable development into an integrated, holistic approach to development policy. Instead, economic, social and environmental policies have been formulated and applied in separation from each other, with little attempt to exploit the synergies or mitigate the potential trade offs between the three components of sustainable development.

Interest in developing a methodology for measuring the impact of development policies on sustainable development has increased in recent years. The application of separate forms of economic, social and environmental assessment at the project level has been practiced for many years, and the application of these forms of assessment at the strategic (policy, plan and programme) level has also increased in recent years. Sustainability appraisal or sustainability impact assessment (SIA) is a method of integrated strategic assessment which accords the same level of consideration to economic, social and environmental impacts, and is now beginning to be adopted at the international and national level of decision making, as a means of measuring the potential or actual impact of development policies and strategic interventions on sustainable development (DETR 2000, CEC 2001, Lee and Kirkpatrick 2000, Kirkpatrick and Lee 2002).

The notion of integration applies not only to methods of assessment, but also to policy and decision making processes. It is increasingly recognized that policy makers need to ensure that their policies are consistent with each other and with the goal of sustainable development. Achieving greater policy coherence requires efforts to improve the integration of policies across all levels of government. This will often involve fundamental changes in the institutional and organisational structures of government, if effective results-based public management processes are to become permanently embedded in governance structures as a means of monitoring and assessing performance in terms of sustainable development and poverty reduction objectives (ODI 2003).

(c) Ownership

There is widespread agreement on the need for national strategic planning processes to be country-owned. Lack of national ownership and commitment has been seen as a major factor contributing to the lack of success of development assistance programmes (OECD 2001). The principle of national ownership implies that the component processes and targets should be based on a country’s own perceptions of what constitutes its national strategy for sustainable development (McGee and Norton 2000). However, even when the development strategy is nationally led, it may not become embedded in actual implementation processes if there is insufficient political commitment to it at those levels of government which are influential in effecting (or blocking) change (McCourt 2003). Further, tensions may arise between the need for political commitment at the national level, and the implementation of sustainable development principles as defined internationally.

If strategic planning is to implement internationally agreed principles of sustainable development, ownership must extend beyond government to include other national stakeholders. The involvement of non-governmental stakeholders in strategic planning strengthens the planning process by building broad legitimacy for the

process, by engaging with partners whose support will be needed for effective implementation, and by widening the range of skills, information and understanding available for formulating and implementing the strategy. The level of participation that is possible and appropriate will be determined at the country level, in the light of the particular configuration of actors at national and local level, their various capacities to engage in participation, and the degree to which the country's political and social context is conducive to civil society engagement with government (McGee and Norton 2000). In practice, however, there may be a tension between government ownership and non-government stakeholder participation. 'Government 'ownership' of a strategy must not be too strong in relation to civil society and private sector stakeholders' (Dalal-Clayton and Bass 2002). This could shift the emphasis away from direct reform of a country's development decision-making mechanisms, to an agency-sponsored multi-stakeholder learning process whose aims are more limited.

Reconciling this tension between government ownership, the interests of non-governmental stakeholders, and the goals of international development aid agencies is a key issue in making an effective NSDS a practical reality. If the strategy is fully owned by government, but does not embed the principles of sustainable development, it will not be an effective NSDS. If on the other hand the process of ensuring that sustainable development principles are incorporated is driven by development aid agencies rather than by a country's own government, the likelihood of effective implementation will be impaired. In order to measure the effectiveness of a NSDS, it is necessary to assess the extent to which the two sides of this tension have been satisfactorily resolved in the strategy formulation process.

Basic principles for the 'scaling up' of development policy planning have been reflected, in part, in the literature and discussions on the development of national sustainable development strategies (NSDS). Agenda 21 envisaged that the necessary harmonisation and extension of existing policies and plans would occur through the adoption of an identifiable strategy for sustainable development, which itself 'should be developed through the widest possible participation' (para 8.7). However, the overall objective was not to develop a new strategy document, nor even to incorporate participation into the process of developing one, 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' (para 8.3). Agenda 21's approach to NSDS as a part of the reform of existing decision-making mechanisms was reinforced at Johannesburg. 'Each country has the primary responsibility for its own sustainable development, and the role of national policies and development strategies cannot be overemphasized. All countries should promote sustainable development at the national level by, inter alia, enacting and enforcing clear and effective laws that support sustainable development. All countries should strengthen governmental institutions, including by providing necessary infrastructure and by promoting transparency, accountability and fair administrative and judicial institutions' (para 163).

The OECD (OECD 2001) has defined a NSDS as 'a coordinated 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'. The UK Government's Target Strategy Paper on Sustainable Development (DFID 2000) argues that 'national strategies for sustainable development should be seen as

processes not new plans. They should seek to ensure that strategic planning takes account of sustainable development issues’.

It is widely agreed that the necessary reforms should be driven by countries themselves. Agenda 21 referred to a NSDS as ‘a country-driven sustainable development strategy’ (para 8.7). In its guidance on how development assistance agencies can contribute to the development of such a strategy, the OECD states that ‘past strategies have often resulted from external pressure and development agency requirements. It is essential that countries take the lead and initiative in developing their own strategies if they are to be enduring’ (OECD 2001). In support of this, ‘the role of agencies should be supplementary and not integral. The starting point is existing national policies and strategies. The specific areas where support might be sought are for the individual country to decide, in consultation with its development partners’.

3. PRINCIPLES OF STRATEGIC PLANNING AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

A strategy for sustainable development comprises a set of processes which seek to integrate the economic, social and environmental objectives of society. A strategic planning approach does not necessarily involve a development plan, with a commencement date and covering a fixed period of time. Nor does it require a separate planning process, alongside existing strategic planning processes. Instead, a national strategy for sustainable development will be distinguished by adherence to a set of strategic planning principles and by a coordinated set of measures that ensure their implementation. These principles and procedures may already be in place, in which case the implementation of an effective strategy for sustainable development will consist of improving existing planning processes and their coordination. An effective national strategy for sustainable development is evidence of the commitment to the principles of strategic planning and sustainable development and to progressing towards the desired outcomes, through a process of improvement in the effectiveness of the principles.

There is a sizeable body of literature and experience on various approaches to strategic planning for sustainable development, which attempts to integrate the components of sustainable development into national planning processes. This stock of knowledge has led to the identification of various sets of principles which strategic planning processes should seek to follow. The World Bank, IMF and OECD have each proposed separate sets of principles for strategic planning, as summarised in Box 1.

Box 1. Principles of development strategies

World Bank Principles for Assessing Comprehensive Development Framework (CDF)

- comprehensive, long term approach
- country ownership
- strategic partnership
- focus on results

Source: World Bank (2001)

IMF-World Bank Principles for Assessing Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP)

- country ownership through participation
- poverty focus
- medium and long term goals, indicators of progress, monitoring process
- priorities for public action

Source: World Bank-IMF (2001)

OECD-DAC Guiding Principles for Sustainable Development Strategies

Strategy Formulation

- Country ownership and participation, leadership and initiative in developing their strategies.
- Broad consultation, including particularly with the poor and with civil society, to open up debate on new ideas and information, expose issues to be addressed, and build consensus and political support on action.
- Ensuring sustained beneficial impacts on disadvantaged and marginalised groups and on future generations.
- Building on existing strategies and processes, rather than adding additional ones, to enable convergence and coherence.
- A solid analytical basis, taking account also of relevant regional issues, including a comprehensive review of the present situation and forecasts of trends and risks.
- Integration of economic, social and environmental objectives through mutually supportive policies and practices and the management of trade-offs.
- Realistic targets with clear budgetary priorities.

Capacity Development

- Strengthening and building on existing country capacity – public, civil society and private – as part of the strategy process.
- Linking national and local levels, including supporting devolution, in all stages of strategy development and implementation.
- Establishing continuous monitoring and evaluation systems based on clear indicators of track and steer progress.

Source: OECD (2001a)

The various sets of principles summarised in Box 1 have many similarities, with the common aim of integrating principles of strategic planning with principles of sustainable development. This integration is discussed more fully below.

Principles of sustainable development

Understanding of the concept of sustainable development has evolved over time, from the early focus on its environmental dimension to the current emphasis on sustainable development as a process, which integrates social, economic and environmental objectives. For the purpose of assessing national strategies for sustainable development, the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development can be taken as the starting point for defining those characteristics of the sustainable development process which distinguish it from other forms of development. The Rio Declaration, together with Agenda 21, established the basis from which subsequent understanding of the distinguishing characteristics of sustainable development has evolved.

This interpretation of sustainable development emphasises two key principles, namely:

- A. integration of economic, social and environmental priorities; and
- B. participation of interested parties.

As we have seen, both principles have been incorporated as key components of the new ‘scaling up’ paradigm.

A. Integration of economic, social and environmental objectives

Sustainable development entails balancing the economic, social and environmental objectives of society in decision-making. This involves the assessment of the positive and negative economic, social and environmental consequences of policy changes, the identification of ‘trade-off’ outcomes where benefits in one or more spheres are accompanied by losses in other(s), and the implementation of appropriate mitigation measures to minimise the negative impacts.

Assessment of development policy has traditionally been focused on economic impact, and more recently on environment issues. Less attention has been given to the social ‘pillar’ of sustainable development. The international community’s commitment to the reduction of world poverty means that appropriate weight must be given to the needs of the poor and other disadvantaged or marginalised groups, in integrated policy and decision-making.

B. Participation and consensus

Agenda 21 (Chapter 23) observed that ‘one of the fundamental pre-requisites of sustainable development is broad public participation in decision-making’. The involvement of non-government stakeholders in strategic planning strengthens the planning process by building broad legitimacy for the process. Participation is also an objective in its own right, meeting the fundamental equity principle of sustainable development as a process, expounded by the Rio Declaration’s Principle 3: ‘the right to development must be fulfilled so as to equitably meet developmental and environmental needs of present and future generations’.

The nature of participation in the strategic planning process can be at various levels – information sharing, consultation, joint-decision making and control by stakeholders. The level of participation that is possible and appropriate will be determined at the country level, in the light of the particular configuration of actors at national and local level, their various capacities to engage in participation, and the degree to which the country’s political and social context is conducive to civil society engagement with government (McGee and Norton, 2000). However, to the extent that it is practicable, decision-making processes need to reflect the interests of all social groups and interested parties. Achieving a degree of consensus is generally more practicable for long-term strategic decisions than for more immediate, detailed decisions, since more options are likely to be available for reconciling conflicts. The need for consensus may also be considered to be greater for long-term strategic decisions, given that such decisions are likely to have significant implications for a wide range of social groups. A consensus-based approach, based on a widespread participation process, therefore, is closely aligned to sustainable development principles.

Principles of strategic planning

Understanding of the concept of strategic planning has also evolved over time. In earlier decades, strategic planning was narrowly conceived of as consisting of a fixed plan which set target outputs for the main macro economic variables (GDP, investment, trade balance) over a fixed period of time. The selection of the targets and responsibility for implementation rested solely with government. Economic planning exercises were often donor-driven and dependent on external resources and

assistance. Planning was designed to follow a ‘rational’ model, assuming a well-coordinated decision process with the formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of planning policy following a sequential cycle.

It is generally recognised that in practice the planning process seldom follows the sequence from formulation to implementation to monitoring and evaluation, but instead occurs as a continuous and iterative process, where important decisions are frequently taken during the implementation stage, and monitoring and evaluation occur in advance of outputs and outcomes (Booth and Lucas, 2001). Thus, while current understanding of strategic planning retains the idea of planning as being about setting goals and identifying the means of achieving them, it has moved away from a fixed plan and solutions, to an adaptive process, involving the management of change as it affects conditions, constraints and resources. Second, it involves a shift from the view that the state alone is responsible for development, to one where various stakeholders are involved in the planning process through consultation and participation. Third, strategic planning involves national ownership, reflecting national objectives and priorities that are rooted in national processes of dialogue and accountability. Fourth, strategic planning involves a comprehensive and holistic approach which seeks to integrate the full range of available resources, and to build on existing policies and initiatives. The strategic planning process should also incorporate procedures for targeting, resourcing and monitoring.

The principles of effective strategic planning which emerge from current understanding of the strategic planning process can be summarised as:

- C. Country ownership and commitment
- D. A comprehensive and coherent policy process
- E. Targeting, resourcing and monitoring

Further interpretation of these principles can be obtained by reference to more general principles of planning. These have been elaborated, for example, in the international definition of quality systems, through which reliable processes can be established for achieving any desired goals. The international quality systems standard ISO 9001 offers a set of general principles for effective process management (ISO 2000), the most relevant of which are taken into account in the following discussion of the principles of an effective planning process.

C. Country Ownership and Commitment

While the need for the strategic planning process to be country-owned may seem self-evident, it needs to be stressed, in the light of experiences where the development of a strategy has been led by donors, and not translated into national planning systems. The principle of national ownership implies that the component processes and targets should be based on a country’s own perception of what constitutes its national strategy for sustainable development (McGee and Norton, 2000).

Even when the development of strategy is nationally led, it may not become embedded in actual planning processes if there is insufficient commitment to it at those levels of government which are the most influential in defining those processes. This corresponds to clause 5.1 of ISO 9001, which requires top level commitment to be demonstrated, and the involvement of top level decision-makers in reviews of the system’s effectiveness.

D. Comprehensive and Coherent Policy Process

For a strategy to be effective it must be realistic. Booth and Lucas (2001) identify a ‘missing middle’ in much of current strategic planning, which they describe as the failure of the planning process to specify how identified activities are expected to result in the specified target outcomes; and more particularly, why the activities are expected to do better than comparable activities have done in the past.

This means that a strategy must be based on reliable information and draw on valid analyses of the likely outcomes of chosen strategy options. This need corresponds to ISO 9001’s clause 5.4.2, which requires a demonstration of how plans will meet their desired objectives.

As noted in the above discussion, sustainable development strategies should not be seen as new plans, nor as separate planning processes alongside existing processes. They should instead represent the adaptation of existing processes, where this is necessary to comply with sustainable development principles. Clauses 4 and 5 of ISO 9001 set out similar requirements, which ensure that the strategy is coherent with actual management processes.

The strategic planning process will only be effective if the decisions which it requires to be made are allocated to those bodies with the necessary information and resources to make them. In particular, overall national strategy needs to be set at national level, while detailed local decisions which will contribute to the achievement of that overall strategy need to be made at local level. Clause 5.5.2 of ISO 9001 states this need in general terms, requiring that the responsibilities, authorities and interrelationships of those authorities responsible for implementation must be defined.

E. Targeting, Resourcing and Monitoring

Although understanding of the principles of strategic planning has evolved to embrace adaptive processes and the management of change, the need for setting goals and identifying the means of achieving them remains an essential part of the process. This is closely aligned to ISO 9001’s clause 5.4.1, which requires measurable objectives to be defined, and clause 5.4.2, requiring the means of achieving them to be established.

Of its nature, strategic planning involves a high degree of uncertainty. Few aspects of the development process are sufficiently well understood to allow accurate forecasts of the effects of strategic decisions, and information on current conditions and influences on them is rarely sufficient to support precise analyses. To be effective, therefore, the process relies on monitoring of progress and of unanticipated effects, and feedback into the planning process to adapt it as necessary. This is a critical component of ISO 9001, where clause 8 requires that implementation of processes must be routinely audited, that achievement of their objectives must be monitored, that corrective action must be taken in response, and that all results must be recorded.

As part of the need to ensure means of achieving the strategy’s goals, institutional and human resources are just as essential as financial ones. ISO 9001 establishes this in its clause 6, which requires that resources must be provided for implementing all aspects of the system, and for improving it where appropriate.

OECD and the UN have both developed a number of principles which a NSDS should follow if it is to be effective (OECD 2001, UN 2001a). These are given in full in Annex 1 and summarised in Table 1, together with each of the five corresponding

core principles of sustainable development and strategic planning discussed above. Consistent with the notion of convergence between different strategic development planning processes, the twelve principles proposed by the OECD and the fifteen proposed by the UN are broadly similar, and may be grouped within the five broader core principles. As discussed above, these core principles are grounded in the fundamental characteristics of sustainable development established in the UNCED and subsequent UN Conferences, and the general characteristics of effective planning and process management set out in the international quality systems standard ISO 9001.

Table 1. Principles of strategic planning for sustainable development

Core principles	OECD principles of strategic planning for sustainable development	UN principles for effective national sustainable development strategy
A. Integration of economic, social and environmental objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comprehensive and integrated • People-centred 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrated and balanced across sectors and territories.
B. Participation and consensus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consensus on long-term vision • Effective participation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shared strategic and pragmatic vision. • Link the short to the medium and long term. • Ensure continuity of the strategy development process. • Participatory and the "widest possible participation" ensured.
C. Country ownership and commitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Country-led and nationally-owned • High-level government commitment and influential lead institutions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nationally owned and country driven process. • Strong political commitment at the national and local levels. • Spearheaded by a strong institution.
D. Comprehensive and coherent policy process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Based on comprehensive and reliable analysis • Building on existing processes and strategies • Link national and local levels 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targeted with clear budgetary priorities • Incorporate monitoring, learning and improvement • Develop and build on existing capacity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set realistic but flexible targets. • Coherence between budget and strategy priorities. • Build mechanisms for monitoring follow up, evaluation and feedback. • Built on existing knowledge, expertise and capacity.

4. A METHODOLOGY FOR ASSESSING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF NATIONAL SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

The five core principles discussed in the previous section provide the starting point for the development of the assessment methodology which is discussed in this section of the paper. The purpose of the assessment methodology is to provide a qualitative indicator of the progress made in implementing a national process of strategic planning for sustainable development.

Selection of assessment criteria

The proposed assessment approach consists of a set of criteria for each of the five principles defined above, which taken together provide the basis for an assessment of the particular principle. For the criteria to serve this purpose, they should 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 well-defined, and 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 to be applied to each of the five principles was based on an comprehensive analysis of a range of information sources relating to strategic planning and sustainable development. First, the general principles of effective process management, as elaborated in the international quality systems standard ISO 9001, were reviewed, and those principles having particular relevance and applicability to the sustainable development planning process, were identified. Second, the literature on the policy and practice of strategic planning processes, particularly in developing countries, was examined, with the aim of identifying key issues and experiences which could inform the framing of the assessment methodology.

Four key criteria are identified which cover the separate aspects and dimensions of the principle to which they relate. The criteria for each of the five principles are given in Box 2.

Box 2. Assessment criteria

a. Integration of economic, social and environmental objectives

Criterion a1 - integration

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.

Criterion a2 - social and poverty issues

Strategic planning in the country integrates poverty eradication, gender issues and the short- and long-term needs of disadvantaged and marginalised groups into economic policy.

Criterion a3 - environmental and resource issues

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.

Criterion a4 - international commitments

Measures are in place to ensure compliance with international agreements which the country has entered into, on environmental and social issues.

b. Participation and consensus

Criterion b1 - involvement of stakeholders

The country's processes of strategic planning, implementation, monitoring and review include the participation of stakeholders, including government, decentralised authorities, elected bodies, non-governmental and private sector institutions and marginalised groups.

Criterion b2 - transparency and accountability

The management of the country's strategic planning processes is transparent, with accountability for decisions made.

Criterion b3 - communication and public awareness

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.

Criterion b4 - long term vision and consensus

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- and medium-term necessities, and has wide political and stakeholder support.

c. Country ownership and commitment

Criterion c1 - high level government commitment

The process of formulating and implementing the national strategy is led by government, with evidence of high level commitment.

Criterion c2 - broad-based political support

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 - co-ordination with donors

The country's strategic planning process is co-ordinated with donor programmes.

d. Comprehensive and coherent 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 co-ordination 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.

Applying the assessment criteria

Many of the criteria define characteristics of strategic planning processes which are variable in nature, rather than being clear-cut attributes. For example, criterion a1 states that planning "is based on a comprehensive and integrated analysis". In practice, there will be different degrees of comprehensiveness and integration. For a criterion to be satisfactorily met, a significant degree of adherence to it will normally be sufficient. If, however, some form of integration of economic, social and environmental issues takes place (criterion a1), but in a way that is considered to be technically unsound, or such that planning is nonetheless dominated by economic considerations, the assessment will have identified a need for improvement, and the criterion will be only partly met.

In forming judgements on whether a criterion is met satisfactorily, the assessment should take into account whether the action being taken under the planning process is relevant, appropriate, and effective. In order to facilitate such judgements, a set of supplementary guidance questions relating to each criterion has been developed (Kirkpatrick, George and Curran 2001). The purpose of these guidance questions is to aid assessors in gaining sufficient understanding of the planning system and its practical operation to form a judgement on whether the corresponding criterion is met

satisfactorily. These supplementary questions do not themselves imply requirements for an effective national strategy. They serve only to provide information which may help to determine whether the requirements defined by the criteria are satisfied.

Categorising progress in meeting the criteria

The purpose of the assessment is to provide guidance to policymakers on progressing the implementation of an effective national strategic planning process for sustainable development. The outcome of the application of the assessment, therefore, should provide decision-makers with a clear indication of areas where progress has been sufficient to meet the requirements for the implementation of an effective planning process, and to identify areas where further improvement is needed. With this objective in mind, a scoring scheme is proposed, with four alternative scores being used to indicate the extent to which each criterion is being met.

The scoring is as follows:

- A = all of the requirements of the criterion are fully met
- B = all of 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

This scoring system is loosely based on that used in ISO 9001 assessments, which focus on identifying major or minor shortcomings in an organisation's management processes, that need to be rectified in order to comply with the defined criteria. As with the ISO system, the validity of the assessment depends on the competence and objectivity of the assessor in making informed judgements.

The proposed assessment methodology is designed such that it may be incorporated into a country's own strategic planning process, to provide for the review of the effectiveness of the entire planning process as a strategy for sustainable development. It also provides support for any other systems that may be in place in the country to monitor the implementation of strategic plans for the achievement of economic, social and environmental objectives.

It is intended that countries may use the methodology proposed here, to undertake an initial assessment of their progress towards implementing effective strategies for sustainable development, and repeat the assessment periodically as part of the overall strategic planning process.

Using the scoring scheme described above, a score of A, B, C or D is assigned to each criterion. In order to obtain the necessary information and form appropriate judgements on what improvements may be needed to fully satisfy the criteria, the assessment team may make use of the supplementary guidance questions for each criterion. The assessment report should provide a brief supporting text which summarises the reasoning and evidence upon which the assessment score for each criterion is based. The results and supporting text should be clearly presented for each of the criteria. These results are then extracted, and are recorded for each of the principles.

Annex 2 gives an example of Assessment Worksheets that may be used to present the findings. In addition to giving the scores for each criterion, the assessment's conclusions for each of the principles are recorded. These provide an overall, qualitative assessment for each principle, based on the scores assigned to each criterion. Importantly, these conclusions should draw attention to the main areas where existing processes might be strengthened to improve the effectiveness of the principle's implementation as a key component of the strategic planning for sustainable development process.

The results recorded can be used to draw general conclusions as to the effectiveness of the national strategy for sustainable development, and to identify the main areas where improvements should be sought. For example, if a country records no scores below B for a particular principle, it can be concluded that the strategic planning process for sustainable development is being satisfactorily implemented for this principle. Alternatively, if most of the scores are below C, it indicates a need for further improvement. Lower scores (C or below) indicate areas where efforts to improve the strategic planning process might be concentrated. On this basis, overall conclusions can be formulated in a manner similar to the hypothetical example in Table 2.

Table 2. Hypothetical Example of Level 2 Assessment Worksheet

Principle	Criteria Scores				Overall conclusions
	1	2	3	4	
A	B	B	B	C	The national strategy on the whole satisfies the principle. Further progress can be made in all areas, but improvement is needed for only one of the criteria.
B	B	C	C	C	The principle is satisfied for one of the criteria, but improvements are needed for each of the others.
C	A	B	A	B	The national strategy satisfies all the criteria, and fully meets the requirements for two of the criteria.
D	C	C	C	D	Progress towards satisfying the principle has been made for all but one of the criteria.
E	A	B	C	D	The principle is fully or satisfactorily met for two criteria, but the requirements for the other two are not yet satisfactory.

Organisation of the assessment

The scores for each criterion need to be based on a thorough understanding of the country's strategic planning processes, as a strategy for sustainable development. 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, while 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 will be to investigate the country's actual strategic planning processes.

These processes will be highly complex, covering many government departments at both national and local level, and a wide variety of other stakeholders. A judgement has to be made on how thoroughly those processes need to be investigated, understood and evaluated, in order to assess their effectiveness as a national strategy for sustainable development. An in-depth study is likely to take many months, and involve extensive consultation. However, investigations that are considerably less intensive may yield sufficient understanding and information to permit reliable judgements to be made. An example of an in-depth investigation is the mid-term review of Pakistan's National Conservation Strategy (Hanson et al 2001), which took 18 months to complete, and included nine preliminary studies of individual aspects of the strategy. At the opposite extreme, an independent review of Uganda's development policies and programmes (Dearden 1998) was undertaken in a two-week visit by two people, working with a local adviser, with about one week's advance preparation. Our own experience in conducting assessments of national environmental assessment systems, though more limited in scope, suggests that a reasonably thorough understanding of planning system performance can be attained in a short space of time (METAP 2001). However, the process of consultation on the findings, and reaching agreement between the different stakeholders involved in approving the assessment report, will take longer.

To give the assessment credibility in the eyes of the decision-makers who are responsible for acting on its findings, the process should be overseen by a steering committee composed of senior officials of the most relevant government ministries, including a representative of the office of the Prime Minister or President. The assessment team should be composed of senior experts covering the economic, social and environmental spheres. The assessment should begin with desk study of key documents. A series of interviews and discussion fora will follow, supported by examination of further documents. Wherever practicable, evidence should be sought to verify opinions that are expressed. Attendance at meetings to observe the planning process in practice will provide additional valuable information.

Before the assessment report is published, it is recommended that a draft should be circulated for comment to all participants in the assessment, and made publicly available for comment. One or more consultation meetings may also be valuable, to allow wider debate on the conclusions before the report is finalised

Guidelines on undertaking an assessment of the effectiveness of a country's strategy for sustainable development are provided in Annex 3. 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 arrangements for conducting an assessment and for the analysis and reporting of results are both covered in the guidance. 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.

While the guidelines given in Annex 3 are intended for use by governments as part of a strategic improvement programme, they may be adapted for use in independent evaluations. In such cases it is recommended that the methods of investigation and reporting (sections ii to v and viii) should be similar to those described, but the organisation and consultation processes may be varied to suit the nature of the assessment, and hence to allow, where appropriate, a considerable reduction in the time and resources needed.

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 as discussed in Section 4.3.
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 effective monitoring and corrective action are taking place 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.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This paper has proposed a methodology for assessing the effectiveness of a country's national strategic planning processes for progressing the objective of sustainable development. The approach that has been proposed is designed to be adaptable to different national needs, resource constraints and capacities. The approach is not intended to serve as a fixed blueprint or template, but will need to be trialed in the field and adapted in the light of experience¹. At the same time it offers a process for recording progress made in achieving outcomes that contribute towards the goal of sustainable development.

¹ To date, the approach has been applied in independent evaluations carried out in Uganda (Moyini and Kagoro 2002) and a number of transitional economies.

The evaluation methodology proposed in this paper is intended primarily for use by countries themselves, to assess the effectiveness of their national sustainable development strategies, in pursuit of their own sustainable development goals and the international commitments they have made. Its design is such as to encourage this, although significant barriers need to be overcome. Few governments willingly subject themselves to open scrutiny and potential criticism of their decision-making mechanisms. To make the evaluation process fully effective there needs to be some other body with the authority to oversee it, and to validate the competence and objectivity of assessors.

For developing countries, donor agencies might fulfil this role. However, this runs the risk of introducing a new conditionality into development assistance, and would excuse high income countries from being subjected to the same scrutiny as developing ones. Ideally, the role would be assumed by the United Nations, by agreement of its member states, as the body under whose authority countries are required to develop and adopt NSDS. In the absence of such agreement, use of the methodology is likely to be restricted initially to independent evaluations, or voluntary application by governments themselves. To encourage this, the methodology focuses on identifying potential improvements to a country's strategic planning processes, and on measuring incremental change and progress towards implementing a fully effective national strategy for sustainable development.

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ANNEX 1 NSDS PRINCIPLES

OECD Principles

People-centred. An effective strategy requires a people-centred approach. While many past strategies have been about development, they have often had mixed effects on different groups. More should be done to ensure that strategies have long-term beneficial impacts on disadvantaged and marginalised groups, such as the poor.

Consensus on long-term vision. Strategic planning frameworks are more likely to be successful when they have a long-term vision with a clear timeframe upon which stakeholders agree. At the same time, they need to include ways of dealing with short- and medium-term necessities and change. The vision needs to have the commitment of all political parties. Without this, there is the danger that an incoming government will see a particular strategy as representing the views or policies of its predecessor.

Comprehensive and integrated. Strategies should seek to integrate, where possible, economic, social and environmental objectives. But where integration cannot be achieved, trade offs need to be negotiated. The entitlements and possible needs of future generations must be factored into this process.

Targeted with clear budgetary priorities. The strategy needs to be fully integrated into the budget process to ensure that plans have the financial resources to achieve their objectives, and budgets are informed by meaningful planning. Strategies not linked to budget processes tend to be wish lists, while budgets not linked to plans lead to unclear priorities. Capacity constraints and time limitations will have an impact on the extent to which the intended outcomes are achieved. Targets need to be challenging – but realistic in relation to these constraints.

Based on comprehensive and reliable analysis. Priorities need to be based on a comprehensive analysis of the present situation and of forecasted trends and risks, examining links between local, national and global challenges. The external pressures on a country – those resulting from globalisation, for example, or the impacts of climate change – need to be included in this analysis. Such analysis depends on credible and reliable information on changing environmental, social and economic conditions, pressures and responses, and their correlations with strategy objectives and indicators. Local capacities for analysis and existing information should be fully used, and different perceptions amongst stakeholders should be reflected.

Incorporate monitoring, learning and improvement. Monitoring and evaluation needs to be based on clear indicators and built into strategies to steer processes, track progress, distil and capture lessons, and signal when a change of direction is necessary.

Country-led and nationally-owned. Past strategies have often resulted from external pressure and development agency requirements. It is essential that countries take the lead and initiative in developing their own strategies if they are to be enduring.

High-level government commitment and influential lead institutions. Such commitment – on a long-term basis – is essential if policy and institutional changes are to occur, financial resources are to be committed and for there to be clear responsibility for implementation.

Building on existing processes and strategies. A strategy for sustainable development is not intended as a new planning process. It should build on what already exists in the country, so enabling convergence, complementarity and coherence between different planning frameworks and policies. This requires good management to ensure coordination of mechanisms and processes, and to identify and resolve potential conflicts. The latter may need an independent and neutral third party to act as a facilitator. The roles, responsibilities and relationships between the different key participants in strategy processes must be clear.

Effective participation. Broad participation helps to open up debate to new ideas and sources of information; expose issues that need to be addressed; enable problems, needs and preferences to be expressed; identify the capabilities required to address them; and develop a consensus on the need for action that leads to better implementation. But to date, most strategies have been prepared with only limited participation. Clearly central government must be involved (it can deliver leadership, provide

incentive structures and distribute financial resources) but multi-stakeholder processes are required involving decentralised authorities, the private sector and civil society, as well as marginalised groups. This requires good communication and information mechanisms with a premium on transparency and accountability.

Link national and local levels. Strategies should be two-way iterative processes within and between national and decentralised levels. The main strategic principles and directions should be set at the central level (here, economic, fiscal and trade policy, legislative changes, international affairs and external relations, etc. are key responsibilities). But detailed planning, implementation and monitoring would be undertaken at a decentralised level, with appropriate transfer of resources and authority.

Develop and build on existing capacity. Many existing strategies have failed as countries have lacked the human resources and skills to develop and implement them effectively. At the outset it is important to assess the political, institutional, scientific and financial capacity of potential state, market and civil society participants. Where needed, provision should be made to develop the necessary capacity as part of the strategy process. A strategy should optimise local skills and capacity both within and outside government.

Source: OECD (2001)

UN Principles

- i. **Strong political commitment.** The strategy development process needs to be backed by strong political commitment at both the national and local levels. Such commitment should there on a continuous and long-term basis. This is key to guaranteeing that the policy and institutional changes that the strategy entails are effected, the necessary financial resources committed and institutions assume full responsibility for implementation of the strategy in their respective areas.
- ii. **Shared strategic and pragmatic vision.** The NSDS process needs to be based on a long-term strategic vision of a country that outlines what needs to be done in the future and defines targets and courses of action. Such a vision should reflect the country's history, core values and aspirations of the people. It is important to ensure that the stated goals and objectives can reasonably be achieved and that they are backed with the full commitment of those sectors (private, government, academic and research, etc), which are supposed to implement them.
- iii. **Nationally owned and country driven process.** Countries should take the initiative to develop their own strategies. This is one of the key factors that would ensure the effectiveness and continuity of the NSDS process. Many strategies of the past decade have been responses to external pressure and development agency requirements. As a result, they were either one time exercises or have often failed.
- iv. **Build on existing knowledge, expertise and capacity.** A strategy should optimize local skills and capacity both within and outside government. Where needed, provision should be made to develop the necessary capacity as part of the strategy process. Traditional knowledge and institutions, often neglected by strategy processes, need to be given due recognition and be brought on board. Assessment of the political, institutional, scientific and financial capacity of potential state, market and civil society participants may be among the activities undertaken at the beginning of the sustainability strategy formulation process.
- v. **Build also on existing processes and strategies.** A strategy for sustainable development should build on existing strategies, policies and processes. The strategy should work towards convergence, complementarity and coherence among different planning frameworks and policies. This requires good management to ensure co-ordination of mechanisms and processes, and to identify and resolve potential conflicts. The roles, responsibilities and relationships between the different key participants in strategy processes must also be made clear.
- vi. **A strong institution should spearhead the process.** A high level, influential institution, e.g., a commission, ministry, sustainable development or planning council, with the full support of the head of government should coordinate the process. That institution should also be technically strong to carry out coordination, provide guidance and command the respect of sector ministries, provincial administrations and civil society. To succeed, the NSDS requires a highly motivated, inspiring and knowledgeable person in a leadership position. The leadership of that organization would play a decisive role.

vii. **Ensuring the "widest possible participation."** This means sharing responsibility and building partnerships among all concerned – civil society, business, community and interest groups, as well as governments. Broad participation helps to open up the strategy development process to new ideas and sources of information; expose issues that need to be addressed; enable problems, needs and preferences to be expressed; and develop a consensus on the need for action that leads to better implementation. Clearly, the role of central government is crucial as it provides leadership, incentive structures and allocates financial resources. But the central government has to be part of a multi-stakeholder participatory process that involves local authorities, the private sector and civil society, as well as indigenous groups.

viii. **Anchor the strategy process in sound technical analysis.** Priorities need to be based on a sound analysis of the present situation and of projected trends and risks, examining links between local, national and global challenges. The external pressures on a country - those resulting from globalization, for example, or the impacts of climate change - need to be included in this analysis. Such analysis depends on credible and reliable information on changing environmental, social and economic conditions, pressures and responses, and their correlations with strategy objectives and indicators. Local capacities for analysis and existing information should be fully used, and different perceptions amongst stakeholders should be reflected.

ix. **Integrated and balanced strategy.** Sustainability strategies need to be comprehensive as well as vertically and horizontally integrated. Vertical integration refers to incorporating community (local) level concerns and actions into national decision making processes. Special efforts should be made to ensure that strategies have long-term beneficial impacts on disadvantaged and marginalized groups, such as the poor. Horizontal integration on the other hand refers to the coordinated involvement of various sectors in strategy development. Ensuring balance between economic growth, social development and protection of the environment is a fundamental principle of sustainable development strategies. Perfect integration or perfect balance is not possible. Nor could every conflict result in a win/win situation for all. In some situations, trade offs might in the end be necessary.

x. **Link the short to the medium and long term.** Medium and long term plans and actions are implemented through a series of short-term action plans. It is only when planned outputs of the strategy are specified in a work plan (daily activities) for stakeholders that the strategy becomes a reality. Indeed, one of the key lessons learned from the conventional five year development plans was the importance of shortening the time horizon through a series of five, three and yearly plans. This process enables countries to ensure consistency and to establish strong linkages between immediate and medium term undertakings. Sustainable development strategies should not necessarily have a rigidly defined time frame. However, it is important to ensure that what is being done in the immediate term does not thwart expected outputs in the medium and long term.

xi. **Coherence between budget and strategy priorities.** The annual budget process plays a central role in linking the short to the medium and long term. The strategy needs to be fully integrated into the budget process to ensure that components of the strategy have the financial resources to achieve their objectives. Strategies not linked to the budget process tend to be wish lists, while budgets not linked to the strategy lead to unclear priorities. Capacity constraints and time limitations will have an impact on the extent to which the intended outcomes are achieved.

xii. **Set realistic but flexible targets.** Target setting helps individuals and organizations to define the quantity and quality of expected outputs and services "Targets" accompanied by incentives can, indeed, motivate both management and workers to work hard and apply their utmost creativity and energies. Although targets need to be challenging, they ought to be achievable and realistic in relation to actual and perceived constraints and be set at the organizational or firm level.

xiii. **Link national and local priorities and actions.** Strategies should be two-way iterative processes within and between national and provincial/ district level entities. The main strategic principles and directions should be set at the central level (here, economic, fiscal and trade policy, legislative changes, international affairs and external relations, etc., are key responsibilities). But detailed planning, implementation and monitoring should be undertaken at local administrative levels. It is, however, important to ensure that such local institutions have the necessary capacity as well as the authority to mobilize and allocate resources.

xiv. **Build mechanisms for monitoring, follow up, evaluation and feedback.** Evaluation and learning from experience need to be an integral part of the strategy process. Monitoring and evaluation needs to be based on clear indicators and built into strategies to steer processes, track progress, distil and capture lessons, and signal when a change of direction is necessary. It is important to develop an evaluative culture (doing, improving, learning and relearning). The strategy process should enhance institutional arrangements, sharpen concepts and tools, foster professional skills and competence, and improve public awareness. As policy responses and technological capability change over time, the M&E process would permit regular update and continuous renewal of the strategy. It would also enable public institutions to produce regular national reports (including indicators) so that stakeholders can see progress (and the Government) be held accountable.

xv. **Ensure continuity of the strategy development process.** Strategy development is a continuous process that requires long-term and uninterrupted effort. Regardless of the political party in power, the strategy development needs to be carried out as a continuous and cyclical process with broad national support.

Source: UN (2001)

ANNEX 2 ASSESSMENT WORKSHEETS

Example of Level 1 Assessment Worksheet

Principle A: Integration of Economic, Social and Environmental Objectives

Criteria	Score	Summary Explanation of Score
A1		
A2		
A3		
A4		

Level 2 Assessment Worksheet

Principle	Criteria Scores				Overall conclusions
	1	2	3	4	
A					
B					
C					
D					
E					

ANNEX 3. GUIDANCE ON UNDERTAKING AN EVALUATION

Note: the following guidance is intended for use in a country's own improvement programme, and will need to be adapted for specific circumstances. In particular, sections (i), (vi) and (vii) may be simplified for use in independent evaluations.

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.

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.
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 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.

This paper was based on research commissioned by the UK Department for International Development (DFID)