

# National Strategies and National Councils for Sustainable Development



Mainstreaming Sustainable Development at  
National and Local Levels

## Abstract

In the post 1992 (Earth Summit) and 2002 (World Summit on Sustainable Development) the call to all nations to "make progress in the formulation and elaboration of national strategies for sustainable development" and also to begin their implementation by 2005 has been met with limited success.

Though many countries prepared National Sustainable Development Strategies (NSDSs) and formulated National Councils for Sustainable Development (NCSDs), the outcome has not been satisfactory, mainly due to the absence of inter-generational planning, inadequate horizontal as well as vertical integration across government ministries / departments and lack of formal tracking mechanisms that could guide shorter term planning processes.

But does this failure mark the end of NSDSs and NCSDs? Not quite.

Going forward, there is a belief that the current framework of NSDS and NCSD must continue, but with an added mechanism – that of "watch" institutions - who can shoulder the responsibility of systematically tracking progress towards Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as defined by the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (JPoL) . Left to themselves in the years following the Rio+20 conference, NCSDs, (largely government agencies) may not be able to address regional concerns adequately and achieve the SDGs.

This paper examines the experience of the past decade and discusses a potential framework that will leverage the immense potential of NSDS and NCSD along with the collective experience of regional and national "watch" institutions, who, in the post-Rio+20 scenario, should be tasked with the responsibility of tracking progress towards sustainability (while balancing the three pillars of social, environmental and economic development) and enabling nations to fulfil their Sustainable Development vision.

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<sup>1</sup> The Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, agreed at the World Summit on Sustainable Development (Earth Summit 2002) affirmed UN commitment to 'full implementation' of Agenda 21, alongside achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and other international agreements.

## Outline

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>NSDS and NCSD: A Brief Overview</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>The NSDS and NCSD Experience across the World</b>	<b>2</b>
3.1	Integration across the 3 Pillars	2
3.2	Institutional Mainstreaming	3
3.3	Successful Practices – Experiences from OECD Countries	4
<b>4</b>	<b>Challenges faced by NCSDs</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Recommendations for NSDS and NCSD Post Rio+20</b>	<b>6</b>
5.1	Global Level	6
5.2	Regional Level	6
5.3	National Level	7
<b>6</b>	<b>Role of “Watch” Organisations Post Rio+20</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>9</b>

## 1 Introduction

At the 1992 Earth Summit, the international community adopted Agenda 21<sup>2</sup>, an unprecedented global plan of action for Sustainable Development (SD). Ten years later, in Johannesburg, at the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development, the community reiterated the call to all countries to "make progress in the formulation and elaboration of national strategies for sustainable development" and also to begin their implementation by 2005.

As the activation and acceleration of development requires, both, a dynamic and a supportive international trade policies and determined policies at the national level, many developed and developing countries took the initiative to prepare National Sustainable Development Strategies (NSDSs) through formulation of respective National Councils for Sustainable Development (NCSDs).

At the 20th Anniversary of the Rio Summit (Rio+20), member states need to reaffirm and renew political commitment for SD by agreeing to the principles laid down in 1992. In the lead up to Rio+20, member states have agreed that SD must be the overarching goal. On March 3, 2012, the UNCSD Secretary General emphasized that "proposals for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are being discussed as the mechanism to prioritize actions to achieve SD"<sup>3</sup>. In line with Agenda 21, these SDGs integrate the three pillars of sustainability and, building on the lessons from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), are expected to be at the core of the strategy to achieve the overall global sustainability in a given time frame in the post-2015 scenario.

It is recognized that each nation will need the policy and planning space to pursue its own development path relevant to its national and regional circumstance. Therefore, the role of the NCSDs and their potential in directing nations towards regional and global synergies for SD gains increasing relevance.

Over the past one decade, many reports, assessments, and workshops to discuss the progress, achievements and challenges of NSDS and NCSD have been put forward. While acknowledging the significant strides made by some nations, lessons indicate that NCSDs have not been mainstreamed into most national processes and their potential at addressing regional concerns has not been realized.

This paper examines the experience of the past decade and discusses a potential framework that will leverage the immense potential of NSDS and NCSD along with the collective experience of regional and national "watch" institutions, who, in the post-Rio+20 scenario, should be tasked with the responsibility of tracking progress towards sustainability (while balancing the three pillars of social, environmental and economic development) and enabling nations to fulfil their SD vision.

## 2 NSDS and NCSD: A Brief Overview

A National Sustainable Development Strategy (NSDS) is a continuing and adaptive process which involves situation analysis, formulation of policies and action plans, implementation, monitoring and regular review.

A National Council/Commission for Sustainable Development (NCSD) is a political body mandated to express the priority that the country places on undertaking development in a sustainable manner, and to maintain this priority through implementation and monitoring of the NSDS. The structure of the NCSD differs from country to country and, in some cases, has been assigned to special departments created for the purpose or to existing agencies such as the Ministry of Environment. In almost all cases, NCSDs are represented by government ministries and till 2008, only about 40% of the NCSDs had civil society representatives.

In line with Agenda 21, the purpose of the NSDS and NCSD was two-fold:

1. Integration of the three pillars of SD viz., Strengthening Economic Base, Sound Ecosystem Management and Social Inclusion, in the decision-making processes of countries in order to promote SD at national, regional and global levels, and
2. Institutional mainstreaming across Governments, Civil Society, the Private Sector and International Bodies.

It needs to be emphasized here that NSDSs were not intended to replace existing national planning and development strategy tools per se. Agenda 21 had called for a more "organized and strategic approach" to ensure that national development plans of countries integrated the principles of SD embedded in a dynamic manner. The envisaged role of the NSDSs was, therefore, supportive and strategic.

However, except for some OECD countries as discussed later and few examples from the Asia Pacific region, the impact of NCSD and NSDS on the annual or mid-term planning of national development plans has been contentious. Discussions have revealed the challenges of inter-governmental coherence, integration, capacities and lack of credible data, external economic and trade pressures of trade, lack of stakeholder engagement and political and unwillingness amongst others. Further, numerous assessments of the NCSDs on how they fulfilled the above two objectives have indicated that they have tended to act in an advisory rather than a decision-making capacity, and failed to fulfil the twin functions of integration and institutional mainstreaming.

<sup>2</sup> Agenda 21 is an action plan of the United Nations (UN) related to sustainable development and was an outcome of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 1992. It is a comprehensive blueprint of action to be taken globally, nationally, and locally by organizations of the UN, governments, and major groups in every area in which humans directly affect the environment. (source: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agenda\\_21](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agenda_21))

<sup>3</sup> Speech of the UNCSD Secretary General at Rio on March 3, 2012.



### 3 The NSDS and NCSD Experience across the World

This section examines the assessments carried out over the past decade and provides a view of the NSDS and NCSD experiences in various countries across the world, with respect to the twin objectives mentioned above.

#### 3.1 Integration across the 3 Pillars

Despite challenges faced, developed and developing nations alike have, since 2002, established national processes to plan and reflect economic, social and environmental concerns in their national plans. These are



at different levels, respond to different national priorities and political compulsions and have at varied degrees attempted to integrate the three pillars.

But the integration and convergence of all three issues is lacking. For example, liberalization of economies in South Asian nations has generated FDI investment and higher GDPs but progress across the social dimension, especially with respect to inequities, weakening traditional knowledge base and environmental degradation is lacking. With increasingly networked and trade linked economies, cross cutting impacts of climate change and social mobility (not the least of which is foreseen due to climate impacts), national processes are inextricably linked to sub-regional, regional and global processes.

It has been observed conclusively that SD requires policy changes in many sectors and coherence between them. It entails balancing the economic, social and environmental

objectives of society and integrating them wherever possible, through mutually supportive policies and practices, and making trade-offs where necessary.

#### 3.1.1 Balancing Environmental Management with Economic Growth

NSDSs have, in the past, placed environmental planning as the top of their agenda. This is also reflected in the location of the NCSDs within or associated with the Environment Ministries in many countries.

However, this has brought into question the impact of the NSDS on the environmental agendas of countries as despite the recent rise of environmental concerns to the top of the policy agenda, development plans are driven by the agendas of economic growth and the need to reduce government budget deficits.

Additionally, while environmental management may be an important component of an NSDS, such a strategy needs to cover a much greater perspective. The MDGs and the emphasis on concerns of equity and economic growth have brought into sharp focus the need to look at the nexus between social-economic and environmental challenges and concerns. One view is that learning about how economic policies/programmes with environmental consequences were adopted or implemented would be useful in allowing better integration of environmental concerns into economic policies. Economic policy makers have a higher incentive to consider environmental and social policies if it can be shown that such policies could generate economic benefits. An example at the global level that shows how governments, civil society, private sector and development actors have sought to integrate environmental and equity concerns and promote human development (win-win-win strategies) is the 1987 Montreal Protocol, which bans ozone-depleting chemicals, thereby benefiting sustainability (through protection of the ozone layer), equity (through technology transfer to developing countries) and human development (through positive impacts on health).<sup>4</sup>

For the developing nations, the need for healthy ecosystems and the services they provide, especially for the poor, is critical. Ecosystems build the foundation for water quality, food security, flood protection and natural climate regulation. Ecosystem services can reduce loads on national energy and water infrastructure. This has been shown through examples at local levels in Nepal and India. In order to scale up successful community and local initiatives and address environmental deprivations and build resilience, synergies across local and national strategies are needed. Key elements at the national level are policies that bring together social, economic and environmental concerns; coordination mechanisms aligned with budget frameworks; a culture of innovation and strong institutions, alongside mechanisms that ensure accountability.

A recent approach to enhance the component of non-plan expenditures at local and sub-national levels is an indication of flexibility that will support local demand based

<sup>4</sup> [http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/HDR\\_2011\\_EN\\_Chapter4.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/HDR_2011_EN_Chapter4.pdf)

initiatives. In Malawi the Ministry of Agriculture helped create demand for measures to reduce poverty and protect the environment, and in Rwanda the Ministry of State, Lands and the Environment garnered presidential and cabinet support for integrating environmental concerns into the country's Economic Development and Poverty Strategy.

For many of the South Asian nations as also in the island countries, the global environmental challenge of climate change has brought into focus the shared concerns of adaptation to climate variability by local communities. The formulation of the National Action Plans for Climate Change in India and similarly in many countries in South Asia, Latin America and South East Asia., for example, blending adaptation and mitigation measures, has given the opportunity to develop cross-sectoral approaches that address environmental, social and economic pillars of sustainability. The SAARC declaration in Thimpu in 2010 is also a reflection of regional co-operation towards developing and putting to action integrated strategies.

### 3.1.2 The Challenge of Meeting the MDGs – Understanding the Socio-Economic Aspect

The progress towards inclusiveness is more difficult to assess, because inclusiveness is a multi-dimensional concept. The on-going global economic crisis has, in a short period of time, significantly reduced many of the anti-poverty and humanitarian development achievements of the past decade, bringing into question the sustainability and the viability of current approaches. In over a decade since the commitments to MDGs were signed by countries, assessments indicate that setting the goal is a small part of the job, a much greater challenge is meeting it.

According to the UN, because of the economic crisis as many as 90 million people otherwise expected to move up the development ladder will remain in absolute poverty. Hunger is on the rise and progress on child nutrition achieved in the period of nearly two decades from 1990 to 2007 is likely to be wiped out in just a few years due to high food prices and the economic downturn. (United Nations, 2009)

Governance failures and poverty traps were identified as two of the major barriers to meeting the MDGs. Flow of Official Development Assistance (ODA) to the world's least developed countries to improve governance and get the poor out of poverty traps was a key recommendation. Although economic growth is seen as the key to solving poverty, not just any economic growth is good enough; it must be high quality, inclusive, sustainable, and driven by fundamental institutional reforms, not natural resources or other exogenous factors.

The focus of multi-lateral development institutions committed to achieving concrete progress in meeting MDGs is shifting towards empowering the private sector (SMEs) representing the poor to gain 'voice and power' in developing and implementing reforms. This can be done by empowering civil society organizations (CSOs), including think tanks, business associations, industry

groups, and labour unions, to identify barriers to development, develop solutions, and participate effectively in policymaking to implement reforms. This is a two-part challenge as it includes the need to: (1) build the capacity of civil society to fulfil its role; and (2) pressure governments to become truly democratic in instituting concrete changes to make political systems inclusive of the voice of the poor.

## 3.2 Institutional Mainstreaming

Many of the developing countries have attempted to address the concerns of economic, environmental and social development through their national plans. Typically the planning body is the one member of the macro-economic triumvirate of institutions which takes a longer term view of development issues. It is the institution which collates, assesses and prioritizes the country's public investment programme. Therefore it has a crucial role in promoting SD and the integration of environmental considerations into its work. Examples of such institutions can be seen in India where the Planning Commission is in



charge of the Environment and Forest sectors, in Nepal where the National Planning Commission is in charge of exploring innovative sustainable development approaches, and in Sri Lanka where the Environment Cell is part of the National Planning Department.

Countries, especially in the Asia-Pacific region, Island Nations and Africa have typically faced challenges with respect to inter-governmental coordination, lack of formal mechanisms between agencies and different stakeholders including public and private sector, inadequate capacities and lack of feed-back on monitoring and enforcement.

Some countries have overcome siloed arrangements through medium-term plans that allow cross-sectoral coordination across government agencies and with development partners. The decentralization of planning processes in India and the cross-sectoral consultations preceding the mid-term five year plans and annual budget preparation processes are a good example of this arrangement. Lessons indicate the need to further strengthen the NCSDs at the national level as a body that functions to:



- Strengthen the horizontal and vertical coherence in governance,
- Develop strategies for and to support governments to enhance participation across sectors,
- Monitor and track progress at national levels, and
- Contribute to development of regional and sub-regional strategies for SD.

Although many examples of planning tools to support and aid this process and innovative approaches have been developed by countries over the years, they have all not been mainstreamed. The concerns of vertical and horizontal integration in governance structures at national levels have found to be of significance in strengthening the national processes for pursuing NSDS.

NSDS thus require flexibility and vertical integration to respond to both local challenges and initiatives emerging locally. Strong institutions at the local level, particularly those that pay attention to disadvantaged groups and promote community management are crucial.

This brings into focus, the need for capacity building of local institutions in developing nations.

Regional interdependencies and the institutional frameworks available for those such as SAARC platform, the OECD platforms have indicated that developing nations and regions have primarily lacked long term inter-generational time frames in planning on the one hand and many local bodies lack the decentralization frameworks required to integrate development planning at all levels.

### 3.3 Successful Practices – Experiences from OECD Countries

An OECD review (International Institute for Sustainable Development [IISD]; 2005) has attempted to identify successful practices in the NSDSs implemented in the different circumstances of the OECD countries. These are classified as:

- Policy integration across the three pillars
- Inter-generational time-frames
- Integrated analysis and assessments, and development of tools to identify environmental, economic and social costs and benefits of policy strategy processes
- Co-ordination and co-operation across government departments and agencies involved in formulation and implementation of strategies and plans
- Engagement of local and regional governance in the development of national strategies and delivery aspects devolved to sub-national levels
- Stakeholder participation so that the private and independent sector are involved in the development of strategies and plans, and contribute to the implementation
- Indicators and targets enumerated in national plans to assist in monitoring progress

- Independent monitoring and evaluation systems that can recommend continuous improvement in strategies and plans

Amongst the tools that emerged from countries to improve the understanding of linkages include the Integrated Policy Appraisal (IPA) system pursued in the UK, which has been identified as a good practise. The IPA process is designed to assist government departments in assessing the total potential impact of policy proposals. It draws on existing appraisal requirements and assists departments in identifying the links between environmental, social and economic impacts. IPA is used at both the policy development and implementation stages and can also serve as an evaluation framework during the review process. IPA includes the following assessment categories:

- Environmental appraisal
- Regulatory impacts
- Policy appraisal for equal treatment
- Rural proofing
- Climate change
- Health impact assessment

Establishing cross cutting SD strategy objectives is another means of helping to improve the understanding of SD linkages. In Germany, the framework has been defined as an integration challenge in terms of four cross cutting coordinates for policy action:

- Fairness to different generations,
- Quality of life,
- Social cohesion, and
- International responsibility.

## 4 Challenges faced by NCSDs

Discussions with various stakeholders have revealed the key challenges of:

- Inter-governmental coherence,
- Integration,
- Capacities and lack of credible data,
- External economic and trade pressures,
- Lack of stakeholder engagement,
- Political unwillingness, and
- Institutional tools and mechanisms.

Planning bodies require systematic access to relevant socio economic data on a timely basis. While in some countries the system for data generation, storage and retrieval are developed in most cases, for the developing countries, information tends to be dispersed and the compilation and analysis is challenging. The challenges are also with respect to suitability of data especially environmental costs for economic planning purposes. The following table outlines some of the challenges and the approaches and tools that have been seen to address and can, going forward, help provide solutions.

## Challenges and Approaches to Address SD through NSDS and NCSD

Area to be Addressed	Challenges	Approaches and Tools
Inclusion and democratic principles	Institutionalizing participator	National councils for SD Cross-sectoral councils Independent advisory bodies Place-based councils Ad hoc public consultation
	Building trust	Use of media to obtain members Negotiation and conflict resolution as an explicit and necessary part of the participation process
Political Commitments	Responsibility	Shifting of responsibility to the Prime Minister/President
Clarity in long term goals and objectives / planning processes	Choosing approaches for the strategy process	Comprehensive strategy (15 countries) Cross-sectoral strategy (4 countries) Sectoral strategies (Canada) Integration with existing planning process
	Demonstrating commitment and focus	Quantified and time-bound objectives (7 of 19 countries) Constitutional provisions
	Inter-generational principle of SD	Long-term objectives
	Understanding interdependency	Integrated policy assessment Strategic sustainability assessment Cross-cutting objectives
Institutional Structures	Legal basis	Enactment as law
	Institutional basis	Green Cabinet Home outside of environment departments Inter-departmental Commission
	Financing	Green Budgeting HIPC debt relief Donor co-ordination Co-ordination with national budgeting process Action Plans
	Mix of specific SD initiatives	Expenditure policy initiatives Economic policy initiatives Regulatory policy initiatives Institutional policy initiatives
Monitoring, tracking, watch functions and mechanisms	Process monitoring	Process (output)-type monitoring and reporting (9 countries) Auditing agencies and committees Spending reviews
	Monitoring outcomes	Minister's reports National SD indicators and reporting (9 countries) National accounts statistics Independent advisory bodies, agencies and committees
	Learning and adaptation	Task Force or strategy revision Advisory councils Progress reporting Research networks Public consultations
Mainstreaming	With national budgeting processes	Incentive structures Spending review Environmental taxes Links to national planning process
	With other strategy processes	Comprehensive SD strategies that provide framework for other strategies Inter-departmental co -coordinating committees Institutional home for national SD council Cross-sectoral workshops and action areas Cross-cutting issues Green Cabinets
	With sub-national and local strategy processes	Municipal SD strategies Local Agenda 21 process



The additional challenge to the attainment of SDGs at national, regional and global levels will be to integrate concepts of sustainability within the local services. National policies that set in place systems of incentives and disincentives, taxation, transparency, accountability and legal measures to promote the integration of sustainability concerns into services delivered at local levels by private and public sectors will be required. Also, comprehensive support needs to be targeted at the policy issues linked to institutional and capacity challenges.

The geo-continuity of environmental resources and the networked economies, trade dependencies, make it imperative that national and regional sustainable development plans are in tandem with each other. Regional and sub-regional co-operations are especially critical for vulnerable countries that face multiple stresses such as: poverty and unequal access to resources; weak institutions; and food and water insecurity, in spite of rapid advances in technology and economic resources.



Therefore, for example, the SD Strategy of South Asia identifies the common and trans-boundary goals of South Asian States to achieve SD goals. Visions need not only be found at the national or local levels. They can extend beyond national limits, to supranational levels depending on the goals to be achieved.

## 5 Recommendations for NSDS and NCSD Post Rio+20

### 5.1 Global Level

The OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) in 2001 provided a set of key principles for SD strategies. They were not prioritized, but they are still relevant as a checklist 20 years after all nations agreed to a global SD agenda. If national planning processes, especially in the Southern developing and least developed economies are supported to integrate these concepts, then synergies with global goals for sustainability can be developed.

### 5.1.1 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.

### 5.1.2 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 to track and steer progress.

## 5.2 Regional Level

The international processes since the World Summit on Sustainable Development (2002) recognized the value of regional and sub-regional integration and the regional dimension of development as a critical link between national and global platforms. The strengthening of regional commissions and sub-regional cooperation platforms, setting norms and standards at regional levels and co-ordination among entities at the regional levels and UN bodies have been identified as mechanisms to service nations in the pursuit of SD goals at national levels and to synergize these with global goals.

### 5.2.1 Need for Integrated Mechanisms

The role of NCSDs at the regional level, working within the regional co-operation frameworks, would be useful to integrate trans-boundary environmental, social, trade issues in a more integrated manner. National Council representation at regional levels would respond to regional concerns such as climate induced disasters, trans-border water management, issues of the Himalayas

as in South Asia, shared marine resources and cross boundary environmental refugees, technology sharing and trade, etc., within the backdrop of regional co-operation, compulsions and conflicts.

### 5.2.2 Looking beyond Political Conflicts

Recognizing that political conflicts across nations in a region are an unfortunate and unnecessary reality, it is hoped that SD concerns would be able to provide a paradigm of regional growth, equity and security, thus creating conditions for achieving SDGs at national, regional and global levels.

### 5.2.3 Lack of Decentralized Frameworks

Regional inter-dependencies and the institutional frameworks available for these such as the SAARC and OECD platforms have indicated that developing nations and regions have primarily lacked long term inter-generational time frames in planning. On the one hand, many LDCs have lacked the decentralization frameworks required to integrate development planning at all levels.

## 5.3 National Level

The primary responsibility of national governments, in the SD process, is to empower and facilitate the functioning of local governance institutions, and to ensure that governments at all levels are democratic, participative, transparent and accountable. They also need to ensure participation of non-state actors, the civil society and the private sector into planning processes, as both are being seen as potential partners in delivering SD services to the poor with significantly higher levels of efficiencies. For this, encouragement and nurturing of the civil society and de-constraining the private sector in the delivery of services to the poor through fiscal and other measures is required.

Beyond facilitating stakeholder participation, setting operating guidelines and norms for all agencies state and non-state through incorporation of SD principles in national constitutions and legislations has been identified as a core function of governments. Thus, a focus on legal and regulatory regimes that improve political and civil service accountability to both people and environment within the context of true democratization of polity is required.

### 5.3.1 Coherence in National Reporting

It is important that the burden of reporting commitments of local and sub-national governments to national bodies and national governments to regional and global bodies be minimized and integrated. The linkages at national level between the NSDS process and global initiatives that have similar intentions, such as the MDGs, should be examined. It may be useful to have coherence across national reporting by the NCSDs for the many different global reporting commitments (at least arise from an integrated data base) while at the same time using the opportunity afforded for maximum national benefit.

### 5.3.2 Support for Policy Framework

National and regional entities will require supports for developing policy frameworks and policy option menu, tool-kits of good practice, and strengthening of regional and sub-regional platforms where lessons can be shared.

### 5.3.3 Availability of Finance



One of the main constraints associated with building SD capacities in least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small, island developing States is the lack of access to financing. To alleviate this situation, as well as to attract more favourable official development assistance, these groups of countries need innovative financial packages from multilateral and bilateral financing institutions.

### 5.3.4 Green Economy Focus

Another focus at Rio+20 is expected to be on declarations for green economy. While the green economy development is not being seen as explicitly linked to the SDG agenda, it is quite clear from the core definition of "green economy" (ILO) that while such an economic growth has clear triple bottom (economic, social and environmental) line benefits, the integrated strengthening of the three pillars (SDGs) of development is a necessary condition for green economy.

### 5.3.5 Deepening of the Reform Process

SDGs are expected to be at the core of the post-2015 development. And as lessons from MDG progress have indicated strong mechanisms for implementing SD initiatives at local, national, regional and international levels will be required. Deepening of reform at all levels is therefore critical. At the UN level agencies identified to anchor one or all the pillars will need to improve coordination to "deliver as one" and at all levels, political space for participation by all stakeholders must be accompanied by capacity enhancement to participate.

### 5.3.6 Political Commitment

Sustainable development issues are multi-sectoral in nature and lessons point to co-operation amongst all ministries and government agencies to be of utmost importance in the formulation of national SD policies and programs. The crucial issue underlying the promotion of co-operation among government ministries is the level of political commitment, which at regional and sub-regional levels – much more difficult as entities are not sovereign to each other – is a challenge that must be addressed.

It is perhaps worth bearing in mind that success at the national level might be an outcome that includes, but is not restricted to the following:

- Visible long term national strategic vision, linked to medium term goals and short term actions
- Visible, operating linkages of coordination “horizontally” across sectors
- Visible, operating linkages “vertically” of local to national and to international policy and governance efforts, and that these linkages are supportive
- Streamlined and effective national effort to link NSDS, MDG and similar global commitments

## 6 Role of “Watch” Organisations Post Rio+20

A strategy for SD is not a new planning mechanism; rather it is a mechanism for 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

require an independent and neutral third party to act as a facilitator.

This potential role of a “watch” organisation or a facilitator can be described using an India-centric example – that of the “India Sustainability Watch” (ISW) conceptualised by Development Alternatives (DA).

ISW seeks to track the progress of India’s development process towards sustainability based on its values and imperatives. It is a process that captures empirical evidence for a synthesized and balanced perspective. ISW will be initiated with the state as a unit of reference. All parameters for the state as a whole will be tracked from the most credible available data and information. No primary data collection will be attempted. The focus will be on analysing available data and information to provide a synthesized perspective. The methodology will be later adapted for other units of reference including spatial clusters like regions within the country, districts and urban areas – including cities and towns. It may also serve as a global comparator among nations, and will also be relevant to the private sector, CSOs and government agencies to track the progress of their initiatives.

It may be noted here that there are several initiatives driven by the global business community that are attempting to measure sustainability and the triple bottom line. While these attempts need to be encouraged, ISW will enable these initiatives to be grounded in the cultural and socio-economic contexts of developing economies like India.

The key question for ISW will be: “Does our currently prevalent development paradigm provide adequate options and choices for meaningful lifestyles to future generations?” This question will be tracked along the three dimensions of sustainability:

Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Equity – is the development process providing a more equitable distribution of wealth among the various sections of society?</li> <li>• Empowerment – is the development process empowering the marginalized and vulnerable communities and providing them more opportunities?</li> </ul>
Environmental	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Environmental Soundness – is the development process eating into the capital base of the natural resource endowments or living within the rate of natural regeneration?</li> <li>• Ecological Harmony – is the development process threatening or reinforcing the basic fabric of life support systems?</li> </ul>
Economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Economic Efficiency – is the development process generating optimal outputs for each unit of input resource?</li> <li>• Endogeneity – is the development process adequately self-reliant while taking advantage of unfolding trade and out-sourcing opportunities?</li> </ul>



In this manner, a “watch” institution would seek to track the results and the efforts to balance the three pillars of SD and would function in reporting cycles in relation to the planning processes of the country while developing communication on the same to related global processes.

Another example is that of Climate Action Network South Asia (commonly called as CANSA) which was established by few like-minded development experts in South Asia during the 1990s, to attempt to redress environment and development concerns through voluntary civil society association.

CANSA has expanded horizontally and vertically with 90+ Member Organizations (MOs) who have roots in all the South Asian countries (except in Afghanistan and Maldives). Vertically, the MOs have gained experience, expertise and recognition to influence national policies and global development practices as knowledge partners.

In future, CANSA MOs with their varied capabilities and vast experiences will seek to offer impetus for global and national policy debates and directions. In last two decades, the idea of collective strength of voluntary network of CSOs has graduated from a group of individuals to institutional partnership by retaining the philosophy of learning and sharing. CANSA strategically positions itself as a real life laboratory; produces learning outcomes and provides space for experimentation. It provides an opportunity to evolve complimentary policy framework across the countries through experiential learning of LDC, BRIC and land-locked countries; progressing and less progressing economies; and growing and less growing populations. CANSA members have mandated themselves to advocate fair, ambitious, binding and equitable climate change regime on to the global agenda to influence the international decision making process(es), to empower civil society organizations for effective action on mitigation and adaptation, and to network, coordinate

and with regional actors to formulate strong a regional voice on critical issues.

There are several other similar initiatives being undertaken around the world, especially in the APAC region. This paper, however, does not seek to provide exhaustive details at the present stage.

## 7 Conclusion

The fact that NSDS and NCDS will continue to be relevant, and indeed vital, in the quest for Sustainable Development in the post Rio+20 world is a certainty. What remains to be done to reinforce their utility includes introduction of inter-generational and integrated planning at the national and regional levels, ensuring adequate horizontal as well as vertical integration across government ministries / departments, and most importantly, making “watch” institutions responsible for formal tracking of all initiatives taken to achieve SDGs.

There are enough opportunities through regional modalities and mechanisms to collectively consider coming to agreement on a way forward. And it is up to each of the nations to not only devise “right” strategies but also take the missing step forward and put in place a framework for implementing, monitoring and learning, whilst balancing the three pillars of Sustainable Development.

It is to be emphasized and reiterated here that in the absence of “watch” institutions and highly committed political will, all efforts in the direction of Sustainable Development would continue to be frustrated. NSDSs and NCSDs continue to be a critical first step but to walk all the way the road pavers need to be firmly in place.



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Ever since its inception in 1982, Development Alternatives (DA) has acted as a research and action organisation, designing and delivering eco-solutions for the poor and the marginalised.

With a deep understanding of the rural market and a strong presence in the Indian heartland, its existence has been a credible and visible one – nationally and internationally – in addressing poverty challenges in a climate-sensitive environment.

A pioneer in sustainable development and the first social enterprise in India, DA realised the necessity of establishing several associated organisations working toward distinct goals that converge on the unified ambition of regenerating the environment and creating large-scale sustainable livelihoods.

Thus, a conglomerate called Development Alternatives Group was set up, comprising five organisations. The non-profit Societies, such as the flagship entity Development Alternatives and TARA (Technology and Action for Rural Advancement) are responsible for research, innovation, policy, incubation of green businesses and technical support services. The for-profit companies, such as DESI Power, TARA Machines and TARA Enviro are responsible for implementing the work of the DA Group at scale in business mode, all under the overall brand name of TARA.

The DA Group envisions a world where every citizen can live in security, with a dignified job and an assured income. We believe that the key to achieving this is the creation of the means for sustainable livelihoods in large numbers - providing the rural poor with jobs and decent incomes, giving meaning and dignity to life, producing goods and services for local markets and preserving the environment.

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