

DISCUSSION DOCUMENT

A SOUTH AFRICAN NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT – RATIONALE, VISION MISSION AND PRINCIPLES

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1. INTRODUCTION

Sustainable development has gained increasing recognition world wide as a conceptual framework for development that recognizes the interdependencies between economic growth, social equity and ecological integrity.

For more than a decade, there have been repeated calls for the design and application of an integrated approach to implement sustainable development. From the Earth Summit (UNCED 1992) to the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD 2002) there is frequent reference to the importance of taking a 'holistic and inter-sectoral approach' to implement sustainable development. However, there is relatively little discussion of what this approach entails or how it should be introduced.

What this means is that there are no blueprints to sustainable development or National Strategies for Sustainable Development. Different countries have to settle for different solutions, but all will have to make choices. National Strategies for Sustainable Development are essentially about setting priorities and implementing these choices in a realistic, effective and lasting way.

This discussion document is aimed at summarising the basis and need for a contextualised South African national Strategy for Sustainable Development. Whilst the contextualised does not undermine the international best practice and benchmarks, it emphasises national context parameters as a fundamental of any NSSD.

2. DEFINING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The most commonly used definition of sustainable development, as provided by the Brundtland Commission, is "development that meets the needs of the present, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs".¹

In unpacking this definition, it is clear that sustainable development has social, economic, cultural, political, geographical and ecological aspects.

¹ World Commission on Environment and Development, (1987). Our Common Future. .

Three aspects of sustainability are particularly pertinent for development, namely:

- Social sustainability – the maintenance of a cohesive and strong community and civil society;
- Economic and financial sustainability – the maintenance of financial capital and the making of sufficient profits; and,
- Environmental sustainability – the maintenance of natural capital and the conservation of life support systems.

Sustainable development emphasizes:

- The need for a long term planning horizon, and the adoption of a development path that improves the quality of life of current generations, while leaving future generations with at least the same capacity and options for development;
- The importance of enhancing ‘horizontal’ linkages and promoting co-ordination across sectors, and in particular for recognizing synergies and tensions across sectors;
- The importance of ‘vertical’ spatial linkages, so that local, provincial, national and global development efforts and governance are mutually supportive; and
- The role of partnership between government, business, non-government and community and voluntary organizations.

Sustainable development is defined in South African policy as “development that does not use up resources more quickly than they are replaced by natural processes or new technology. It combines concern for the environment with social and economic issues to make sure that human health and natural and cultural resources are not harmed”².

While the definition highlights the environmental pillar of sustainable development, the position taken by the South African government is that “Sustainable Development is foremost about development rather than purely or specifically about environment. If development is about the quality of economic growth, sustainable development is about the quality of that development. Sustainable development is about whether we are growing our economies and societies in a way that will enable future generations to enjoy a better - rather than worse - quality of life than we do”³.

There is no doubt that if South Africa does not address the issue of unemployment or low levels of poverty, the country will not become sustainable. Unless basic needs are met, people are unlikely to be interested

² White Paper on Environmental Management Policy, Government of South Africa, 1999, pp18.

³ Kasrils, R. (2002). South Africa's Approach to the World Summit on Sustainable Development. Address by Ronnie Kasrils, Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry, South Africa to the SADC/E9 Ministerial Meeting on Health And Sustainable Development.

in sustainability issues and, any form of development will be welcomed irrespective of how environmentally unsustainable development proposals may be.

What is not acknowledged from this argument is an understanding of the extent to which environmental constraints or natural resource availability constraints will impact on the long-term viability of social and economic development goals.

3. INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, held at Stockholm in 1972, was the first major international discussion of environmental issues as a development concern.

The meeting marked a polarization between the priorities of economic growth and environmental protection. This polarization has dominated the debate between rich and poor countries and between interest groups within countries for many years and is still not fully resolved.

Twenty years later at the Rio Conference in 1992, 178 countries, including South Africa, agreed on Agenda 21 as a blueprint for sustainable development.

It reflected a global consensus and political commitment at the highest level to integrate environmental concerns into social and economic decision making processes.

Since the early 1990s, understanding of the concept of sustainable development has been widened to include the social dimension and has been made more dynamic, so that it involves enhancing the opportunities of future generations rather than preserving a historically given state of environmental quality or abundance of natural resources: "Sustainability is to leave future generations as many opportunities as, if not more than, we have had ourselves".⁴

Once again, in Johannesburg 2002, world leaders reaffirmed their commitment to sustainable development at the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD). The Summit placed poverty eradication at the centre of efforts to achieve sustainable development, and reinforced the notion of development that aims for equity within and between generations.

The Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (JPOI) that came out of the WSSD encompasses the three pillars of sustainable development, namely:

⁴ Leisinger, M. (2004). Sustainable Development at the Turn of the Century: Perception, Reality and Outlook. Novartis Foundation for Sustainable Development.

- *Economic* - encompassing fair trade, finance, investment, technology transfer and employment;
- *Social* - provision of services: water, sanitation, health, energy, education, and food security;
- *Environment* – protection of oceans, atmosphere, and biodiversity; prevention of land degradation and climate change.

The JPOI establishes 37 negotiated targets on each of these areas, the majority of which are consistent with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). One of the targets address the need for countries to develop their own Sustainable Development Strategies:

“States should:

- (a) Continue to promote coherent and coordinated approaches to institutional frameworks for sustainable development at all national levels, including through, as appropriate, the establishment or strengthening of existing authorities and mechanisms necessary for policy-making, coordination and implementation and enforcement of laws;
 - (i) Take immediate steps to make progress in the formulation and elaboration of national strategies for sustainable development and begin their implementation by 2005. To this end, as appropriate, strategies should be supported through international cooperation, taking into account the special needs of developing countries, in particular the least developed countries.” (Paragraph 162).

A common national sustainable development vision requires strategic choices for the longer-term and a capacity to maintain commitments over time. It also requires capacity to provide decision-makers with adequate information and knowledge to support their decisions.

In developing a national sustainable development strategy, the idea is not to create a ‘super policy ’ but rather a framework that builds on existing programmes and strategies. It is simplified as follows

4. SOUTH AFRICA’S CHALLENGES AND RESPONSE TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: 1992 – 2005

At the time of the Rio Conference in 1992, South Africa had not yet been admitted to the UN system. At that time, South Africa was in the process of negotiating the transition from a system of apartheid to multi-party democracy. However, the concept of sustainability, as articulated in Agenda 21, informed the content of broad policy statements for South Africa’s future economic and social development.

In 1994, the newly elected democratic government was faced with the challenge of reconstructing and developing a country confronted by serious problems - economic, social, legal, political, moral, cultural and environmental.

The Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), developed shortly after the elections in 1994, was government's first attempt to respond to these multiple problems in an integrated and coordinated way. With this in mind, the vision of the RDP was to:

- (i) Develop strong and stable democratic institutions;
- (ii) Ensure representivity and participation by all stakeholders;
- (iii) Ensure that South Africa becomes a fully democratic, non-racial and non-sexist society; and
- (iv) Create a sustainable and environmentally friendly growth and development path.

The RDP is essentially South Africa's first policy statement on sustainable development, although it may not have been explicitly formulated in this way at the time.

Because of its strong focus on addressing social and economic inequities, it is not surprising that environmental sustainability issues are largely glossed over in the RDP.

Within the context of the RDP framework, the government has developed a number of 'cross-cutting' implementation strategies to promote sustainable development in the country. Foremost amongst these strategies is the Anti-Poverty Strategy (APS), which defines the programmatic efforts of government departments. Three other crosscutting strategies, namely the Integrated Sustainable Rural Development Strategy, the Urban Development Strategy and the Human Resource Development Strategy, and various sectoral policies, in human settlement, health, energy and a suite of environmental legislation.

This effort also involves finding solutions to hunger, malnutrition and disease, promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women, guaranteeing a basic education for everyone, and supporting the Agenda 21 principles of sustainable development. Direct support from the richer countries, in the form of aid, trade, debt relief and investment is to be provided to help the developing countries.

South Africa's Ten Year Review (1994 – 2004) sets out the major achievements in addressing the apartheid legacy, transforming society and restructuring the South African economy. It also sets the vision and framework for the next decade and describes the 'Four Big Ideas' or

challenges that are central to the growth and development path towards 2014.

Some of the most important targets and objectives making up South Africa's Vision 2014 include:

- Reduce unemployment by half through new jobs, skills development, assistance to small businesses, opportunities for self-employment and sustainable community livelihoods.
- Reduce poverty by half through economic development, comprehensive social security, land reform and improved household and community assets.
- Position South Africa strategically as an effective force in global relations, with a vibrant and balanced trade and other relations with countries of the South and the North, and in an Africa that is growing, prospering and benefiting all Africans, especially the poor.

Vision 2014 focuses exclusively on the Economic and Social pillars of sustainable development. There is unfortunately no clarity how environmental concerns will be integrated into economic and social decision-making processes. There is also no analysis of how environmental constraints will impact on the longer-term sustainable of social and economic development goals.

Sustainable development challenges relate to policy implementation and integration; monitoring and evaluation; strengthening the capacity for sustainable local development; taking a longer-term view; and improving interactions between government and society. These Challenges are briefly elaborated below

- (ii) Huge strides have been made since 1994 in developing a new and progressive policy framework that breaks emphatically with the past. The policy and systemic changes brought about in the first ten years of democracy provide a sound basis for sustainable development, however, there is still much to do in the areas of implementation and delivery.
- (iii) The areas of economy, society and environment make up the three pillars of the sustainable development, requiring both integration between the different pillars, and decision making that promotes equity both within the current generation, and between generations. A truly holistic approach should encompass horizontal integration across the sectors of government, and vertical integration within the various levels of government. This poses great strains on the governance systems and the government's organization.

- (iv) Monitoring and evaluation are key areas requiring urgent attention in order to improve the governance framework for sustainable development. Comprehensive analysis of the impact of developmental programmes against consistent and measurable criteria has been lacking and therefore appropriate targets and indicators will need to be developed for all three pillars of sustainable development.
- (v) The integrated development planning process provides a firm foundation and the legislated requirement for strategic environmental assessment to form part of the IDP further adds to the sustainable development orientation of the local planning system and mechanisms. The ultimate aim of improving capacity and resources at the local level is to accelerate the provision of basic services to poor households, within a broad sustainability framework.
- (vi) Sustainable development is of critical importance for all citizens, it engages choices that will affect essential aspects of our lifestyles, and, being typically crosscutting, it should take into consideration various conflicting interests. However, the necessary broadly based involvement of individual citizens, organized and in corporate form requires well-defined mechanisms and management.

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Sustainable development must be integral to the 2014 vision and economic growth path. Development choices must address the need for a balance of social, economic and environmental parameters, and explicitly recognize the trade-offs that are being made at any particular time.

5. INTERNATIONAL APPROACHES TO NATIONAL SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

Increasingly it is recognised that the point of departure for sustainable development in nations of the developing world differs from that of industrialized nations. While developing countries prioritise economic growth

and poverty eradication, industrialized nations focus on sustainable consumption and production and environmental management.

There are legitimate reasons for different perceptions of sustainable development and hence political priorities. Although the most significant ecological issues are of truly global importance, industrial and developing countries still have different problems. For the majority of the people affected by environmental problems in developing countries, lack of sanitation and sewage facilities, polluted drinking water, urban air pollution, shrinking water resources, and eroding topsoil are the most pressing problems. In industrial countries, where such problems have mainly been solved, the public focuses instead on issues such as depletion of the ozone layer as well as the accumulating carbon dioxide in the atmosphere and its potential impact on climatic change.

These differing priorities are reflected to a large extent in the National Sustainable Development Strategies of the handful of developed and developing countries that have prepared them.

The prevailing approach to Sustainable Development Strategies is that they are a tool to manage the tensions between social and economic development and environmental protection i.e. making trade-offs between these three dimensions. Within this approach, environmental issues are addressed through a mixture of environmental regulation and incentives.

This approach to 'doing' sustainable development is however increasingly seen as limited. Sustainable development is not about environmental regulation or incentive-based approaches to ensure compliance, but about planning for longer-term impacts. It's about how to ensure long-term equitable social and economic development within environmental constraints.

6. DEVELOPING A NATIONAL SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY FOR SOUTH AFRICA – THE NATIONAL CONTEXT

While South Africa has not yet formally developed a National Strategy on Sustainable Development (NSSD), as required by Agenda 21, the ingredients for such a strategy are in place, embodied firstly in the overarching framework for sustainable development, namely, the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), secondly, in a number of cross-cutting implementation strategies (such as the Integrated Sustainable Rural Development Strategy), and finally in a host of other policy developments as reflected in the White Papers and legislation that have emerged since 1994.

Since the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002, South Africa has made a commitment to develop a NSSD. The idea behind this

commitment to develop a NSSD is not to create a 'super institution' but rather a framework that builds on existing programmes and strategies.

In developing a NSSD, South Africa needs to avoid taking the conventional, narrow view namely that of environmental regulation and rather adopt an approach, which focuses on emerging trends in the environmental sector and the implications for economic growth and social development.

South Africa's current development path does not adequately take into account the substantial changes that are likely to occur in the future due to factors such as Peak Oil and climate change. It is likely that a totally new development path will need to be conceived to ensure social and economic sustainability under these dynamic future conditions.

The projections of the impact of trends provided by the "business as usual – current social , economic and enviorenmntal paradigm " option will form the scenario what with a high level of certainty can be expected if no change of the trends will be initiated – politically and economically but also with regard to the behaviour of the people.

Changes, which will provide the means to achieve equity by sustainable resource-use will determine the sustainable development option as the more consistent, coherent and future oriented one.

This is what a National Strategy of Sustainable Development is meant for:

- To reduce the ecological footprint of the over-consumers both in the household as well as in the growing economy. This must be done in a balanced way, without inappropriately restricting growth opportunities and without fundamentally altering the lifestyles of the people.
- Regarding the particular situation of South Africa in its post-apartheid transformation investments in infrastructure and housing have to be considered which are designed to protect poorer houses from future ecological and economic challenges.
- Interventions for the sectors of the economy (manufacturing, agriculture, tourism) must be identified to ensure the highest possible impact with regard to water and energy consumption, air pollution and waste management. One of the most important shifts for the industries and the agricultural sector will be the move from the "end of the pipe solutions" to the "beginning of the pipe solutions" with regard to a significant improvement of the ecological impact.
- Advocate for changing consumption and prodction partterns interventions at all levels that will for example include:

- Transition to renewable energy alternatives and energy efficiency,
- Significantly reduced waste via re-use of waste outputs as productive, and
- Sustainable transport, with a major focus on public transport.

Such interventions will already drastically reduce: green house gases, water resource pollution, waste generation, and pollution levels.

South Africa's NSSD should be positioned as a critical decision-making tool that guides the various tiers of government and public entities in making strategic choices based on a longer-term analysis of key environmental issues that will impact on the achievement of social and economic development goals.

7. TOWARDS A COMMON APPROACH – THE EMERGING SOUTH AFRICAN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT VISION, MISSION AND PRINCIPLES

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT VISION

Sustainable development becomes an integral part of a coherent growth and development framework which ensures the alignment of policies, institutions and strategies orientated around the core beliefs of social equity, natural resource protection and ethics in terms of the values and transformation needed in the South African society.

- High/full levels of employment or low levels of unemployment or low levels of absolute poverty in SA society.
- Development proceeds within the carrying capacity of the natural resource base.
- All citizens practice sustainable living in all facets of daily life.
- Public and private sector adopt an ethic of sustainable decision-making.
- Strategy addresses the needs of current and future generations.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT MISSION

Develop effective tools, process and frameworks to manage the integration between social demands, natural resource protection, sustainable use and economic development.

- Protect the natural resource base as a priority in order to achieve a sustainable supply of environmental goods and services.

- Need for flexible and productive labour markets/product markets/capital markets.
- Need for equitable/fair trade.
- Need for sustainable consumption and production patterns.
- Need for poverty reduction strategies linked to sound environmental management.
- Need for equity and empowerment through sector development.
- Need for financial and legislative tool that ensure protection of natural capital.
- Need for investment attraction and retention strategies.
- Need for tax, land and activity rationalisation strategies that support sustainable development.
- Need to affect a move away from a carbon-dependent economy to one that facilitates the use of renewable and sustainable energy sources.
- Need to consider the specific sustainability issues attached to each of the specific natural resources of the country e.g. fresh water, marine, forests, grasslands.
- Need to reduce exposure to risks from natural events.
- Need to reduce pollution levels in all media.
- Ensure sustainable livelihoods and food security.
- Align policy and legislation that integrates and gives effect to sustainable development at the levels/spheres where it matters most.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT PRINCIPLES

Articulate values of environmental sustainability, social equity and fair economic models.

- Equity is central to achieving sustainable development.
- Decisions based on evidence based information.
- Maintaining ecological systems to support present and future generations.
- Development decisions are made on the basis of achieving an appropriate and sustainable balance between the imperatives of economic efficiency, social equity and ecological integrity.
- Transparency in all facets of public and private operations.
- Decision-making to be based on full cost accounting (i.e. costs to the environment and society) not only short term economic gains.
- All development should occur within the carrying capacity of the natural resource base/biodiversity.
- Long-term ecological viability should not be sacrificed for short-term development needs.
- Precautionary principle should be adopted in cases of uncertainty about future impacts.
- Local government to be acknowledged as a key implementing agent.
- Need to push back the frontiers of poverty and meet basic needs.
- Need to manage the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

- Develop and empower people.
- Reverse our unsustainable development path and natural resource base degradation.
- Ensure a safe and secure environment.
- Ensure the availability of adequate environmental information to underpin and inform decision-making.
- Intergenerational equity and environmental justice.

8. CONCLUSION

It has become clearly evident that there is a need for South Africa to consolidate its approach to the sustainable development agenda in order for it to be more efficient within its own country and also for it to be able to compete within the global arena. As is evident in the body of this CSD-12 Report, there has already been substantial progress made by various departments with the aim of addressing the needs of the citizens of South Africa. There has, however, not been a collective approach, which in itself is a wasteful approach. The diagram below therefore elaborates on the proposed approach for the development of a National Sustainable Development Strategy for South Africa.

The implementation of Agenda 21 and the achievement of the internationally agreed development goals, including those contained in the Millennium Declaration as well as in the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, require a substantially increased effort, both by countries themselves and by the rest of the international community, based on the recognition that each country has primary responsibility for its own development and that the role of national policies and development strategies cannot be overemphasized, taking fully into account the Rio principles.

Government represents the collective will of the nation and should therefore provide leadership for furthering the sustainable development agenda in South Africa, through being willing to “pre-commit”⁵ to an integrated approach and action plan.

For this country to move forward in responding to the global vision of Sustainable Development, South Africa should declare that sustainable development is the fundamental principle in its policy and programs.

⁵ Precommitment is the ability to articulate long-term but conditional public development objectives that enable a nation to achieve economies of scale from coordinated effort of many actors and partners. (Towards a 10 Year Review)