Sustainable Development Frameworks

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Outline

• What are conceptual frameworks and why important for SD?
• The types of frameworks
• The role of strategies as frameworks
• Content of frameworks
  – Clear objectives – definition of SD?
  – Targets, tools for deliver
• The importance of the process
• The importance of status
Conceptual Frameworks

- outline possible courses of action or to present a preferred approach to an idea or thought
- help to focus and clarify objectives, set out action to take, what tools to use, targets, timetables and review.
- Different types due to diversity in core values, measurement processes, and SD theories
- Must ‘fit’ with state, institution
Types of Frameworks

• Differences among frameworks
  – the way they conceptualize key dimensions of SD,
  – the inter-linkages among these dimensions,
  – the way they group the issues to be measured,
  – the concepts used to justify the selection and aggregation of various tools including indicators
Types of Frameworks

• driver, state, response frameworks
  – Looks at challenge from all angles – what is causing the problem, status quo, how to resolve

• issue- or theme-based frameworks
  – groupings used for objectives, actions, indicators

• capital frameworks
  – sustainability is framed in terms of managing the resource base in a way that secures its maintenance over time
  – calculates national wealth as a function of the sum of, and interaction among, different kinds of capital requires that all forms of capital be expressed in common, usually monetary, terms
Role of strategies as frameworks

• Agenda 21 explicitly promotes NSDSs as mechanisms for translating a country’s goals and aspirations of sustainable development into concrete policies and actions.

• Ideally the SDS as ‘a navigational tool for identifying priority sustainability issues, prioritizing objectives, and co-ordinating the development and use of a mix of policy initiatives to meet national goals’.
Content – vision, objectives

1. Problems of scale, urgency and interconnectedness continue to overwhelm and hinder progress towards implementing SD

2. There is also a great deal of inconsistency in understanding of the vision set out in strategies and application of the vision
Content – vision and objectives

• We still focus on weak interpretations of sustainable development
• We still fail to convey a clear message as to any interpretation of sustainable development
The Brundtland definition

• The Brundtland definition usefully provides some parameters of acceptability for interpreting SD

• Brundtland can fall short of being useful on two counts which can occur together or separately
  – Problems with actual priorities in the definition – still allows weak interpretations
  – Problems with when there is no prioritisation – wish list and the DM is left to do their own prioritisation
UK Strategy for Sustainable Development – Securing the Future

Sets first two principles covering the overarching ambitions of the Strategy:

– Living within environmental limits; and
– ensuring a strong, healthy, just and equal society.

Three remaining principles are enablers for the achievement of sustainable development:

– Achieving a sustainable economy
– Promoting good governance

Gives a sense of Priority
One Wales: One Planet (WAG, 2009)

‘sustainable development means enhancing the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of people and communities, achieving a better quality of life for our own and future generations: in ways which promote social justice and equality of opportunity; and in ways which enhance the natural and cultural environment and respect its limits - using only our fair share of the earth’s resources and sustaining our cultural legacy.

Some priority is implicit
Priority on Growth

– ‘To focus government and public services on creating a more successful country, with opportunities for all of Scotland to flourish, through increasing sustainable economic growth’ (Scotland’s Economic Strategy 2007)

– ‘Sustainable development aims to bring viability, stability and opportunity to all of our social, economic and environmental activities and programmes. It does not aim to stop us from growing our economy. It does not seek to obstruct our attempts to improve our society and communities. It does not prevent us from using and capitalising on our natural resources.’ (Everyone’s Involved Northern Ireland Executive, 2010)
Content – tools

The use of principles, priorities and targets linked directly to the objectives in the strategy

Scotland’s Economic Strategy

The Scottish vision for success for Scotland is described and measured in four parts which support and reinforce each other:

• Government’s purpose (sustainable economic growth) and associated targets;
• five strategic objectives that are the focus of actions - wealthier and fairer, smarter, healthier, safer, and stronger and greener;
• 15 national outcomes describing what the Government wants to achieve; and
• 45 national indicators to track progress.
Process of developing a strategy

‘development of the strategy empowers countries to address inter-related social and economic problems by helping them to build capacities, develop procedures and legislative frameworks; allocate limited resources rationally and present timetables for actions. Countries can benefit a lot from formulating strategies both directly (as a result of making development more sustainable) and indirectly (from the process itself)’ (Division for Sustainable Development, UNDESA, 2002, Executive Summary).
Process – key elements

The strategic process ideally should:

• be subject to a wide consultation process - experts, regulators, businesses, the voluntary sector, and the wider public.

• use of principles, priorities and targets (see above).

• be subject to both internal and external independent reviews that are then fed back into the development process. Progress towards the objectives and targets needs to be reported and monitored, and those responsible called to account.
Status of the strategy

Dernbach (2008), ‘While it is difficult to envision how sustainable development can occur without a legal foundation, the issue of an appropriate legal foundation for sustainable development at the national level has received less attention than it deserves’.  

Swanson et al. – legislative underpinning for sustainable development strategy a key criteria for effective implementation of SD
Improving the status of the strategy

Alternatives – non-legislative – make PM responsible for production, link objectives to specific duties on specific departments and ministers (see NI)

Alternatives – legislative – 3 possible for UK

Aim: To increase consistency in decision making by turning what may currently be established good practice or policy into legally-binding obligations that can compel compliance.
Three models

1. procedural obligation to produce and review a strategy could also include action plans, spending reviews, indicators and targets, and set out key monitoring and enforcement tools for bodies such as the Audit Offices or Parliamentary committees

2. explicitly establish the sustainable development strategy as the framework or central point of reference for all decision making. Gives the strategy legal status, provides a clear point of reference for those bodies with substantive obligations relating to sustainable development and generally improves the understanding of the term. It does not explicitly set out the role of sustainable development in the workings of government.

3. make sustainable development the central organizing principle of government. Requires a declaration plus a duty

See A. Ross *Sustainable Development Law in the UK – from Rhetoric to Reality?* Earthscan Publications (out December 2011)
Conclusions