Northern Ireland Assembly

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

BACKGROUND

The purpose of this paper is to provide information on the development of sustainable development strategies in order to inform consideration of a future revised sustainable development strategy for NI.

This paper considers the origins of sustainable development, and sustainable development strategies in the OECD, EU, UK and UK-Regions.

THE ORIGINS OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Concern about the environment and development are not new. The roots of sustainable development lie in the gradual merging of the environmental movement and the post-World War 2 international development movement. Authors, academics, pressure groups and organizations worked to raise awareness and consensus, which led to broad international acceptance of the concept, its possible solution for pressing global problems, and the need for urgent and concerted action. The main milestones are outlined below[1].

- 1968: The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) Intergovernmental Conference for Rational Use and Conservation of Biosphere provided a forum for early discussions of the concept of ecologically sustainable development.

- 1971: The International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) was formed to seek ways to make economic progress without destroying the environmental resource base.

- 1972: The UN Conference on Human Environment cohesively argued that sustainable development presented satisfactory resolution to the dilemma of environment and development, leading to establishment of numerous environmental protection agencies and the UN Environment Programme (UNEP).

- 1980: The World Conservation Strategy defined development as 'modification of the biosphere and the application of human, financial, living and non-living resources to satisfy human needs and improve the quality of human life'.

- 1982: The UN World Charter for Nature called for an understanding of our dependence on natural resources and the need to control our use of them.

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[1] http://www.iisd.org/rio+5/timeline/sdtimeline.htm

- 1987: The UN Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development (the 'Bruntland Report') gave direction for comprehensive global solutions to problems of environment and development, and popularized the term 'sustainable development'.

- 1992: The UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), the 'Earth Summit', published important documents, including: Agenda 21, a blueprint for action on specific issues relating to sustainable development; and the Rio Declaration, a statement of principles upon which nations agreed to base their actions in environmental and development issues.

- 2000: The UN Millennium Development Goals aimed to, by 2015:

  o Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger

  o Achieve universal primary education

  o Promote gender equality and empower women

  o Reduce child mortality

  o Improve maternal health

  o Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases

  o Ensure environmental stability

  o Develop a global partnership for development

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE ORGANISATION FOR ECONOMIC COOPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT (OECD)

23 of the 30 OECD countries have developed and implemented national sustainable development strategies in accordance with the 1992 mandate of Agenda 21. Some (eg the UK and EU) have since revised their strategies. The sustainable development strategy process offers an opportunity to build on the complementarities of programmes in the economic, environmental and social spheres to improve the long-term effectiveness of government policy agendas. However, a review of country strategies showed that many lack the basic design and implementation elements recommended by both the OECD and the UN[2].

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE EUROPEAN UNION (EU)

Renewed EU Sustainable Development Strategy. In 2001, the EU developed a sustainable development strategy for its Member countries, revised and adopted in 2006 as the Renewed EU Sustainable Development Strategy[3]. The EU strategy set out how to meet our needs without making the quality of life worse for the next generations, and deals with most of the Rio challenges covering economic, environmental and social issues. In 2005 the European Commission took stock of the progress that had been made and came to the conclusion that the situation was

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[2] http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/58/42/36655769.pdf
[3] http://ec.europa.eu/sustainable/welcome/index-en.htm

deteriorating. In 2007 a progress report was published, which showed that progress on the ground was modest but that policy development at both EU and Member State level has progressed significantly in many areas, notably on climate change and clean energy. The priorities set in the 2006 strategy remain valid but continued attention needs to be paid to implementation in all priority areas.

EU efforts are focused on:

- Climate change and clean energy:

    o Reducing EU greenhouse gas emissions

    o Improving energy efficiency

    o Raising the share of renewable energy

    o Increasing the level of biofuels in transport fuel

    o Main sources of EU greenhouse gas emissions are energy, industry and transport, followed closely by households and agriculture.

- Sustainable transport:

    o Reducing pollutant emissions to minimise effects on human health and the environment

    o Achieving a balance in the frequency of use between different modes of transport

    o Cutting vehicle CO2 emissions

    o Halving the number of road deaths

- Sustainable consumption and production:

    o Putting an end to the destructive link between economic growth and damage to the environment

    o Encouraging businesses and the general public to use objects that have been produced responsibly

    o Aiming to get public authorities across Europe to buy products and services that do not damage the environment.

    o Increasing the market in environmentally-friendly technologies and innovations

    o Improving the welfare of animals within the EU and beyond

- Conservation and management of natural resources:

    o Contributing to halting and significantly reducing the rate of worldwide biodiversity loss

- o Cleaning up degraded marine environments and avoiding over-exploitation of fish stocks

  o Working towards the UN targets on forest protection

  o Improving efficiency and so gain competitive advantage

  o Promoting recycling and cutting down on the generation of waste

- Public health:

  o Promoting recycling and cutting waste generation

  o Making sure that chemicals, including pesticides, are produced, handled and used safely

  o Working to reduce the inequalities in life expectancy and curbing lifestyle-related diseases

  o Developing strategies to deal with health threats quickly and efficiently

  o Bringing down suicide rates and improving mental health

  o Tightening food laws for humans and animals

  o Ensuring high animal welfare standards in the EU and outside

  o Legislating on the use and production of chemicals, including pesticides.

- Social inclusion, demography and migration:

  o Developing strategies to deal with health threats quickly and efficiently

  o Reducing the number of people at risk of poverty and social exclusion, with particular emphasis on child poverty

  o Ensuring territorial and social cohesion

  o Supporting EU countries as they modernise social protection, in the face of challenges such as falling birth rates and longer life spans,

  o Welcoming and integrating migrants into European society

  o Promoting employment for young people, ensuring that at least 85% of 22 year-olds complete secondary education and, within 6 months of leaving education, every young person should have some kind of job, apprenticeship, training or something to make them more employable

  o Helping those with disabilities to get work

- Global poverty efforts include a firm commitment to the eight targets set at the 2000 UN Millennium Summit which have a deadline of 2015.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE UK

The UK Sustainable Development Strategy 'Securing the Future'. 'Securing the Future'[4] aims to enable all people throughout the world to satisfy their basic needs and enjoy a better quality of life without compromising the quality of life of future generations, by:

- Helping people to make better choices

- Sustainable consumption and production ('One planet economy')

- Climate change and energy ('Confronting the greatest threat')

- Protecting our natural resources and enhancing the environment ('A future without regrets')

- Creating sustainable communities and a fairer world ('from local to global')

- Ensuring it happens

The UK Framework for Sustainable Development '1 Future, Different Paths'. The model for the UK's strategic approach to sustainable development reflects the new Devolved Administration (DA) structure of decision making[5]. The framework, launched in conjunction with the UK Government Strategy, comprised:

- A shared understanding of sustainable development

- A Common purpose outlining what we are trying to achieve and the guiding principles we all need to follow to achieve it

- Sustainable development priorities for UK action, at home and internationally

- Indicators to monitor the key issues on a UK basis

The following 'purpose', agreed by the UK Government and the DAs, was adopted as the new framework goal for sustainable development:

> *The goal of sustainable development is to enable all people throughout the world to satisfy their basic needs and enjoy a better quality of life without compromising the quality of life of future generations.*
>
> *For the UK Government and the DAs, that goal will be pursued in an integrated way through a sustainable, innovative and productive economy that delivers high levels of employment, and a just society that promotes social inclusion, sustainable communities and personal well-being. This will be done in ways that protect and enhance the physical and natural environment, and use resources and energy as efficiently as possible.*

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[4] http://www.sustainable-development.gov.uk/publications/pdf/strategy/SecFut-complete.pdf
[5] http://www.sustainable-development.gov.uk/publications/pdf/SD%20framework.pdf

> *Government must promote a clear understanding of, and commitment to, sustainable development so that all people can contribute to the overall goal through their individual decisions.*
>
> *Similar objectives will inform all our international endeavours, with the UK actively promoting multilateral and sustainable solutions to today's most pressing environmental, economic and social problems. There is a clear obligation on more prosperous nations both to put their own house in order and to support other countries in the transition towards a more equitable and sustainable world.*

The UK Government and DAs agreed the following set of shared principles to set out an overarching approach, which the 4 separate (DA) strategies can share. These principles form the basis for sustainable development policy in the UK. For a policy to be sustainable, it must respect all 5 principles:

- Living within environmental limits

- Ensuring a strong, healthy and just society

- Achieving a sustainable economy

- Promoting good governance

- Using sound science responsibly

The priority areas for immediate action, shared across the UK, are:

- Sustainable consumption and production

- Climate change and energy

- Natural resource protection and environmental enhancement

- Sustainable communities

UK framework indicators give an overview of sustainable development and the priority areas for the UK. Despite devolution, there remained, however, strong support for an overarching set of UK 'headline' indicators, as follows: greenhouse gas emissions; resource use; waste; bird populations; fish stocks; ecological impacts of air pollution; river quality; economic output; active community participation; crime; employment; workless households; childhood poverty; pensioner poverty; education; health inequality; mobility; social justice; environmental quality; and well-being.

The 2007 Sustainable Development Commission (SDC) Sustainable Development in Government (SDiG) Report. The SDiG report[6] is the 6th annual assessment of the performance of central government operations against the targets of the Framework for Sustainable Operations on the Government Estate (SOGE). Overall, SDC noted that:

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[6] http://www.sd-commission.org.uk/sdig2007

There has been considerable activity and encouraging signs that the Government is preparing to up its game with regard to the performance of its estate.

Serious effort is now being put in to creating an evidence base which is truly fit for purpose.

There is no evidence that the overall performance of the Government estate will have been shown to be any better over the period reported on.

Individual departments are still not on track to meet all their SOGE targets, particularly on carbon emissions from offices and road vehicles.

SDC was pleased to hear that a Delivery Plan is being put in place with a package of measures which, if fully implemented and sustained over time, have the potential to transform the actual performance of Government looking forward, and therefore hugely strengthen its ability to lead by example with respect to the private sector and wider society.

SDC commented that:

The UK will soon become the first country in the world to enshrine its climate change commitments in legislation, through the Climate Change Bill.

Unless government takes serious action to cut its own carbon dioxide emissions, it will lack credibility in its challenge to society to do the same. The reputational risk for government is huge.

'Securing the Future' clearly set out the government's intention to lead by example. Such leadership must extend to the way government manages its own estate and other operations. In doing so, government needs to think beyond its current environmentally focused SOGE targets if it is to play a full role in delivering on its own objectives of creating sustainable communities, a strong and sustainable economy, and living within environmental limits.

Pan-government performance in areas such as water consumption and carbon dioxide emissions from road vehicles and offices continues to fall short of what is needed to achieve the targets. Drastic improvement is urgently needed to remedy the situation. Offsetting should only be implemented once all possible emission reductions have been achieved.

There are several areas where data is either not available or poor.

Government also needs to make better use of the levers and mechanisms that can help it achieve the results needed, in particular its huge spending power.

Over the last year government has introduced a number of initiatives to help drive forward improvements in operational performance.

Passion must be supported by properly resourced action plans that drive real improvement on the ground, and integrate sustainable development into all core business activities.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NI

The NI Sustainable Development Strategy[7]. NI is the only part of the UK which shares a land border with another EU Member State, a situation which can both create difficulties and afford opportunities. The strategy recognizes the need to look at sustainability issues on an All-Island basis, work with RoI's Environmental Protection Agency to develop an All-Island ecological footprint, and liaise to produce an All-Island energy market development framework.

In NI the extent of our unsustainable lifestyle has been highlighted by the Northern Limits Report which provided an estimate of our Ecological Footprint. At over 5.6 global hectares per person we have a slightly higher footprint than anywhere else in the UK, principally as a result of our over reliance on imported oil and coal for energy, imported food and food processing on transport and our reliance on the private car and our poor waste management and reliance on land fill.

When we look at this in global terms, a fair share of the earth's productive capacity would represent 8 global hectares per person. We are therefore trying to live a three planet lifestyle within only one planet's finite resources. Clearly this model of development and consumption is unsustainable. In this way sustainable development has the potential to be a very powerful mechanism for delivering more coherent, more joined up government.

A sustainable society:

Must be instilled with democratic values.

Is prepared to invest over the long term in its 2 key resources: people and the environment

Must take account of what the environment and the health of its citizens can tolerate, and be designed accordingly.

Must create conditions that are conducive to good health on equal terms for its entire population and its population must enjoy the same wider opportunities irrespective of gender, socio-economic class or ethnic/cultural background.

Is distinguished by a system of governance that focuses on mainstreaming and balancing social, economic and environmental progress ensuring sound management and efficient use of its natural resources.

Will encourage sustainable economic growth and have a business sector that is both thriving and competitive.

The NI strategy focuses on:

- Sustainable consumption and production:

    o Becoming more resource efficient

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[7] http://www.sustainableni.org/our-activities/promoting-sustainable-development/index.php

- o Making the NI public sector an UK regional leader in sustainable procurement

- o Minimizing the unsustainable impacts of consumption

- Natural resource protection and environmental enhancement:

    - o Conserving our landscape and manage it in a more sustainable way

    - o Protecting and enhancing the freshwater and marine environment

    - o Improving our air quality

    - o Conserving, protecting, enhancing and sustainably re-using our historic environment

    - o Protecting and enhancing biodiversity

- Sustainable communities:

    - o Increasing the economic well-being of the people of NI

    - o Creating an attractive/high-quality environment where people feel safe and which provides the conditions for health and social well-being

    - o Promoting the development of community engagement, civic leadership and responsible citizenship

- Climate change and energy:

    - o Reducing greenhouse gas emissions principally by promoting energy efficiency and the use of renewables

    - o Establishing NI as a world class exemplar in the development and use of renewable energy technology

    - o Planning and preparing for climate change impacts in NI

- Learning and communication for sustainable development:

    - o Providing access for all citizens to gain sustainable development skills and knowledge

    - o Bringing about the behavioural changes necessary to progress and contribute towards a sustainable society

- Governance and sustainable development:

    - o Mainstreaming sustainable development across government

    - o Strengthening the network of accountability for governance of sustainable development

The NI Sustainable Development Implementation Plan[8]. Following the launch of the Strategy, the Secretary of State transferred responsibility for the implementation of sustainable development to the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, to emphasise that the principles of sustainable development must lie at the heart of Government and all the work that it does.

The Implementation Plan highlighted 3 key themes: Sustainable Communities; Energy; and Procurement. These themes demonstrate different facets of sustainable development in action.

The Implementation Plan addressed how Government will take forward the high level set of targets and commitments in the Strategy, and also explained how it intends to ensure that the principles of sustainable development underpin its approach to all the work it undertakes.

The specific targets and actions in the Implementation Plan are all attributed to Government Departments. However, it is clear that many of the key targets cannot be achieved by Government actions alone and require positive actions from other players including district councils, business, industry, non-governmental organisations and the voluntary and community sector etc.

The structure of the Implementation Plan reflects that it is a single plan for all NI Departments. This differs from Whitehall, where Departments produced individual plans. It was considered that to produce separate plans for each NI Department might miss opportunities for co-ordination and create a risk of fragmentation of approach.

The spotlight themes are followed by a series of Departmental statements, designed to give Departments an opportunity to demonstrate how they are underpinning and taking forward sustainable development across the full range of their policy and operational responsibilities.

SDC Submission to Draft Programme for Government (PfG)[9]. SDC is Government's independent advisor on sustainable development, helping to place sustainable development at the heart of Government policy through advocacy, advice and appraisal.

SDC saw many positive elements in the draft PfG, including:

- Fostering a high quality of life for those who wish to live and work here

- Creating strong, vibrant sustainable communities

- Providing more social and affordable housing

- Using Government procurement to tackle patterns of socio-economic disadavantage

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[8] http://www.sustainableni.org/our-activities/promoting-sustainable-development/index.php

[9] http://www.pfgbudgetni.gov.uk/sustainabledevelopmentcommission.pdf

SDC especially welcomed the inclusion of sustainability as a cross-cutting key theme.

SDC also criticised the PfG, including elements of how to deliver on it and measure progress.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN OTHER DEVOLVED ADMINISTRATIONS[10]

Scotland. The principle has been part of the discussion around the Scottish Parliament since the Report of the Consultative Steering Group on the Scottish Parliament in 1998, and has been signed up to by the Scottish Executive, most recently through the Scottish Sustainable Development Strategy

Tools exist which can be used by Scottish Executive policymakers to integrate the principles of sustainable development into policy and legislation. The Scottish Executive gives some analysis, in accompanying documents to Bills, of their sustainable development impact

The First Minister chairs the Cabinet Sub-Committee on Sustainable Scotland, though consideration of legislation is not an explicit part of the remit of the Sub-Committee. Most detailed work in the Scottish Parliament on this area has taken place in the Environment Committee, though the issue is a cross-cutting one

Wales. The Government of Wales Act 1998 placed a duty on the Welsh Assembly Government to integrate sustainable development into everything the National Assembly does. The duty now falls to Welsh Assembly Ministers rather than the legislature. The Welsh Assembly Government does not yet have a formal role in considering primary legislation, and it does not have a checklist to work to when carrying out other scrutiny roles.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE ENGLISH REGIONS

SDC Independent Review Of Sustainable Development In The English Regions[11]. Regions should have an important role in helping to deliver the 4 shared priorities for UK action:

- Sustainable consumption and production

- Climate change and energy

- Natural resource protection and environmental enhancement

- Sustainable communities

In a truly sustainable region, all actors in the public, private and voluntary sectors would incorporate sustainability requirements at the heart of all their operations and in their procurement and construction activities. They would create powerful alliances and initiatives for promoting energy efficiency and greater use of renewable sources of energy. They would enhance the natural environment and tackle past pollution and land degradation. They would co-operate together to ensure that all

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[10] http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/business/research/briefings-06/SB06-75.pdf
[11] http://www.sd-commission.org.uk/publications/downloads/Full_report-final.pdf

new developments are created on sustainable development principles and that existing communities are encouraged and assisted to evolve in more sustainable directions.

Some good progress has been made in recent years on all these goals, and there is evidence of excellent, if sporadic, practice at the regional level. But much remains to be done.

London[12]. The Mayor of London, and the London Assembly, whilst not having legislation-making powers, still wield considerable influence. The Mayor of London has a duty to promote equality of opportunity, contribute to the good health of Londoners, and ensure London develops in a sustainable way. The London Assembly scrutinises the work of the Mayor.

The Act which established the office states that the Mayor must:

- Have regard to the effect of all we do on the achievement of sustainable development in the UK

- When preparing or revising strategies, include policies and proposals best calculated to contribute towards the achievement of sustainable development in the UK.

The Mayor uses sustainable development checklists for all three of the key cross-cutting areas he must consider, namely: Equalities Impact Assessments; Health Impact Assessments; and Sustainability Appraisals.

The London Assembly committees measure progress against commitments set out in the Mayoral strategies and invite external expert opinion on how they think the commitments or progress can be improved on.

April 2008

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[12] http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/business/research/briefings-06/SB06-75.pdf