

1c Policies, Strategies, Programmes

Short summary of characteristics

- 1) **Policies** interpret high level political and social decisions. They set broad goals; define main strategies; identify main levels and distribution of resources; state problems; link urban development to other goals and policies; and outline temporal horizons.
- 2) **Programs** are implementation of policies. They make defined strategies operational by: setting quantitative goals and time schedules; defining sources and distribution mechanisms for finance; specifying institutions and organisations involved; formulating and planning sets of projects.

3) **Projects** put policies and programmes into action. They are activities that have a clearly defined: focus in space; budget; start and end point; detailed description. Policies, strategies and programmes for sustainable development are important tools at all governance levels, from local to international, as the nature of the sustainability concept, which claims to integrate complex ecological and socio-economic (sub) systems, to introduce long-term visions on the development process; and to build the basis of general societal consensus on both aims and means to achieve them. A **Sustainable Development (SD) Strategy** comprises "a coordinated set of participatory and continuously improving processes of analysis, debate, capacity-strengthening, planning and investment, which seeks to integrate the short and long term economic, social and environmental objectives of society - through mutually supportive approaches wherever possible - and manages trade-offs where this is not possible". (OECD/UN/World Bank indicator for SD strategies). A SD Strategy is (a) people-centred, (b) building consensus on long-term vision, (c) targeted with clear budgetary priorities, (d) based on comprehensive and reliable analysis; (e) incorporating continuous monitoring and learning; (f) building on existing processes and strategies, (g) developing existing capacity; (h) linking national and local levels.

Stage that the tool is used

SD policies and strategies are developed to provide the common basis for a coordinating a broad range of activities involving numerous actors. As the strategic horizon usually comprises 15-20 years, the flexibility of policies and strategies is very important; they should be reviewed and updated to reflect changing processes, needs and priorities.

Output from the tool

A SD strategy has no strictly required format. However methodological advice on structure and contents usually requires: (a) a **clear vision and goals** with respect to sustainability; (b) **holistic perspective**, including a review of the whole system and its parts; (c) **essential elements** to be considered such as equity and disparity, resource use, consumption, poverty, human rights, etc.; (d) **adequate scope** - adopted time

horizon should be long enough to capture both human and ecosystem time scales (e) **practical focus** – a framework linking goals to indicators and assessment criteria; (f) **openness** - making used data and methods accessible to all; (g) **effective communication** designed to address the needs of all users; (h) **broad participation** of key citizen organisations, professional, technical and social groups to address diverse values; (i) **ongoing assessment** – adaptive and responsive to change and uncertainty; (j) **institutional capacity** providing support in the decision-making process.

Strategies and programmes are often accomplished by **Action Plans** that provide more detail about responsibilities, financial means and time interval of actions to be undertaken. **Strategic SD programmes** could be developed to focus on particular aspect of sustainable development.

Experiences of use

Most of the mechanisms devised at the European level are non-binding and have not been designed to address and fully assess the complex issues, which the implementation of the principle requires, in a co-ordinated manner. Göteborg European Council (2001) has identified “too much focus on short-term costs and too little focus on the prospect of longer term ‘win-win’ situations”.

Local Agenda 21 has led to considerable innovation in urban areas, including initiatives to encourage exchange of experience. Two major limitations to Local Agenda 21 plans and strategies are pointed out: (a) their effectiveness strongly depending on accountable, transparent and effective local government; (b) they have been so far weak in ensuring adequate attention to less obvious environmental issues. There is a need for closer linking of SD strategies to local and national budgets; it is also important to secure the commitment of the private sector and civil society. Informal movements such as citizens’ groups and professional organisations and networks, etc.), provide broad political support. Most SD strategies still remain mainly top-down, developed mainly by authorities and professional staff. Community-based, bottom-up approaches provide a chance for addressing important local issues.