

National assessment of sustainable development in Finland

ESDN Case Study No. 2

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Introduction

According to the implementation and monitoring requirements of the revised EU Strategy for Sustainable Development (EU SDS), many EU countries have started assessing their national sustainable development strategies (NSDS). Among all, Finland seems to have been quite successful in its national assessment process. The Finnish assessment proved to be very useful in better understanding the importance and significance of SD in the decision making process and in identifying the current vulnerable aspect of the NSDS process and its implications.

The second ESDN case study provides an overview of this national assessment process of the national sustainable development strategy in Finland. The aim of this report is to reveal best practices, in particular emphasizing procedures and tools employed, follow-ups as well as recommendations for future work. The information provided in this second ESDN case study could be instrumental for other EU Member States that are in the process to assess their national sustainable development strategies (NSDS).

This ESDN case study is divided in three parts. The first part describes the initial assessment process and the tools and methods employed therein. The second part adopts the assessment criteria defined in the first section in order to evaluate the implementation of the strategy and its significance for the decision-making process. Finally, the third part proposes some recommendations and reflection for policy-makers involved in similar processes.

This report is based on the Finnish experience. Information is drawn from the document outlining the [national assessing of sustainable development](#)¹ and from interviews with key actors participating in the assessment process (please see interview guide in Appendix I). The interview partners were two members of the assessment steering group, namely Mr. Sauli Rouhinen (Environment Counsellor in the Ministry of the Environment and Secretary General of Finland's National Commission on Sustainable Development) and Mrs. Annika Lindblom (Senior Adviser in the Ministry of the Environment and Deputy Secretary General in the Finland's National Commission on Sustainable Development) as well as Dr. Mikko Wennberg, Director of the external consultant agency Ramboll Management Consulting Finland.

Assessment framework

Finland's revised national strategy for sustainable development (NSDS), "Towards sustainable choices. Nationally and globally sustainable Finland", was adopted in June 2006 by the Finnish National Commission on Sustainable Development (FNCSO). The Finnish national sustainable development policy foresees a wide-reaching participation of various societal actors in both the definition of the contents and in the implementation of the

¹Ministry of the Environment, 2010: National Assessment of Sustainable Development 2009. Helsinki.

measures. In this section, the report describes how the process of the national assessment started and developed as well as the tools and methods used.

Initiation Process

The assessment of the revised NSDS has been carried out in the framework of the progress evaluation of the NSDS implementation – a biannual process. The institution responsible for the coordination and for the assessment of the strategy is the Ministry of Environment. Therefore, in a preliminary phase of the assessment, the Ministry of Environment organized several meetings with the inter-ministerial network secretariat (a preparatory body for the FNCSD, that includes all ministries with a stake in SD) in order to exchange ideas and suggestions on the assessment and, furthermore, to gather information on the implementation of the strategy from the various ministries. The Ministry of Environment then created a steering-group. Its members were policy-makers (here understood as public administrators or policy planners) of the Ministry of Environment, namely Sauli Rouhinen, Annika Lindblom and Jarmo Muurman, and Professor Per Mickwitz from the Finnish Environment Institute². The steering-group launched a tender process for selecting an external consultant for the assessment and selected Ramboll Management Consulting. The steering-group, along with Ramboll Management Consulting, designed then the assessment process. This was mainly based on interviews and revision of administrative reports, statistical data and indicators. The evaluation was carried out by the external consultant. The assessment process started in March 2009 and ended in December 2009. Based on the assessment, recommendations were drafted. The key recommendations were:

- new measures for re-formulating the strategy concept,
- a preliminary ex-ante assessment process as a new planning tool for the strategy and
- further enhancement of the indicators.

The recommendations were considered useful by the inter-ministerial network secretariat. Currently, the work concerns the way how to integrate these recommendations in further governmental programme.

Development process: tools and methods

The national assessment process had two goals. On one hand, it aimed to estimate the extent to which the targets (see Box 1) set in the revised NSDS (2006) was achieved. On the other hand, it aimed to evaluate the role and importance of the NSDS in the decision-making process of the various ministries with a stake in SD.

Based on the interviews, evaluating the importance and steering influence of the NSDS in the various state agencies should give information on the added-value that this particular policy tool represents for the achievement of SD policy.

² The latter one is affiliated to the Ministry directly and supports the Ministry with evidenced based policy-making.

Box 1: Target of NSDS

The targets of the Finish NSDS are:

- Taking the sustainable development guidelines into account in the programmes of various actors;
- Preparation of sustainable development programmes;
- Cooperation between administrative sectors;
- Monitoring of the success of sustainable development policy;
- Assessment of the National Strategy for Sustainable Development;
- Development of impact assessment.

The assessment process relied on four criteria:

- (1) **target-setting**: it assesses how extensively the guidelines of the NSDS have been taken into account both by public and private actors;
- (2) **measures**: it aims to evaluate how well the measures required by the strategy have been implemented and how successful the implementation of the strategy has been;
- (3) **results and impacts**: it aims to determine how well have the targets set in the strategy been achieved as whole and by theme area;
- (4) **follow-up and assessment**: it aims to evaluate how well does the follow-up and assessment phase support the implementation of the strategy (see Appendix II).

For the evaluation of these criteria, Ramboll Management Consulting employed various types of sources. Primarily, its team relied on the reports of the various ministries on the implementation of their strategies. Further data and information were obtained both through traditional qualitative (questionnaires and interviews) and quantitative evaluation methods. In general, interviews proved very useful. However, indicators, statistics, previous research studies and reports from member organisations of the FNCSD, played a significant role as well.

Assessment findings of the NSDS

The assessment findings of the evaluation report are sub-divided according to the four criteria on which the assessment was based: the target setting, measures, results and impacts and follow-up mechanisms of the strategy.

Assessment of target setting in the NSDS

The assessment was based on the reflecting the foci of the NSDS in the actors' strategies and the extent to which the NSDS has steered target setting and affected internal target setting by actors. Secondly, the level of coherence between the NSDS targets and targets of each administrative sector was evaluated (see figure 1).

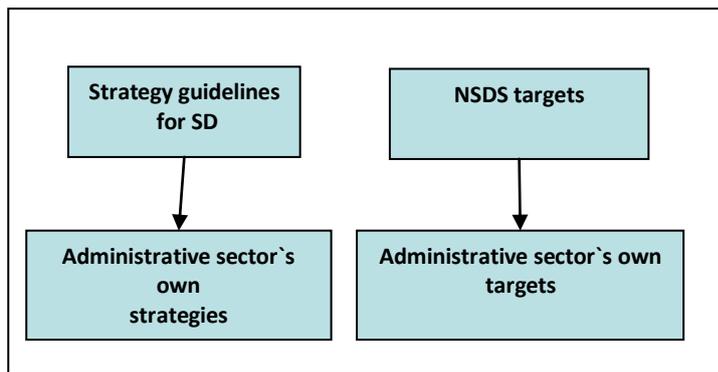


Figure 1: Assessment of target-setting

Source: own analysis

Interestingly, it emerged from this process that many SD themes (like climate change, sustainable use of natural resources) were widely present in the target setting of the public administration. Many sectors have developed, therefore, their own strategies in these areas.

In contrast, with respect to other topics, such as well-being, the targets are mainly pursued outside the strategic framework of SD. This assessment also underlined the lack of an overarching understanding of SD within the administrative sectors. The result is compartmentalization: each bureaucracy focuses on the topics closer to its own core competences, and their integration remains limited.

Furthermore, little attention seems to have been paid to the coherence of target setting. Conflicting targets between the sectoral strategy and the NSDS are rarely addressed (i.e. economic vs. sustainability targets). Finally, a sort of vagueness seems to have affected the process and given rise to the problem “everything is SD”.

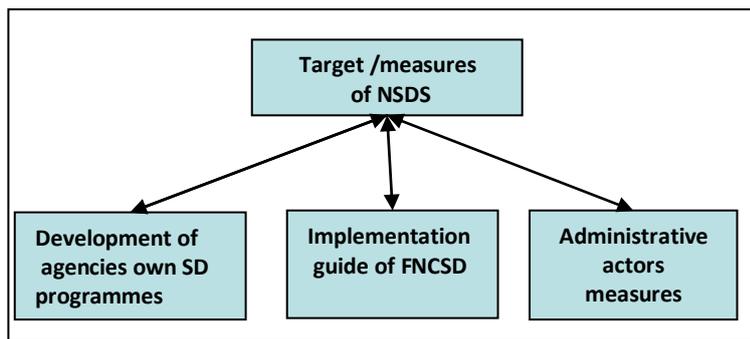
In sum, the importance of the NSDS content has increased within the Finnish public administration. And this is particularly true whenever there is some overlapping between SD theme areas and administrative focus areas (i.e. forest policy). However, as a governing instrument, the strategy has achieved less rather than more prominence. This is due to two different dynamics: Firstly, key SD themes are managed by other sectoral strategies. Secondly, the contents of the NSDS are determined by decision-making processes that are steered separately from the strategy itself. In other words, the high political profile of the SD Commission is not followed by a similar political importance attributed to the strategy itself.

Assessment of measures in the NSDS

This part assessed how well the measures of the NSDS have been implemented (for an overview of the targets of the NSDS, see figure 2). It evaluated three specific aspects:

- (1) Preparation of SD programmes from government agencies and municipalities;
- (2) Compliance with the implementation guide of the FNCSD, which sets targets of promotion of SD principles in administrative sectors and inclusion of SD principles in public organization everyday activities;
- (3) Relationship between measures of the actors and the targets set in NSDS.

Figure 2: Assessment of measures of NSDS



With one exception (Ministry of Transport and Communication), no sustainable development programmes have been prepared by central government agencies, mainly due to the actors considering this unnecessary.

Source: own analysis

A number of local agendas or sustainable development programmes were prepared by municipalities in the late 1990s and the early 2000s. The assessment provides no evaluation of the current situation in municipalities or whether these programmes have been genuinely utilised and updated as part of municipal decision-making.

The implementation guide of the FNCSD aims to promote the commitment of the management of ministries and organisation to the vision and target framework of the NSDS in order to indirectly affect the preparation of SD programmes at the various administrative levels. One of the shortcomings in the implementation of the strategy is directly linked to the lacking commitment of management at the senior level. Although environmental issues in particular have received more emphasis than before in senior management agendas, the *NSDS has not succeeded in establishing itself as a strategy governing inter-administrative activity*. Actors have remained unfamiliar with the strategy, which lacks the credibility needed for directing either the target-setting activities or thinking of senior management (in comparison to e.g. the productivity programme, regional policy programmes or strategies on climate change).

The third assessment aspect of evaluating the impact of the already launched measures did not provide any fruitful results. The desired impacts of most measures cannot yet be observed, due to the time span of the evaluation. With regard to measures implemented in a number of key target areas, the impacts may be observed only after several years. A more important problem originates from the *lack of a clearly defined programme theory for the strategy* that would describe how the desired impacts could be achieved through the selected measures, while defining the roles and responsibilities of various parties within this entity. The development of such a programme theory might improve the impact of the strategy measures in the future.

Assessment of results and impacts in the NSDS

The evaluation aimed to assess three aspects:

- (1) To what extent the targets set in the NSDS have been implemented as a whole and by thematic entities (i.e. use and protection of natural resources, communities and

- regional structure, well-being of citizens, economy as a safeguard for SD, Finland as a global actor and bearer of responsibility, supporting sustainable choices)?
- (2) What results have the targets set by the strategy produced?
 - (3) What is the status of sustainable development in Finland and how has it developed?

Figure 3: Assessment of result and impact



Source: own analysis

At the international level, Finland's level of SD³ can be considered high as measured through the Sustainable Society Index, Environmental Performance Index and Human Development Index. However, despite this high performance, the situation is more complicated when assessed through the targets set in the NSDS. In fact, the assessment phase has concluded that in most target areas, there has been no progress. In general, progress seems to have been more marked in environmental rather than social and economic issues.

As to the results of the target setting, the strategy seems to have been *more effective in promoting processes, rather than end results*. These processes have permitted the creation of a discussion forum that in turn helped the actors to structure the theme areas of SD on a cooperative basis. However, according to the consultant, the NSDS has had no great significance in terms of directing or launching measures.

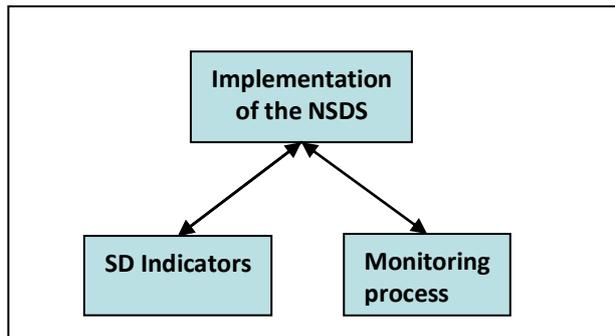
Assessment of monitoring and evaluation systems of SD

SD indicators are employed to monitor and assess the implementation of SD in Finland. There is already an established Finnish National Indicator Network of SD which takes part in the strategy work by identifying development challenges in the early phase of the work and by producing follow-up indicators for monitoring the implementation of the strategy objectives. The monitoring process of SD consists of the following elements as:

³ In December 2008, the Sustainability Society Foundation (SSF) a Dutch organisation, published an international comparison on the level of sustainability in 151 countries. Finland ranked fourth in this comparison, following Sweden, Switzerland and Norway.

- Sustainable development indicators;
- Reporting on the implementation of the strategy to the National Commission on Sustainable Development;
- Developing the ENVIMAT-model (environmental impacts of material flows caused by the Finnish economy);
- National Assessment.

Figure 4: Evaluation of the follow-up system



This part of the assessment aimed to evaluate the following aspects:

- (1) Do the indicators sufficiently facilitate the implementation of the NSDS?
- (2) Are they reliable and up-to-date on the state of SD?
- (3) How well does the monitoring system, comprising the elements mentioned above, facilitate the implementation of the NSDS?

Source: own analysis

When assessing the indicators the core criteria used were:

- Validity: the indicators measure what is set as a target;
- Specificity: it is known what should be done on the basis of the trends indicators show;
- Relevance: important data or statistics that must be followed;
- Timeliness: the data is available when needed.

The conclusions have shown that the indicator work has contributed positively to the strategy work related to sustainable development. *Through these indicators, the NSDS has been enhanced and the contents of the target areas have become more concrete.* The core problem in the evaluation of the validity of indicators was the vagueness of some targets or target areas of the strategy. The main difficulty was to define what the indicator should describe. This problem was related more to the target setting rather than to the indicator work.

Indicators have seldom been used in decision-making. Indicator work has not produced indicators facilitating operative decision-making, but measures that describe the state of SD at the macro-level by target area. The use of such indicators in organisational decision-making is rather low.

In strategy work related to SD, significant efforts have been made to develop follow-up and assessment systems. Indeed, this assessment criteria received the best evaluation score (see figure 6) Key efforts in this respect concern the indicator work carried out by the indicator

network (composed of civil servants, researchers and statisticians from various branches), the [ENVIMAT project](#)⁴ and the national assessment⁵.

The indicators are weaker with regard to the social aspect of sustainable development. For the ENVIMAT model, the situation is similar in the sense that the model expressly reflects on the relationships between economic and environmental impacts. When used as a tool for assessing sustainable development, its shortcomings are directly related to the social aspect.

Summary of the assessment findings

The evaluation looked at Finland's NSDS implementation and what has been the "importance" or "additionality" of the strategy in the decision making process of the stakeholders.

On the basis of the findings derived from the assessment criteria (figure 5) and on the interviews we conducted, *the NSDS seems to have delivered an added-value, providing a particular forum of dialogue for various stakeholders on various themes*. This participative process – being at the heart of the strategy – has allowed reaching various societal actors both in the definition of the contents and in the implementation of the measures. Although the themes related to the environment (i.e. climate change, sustainable use of natural resources) have emerged extensively in the public sphere target-setting process, it appears that they are carried on mostly by other political processes. Thus, based on the evaluation findings, *the strategy itself does not direct the decision-making processes of government agencies*. The central themes of SD are being steered through other strategies, while strategy contents are determined by decision making processes steered separately from the strategy itself.

According to the consultant's opinion, *the NSDS as a governing tool for SD, does not provide any policy guidance in SD policy terms to most actors*. The strategy appears as a compilation of SD targets set by disparate organisations. There have been attempts to deploy the strategy through SD action programmes but programme work has not been properly coordinated and with a few exceptions, practically no action programmes have been prepared within the state administration. According to the consultant, the "lack of commitment of senior managers towards the NSDS and the unawareness of the strategy in sectoral target setting" represent key problems concerning the implementation of the strategy.

Based on the evaluation results, *the strategy content (targets and measures) has become important to various branches, although the significance of SD varies greatly between branches or administrative sectors*. In fact, where SD themes are substantially linked to the bureaucracy's focus, SD targets have become central or their importance has increased. In contrast, SD has proved to be barely visible in target setting in sectors whose activities have

⁴ The objective of the ENVIMAT project has been to create a tool with which the relationships between environmental impacts and economic effects, due to the use of natural resources in Finland, can be assessed. This project has concentrated on environmental impacts, even though the ENVIMAT model also enables the assessment of effects on added value and employment in various sectors, and the products and services produced therein.

⁵ No evaluation of the national assessment on SD has been undertaken in the National assessment for SD 2009.

only narrow connection. Generally, the direct impacts of most measures launched after the preparation of the strategy can not yet be observed, due to the time span of the evaluation. The impacts of measures launched on those sectors which have linked focus with SD might be observed only after several years.

Based on the evaluation findings, *the basic problem in the interpretation of SD lies in the very concept of SD and the administrators' understanding of SD*. This has two implications: Firstly, since the concept has become so vague, almost all activities can be interpreted as being in line with SD. During the evaluation only few public administrators were able to identify features of target-setting within their own organisation that might be poorly compatible with the principles of SD. Secondly, as the consultant mentioned in an interview, the interpretation of the content of SD has been widely subjected to "cherry-picking", each actor is able to select those elements of the NSDS which best serve the needs of their own organisation. In fact, the assessment findings show that an overarching perspective on SD was mostly lacking (environmental, social and economic). This seems to be due to the very broad and unconcrete nature of most targets in the strategy.

The importance of the SD lies mainly in its procedural value: *it offers a forum for participative dialogue among various stakeholders and less in the strategy as a governing instrument*. When SD is considered as a broad horizontal principle governing all activities, it has been overshadowed by other strategies. In fact, *it lacks political support, concreteness in its targets and appropriate implementation measures*. However, it has had a *positive impact on the development of appropriate indicators (indicator work network) and the development of some policy planning tools (like the ENVIMAT Model⁶)*.

⁶ The model was not an explicit result of the NSDS but it was considered useful when analysing the impacts of many SD strategy objectives and their implementation

Figure 5: Summary of the four criteria of the assessment

Aspect assessed	Assessment questions	Assessment
Target setting Coherence of target setting	How effectively have the guidelines of the strategy for sustainable development been taken into consideration in administrative sectors' own strategies and programmes?	
	What level of coherence is there between the targets set by the strategy for sustainable development and other administrative targets?	
	What is the importance of targets set for sustainable development in relation to other administrative targets?	
Measures Implementation of measures according to the strategy	How many central government agencies and municipalities have prepared sustainable development programmes?	
	How extensively have the actors considered the implementation guidelines prepared by the National Commission on Sustainable Development?	
	How effectively have the chosen measures promoted the targets set by the strategy for sustainable development?	
Results and impacts The achievement of targets set as an entity and by theme area	How effectively have the targets set by the Strategy for Sustainable Development been implemented as a whole and by thematic entity?	
	What results, promoting the targets set by the strategy, have been generated by strategy work?	
	What is the state of sustainable development in Finland and how has it developed?	
Follow-up and assessment systems Follow-up and assessment of the achievement of targets set	Do the follow-up indicators adequately facilitate the strategy's implementation?	
	How does the current follow-up and assessment system facilitate the implementation of the strategy?	
	How comprehensive, reliable and up-to-date is the data available on the state of sustainable development?	

Source: Ministry of the Environment, 2010:78

Recommendations and follow-ups of the assessment

Based on the evaluation report, the recommendations suggest that the *NSDS concept should be substantially changed, less in terms of governance mechanisms and more in terms of new responsibilities and planning tools*. The goal is to develop a more coherent target-setting between the strategy and the sectoral agendas. From this perspective, this section will shortly summarize these recommendations and their implications. A general comment on the assessment process (based on the interviews) will follow.

On the basis of findings of the evaluation report, the consultants proposed the following recommendations:

- Renewal of the NSDS concept;
- Further development and piloting of an ex-ante assessment framework;
- Enhancement of the operational indicators.

The recommendations related to the new strategy concept refer to the improvements in content and renewal of the concept. According to the assessors, the strategy should be

modified in its targets and targets levels, as it is quite “messy” currently. Therefore, the new strategy concept should:

- clearly define the targets and target level of SD in Finland;
- define the principle of SD, which are not quite clear in the current strategy;
- define the role and responsibilities of the actors in the implementation;
- present a model for monitoring the achievement of the targets.

Most interview partners shared the opinion that an NSDS should be a concise document. Thus, it should not integrate all implementation measures for every administrative sector. According to the consultants, the responsibility for the measures and implementation should remain in the administrative sectors and other actors. Then, each sector should be allowed to report on the measures in line with its own, normal practices.

The NSDS should also provide guidance for the administrative sectors on how to take into account SD aspects in the policy planning of respective sectors. A pilot project “ex-ante assessment framework” between the Ministry of the Environment and the assessors was introduced in this respect (see a first draft of it in Appendix III of this report, and more in the Finnish assessment report on sustainable development). The assessors also suggested that the Ministry of the Environment integrates into the assessment process the target-setting process of the strategy. Consequently, this tool should help for the identification of urgent future targets in the new strategy, which need cross-sectoral actions in line with the SD principles. Moreover, it should also ensure that the strategy gives its added-value to the administrative sectors at the very beginning of their policy planning procedures. The ex-ante planning tool in the decision-making process might contribute to more coherence in target-setting between the NSDS and the sectoral strategies. This tool should then be further developed to an “ex-ante framework programme”, providing guidance in implementation of the strategy to the sectoral level in order to ensure that all aspects of SD are being considered in the targets setting of the sectoral agenda. However, more information on how this planning tool will be implemented in the daily working tasks of the administrators is not available yet.

The third recommendation concerns the lack of concreteness of the targets in the strategy. As target setting (operational measures) is closely linked to the development of indicators, the quality of both policy objectives and indicators should be reconsidered. Indicators should be able to provide direct information on the results and impacts of operational measures. The Finnish Indicator Network of SD is already working on improving the list of SD indicators.

Implications for a renewed NSDS and follow-up

The current governance structures were not assessed in the evaluation. Thus, the recommendations have no implications on this issue. However, they imply some changes related to the specification of the role of actors and institutions in the planning, implementation and monitoring phase of the strategy. Thus, the FNCSD should play a more specific role in the planning and monitoring phase of the strategy, while the administrative sectors should further engage with the implementation of the measures and actions in line with their sectoral practices. However, the risk that the new strategy might not result in any

improvement derives from the lacking power of the FNCSD and the lacking political importance of SD in the perception of high level senior managers in the administration.

Based on this new strategy concept, and according to the interview partners, the role of the FNCSD, should be more specific and play a more central in the strategy process. Its tasks should be:

- 1) Target-setting and measurement: so to better identify those topics of the NSDS which give an added value to sectoral policy;
- 2) Planning of processes and practices: (a) to highlight and give a visibility to those SD issues which need common actions among the various sectors; (b) to ensure that the principles of sustainable development are translated in policy planning
- 3) Follow-up and communication on progress: to ensure that the administrative sectors receive information on how they have been progressing in achieving the targets set by the strategy.

Administrative sectors would remain responsible for the implementation and would report on this to the Commission. According to the interview partners, the introduction of the ex-ante assessment framework programme might provide guidance for planning the sectoral actions, in order that SD aspects are considered. The specific tasks of the administrative sectors can be summarised as follows:

- 1) planning of measures;
- 2) reporting on measures in line with their own reporting practices;
- 3) introduction of practices(through the ex-ante assessment plans)
- 4) utilising follow-up data in their own planning processes.

So far, the horizontal coordination mechanisms have not been efficient due to the lack of political impetus and proper steering mechanisms of the NSDS. For this reason, new governance mechanisms would be necessary in order to reach a better coordination among the ministries and thus ensure an effective implementation of the strategy. However, the assessment does not provide any information on new governance mechanisms or recommend changes in the current administration system. In this regard, the consultant argues that the new strategy concept might have potential for improving the strategy implementation, also in the current governance structures. Indeed, the new strategy concept is a pro-discussion forum, which sharpens the participative process of the agenda-setting. Consequently, the participative process might result to be the driver for a more effective implementation of the strategy.

Based on the evaluation result, the renewal of the strategy concept might also not lead to significantly improved results. This would be due to the lack of power characterizing the FNCSD and to the lack of importance assigned to SD in policy processes. All the interview partners have confirmed that, since the FNCSD lacks the power for implementing an effective coordination among ministries, its secretariat should be put on a higher political level (possibly to the Prime Minister Office). However, due to restricted financial resources, this is unlikely to happen. According to the civil servants from the Ministry of Environment, at present circumstances, the SD coordination can continue to be in the Ministry of the Environment. The Ministry of the Environment has longstanding experience on other cross-

departmental policy coordination (e.g. climate, biodiversity) and wide knowledge on SD aspects. However, in the future they would prefer the Prime Minister Office to take the lead by using the Ministry of the Environment knowledge and expertise in terms of SD policy.

In order to increase the political importance of the strategy, the interviews revealed policy-makers' willingness to discuss SD in a high level-institution as the Commission (governmental members and other stakeholder civil society). Their goal is to further urge the government and influence the policy making process in order to slowly provide the strategy with higher political status.

As a follow-up to the assessment, various preparatory meetings within the Ministry of Environment and the inter-ministerial network secretariat are planned. Their aim is to draft a proposal of the new strategy concept, which should include the current recommendations of the assessment and other suggestions. According to the policy-makers, the proposal is planned to be presented to the SD Commission for further discussion. Possible guidelines for the strategy might be then implemented and integrated in the 2011 government programme.

Reflection on the assessment process: lessons learned

Based on the interview results, the assessment process has been quite successful. Although Finland is one of the front-runners in SD, the policy-makers observed that such an assessment clarified once more, despite the progress done, the obstacles that still impede an effective implementation of the NSDS. According to the policy-makers, the assessment proved to be very useful for better understanding the importance and significance of SD in the decision-making process and for identifying the current vulnerable aspects of the strategy. The ex-post reflections on the assessment process included both positive and negative experiences.

The *positive experiences* of the policy-makers relate to the collaboration process with the external consultant and among the steering group and the network secretariat. The external process of the assessment offered a “fresh perspective on new insights in the stakeholder approach and assessment processes of SD. In comparison to the previous internal evaluations and the facilitated self-evaluation of Finland’s NSDS in 2003, the policy-makers evaluated the SD assessment of 2009 as more successful in the selected methods, comprehensive analyses and in the employed evaluative processes to the administrative sectors. Seemingly, responsible for this was the longstanding experience of the external consultant. Moreover, another positive experience of the policy-makers regarded the “honesty” of the assessors towards the results of their evaluation process (i.e. as senior managers of the Ministries rejected to hold interviews, this was appropriately also reported in the assessment document).

In the light of the internal organization of the assessment, the involvement of few members in the steering group (two to three policy-makers from the Ministry of the Environment and one scientist from the Finnish Environment Institute) facilitated the coordination between the assessor and the inter-ministerial network. Moreover, the commitment of the public administrators (at least at the advisor level) for undertaking the national assessment on SD

seemed to be decisive for the process. Therefore, the interviewed policy makers recommended to other EU Member States, which are interested in conducting NSDS assessments, to ensure from the start the administrators' commitment for actively contributing to the evaluation of the NSDS.

These *positive experiences* contrasted with some negative ones. They concern the lack of the political relevance, the limited time resources for the assessment and the non-inclusion of governance mechanisms in the assessment criteria.

According to the policy-makers, despite the efforts of the Ministry of the Environment, the political relevance of this assessment in Finland remained quite low. The high-level public administrators still lack credibility of the NSDS in the formulation of their visions and targets. Many of the senior managers were not prepared to hold interviews on the assessment of the strategy. Moreover, the policy-makers would have expected a longer time span for the assessment in order to reflect better on the past and, especially, the future steps. Events using various back-casting and future scenario methods could have been very useful. Moreover, the methods used for the assessment of SD were not very participatory. Policy-makers missed substantially their involvement in the assessment methods of the material gained. As SD is a societal learning process, they would prefer a stronger involvement of stakeholders in the evaluation of the results in the future. Generally, the policy-makers missed the assessment of governing structures and mechanisms of the administration of the strategy. This evaluation might have provided further useful insights for a better implementation of the strategy in the administration. Indeed, the consultant confirmed this statement of the policy-makers. The consultant stated that future assessments of SD strategies should concentrate more on the processes and mechanisms of the strategy and less on the appropriateness of selected targets and measures in the strategy documents. They specifically emphasized the need of focusing specifically on potential improvements for the implementation of the strategy in the administration in the future.

For any further information on the assessment of SD in Finland and all related issues, interested parties might contact at the Ministry of the Environment:

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Appendix I

Interview guide

Assessment development process

- 1) What was your concrete role during the assessment process?
- 2) What was/were the most striking experience(s) you made during the assessment? Could you mention some highlights?
- 3) Form the methods and tools applied in the assessment process, which one were the most promising?

Institutional set up

- 4) Which changes are needed to be done to the current governance structures based on your recommendations?
- 5) What will be the new role of the National Commission on Sustainable Development and of the Ministry of Environment in the governance mechanisms of the new strategy concept (target setting, coordination, and implementation)?
- 6) How will the recommendations be further integrated in the current work of the National Commission for Sustainable Development and in the sectoral policies? (i.e. the renewal of the strategy concept, the enhancement of operational indicators, the further development of the ex-ante assessment framework of the strategy).

Recommendations and follow-ups of the current assessment of sustainable development

- 7) What is the direct contribution of your recommendations to the improvement of the identified concrete problems related to the governance mechanisms of the strategy in the following issues:
 - a) strategy target setting;
 - b) the implementation of the strategy;
 - c) assessment and monitoring process.
- 8) What will be the follow-up measures of the assessment and how will they be linked to the current strategy and to the policy planning process (national assessment)?
- 9) Could you better describe the framework of the *ex-ante assessment Programme* and the linkages and its establishment in the decision-making process?

Political relevance of the assessment and recommendations to other EU Member States

- 10) How would you describe the political relevance of the assessment process and the report?
- 11) What would you improve in the assessment process if you would do it again?
- 12) What would you recommend to other EU Member States that would like to undertake a similar assessment?

Appendix II

The figure below represents three possible developments for each criteria, marking its outcome progress with the “hand-signs” in the picture below.

Assessment criteria and questions

Aspect of assessment	Assessment questions	Assessment criteria	Material used
Target setting	How well have the guidelines of the strategy for sustainable development been taken into consideration in administrative sectors' own strategies and programmes?	 The guidelines presented in the strategy have been considered clearly and comprehensively in target setting within the administrative sector; sustainable development is referred to in target setting.  The guidelines presented in the strategy have been partly considered in target setting within the administrative sector, but target setting has no clear connection to sustainable development guidelines  The guidelines presented in the strategy have not been considered or have been considered to a very limited extent; sustainable development is not referred to in target setting	Ministries' key strategy documents Kohti kestäviä strategioita (Towards sustainable strategies), a document prepared by the Ministry of the Environment Interviews of representatives of ministries' managerial groups
	What is the level of coherence between the targets set in the strategy for sustainable development and the other targets of each administrative sector?	 Target setting lends clear support to the achievement of targets set in the strategy for sustainable development; the sustainable development perspective is clearly represented in target setting  Target setting does not lend support to the achievement of goals set in the strategy for sustainable development or partly conflicts with these goals  Target setting frequently conflicts with the targets set by the strategy for sustainable development and/or target setting is in conflict with the sustainable development targets	Ministries' key strategy documents Kohti kestäviä strategioita (Towards sustainable strategies), a document prepared by the Ministry of the Environment Interviews of representatives of ministries' managerial groups
	What is the level of importance of targets set for sustainable development in relation to other targets within the administrative sector?	 Sustainable development targets clearly steer target setting within the entire administrative sector and are of a major importance in comparison to other targets in the administrative sector  Target setting in the administrative sector mainly coheres with sustainable development targets but the importance of sustainable development targets varies  Sustainable development targets are clearly subordinate to the administrative sector's other targets; the importance of the sustainable development perspective is limited in general target setting	Ministries' key strategy documents Reports provided by key actors Kohti kestäviä strategioita (Towards sustainable strategies), a document prepared by the Ministry of the Environment Interviews of representatives of ministries' managerial groups
Measures	How many central government agencies and municipalities have prepared sustainable development programmes?	 All central state agencies and the majority of municipalities have prepared a sustainable development or corresponding programme  The majority of central state agencies and some municipalities have prepared a sustainable development or corresponding programme  Only a small number of central state agencies and municipalities have prepared a sustainable development or corresponding programme	Reports provided by key actors Estimates based on interviews and surveys
	To what extent have the actors taken the implementation guidelines prepared by the National Commission on Sustainable Development into consideration?	 The implementation guide has been considered in a comprehensive manner with regard to sustainable development targets and measures  The implementation guide has been considered with regard to only some sustainable development targets and measures  The implementation guide has been considered only partly with regard to the administrative sector's sustainable development targets and measures and/or the guide has not been utilised	Estimates based on interviews and surveys
	How well have the measures chosen promoted the targets set in the strategy for sustainable development?	 Measures taken by actors have promoted the achievement of sustainable development targets and the role of these measures in the achievement of targets is clear  Measures taken have had only a minor impact on the targets and/or the connection between the targets and these measures remains partly unclear  Measures taken have had no impact on the targets and/or the connection between the measures and the targets remains unclear	Reports provided by key actors Summary based on the reports provided by actors, interviews and analysis of document material Estimates based on interviews and surveys

Aspect of assessment	Assessment questions	Assessment criteria	Material used for assessment
Results and impacts Achievement of targets as a whole and by theme area	How well have the objectives of the Strategy for Sustainable Development been implemented as a whole and by theme?	 Progress can be observed in nearly all target areas and theme areas  Progress can be observed in most target areas and theme areas  Progress can be observed in only some target areas and theme areas	Summary based on the reports provided by actors, interviews and analysis of document material
	What results promoting the achievement of the strategy's objectives have resulted from the strategy work?	 The strategy process has launched the planning of sustainable development targets and measures  The strategy process has provided tools for the planning of sustainable development targets and measures  The strategy process has had no significant impact on the planning of sustainable development targets and measures	Summary based on the reports provided by actors, interviews and analysis of document Estimates based on interviews and surveys
	What is the state of sustainable development in Finland and how has it developed?	 75% of the indicators show positive and/or sustainable development  50% of the indicators show positive and/or sustainable development  25% of the indicators show sustainable development	Indicator data
Follow-up and assessment Follow-up and assessment of the achievement of the targets	Do the follow-up indicators adequately facilitate the implementation of the strategy?	 Most stakeholder groups have used the indicators and consider them important and useful in the follow-up and assessment of sustainable development  Some stakeholder groups have used the indicators and consider them important and useful in the follow-up and assessment of sustainable development  Only a small proportion of stakeholder groups consider the indicators important and/or useful in the follow-up and assessment of sustainable development or they are not aware of, or have not used, the indicators	Analysis of document material Estimates based on interviews and surveys
	How well does the current follow-up and assessment system facilitate the implementation of the strategy?	 Most stakeholder groups consider the follow-up and assessment system an important part of the strategy's implementation. The data provided by the system can be easily utilised in the planning and implementation of sustainable development measures and/or this data has also been so utilised  Some stakeholder groups consider the follow-up and assessment system an important part of the strategy's implementation or that the data provided by the system can be easily utilised in the planning and implementation of sustainable development measures, but there is no proof that the data has been so utilised  Only a small proportion of stakeholder groups consider the follow-up and assessment system important with regard to planning sustainable development, or the system has not been used	Analysis of document material Estimates based on interviews and surveys
	How comprehensive, reliable and up-to-date is the data available on the status of sustainable development?	 Most stakeholder groups consider the data provided by the follow-up and assessment system comprehensive, reliable and up-to-date and the data has been used in planning sustainable development targets and measures  Some stakeholder groups consider the data provided by the follow-up and assessment system comprehensive, reliable and up-to-date in the planning of sustainable development targets and measures, but their use of the data varies  Only a small proportion of stakeholder groups consider the data provided by the follow-up and assessment system comprehensive, reliable and up-to-date in the planning of sustainable development targets and measures, or they do not use the data	Analysis of document material Estimates based on interviews and surveys

Source: Ministry of the Environment, 2010: 18-19

Appendix III

Ex-ante assessment framework

During the national assessment of sustainable development, the assessors, in cooperation with the Ministry of the Environment, have been developing a pilot version of an ex-ante assessment model for use in Finland. Methods used in other countries were analysed for the basis of the related development work. The assessment framework is intended for use as a policy planning tool. Its assessment factors are based on the targets and indicators of the NSDS (see figure on the next page). In this respect, the assessment framework matches the effectiveness of the strategy. The assessment framework includes six elements for each assessment factor.

The first of these elements is *likely impacts*, describing the likely change related to the assessment factor (for instance, the average CO₂ emissions of new cars will fall below 130 g/km in 2015). The second element of the assessment framework is the impact mechanism referring to the mechanism by which impacts are obtained (for instance, changes in taxation have impacts on consumer behaviour). The third element is recognised risks: this refers to factors that potentially prevent the expected impact (for instance, the more frequent use of cars producing fewer emissions). The fourth component describes the direction of the impact on a scale ranging from very negative (-3) to very positive (+3). Zero is used to describe a situation where the measure has no effect on the assessment factor in question. The fifth element defines the probability of the impact, assessed on a scale from 1 to 3. The final element defines the sustainable development index of the assessment factor in question, based on the direction and probability of the impact. The assessment framework is available in a draft version only. Prior to its introduction, the framework should be piloted and further developed based on the experience gained during the piloting phase.

Assessment factor	Likely impact	Impact mechanism	Recognised risks	Direction of the impact	Probability	Sustainable development index
USE AND PROTECTION OF NATURAL RESOURCES						
Greenhouse gas emissions	Average CO2 emissions of new cars will fall below 130 g/km in 2015	Changes in taxation have impacts on consumer behaviour.	Wider use of cars producing fewer emissions	+3 +2 +1 -1 -2 -3	3 = great 2 = moderate 1 = small	Impact x probability
Total energy consumption						
Use of renewable energy sources						
Proportion of endangered species by habitat						
Acidifying emissions and eutrophying discharges						
Use of non-renewable natural resources						
Nutrient load to the Baltic Sea						
COMMUNITIES AND REGIONAL STRUCTURE						
Distance to services						
Amount of passenger transportation						
Coherence of regional structure						
Regional differences in dependency ratio						
Citizens' satisfaction in services						
WELL-BEING OF CITIZENS						
Retirement age						
Quality of working life						
Exclusion and poverty						
Healthy lifestyles						
Integration of immigrants						
Voting activity and civil activity						
ECONOMY AS A SAFEGUARD FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT						
Competitiveness of enterprises						
Productivity of production of goods and service provision						
Dependency ratio						
Public debt						
Unemployment						
FINLAND AS A GLOBAL ACTOR AND BEARER OF RESPONSIBILITY						
Resources of development cooperation						
Development of neighbouring regions						
Availability of new technologies and IT solutions in developing countries						
SUPPORTING SUSTAINABLE CHOICES						
Resources of R&D activities						
Production and distribution of information supporting sustainable choices						
Changes in attitudes and values						

Source: Ministry of the Environment, 2010: 80