PRIME-SD

Peer Review Improvement through Mutual Exchange on Sustainable Development

A guidebook for peer reviews of national sustainable development strategies

February 2006

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Glossary

BRICS+G	Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, and Germany dialogue on sustainability and growth
EPR	Environmental Performance Review
CSD	
BRICS+G	Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, and Germany dialogue on sustainability and growth
IISD	International Institute for Sustainable Development
IMPEL	Implementation of Environmental Law Network
IPPC	Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control
NSDS	National Sustainable Development Strategy
OECD	Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development
OMC	Open Method of Co-ordination
SDS	Sustainable Development Strategy
UNDESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UNDP	United National Development Programme
WPEP	Working Party on Environmental Performance (OECD)
WSSD	World Summit on Sustainable Development, Johannesburg, 2002.

Introducing the NSDS Review Guidebook

1 What the Guidebook is for

The EU committed, at the 2002 Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), to take immediate steps to formulate and elaborate national sustainable development strategies (NSDSs) where these were still outstanding, and to begin implementing existing NSDSs by 2005. This followed commitments at the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, where Member States agreed to adopt NSDSs, and at the 1997 UN Rio+5 meeting, when a target date of 2002 was set for introducing them. Moreover, within the 2000 Millennium Development Goals countries agreed to integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes.

Most of the 25 EU Member States developed or revised NSDSs in the run up to the 2002 Johannesburg Summit, with additional NSDSs adopted since. The Member States are therefore making good progress in terms of developing NSDSs although the strategies vary considerably both in their content, approach and level of implementation.

According to the Commission's first analysis published in 2004,[1] Member States face a number of common challenges in preparing, implementing and reviewing their strategies. These relate to adopting appropriate institutional and procedural arrangements, creating a sense of ownership by the target groups, securing international collaboration, prioritising and concretising actions, formulating a coherent vision and agreeing on a path for long term development. The Commission's analysis also found weak evidence of vertical policy coherence between the different policy levels, and in particular between the EU and the national level.

Faced with a wide diversity of approaches in the EU Member States, as well as weak vertical links and many common challenges, there is a clear potential to:

- better identify, pool and exchange national experiences;
- develop greater synergies and complementarities between NSDSs and between NSDSs and the EU SDS, and
- generate information that can be used to inform assessments of progress across the EU and globally.

With this in mind the Commission's proposal for a revised EU SDS[2] launched the idea *"to undertake a light peer review process, focussing on themes, and in particular seeking to identify examples of good policies and practices that could be implemented by all"*.

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[1] European Commission (2004) Commission Staff Working Document – National Sustainable Development Strategies in the European Union: a first analysis by the European Commission, April 2004

[2] Communication of the Commission to the Council European Parliament on the review of the Sustainable Development Strategy - A platform for action COM(2005) 658.

This Guidebook provides an initial framework for underpinning such a mechanism within the EU. It should be seen as a first iteration only and could be changed based on lessons gathered from the application of the Guidebook and specific requests from Member States. Application of the guidebook is entirely voluntary.

The Guidebook presents an approach to mutual improvement and learning on NSDSs that can be applied across all EU Member States. It is designed to be of practical help to Member States, supporting a cost effective and efficient, as well as a tested approach to NSDS peer review. The information and review framework should help to support learning on NSDS development and implementation, the capturing and sharing of lessons that improve programme development and implementation, and the demonstration of accomplishments in a way that benefits all those involved in the process.

2 Who the Guidebook is for

The Guidebook is primarily intended for use by the authorities responsible for coordinating NSDSs or their reviews, and who will be the first beneficiaries of it. Given its specific situation, time and resource constraints a Member States may wish to address one or several particular aspects of their NSDS, or submit their strategy to a full peer review. This guidebook is dedicated to the concept of a full scale review but can also be used for a partial analysis. Some Member States may have also foreseen internal administrative or scientific review mechanisms. This is no contradiction as these types of reviews can be considered valuable inputs and serve as a complement to a peer review.

Besides the core people responsible for the NSDS, the Guidebook should also be useful for anyone else involved in reviews/peer reviews of EU Member State NSDSs. From the review country this includes officials from government departments and representatives from local and regional authorities, business, civil society and other stakeholder groups. From the peer reviewing countries this will include governmental representatives and non-governmental actors. Finally, governments from non-participating countries will also find this guidebook useful to learn from the EU approach to shared learning on NSDSs.

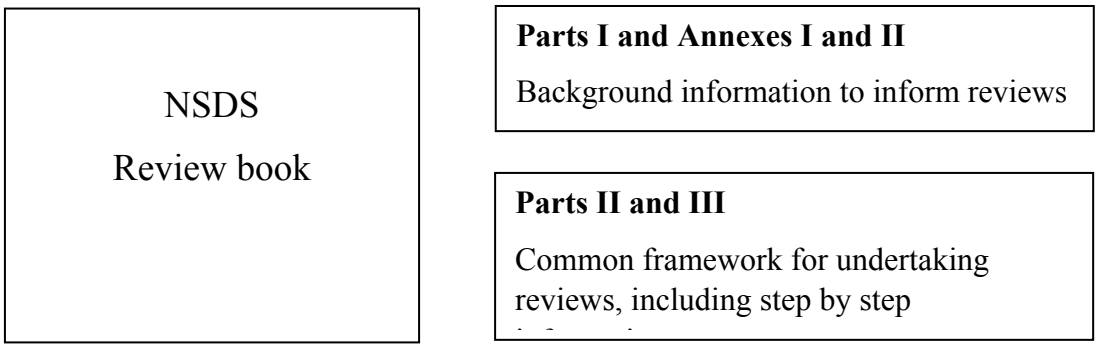
3 How to use the Guidebook

The Guidebook provides the essential information needed for undertaking mutual improvement and learning reviews of NSDSs, set out in an accessible and easy to follow framework. It is essentially a tool box to support the exchange of good practice between Member States and improve the linkage between the EU and national level. It is intended to encourage Member States to work towards similar approaches to their individual NSDS reviews, with a view to facilitating Member State learning and the generation of EU-wide

lessons. It also serves as a means of awareness raising, reaching consensus on values, building commitment, creating an environment with the right incentives, and working on shared tasks, all core to achieving sustainable development.

The framework is complemented by background information on sustainable development and NSDSs, approaches to their evaluation and other information relevant to NSDS review.

The whole Guidebook has been developed in light of past experience with national SDS reviews, selected review methodologies applied elsewhere and discussions with Member State officials and other experts. It is structured in a way that provides both the background and principles for national strategies and their review (Part I); and a practical step-by-step guide to assist Member States and peers in carrying out reviews (Parts II and III).



- **Part I** discusses the approach followed for mutual improvement and learning. Annexes I and II present some of the different approaches and methods used to support NSDS and other reviews, and which have informed the framework itself and can also inform its application.
- **Part II** is the main part and contains the actual framework for undertaking NSDS reviews. It sets out the basic steps to be followed, including the core elements and optional extras for undertaking reviews. It comprises five main steps:
  - Getting started;
  - Preparing for the review;
  - Undertaking the review;
  - Dissemination of the review findings; and
  - Implementation and review
- **Part III** sets out a template made up of a set of questions that might be considered in drafting the review report. This is intended to support the development of comparable review documents, to facilitate shared learning.

Users or potential users are encouraged to familiarise themselves with the main elements of the Guidebook before embarking on a NSDS review. Even if Member States decide to follow a different approach to that presented, the Guidebook provides useful information in

terms of review methodology and principles. The Guidebook has been designed in such a way that users can take from it what they choose – the framework is flexible and it is intended as a tool to assist with national review, in particular peer reviews, rather than being a prescriptive process to follow. It is important to remember that this Guidebook is not a one-off document. Rather, as experience with peer review develops over time, it will be revised and continually improved.

Part I Mutual improvement and learning on NSDSs: an EU approach

1 Involving peers for mutual improvement and learning

According to the OECD, 'peer review' can be described as 'the systematic examination and assessment of the performance of a State by other States, with the ultimate goal of helping the reviewed State improve its policy making, adopt best practices, and comply with established standards and principles.'[3] If well designed they offer a number of benefits, as follows:

- **External perspectives**: peers can bring new ideas, knowledge, experience and perspectives to national SDS processes, and help counter any tendency to be excessively inward looking.
- **Capacity building**: peer reviews can support the sharing of information and skills, to the benefit of the review and the peer countries. This can include enhancing skills in relation to certain evaluation methodologies. Developing countries can, for example, bring a wider expertise and experience in relation to development strategies.
- **Networking, communication and dialogue:** peer reviews can lead to enhanced cooperation within and between countries and stakeholders, contributing to better understanding of arrangements and challenges facing different Member States or the EU as a whole.
- **Promoting transparency:** involving external parties as well as stakeholders can increase the visibility of the NSDS inside the country, in peer countries, in the European and international community and among the general public. This can also ensure that assessment does not lead to inappropriate comparisons internationally.
- **Raising the profile of participants:** if the review process is an initiative with high level support, it can raise the profile of the strategy and the involved actors, inside the review country as well as at European or international levels.
- **Catalysing discussions with stakeholders/civil society:** peers can act as a neutral third party and so support discussions and improve collaboration between government and civil society.
- **Promoting a positive work atmosphere:** mutual evaluation and the opportunity for all parties to learn from the review can contribute to creating a friendly atmosphere, which

[3] OECD, 2003, Peer Review: an OECD tool for co-operation and change. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Paris.

may be important for the successful ownership and follow-up of the NSDS and its review.

- **Increased focus on major cross-cutting issues:** peers can help to ensure a more balanced approach to sustainable development issues. Developing country involvement in EU Member State reviews can, for example, help to strengthen the external and social dimensions of reviews. Reviewed countries can also choose to focus on specific areas of their strategy which they believe are of particular importance.
- **Promoting voluntary convergence of practices:** the exchange of experience and good practices may lead to emulation by countries that were not using them yet. This may progressively - and on a purely voluntary basis - increase coherence between widely different national approaches in areas of joint interest, thereby strengthening their collective efficiency and effectiveness.
- **Cost effectiveness:** peer review can be relatively economical compared to extensive evaluations by consultants (although the two approaches should not be seen as mutually exclusive). Participating countries can also access expertise from each other 'for free'.
- **Levelling the playing field:** peer reviews can help lagging countries speed up the development and implementation of their NSDS by learning from past successes and failures of leading countries.
- **Increased exposure:** peer reviews allow national experts otherwise focused on domestic affairs to get directly involved in international exchanges of experiences.
- **Self-reflection:** peer reviews may force participants to reflect upon their own work, which may contribute to a productive reassessment of day-to-day work and stimulate internal discussions about personal work and performance.
- **Self-esteem**: last but not least, peer reviews can contribute to increased self-esteem and a better working atmosphere. For participants it is often satisfying to see that others struggle with similar problems and that there are not always quick fixes.

2 Principles underlying a common EU framework for mutual improvement and learning

A common approach to NSDS review among the EU Member States should help to overcome common challenges through supporting the exchanges of experiences and strengthening vertical EU/national linkages, while fully respecting the diversity of national approaches, priorities, goals and targets.

The following are among the main principles informing a common approach for the EU Member States. These principles have been generated with particular reference to the information in Annex 1 of this Guidebook, and taking account of additional issues that are particularly pertinent to the situation of the EU Member States.

- **Practical, efficient and effective**: the framework is intended to be above all a practical tool, setting out in detail the suggested steps and providing all relevant guidance needed to support and facilitate efficient and effective review exercises. This should help to ensure countries can perform partial or full reviews using an approach that is tried and tested, but at minimal cost.

- **Voluntary**: application of the guidebook is entirely voluntary. Nevertheless, the framework itself encourages reviews that are meaningful. Therefore, the framework includes core elements that Member States are encouraged to follow in preparing for, undertaking and following-up on their NSDS reviews. The aim is to ensure some level of comparability between reviews, so as to facilitate the identification and pooling of good practice. Member States are free to adapt the framework to suit their specific needs or to go beyond it if they so wish. Common application of the core elements is encouraged, however. It is in no way compulsory to undertake reviews as a precondition of access to wider EU funding.

- **Participatory and peer based**: this aspect is central to the Guidebook, given its value in securing mutual improvements and learning. In practice, this means that one country's NSDS is scrutinised not only by stakeholders from within that country (the 'review country'), but also by peers from several other countries (the 'peer countries'). In this way, strong and weak points in the SDS process are identified, as are opportunities for building on experiences in other countries. Discussions, analysis and reflection between those being reviewed and the peer reviewers are informed by background documentation, as well as preparatory interviews and other information gathering exercises (see part II). This exchange of information in both directions will benefit reviewers and reviewees alike.

- **Politically backed:** the success of the approach will depend on ownership, vision, and personal and political commitment to continuous improvement of the SDS process, the review and outputs from that review. This applies to all the actors involved, be they in the review country or amongst the peers.

- **Participatory and partnership:** involving broad participation by the public and stakeholders, including business and trade union representatives and Agenda 21 major groups with transparency throughout the review process.

- **Feedback-cycle:** monitoring and evaluation play a central role in a national sustainable development strategy. That is why conducting a review should not be seen as a one-off event, but as part of a cyclical and iterative process towards sustainability.

- **Learning by doing and sharing**: a constructive and positive approach focusing on improvement and learning based on the gathering and sharing of information on experiences and good practices. The approach should work towards extracting and reflecting on lessons and identifying ways forward. The framework itself should evolve overtime, as lessons from undertaking reviews are fed back. The framework also aims to foster a culture of mutual learning both within and between Member States, where organisations seize the opportunity to work together to analyse objectives and their delivery, reflecting on experiences both good and bad. The success of the review

process will thus depend on the level of voluntary participation and on there being a climate of mutual respect, sharing and trust.

- **Coherence and comparability**: a desire for coherence and comparability between national reviews should allow information to be gathered and disseminated among the Member States as well as aggregated at EU level. This will ensure reviews are of value beyond the participating countries themselves.
- **Vertical linkage**: a common approach should include a core set of issues, so as to ensure appropriate vertical linkage between NSDSs and the EU SDS, balancing this with the desire for NSDSs to reflect national and local priorities. It should also ensure progress is being seen in the light of commonly agreed definitions of SD and SD indicators.
- **Flexibility**: there should be sufficient flexibility so that countries at different stages of development and implementation of their NSDSs can apply what will initially be a quite limited common framework, going beyond that if they so wish. This would also help inform ideas for future iterations of the common framework.

3 Key issues to be reflected in a common approach

Based on the principles outlined above, and experience gained from a variety of existing methodologies and approaches, the peer review approach for EU Member States features the following main elements:

3.1 Initiating the review process

Successful reviews have much to do with the presence of **high level political commitment** to the review process, the **attitude** of the participating actors, and the **resources** at the disposal of the authority responsible for the review. Such commitment would be needed from the outset, and from the range of actors concerned. Political commitment should be demonstrated through the availability of **sufficient resources.** Peer review can consume a substantial amount of time and capacity, in terms of preparation for and attendance at meetings. An appropriate balance needs to be struck to minimise demands on resources without compromising the quality of the review process. Requests for contributions to funding can be made at the EU level (part IV of this guidebook) or potentially to sympathetic Member States contributing to a common pot of funding, or under partnership or twinning agreements.

A **lead authority** should be identified to take operational responsibility for planning and implementing a NSDS peer review, on the basis of a strong political mandate. The lead authority may wish to engage an independent consultant to help support, manage and/or facilitate the review process.

The balanced and continuing engagement of **civil society, major groups and local or regional government** in all parts of the review is important. Managing that engagement is

equally important, particularly given time and financial constraints, as is the need to clarify expectations from the review.

Peers should be involved as extensively as possible, recognising limits on their time and resources. This includes discussions between peers and national actors during a scoping workshop, but also through bilateral meetings or interviews, to explore certain issues in greater depth. The selection of peers should reflect a balance of government, academics and non-governmental actors, from both developed and developing countries. They should be involved in gathering information, discussing and reflecting on that information and producing the review document.

Political sensitivity needs to be demonstrated at each step. In particular, the process has to respond to national needs and this must be handled in a flexible way. However, even in the event of a full scale peer review along the lines suggested here, countries may be reluctant to submit to peer reviews that are overly critical. This can be addressed by ensuring that proceedings and conclusions are constructive, and firmly grounded in recognition of the specific economic, social and environmental circumstances of the Member State under review. The emphasis should be on learning from one another and developing positive recommendations regarding ways forward.

There are a number of **other institutions**, notably the newly created EU sustainable development network secretariat, but also the European Commission and UN which could be involved in individual reviews. This would need to be approached on a case by case basis, recognising the value this would bring in terms supporting mutual improvement and learning across the EU and internationally.

3.2 Preparing for the review

Peer review structure: reviews should ideally be structured according to four key elements:

- *The strategy development process*;
- *The content of the strategy;*
- *Outcome* and *effectiveness of the strategy*;
- *Monitoring, reporting and evaluation arrangements.*

For each section, there would be a discussion of the issues, conclusions and recommendations. A standard list of issues under each heading can ensure the results of reviews are broadly comparable between countries, cover cross cutting issues, and address vertical links to the EU SDS. Individual reviews will in addition need to reflect on the particular circumstances in the countries, as well as the status of NSDSs.

Background information: before starting the review, the review country will need to provide basic information on institutional arrangements regarding their NSDS, as well as qualitative and quantitative information relating to the main trends in relation to the social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainability. This information should to the

extent possible be based on common international and EU indicator sets, to increase comparability across reviews, and linkages between national, EU and international objectives. It can draw on in-depth assessments of the situation, the institutions, the NSDS objectives and mechanisms, produced internally by the review country government or by external national or international experts, on a routine or ad hoc basis, as long as it is presented in a suitably brief and synthesised form.

Scoping meeting: given the need to fully engage relevant actors and maximise the benefit of peer review contributions, good preparation is vital. A scoping meeting provides an opportunity to agree on the method to follow, the objectives of the review and where the emphasis of the review should be placed. It also allows defining arrangements for peers to gather additional information and prepare the report, agreeing how comments on a draft document will be taken on board and other rules of the game. The scoping exercise would be informed by the structure of the peer review document outlined above, and the main messages emerging from the background document.

3.3 Effective involvement of peers

Information gathering: the peers will be involved in reflecting on and discussing the situation in a country, with a view to drawing conclusions and producing recommendations. In order to do this, they will need to use the background materials provided by the review country, and time permitting gather additional information from other documents and stakeholders. Involving sustainable development advisory commissions, natural and social scientists and other experts can provide additional insights and give credence to the review and promote media attention. Information gathering can be done during one main peer workshop, and by supplementing this with separate interviews, consultations or other methods to elicit information.

Drafting final report: support may be provided by an independent consultant, the EU sustainable development network secretariat or others, but the peers themselves will remain responsible for the final review document. A draft of the report would be presented to the review country before final conclusions and recommendations were agreed.

3.4 Disseminating the review findings

The dissemination of the results of the peer review to stakeholders and the wider public should be a core feature of the peer review exercise, ideally done rapidly, before momentum and commitment are lost. The results of the review and lessons from the process should be disseminated in the review and peer countries, to the NSDS stakeholders, the public and possibly to the EU SD network secretariat, which could also act as a repository for review documents.

3.5 Responding to the review: implementation and review plans

After sufficient time to properly reflect on the peer review report, the review country should set out how it intends to respond, including details of plans to implement some or all of the report's recommendations.

3.6 An iterative approach to peer review for mutual improvement and learning

The approach set out in this Guidebook is intended to be flexible, with Member States encouraged to follow what is a relatively limited set of core steps in a review process. There is a great deal of scope for Member States to go beyond the basic requirements set out, and indeed the Guidebook encourages this by referring to practices and approaches applied elsewhere (see annex II). Member States may also wish to adapt the framework, for example, combining elements of this framework with other approaches.

The whole process of implementing the findings of the review should itself be subject to regular review, for example, once every two years. All peers and Member States involved in reviews could exchange experiences and recommendations on how to improve the review guidebook, including the framework.

This may result in changes being made to the guidebook, adapting its text to changing circumstances. It may also be that, having piloted the approach, Member States wish to build on or strengthen certain core aspects (see experience from IMPEL). There may also be a desire to expand or update those sections of the Guidebook that contain case examples of practices elsewhere, references and or other resources.

Starting with a 'light' review process: lessons from the IMPEL network

The EU's Implementation of Environment Law (IMPEL) network brings together government regulatory authorities from the Member States. IMPEL considers what EU law means in practical terms and how competent authorities can work better to deliver implementation. It also uses peer-review analyses of individual Member State authorities. IMPEL members include both government agencies and ministries.

IMPEL has operated since 1992 and began as a bottom-up initiative of the Member States, with support from the EU institutions. The role of the Commission has grown over time, mirrored by a change in perception by the IMPEL members. Initially suspicious of the Commission's desire to get involved, members became more accepting and this acceptance increased when the Commission decided to host the IMPEL Secretariat and contribute to the costs of the work programme.

The success of IMPEL can be considered to be due to its informal nature – it does not threaten the Member States. It produces conclusions, guidelines, etc, but these inform Member State activity, rather than require a response.

4 Summary: Requirements for an optimal full scale peer review

The Review country should:

- Secure high-level political commitment to the review process, in written form;
- Allocate sufficient financial and staff resources to support the review;
- Consider appointing an independent expert to act as a consultant to the review;
- Produce a concise background report setting out clearly the institutions and processes through which the NSDS was developed and implemented, as well as a summary of its content, outcomes, and monitoring, evaluation and reporting procedures;
- Involve peer reviewers from neighbouring and/or developing countries;
- At an early stage, involve stakeholders and, where appropriate, representatives of regional and local government;
- Secure the participation of the European Commission as an observer;
- Disseminate the review report widely to stakeholders and the public via the internet;
- Prepare and publish a follow-up plan, setting out actions and responsibilities for implementation
- Prepare and publish periodical progress reports on the follow-up plan.

The Peer Reviewers should:

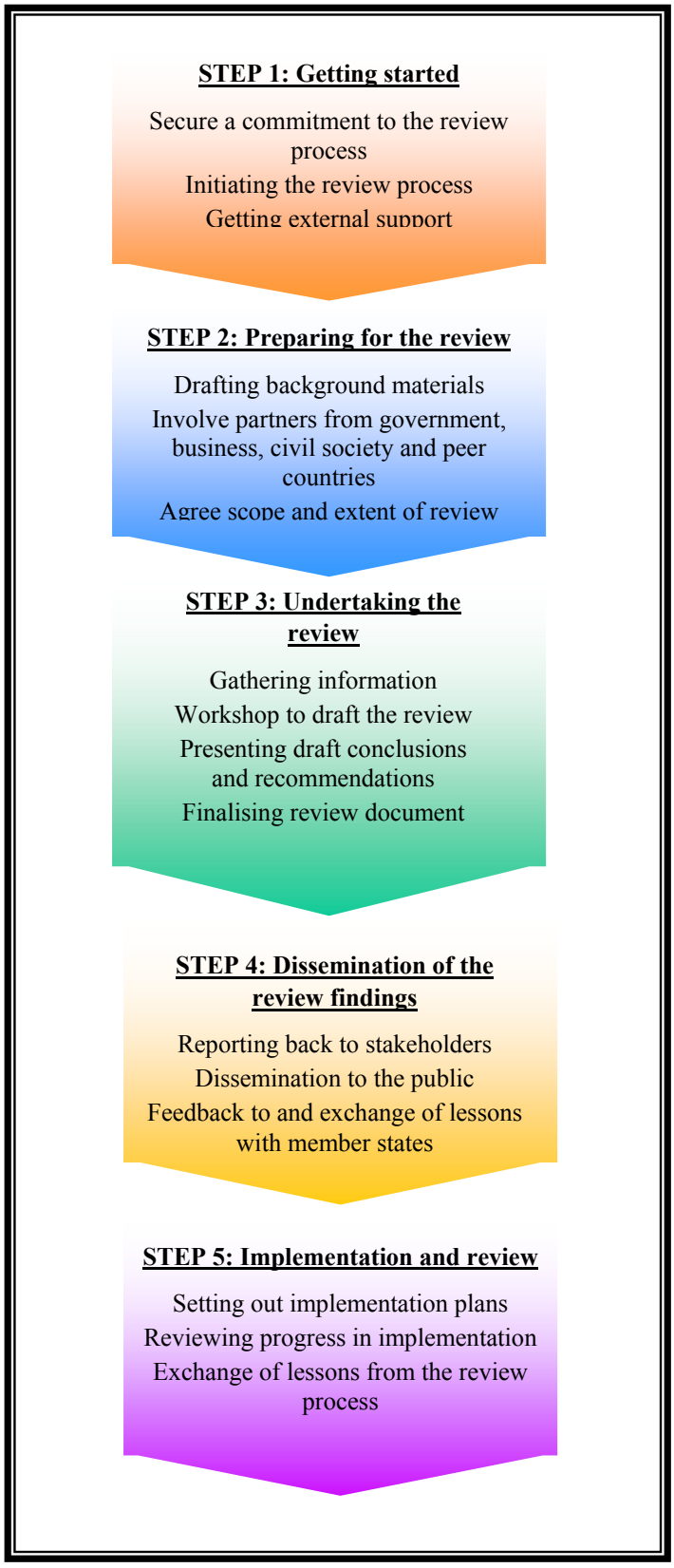
- Commit sufficient financial and staff resources to enable each peer to make an effective contribution to the review;
- Where necessary, develop twinning arrangements to provide financial support to ensure the participation in peer reviews of all Member States;
- Approach peer reviews from the perspective of mutual learning and support, rather than 'naming and shaming';
- Demonstrate willingness to reflect and share insights on both the successes and failures of their own NSDS process;
- Contribute to the drafting of individual chapters of the review report;
- Publicise the review report on their own website;
- Periodically share experiences with other peer reviewers and the European Commission on the operation of the system for mutual learning and support, and contribute to revisions of the Guidebook.

Part II A NSDS Review framework

This part of the Guidebook contains the main template for undertaking reviews based on peer involvement for mutual improvement and learning. It sets out the detailed **steps** to go through in performing the review, from the initial decision to undertake a review and preparation for the review, to final communication of its results. In its electronic version, clicking on each of the steps immediately takes the reader to the appropriate section of the Guidebook.

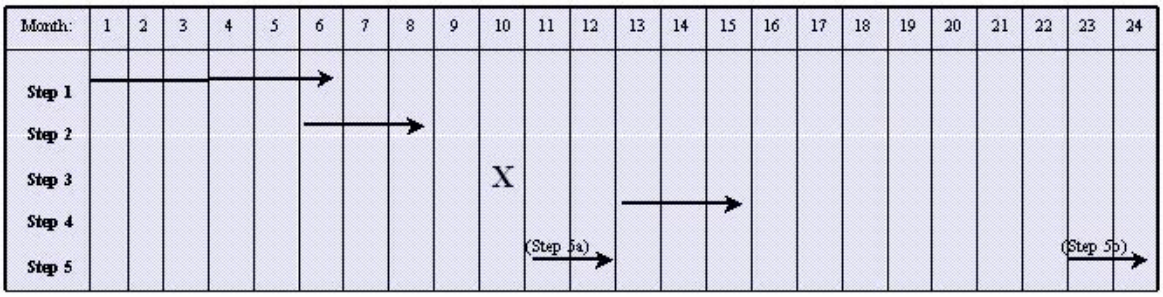
1 Key steps in the review process

Figure 1: Key steps in the review process



Box 1: *Indicative Timeline for a full scale NSDS Review*

This indicative timeline is based on existing experience in relation to related peer review processes. It will vary, however, depending on the political culture and administrative structure of the reviewed country, the existence of ready made background information (e.g. from earlier reviews) and the availability of chosen peer reviewers. Here, the time from first getting started to the dissemination of results is about 15 months, with the first annual review of implementation taking place two years after the initiation of the review.



Step 1: Getting started
Step 2: Preparing for review
Step 3: Undertaking the review
Step 4: Disseminating the review findings
Step 5a: Developing implementation plans
Step 5b: First annual review of progress in implementation

Each of the steps is colour coded for ease of reference, and laid out in a consistent format throughout the section. Throughout the framework, examples are provided to illustrate how different elements could be applied, based on experience elsewhere. Information is also provided on tasks for each participating partner or country.

Step 1 Getting started

a. Securing commitment to a review process

b. Initiating the review process

c. Getting external support for the review

Step 1a Securing commitment to a review process

Before embarking on a review Member States should make every effort to secure high level and cross-sectoral commitment to a NSDS review from both government and main stakeholders, and to follow through on the results of the review. Commitment will also need to be expressed in terms of resources made available to the review.

– Commitment to a productive review process

To be meaningful, reviews will need to have high level, cross sectoral and multi-stakeholder support. Reviews should inform NSDS processes but also – even if only indirectly - lead to change within the review country and within countries involved in reviews as peers. Their chances of success will be significantly increased if the review process benefits from high level political commitment in the review country. Such commitment serves several purposes - generating greater interest in the review, and increasing the chances of follow-through.

Commitment from the top should be complemented by support from a lead ministry and other departments within the government. Attempts should be made across government and outside it, to secure commitment from amongst civil society, business, trade unions and other major groups.

Reviews should be approached in a positive and open spirit, based on a willingness to learn and strive for continuous improvement. The review country needs to be open to challenge, discussion, deliberation and inquiry from stakeholders and other countries. Those leading reviews should ensure that other participants are supported during and after the process by developing capacity, and facilitating discussion and learning.

A broad sample of stakeholders should demonstrate a willingness to commit up front to a constructive mutual learning and improvement process, and subsequently through dissemination activities and action. The review needs to be seen as part of a longer term and iterative SDS process, rather than an *ad hoc* event.

High level commitment to the review process – France:

The President of the French Republic, Jacques Chirac, made a commitment to the international community gathered at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002, that France would be willing to submit its NSDS to the first peer review exercise.

– Willingness to invest in the process

Peer review processes are comparatively inexpensive and timesaving ways to avoid mistakes and learn lessons. At relatively little cost they can help to improve stakeholder engagement, policy making and delivery, both at home and within peer countries.

While peer reviews are relatively cost-efficient, each one will place demands on participating organisations, particularly if reviews are to have maximum effect. The resources needed for each review assessment will vary. Moreover, some countries or actors may be invited to participate in several reviews.

The provision of funding to cover costs incurred by participation by developing country participants and non-governmental organisations is likely to be increasingly important, if participation is to be meaningful. Funding such involvement should also improve the level of engagement and commitment to the process.

There are various sources of funding that Member States might wish to explore. This may include grants from the European Commission as well as other national funding sources that may be available. Twinning arrangements may offer another useful source.

Reviewing the costs of NSDS peer review – France:

Direct costs for the French peer review exercise started in 2004 have been estimated to be in the region of € 80,000 -160,000. This covered staff time for the consultants, costs associated with participation in a one week peer workshop by national stakeholders and representatives from Ghana and Mauritius.

In addition, considerable *time* – not accounted for in the above figure - was invested by civil servants, as well as governmental and non-governmental actors from the four peer countries. In France this included a two person secretariat established for six months to manage the process, arrange interviews, prepare background papers, etc.

In general, governmental peer reviewers each committed in the region of 10 days to the exercise, including to the initial methodological technical workshop (1), the main peer review workshop (5), and preparation (reading reports, etc) ahead of the meetings (4).

Step 1b Initiating the review process

Member States should secure a clear mandate from senior actors in government, outlining the scope of the review, identifying the authority responsible for carrying it out, and the resources to be made available.

– Securing a mandate for the review

Political support for launching a review should be reflected in a clear mandate for undertaking the review. The mandate should establish the main objectives and ambitions of the review, the principles to guide the review process, the time frame of the review and the lead authority responsible for carrying out the review.

– Identifying a lead authority

It is important that a lead authority is identified and given the necessary powers and resources to perform its task effectively. A key issue will be that the lead authority has the power to mobilise both senior and less senior officials from across government departments. If the lead authority lacks this power then the review process will be very fragile. If other departments decide not to participate, the lead authority will have little ability - apart from the strength of its own arguments and convictions - to convince them otherwise. Without the participation of other departments the whole review will be of limited value. The ability of the lead authority to act will in practice depend on who issues the mandate, whether they are committed to seeing it through and whether they are willing to step in should the lead authority not be able to get the cooperation it needs.

The question of resources – both human and financial – at the disposal of the lead authority is also critical. As noted under Step 1a, consideration of the likely resource implications of undertaking a meaningful and successful review should be considered before a review process is launched. Human and financial support to the review should be set out in the mandate.

Depending on the financial situation in the review country, the lead authority may be tasked with securing funding from external sources, such as the European Commission or others.

– Putting in place the necessary institutional support

Member States should consider establishing a steering or advisory group to support the lead authority in executing its mandate. This can consist of government officials from across relevant departments, as well as other national stakeholders. Its role would be to guide and oversee the review process.

The lead authority could formally launch the review process, to raise awareness of it and the associated NSDS, and to increase the political interest and expectations from the review. The overall effect should be to strengthen the eventual impact of the review process.

Advising the Austrian review:

To support the Austrian evaluation, which is conducted by an international scientific team, a steering group and project advisory board have been created. The Advisory Board includes representatives from diverse stakeholder groups. The board's primary function is to offer detailed definitions of the issues, provide feedback on the findings of the current evaluation process, and bind the evaluation process into the particular network of stakeholders.

Step 1c Getting external support for the review

Member States should consider drawing on independent, external expertise to support the review process.

Reviews can benefit greatly from people or institutions independent of national government or national stakeholders, but trusted by them. Independent actors can bring neutrality to a review, and provide independent, objective support to the process.

They can perform a range of functions, complementing and building on internal expertise and capacity, for example:

- independently shaping and steering the process,
- implementing a process under the instruction of the government,
- facilitating and supporting interaction between different parties,
- providing technical support.

Key characteristics that could be considered when identifying an independent source of expertise are:

- familiarity with the culture, administration and language of the review country;
- skills and knowledge relevant to facilitation and evaluation;
- familiarity with multi-disciplinary and interdisciplinary ways of working;
- ability to present information in a positive, constructive and non-judgemental way;
- neutrality and independence from the policy process;
- active engagement with the policy actors and other stakeholders.

In the longer term, it may be possible for the new EU SD network secretariat to provide external support, either directly from their staff or by putting review countries in touch with suitable experts. Involving a body such as the secretariat would also generate longer-term benefits by building up a bank of knowledge and expertise that would be accessible for other reviews.

External support for reviews:

Austria

The Austrian Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management appointed an interdisciplinary group of independent experts to evaluate implementation activities under the Austrian SDS. (The objectives of the NSDS were subject to evaluation at a later stage). The evaluation was jointly carried out by Adelphi Consult, the Free University of Berlin's Environmental Policy Research Centre, and D-Coach. This combines external evaluation with an 'inside view' by consulting with the responsible stakeholders in the Austrian SDS.

OECD Secretariat

The OECD Secretariat supports peer review processes by producing documentation and analysis, organizing meetings and missions, stimulating discussion, upholding quality standards, and maintaining continuity as the keeper of the historical memory of the process. The independence, transparency, accuracy and the analytic quality of work of the secretariat are considered essential to the effectiveness of the peer review process. The intensity of the interaction between the examiners and the secretariat and the degree of involvement of the examiners vary widely. In certain cases, the Secretariat works very closely with the examiners, and the division of labour between them is not always well defined. However, normally the most labour-intensive part of the work is carried out by the Secretariat, which may also have the most expertise in the substantive area under review.

Step 2 Preparing for the review

- Drafting background materials
- Involving partners from government, business, trade unions, civil society and peer countries
- Agreeing the scope and extent of review

Step 2a Drafting background materials

Member States should prepare background information for the initial 'scoping' workshop, describing the main institutional arrangements and SD indicators for the country.

- Content of the background materials

A central step in the common approach is the preparation of background materials to be considered both at the initial 'scoping' workshop where the focus, extent and modalities of the review are to be decided (Step 2c), and also at the main review workshop (3b)

- The background materials (including information derived from earlier internal or expert assessments) should cover common ground to ensure a similar baseline for the reviews, including information from earlier internal or expert assessments, and references to international and EU indicator sets;
- The emphasis of background materials should be on providing the context for the review which will consider NSDS process, content, outcomes and effectiveness, and monitoring;
- If applicable, special attention should be devoted to the changes implemented since the last review, the lessons learnt and the implications for the process under preparation;
- The background materials should also include information on the institutional/political background in the country to be reviewed to inform peer reviewers;
- The background paper should be as concise as possible, consistent with conveying an understanding of the essential context within which the NSDS has been developed and implemented.

The background information should describe the four key elements of the peer review. This section should present the NSDS in a descriptive way (following the four key elements):

- **strategy development** (including how SD has been conceptualised, plus process, objectives and indicators) and implementation process, with a focus on the main changes since the last review;
- **content** (including ensuring that the review will address gaps in addition to the current content of the NSDS);
- **outcome and effectiveness**, expected and experienced; and
- **monitoring, reporting, evaluation and review**

The background document should also include a set of SD indicators as used in the review country to provide basic background information on the state of SD in the country and to identify the major unsustainable trends. National sets can be broadened by making use of the sustainable development indicators proposed by Commissioner Almunia for the monitoring of the EU SDS (SEC(2005) 161 final). Their use would facilitate comparisons between NSDS reviews, and strengthen the vertical integration of sustainability policies between the EU and Member States. The detailed EU SD indicator set can be found in Annex III.

Step 2b Involving partners from government, business, trade unions, civil society and peer countries

A broad range of actors, including national SD councils and representatives from business and major groups, should be involved at an early stage in the review process. Peer countries should be selected to represent a balance between developed and neighbouring or developing countries and different social and legal systems.

- Involving stakeholders and other actors

In line with general UN NSDS principles, the engagement of civil society, business and trade unions, other major groups and local or regional government in all parts of the review is important. Stakeholders should be involved in the choice of peers, in designing the review and as respondents to peer reviewers. Managing actors' engagement is important, particularly given time and financial constraints, as is the need to clarify expectations from the review. Careful attention will need to be paid to ensuring a balanced representation of the main groups of concerned stakeholders.

To enhance multi-actor participation throughout the review process, it is suggested that:

- Officials should be involved at different levels and from across relevant ministries;
- Where appropriate (associations of) local and regional level administrations should be involved;
- Stakeholders could be involved, for instance through a Sustainable Development Council, in drafting the list of who needs to be involved in the review process and can be encouraged to submit background documents.

- Public hearings, including parliamentary hearings, could be used to make the whole process more visible and political;
- Appropriate involvement of the European Commission and the UN (e.g. as observers in certain stages of the review) should be considered to support the process and to access information relevant to EU/UN-wide review and learning.

Stakeholder participation in the French review:

In France, participation was successfully arranged through the National Council for Sustainable Development (CNDD), which has members that cut across various civil society groups, including NGOs and the private sector. The government asked the National Council for Sustainable Development (CNDD) to select 25 representatives, reflecting different civil society groups.

Public participation in Germany

Although the review of the NSDS was essentially internal to the Federal Government (with stakeholder input), to broaden public familiarity with the NSDS, the government organised conferences, media events, targeted dialogues, stakeholder hearings, and an internet chat with ministers and secretaries of state.

- Choice of peer countries and reviewers

The choice of peer countries will be critical to the set up of the review process. Between three and five countries should be involved as peers, including at least one developing or EU neighbouring country. These should be selected to reflect the specific situation of the review country. It is suggested that the total peer review group is comprised of eight to ten people.

Issues to reflect on before identifying potential peer countries:

- The desirability of involving countries with different political, legal and administrative backgrounds and styles (e.g. common law versus Latin legal traditions);
- Balancing countries in terms of the experience and expertise they could offer, and the stage that they are at in terms of their own NSDS process;
- Involving both developed and developing countries to strengthen certain aspects of reviews, such as the social and global dimensions;
- Involving countries facing similar challenges, therefore providing opportunities for greater understanding of the issues faced, and more direct shared learning;
- Language issues and their implications in terms of review costs and the ability to communicate with peers;
- Existing contacts and partnerships between countries, including twinning arrangements.

Peer reviewers should include representatives from government, non-governmental organisations and experts/academics. All peers should have experience of the NSDSs in their country.

The role of peers needs to be carefully set out in advance, stressing that the peer review aims to be a voluntary, open and positive process. It should also be made clear that peers will be informed of review follow-up and implementation plans. An estimate of the expected time a peer is to invest in a review should also be provided (see step 1).

Participation of developing countries:

The problems faced by developing and developed countries in preparing strategies for sustainable development usually are quite different. Most developing countries are occupied with economic development, poverty alleviation and social investment, even though important links with the environmental resource base are made. Developed countries face problems caused by high levels of industrial activity, population ageing, or movement and consumption (for example, pollution and waste).

Countries have consequently approached strategies from different perspectives and pursued them through different means. In the North, the focus has been on institutional re-orientation and integration, regulatory and voluntary standards and local targets, environmental controls, and cost-saving approaches. The South has been concerned with creating new institutions, and 'bankable' projects. But globalisation and global environmental threats have created greater interdependencies between countries from the North and the South. Both now face a stronger challenge of broadening the perspective of their NSDS. learly they have much to learn from each other's experiences and improve overall policy coherence.

OECD peer review – choice of peers:

Peer review implies by definition that officials in the relevant policy field from other countries (peers) will be involved in the evaluation process. Generally, the choice of examiners is based on a system of rotation among the OECD member States, although the particular knowledge of a country relevant to the review may be taken into account. The role of the examiners is to represent the collective body in the early stages of the process and to provide guidance in the collective debate itself. Hence their task includes the examination of documentation, participation in discussions with the reviewed country and the Secretariat, and a lead speaker role in the debate in the collective body. In some cases, the examiners also participate in missions to the country. While individual examiners generally carry out the reviews in their official capacity as representatives of their State, certain reviews require the participation of examiners in their personal capacity. In either case, however, examiners have the duty to be objective and fair, and free from any influence of national interest that would undermine the credibility of the peer review mechanism.

Choice of peer reviewers in France:

The peer reviewers for the French evaluation were chosen on the basis of existing contacts. The UK and Belgium were selected due to contacts between the ministries. Ghana and Mauritius were approached on the basis of existing links with the independent expert. The involvement of Francophone and Anglophone countries provided a good balance between conceptual and pragmatic inputs. The use of non-EU countries added a different dimension that may not otherwise have been captured, including a stronger reference to external aspects of national SD strategy processes. Furthermore, there is a vast amount of experience in the south due to donor pressure from the north, e.g. the World Bank, including experience in terms of participatory processes.

In the French review, background documents were made available in English and French, and there was simultaneous translation during the five-day workshop. This placed large demands on the overall budget. One option is to create single language expert groups, i.e. a French expert group, English expert group etc.

Step 2c Agreeing the scope and extent of review

Member States should organise an initial 'scoping' workshop, involving all partners, to agree on and plan the review. This preparatory meeting would need to be attended by proposed participants in the main peer workshop.

Given the need to fully engage relevant actors and maximise the benefit of peer review contributions, good preparation is vital. This includes scoping the review and background information for it, defining arrangements for the peer review, agreeing how comments will be taken on board and other rules of the game. All partners should be invited to an initial workshop to agree on the scope and emphasis of the review.

The scoping meeting would be used to:

- introduce the peers and national actors to each other and the review process and procedures;
- identify any additional background information to be gathered;
- 'tailor' the common approach, agreeing the main headings and emphasis of the review process;
- highlight one or several priority themes *within* the strategy;
- allocate among the peers responsibility for producing initial drafts of each of the chapters of the peer review report.

The process should normally be structured to reflect the mode of work and main headings of the review framework, i.e.: process for development and implementation of the strategy, content of the strategy, outcomes and effectiveness, monitoring and evaluation. The structure and content of the review would need to be tailored to reflect the maturity of the SD strategy process. In particular, reviews of relatively young strategy processes might emphasise the process and content aspects of the SD strategy, rather than the outcomes of the strategy which might not yet be apparent.

The scoping meeting should decide how responsibility for drafting the chapters of the peer review report is to be allocated. The first drafts of these chapters should be written in advance of the peer review meeting, where they will be further developed and discussed.

Flexibility in the French NSDS review:

The methodology applied in France was a rolling process with a menu of options. This is necessary for allowing it to be used in countries with different national circumstances. For example, in many cases there may not be one 'NSSD', but a suite of other documents, e.g. poverty reduction strategies, environment strategies, biodiversity plans, etc. Sometimes these are developed by the same Ministry, but sometimes not, so it can be difficult to actually identify all the different components.

Step 3 Undertaking the Review

- Gathering more in-depth and analytical information
- Review workshop
- Finalising the conclusions and recommendations

Step 3a Gathering more in depth and analytical information

Information for the review should be gathered from the national administrations and civil society. A range of potential sources of and methods for gathering and presenting this information can be used.

- Information gathering

Following on from the background report produced in Step 2 and the first meeting of the review team to define the scope of the review, the next step is to gather more analytical information on the national situation, with a particular emphasis on the selected themes.

This step needs to capture the personal views of those involved with the national strategy within government and outside government, including experts and civil society, complementary to what is reported in the background report. This stage should be seen as an opportunity to directly involve different stakeholder groups, drawing their experience and expertise into the review, early on. Furthermore, directly involving commissions, scientists and experts, etc, can give credence to the reviews and promote media attention.

Effective and efficient approaches to information gathering should be developed over time and best practice examples should be shared. Suggested ways of doing this include:

- Review of existing literature from the national administration and non-governmental sources;
- Inviting written inputs, for example, via online consultations or questionnaires;
- Bilateral interviews with governmental and non-governmental experts;
- Hearings on specific themes;
- Discussion groups.

Translated versions of key documents should be made available to the peers, as far as necessary.

The list of different approaches taken could be expanded over time as a guide for those Member States new to the review process. Feedback from other reviews relating to the implementation of review conclusions (Step 5 of the Guidebook) could support this, including advice on what has worked well in the reviews undertaken so far.

- Responsibility for information gathering

In principle, it is desirable for peers to play some role in gathering more detailed and analytical information. However, the extent to which this will be possible will depend on the time and resources available. The alternative is for the additional information gathering to be completed by the lead authority, with support from external experts. There are advantages and disadvantages to either approach and these will need to be considered by the review team.

The information gathered would naturally need to reflect where the review team had decided to place its emphasis. As far as possible, however, the information being gathered should correspond to the structure provided in Part III of this Guidebook (process, content, outcome and monitoring/review).

The French NSDS review

Additional background information in the French review was gathered with the help of an external consultant. It involved a questionnaire to key government and civil society representatives, and follow up interviews with 14 people. The detailed extended questionnaire was aimed at getting people to think about a wide range of different issues from the beginning. The benefit was not so much in the responses, but rather in the thought that was stimulated about the scope of the issues to discuss. The follow-up structured interviews were deemed more useful. From the interviews it was established that everyone knew about the strategy, but that no one knew the whole picture. The documentation was sent out approximately one month before the meeting, effectively allowing three weeks of preparation, which was considered to have been enough by those involved. Peer reviewers found it useful to receive the documentation before the main review workshop. Having people from ministries and other stakeholders at the peer review workshop itself helped to bring all the perspectives together.

OECD Environmental Policy Reviews

In the 'Review Mission' stage the expert team meets with government and non-government representatives of the country under review, including industry, trade unions, NGOs, experts and local government representatives. At this stage they should already be well informed, so it is not a fact-finding mission, but discussions focus on the evaluation of environmental performance. Each team member provides a first draft of a chapter of the review report during the mission. Further drafting, compilation, harmonisation and editing of the consolidated draft text are done by the Secretariat. The document is circulated to all reviewing country experts, the Environment Directorate and all other relevant parts of OECD for comments. A minimum of 4 months is needed from the review mission until completion of final document.

Step 3b Main Review Workshop

Member States should hold a review workshop involving the peers and selected representatives from government and civil society. Depending on the approach taken to information gathering, it may be possible to combine steps 3 (a) and (b).

- Structure and purpose of the review workshop

A review workshop should be organised of around 3-5 days in length (depending on the amount of information gathered previously).

Apart from gathering information, the purpose of the peer review workshop is to provide a forum where the peers can probe further on certain issues, clarify points and share their own experiences. By the end of the workshop peers should have produced a draft consensus review report, including conclusions and recommendations for the review country (see Step 4). The workshop chair(s) should ideally come from the peer group or a neutral external institution, e.g. international organisation.

The structure of the workshop will depend to some extent on the approach taken in Step 3(a). If peers are themselves involved in information gathering via email, telephone, or face to face interviews, meetings, etc, the workshop discussions can be shortened and focused on clarifying issues, discussing perspectives and drafting conclusions and recommendations. The peer review team (i.e. peers and lead authority) will need to decide on the structure of the review meeting. The time and resources available will also influence this decision. A suggested structure is suggested below:

Figure 2

Step 3a		• Information is collated by the lead authority and circulated prior to the review meeting. • Initial, draft chapters of the peer review report are also circulated. • Peers read all background documentation before the review meeting. • Peers prepare key points/questions to discuss in advance of the review workshop.
Step 3b	Days 1-3	• Peer review workshop(s) e.g. introductory plenary sessions and separate smaller working groups focused on certain themes. Opportunity for discussion of issues, clarification of points and shared learning. • Internal discussions of peers to reach consensus over the draft • Amending and expanding individual chapters by peers.
	Day 4	• Peers meet together to consolidate findings and draft conclusions and recommendations (internal peer meeting) • Draft consolidated review report in the review group.

	Day 5	• Peers report back to the Member State being reviewed in a closed meeting. • Discussion of conclusions and recommendations. • Peer finalise report. • Public presentation of summary results by peers and other review group representatives.

- Participants

The peer review workshop should involve all peers, the national lead authority, other administrative units as appropriate (plus any independent consultants) and stakeholders. Engaging a range of stakeholders in the whole review process is important, and the review workshop provides one of the main opportunities for doing this. Review countries should seek to engage representatives from national, regional and local government, and as far as possible and practicable, the business community, trade unions civil society, and those involved in the national strategy, for example national SD councils. This is important so that peers can gain a balanced picture of the national situation. The European Commission and the UN should also be encouraged to participate as observers. Ways of engaging stakeholders in the review are covered in more detail in Step 2b.

- Chairing of the workshop

The selection of the workshop chair(s) is important. Chairs need to be impartial – ideally from the peer group. They also need to have strong skills for chairing the sessions in order to ensure that the whole workshop runs to plan and that the discussions provide a good overview and sufficient detail for the report.

BRICS+G:

BRICS+G is a dialogue about sustainability and growth in six Countries - Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa (the BRICS) and Germany. It offers a platform for exchange among experts from government, the economy and civil society of the countries involved about their experiences with national strategies for sustainability. A focus is placed on concrete experiences with designing, managing and implementing national strategies for sustainability or comparable approaches. BRICS+G puts a special emphasis on the exchange of experiences between the participants and selected experts, and therefore conferences have not involved the public at large.

The dialogue process took place on a national and international level. National conferences have been held in each participating country in cooperation with local partners where experts from the public and private sector as well as from civil society focused on practical experiences with National Processes for Sustainable Development. Results of the six national conferences/workshops were brought together in a two-day international conference in Berlin in August 2005, with three to four experts from each country participating. The dialogue was not intended to be a policy-dialogue on the national or international level, although important lessons for the national SD policy processes have been learned from the exchange of experiences on what have been surprisingly similar problems. There will be no joint declaration as to the result, but an on-line documentation of the national conference results (see http://www.bricsg.net/en/home). The political outcome of the dialogue will emerge on the national level due to the high level of participation (ministerial level) and the fact that the process will be continued over the coming years.

The French peer review:

The main event of the French evaluation was the peer review workshop held over one week, with 3 days of debate, one day for conclusions/recommendations and feedback on the final day. This also served the purpose of bringing together government and others for the first time for this kind of discussion, and provided the 'space' to sit back and reflect, and eventually to consider how all parties could move forward with SD from here. The method was non-judgemental, and provided an opportunity for sharing information. The role of the peer reviewers was to open the discussion, dig deeper on certain issues, observe, question, then distil. Peers also made comparisons to their own national circumstances.

Step 3c Finalising the review conclusions and recommendations

The reviewed country should discuss a draft of the review document, including draft conclusions and recommendations, with the review team. Following discussions a final document should be produced. This should include conclusions and recommendations and be immediately placed in the public domain.

At the end of the review workshop peers should present their conclusions and recommendations to the review country in a closed meeting. This will provide an opportunity to raise any outstanding issues and to clarify any points. Following this discussion, the review document should be finalised and put in the public domain (see Step 4). The final document, even if drafted by a third person (e.g. the lead authority or independent consultant), should be approved and signed off by the peers.

The final peer review report should present lessons and formulate recommendations, but these do not have to take the form of quantitative assessment. A template for structuring the final peer report is provided in Part III of this Guidebook.

OECD Environmental Policy Review:

The final stage of the OECD Environmental Performance peer review is undertaken by the Working Party on Environmental Performance (WPEP), which is made up of OECD member country officials. One day is allocated to examining the draft country report, with the peer review countries opening the discussion. In order to encourage frank and honest dialogue, no minutes are taken of this meeting. The focus is on issues that are significant or otherwise sensitive, helping to deepen the understanding of the main issues under discussion, and to probe the ground of any draft conclusions that are challenged. The aim is to find a balance between criticisms and recommendations, as well as ensuring fairness between different review reports. The conclusions and recommendations chapter of the review report is subsequently amended and approved by the WPEP before the final report is published and made publicly available. The final publication stage is the last step in the OECD EPR review process. Apart from updating the conclusions and recommendations, any factual errors are rectified on request of the reviewed country. The OECD Secretariat also updates facts and figures used in the report.

Step 4 Dissemination of the review findings

- Reporting back to stakeholders and the public
- Feed back to and exchange of lessons with the Member States

Step 4a Reporting back to stakeholders and the public

Actors from the review and partner countries should take steps to disseminate the results and key lessons from the review, to the NSDS stakeholders and the wider public.

Apart from the benefits of the process itself, one of the main reasons for conducting a review is so that the findings can be acted upon (applying to partial and full scale reviews alike). The review process also provides an opportunity to raise awareness of and engage interest in sustainable development more generally. Disseminating the results of a review is therefore of central importance so that both the government and politicians, but also civil society actors and the public are informed of the results. This applies not only to the review country but also the peer countries.

This review framework suggests that a draft report is presented to the government for consideration, before conclusions and recommendations of the report are finalised and made public. Once the report is finished, it is important that the results of the peer review are fed back to the core NSDS stakeholders as soon as possible, before momentum is lost. Key stakeholders here include:

- Ministers, politicians and officials from the review and peer countries
- Other NSDS stakeholders from the review and peer countries
- The wider general public

The feedback will normally be organised by the lead authority of the review country and (possibly) officials from the peer countries, although other participating organisations should be encouraged to feedback to their own stakeholders or members as well. The review reports are to be made available using a variety of dissemination methods. These might include:

- issuing a press statements or otherwise feeding into press articles
- printing, producing a CD Rom and posting the materials on a national web site and possibly on the site of the European NSDS secretariat.
- outreach activities, such as presenting the review and its findings at relevant conferences, workshops and meetings, and organising events and discussion fora.

Dissemination by a peer country:

Important dissemination activities were undertaken by one of the peers involved in the French NSDS evaluation. The Belgium government peer participant fed back lessons via a CSD side event, briefed civil servants and civil society bodies at home, and produced a CD Rom of the review materials.

Step 4b Exchange of lessons with the Member States

Member States should ensure that key lessons emerging from their respective reviews are exchanged and discussed, and best practice identified. Insights relating to the review process should also be considered, with a view to improving the review framework itself.

Member States should provide feedback on the reviews, with a view to learning from each other's experiences. The purpose of such feedback sessions would be to create a space for Member States and other participants in the review to reflect on the lessons emerging from peer reviews. Information presented at such events and the subsequent discussions could be kept recorded and kept in a repository, thus informing NSDS development, implementation and monitoring in other countries and regions.

The yearly EU SD networking events provide a natural venue for such feedback and reflection. The opportunity can also be taken to present review results at other fora, such as at annual CSD meetings or side events. Peers may wish to present and discuss review findings at non-EU regional gatherings as well. The European NSDS secretariat could post the results on its website aimed at encouraging the exchange off good practices.

Member States and stakeholders should also take the opportunity to discuss and reflect the strengths and weaknesses of the review framework itself, and its associated methodology. Such lessons would eventually be used by the European Commission to inform future revisions of the review framework. This could be considered every two years, as necessary. A major review and revision of the framework could be envisaged every five years, assuming that all or most interested countries would have completed a review during that period.

Step 5 Implementation and review

- Setting out implementation plans
- Reviewing progress in implementation

Step 5a Setting out implementation plans

The review country should produce a report outlining its plans as regards implementation of the review recommendations.

The review country should respond to the peer review conclusions and recommendations, by indicating to what extent, and how, it plans to follow the recommendations of the review. It should also indicate how and within what timescale it plans to do so.

Although an immediate initial response from the government would be welcome, a more detailed and considered implementation plan should be produced on closer examination and reflection of the peer review report and recommendations. This could, for example, be presented within one month of the peer review report being published.

The implementation plan should be made public and accessible in paper copy and over the internet.

Step 5b Reviewing progress in implementation

The review country should regularly revisit progress in relation to its implementation plan.

The review country should report on progress and prospects in relation to its implementing plan developed in response to the review. The reports should be produced at regular intervals, for example, annually after the publication of the implementation plan. These progress reports would need to be made available to the public and the stakeholders, on paper and over the internet. Alternatively, the progress reports could be integrated in existing national reporting mechanisms.

Part III Structure and content of the review report

1. Introduction

The final report should include an **analysis, conclusions** and **recommendations** under each of the following four main headings.

- The **Process** of developing the current version of the NSDS
- The **Content** of the Strategy
- The **Implementation** of the Strategy (both outputs and outcomes)
- **Monitoring**, **evaluation, reporting and review**

As underlined in the UNDESA guidance on NSDSs, the relative mix of process assessment and outcome/impact assessment will change according to the maturity of a national sustainable development strategy**. '***Process assessment has been very useful in the formative years of a national strategy development when issues of participation, in particular, affect credibility, ownership and practical chances of success. There are, however, diminishing returns to process assessment. Stakeholders soon need to know what the impacts are on the ground, which is important for maintaining political support.'*

Bearing in mind the need for flexibility, the following questions can help structure the analysis of the main headings. The conclusions and recommendations should be more selective, focusing on overall trends, on issues which represent particularly good practice, and/or those which have given rise to specific difficulties which need to be addressed.

2. Suggestions for issues to be raised in the review report

Chapter 1	**THE PROCESS OF DEVELOPING THE NSDS**
Section 1	***Background***
1.1	What precipitated the development/revision of the NSDS e.g. existing commitment; change of government, international commitment?
1.2	Was the development of the current NSDS informed by an *ex post* evaluation of an earlier SD strategy or other relevant national economic, social or environmental strategy (ies)?
1.3	Was data gathering and analysis undertaken to support strategy development– e.g. indicator reviews; opinion polls; comparative studies of practice elsewhere?
1.4	Is there a system of impact assessment for significant policy proposals – both national and EU - and does it incorporate balanced consideration of environmental

and social, as well as economic, impacts?

1.5 Was the time allocated to the development/revision of the NSDS sufficient to deal with the mandate it was based upon?

Section 2 Institutional Structures

2.1 Does the best suited authority have lead responsibility for developing the NSDS?

2.2 Is there an inter-departmental involvement, through e.g.

- Steering Group – which Ministries? Committees, Working Groups?

2.3 Are other Member States, Third Countries, or EU and international institutions at all consulted?

2.4 Does the final NSDS have the ongoing endorsement of the Head of State or Government? The Government as a whole? The Parliament?

2.5 How were the priority issues in the NSDS selected?

2.6 Did the resources allocated correspond to the needs in terms of time, staff and money?

Section 3 Stakeholder Involvement

3.1 Was the NSDS developed through a participative – i.e. stakeholders fully engaged in developing the strategy, or consultative process – i.e. stakeholders responding to a draft strategy or to an initial orientation document?

3.2 Did stakeholders assume a major participative role?

3.3 What role was played by formal and informal (sustainable development, economic, social and environmental) advisory committees/councils?

3.4 What was the involvement of regional and local levels of government?

3.5 Were proactive methods used to engage stakeholders (e.g. through targeted publicity; stakeholder workshops) or reactive (e.g. web-based consultation)

3.6 Were steps taken to inform and engage social groups and the wider public? Groups from outside the review country?

Chapter 2 CONTENT OF THE STRATEGY

Section 1 Status and structure

1.1 What is the status of the NSDS?

1.2 How is the NSDS presented and structured – e.g. one or several documents? A popular, accessible document? A general framework with commitment to produce 'daughter' strategies on sectors or themes or a concrete action plan?

1.4 Is a suitable indicator-based analysis of the main SD trends included?

Section 2 Balancing different dimensions and priorities

2.1	As regards the emphasis of the NSDS, is there a balance between economic, social and environmental issues? Internal and external dimensions? Institutional/process issues, and substantive SD Issues?
2.2	What approach has been taken – e.g. thematic, sectoral or by government department?
2.4	What priority issues or themes have been included and excluded?
Section 3	***Ensuring appropriate linkages***
3.1	Are the links between priority issues and themes and the sectoral policies that affect them made explicit? (see Table 1 to help identify relevant links)
3.2	Are there explicit links with the priorities of the EU SDS?
3.3	Have other existing national and local economic, social and environmental strategies been integrated?
3.4	Are international and equity considerations included in the discussion of each theme or sector?
Section 4	***Provisions for implementation and review***
4.1	Are quantified targets and timetables included for themes/sectors? If so, which? Are they in line with EU and international obligations or commitments?
4.2	Are targets binding or aspirational?
4.3	Are responsibilities for meeting targets clearly allocated between Ministries/government levels/stakeholders?
4.4	Are governance structures and procedures established to ensure the effective implementation of the NSDS e.g. inter-departmental committees; SD advisory committees; stakeholder partnerships; policy dialogues etc?
4.5	Are SD indicators identified for the purposes of monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the strategy? How do these compare with EU SD indicators?
4.6	Is a regular cycle of reporting, review, and evaluation established, and institutional responsibilities for these clearly defined?

Table 1: *Linking sustainability issues and themes to sectoral policies*

Most sustainability issues or themes are cross-sectoral, and require responses from a number of different sectors and government departments. This table gives indicative examples of how different ministries or policy areas (horizontal axis) could contribute to the alleviation of core sustainable development issues (vertical axis). It can be used to help the review country and the peers to identify a limited number of priority issues and policy responses of specific relevance for the review country on which the report should focus.

Policy Areas **Core set of issues**	**Agriculture and Fisheries**	**Energy**	**Transport**	**Development**	**Economics and Industry (incl. trade)**	**Finance (incl. taxation)**	**Foreign Affairs**	**Social and Interior (incl. social transfers)**	**RTD and education**
1. Economic development, sustained and sustainable economic growth	Sustainable agriculture	Energy efficiency	Transport intensity	Growth and fair distribution of its benefits	Competition and fraud control	Incentives for re-investing profits	Partnerships, peaceful cooperation agreements	Gender equity, non-discrimination	Technology base and entrepreneurship
2. Poverty/social exclusion	Employment, average income/cap	No energy poverty	Affordable accessibility for non-car owners	Poverty reduction, food self sufficiency	Full employment	Income distribution		Access to health care for poor Poverty eradication	
3. Ageing of society			Safeguarding elderly mobility		Regulating working conditions	Secure pensions	Immigration?	Elderly participation opportunities	Redirecting money from education to care
4. Public health	Healthy diets	Clean household energy	Reduce accidents and pollution	Sanitation, clean water	Affordable pharmaceuticals	Incentives for healthy jobs	Peace	Full health care cover,	Public health education

				supply		and lifestyles		affordable	
5. Climate change and Energy	Use of waste energy, energy plants	Energy sector energy efficiency	Stabilise transport emissions and volumes	Support for decentralised and non-fossil energy supply	GHG emission trends, energy intensity trends	Energy taxation	Energy supply security	Risk preparedness, public and support for the poor	Awareness, efficiency orientation, efficiency technologies, y, sustainable fossil substitutes
6. Consumption and production patterns	Resource intensity of food production	Energy intensity of production and consumption	Transport intensity of consumer goods (like food miles)	Sufficient and secure supply of safe food and drinking water	Resource intensity of production, standard of living	Disposable income and minimum income		Dignified minimum income levels	Innovation towards sustainability in demand and supply
7. Management of natural resources	Soil fertility preservation, ground water protection	Reducing consumption of non-renewables	Energy efficiency, no more biotope fragmentation	Sustainability standards for business (domestic and foreign)	Minimising resource consumption, dematerialisation	Resource taxes	Fair prices, peaceful exchange	Access to natural resources	Resource use efficiency technologies, new use patterns, biodiversity preservation
8. Transport	Food miles	Transport mans of energy carriers	Average speed of transport, speed limits, congestion charges	Access to public infrastructure and markets	Vulnerability due to transport dependency, transport intensity of supply	Transport charges, taxes etc.	Maritime safety	Accessibility, public mobility	Substituting communication for transport, transport efficiency
9. Good governance	Subsidies	Stable, but steadily increasing prices		accountability	level of corruption and corruptibility	Tax loopholes, effective taxation	Fair partnerships	Equity of rights and civil freedoms	Access to education for all

Chapter 3 IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STRATEGY – OUTPUTS AND OUTCOMES

Section 1 General

1.1 Has the NSDS functioned as a general guide for government policy? Have policies, strategies, regulations been modified to better fall into line with the NSDS? In particular, if subsidiary SD action plans are required from government departments, or other tiers of government, have they been produced? What is their quality?

1.2 Which government commitments proposed in the NSDS have so far been met, and which not?

1.3 If the NSDS organised around specific themes, sectoral competences, the role of main actors or general policy objectives? What mechanisms and procedures have been put in place to engage all relevant ministries in implementing sustainable development in their respective policies, e.g. through thematic strategies or action plans, or impact assessment procedures?

1.4 Did the NSDS result in shifts in the way the budgets are allocated? Have provision been made to take forward NSDS commitments?

1.5 What training and support is provided for government officials in relation to SD requirements – and who has so far benefited from this?

1.6 What pilot or demonstration projects have been established to 'road test' new policy approaches or instruments?

1.7 What has been the role of the private sector (business, trade unions) and civil society in sustainability governance? Do they have sustainability strategies and/or targets of their own? What was the level of co-operation with government in developing these?

1.8 What steps have been taken to stimulate education and awareness-raising among the general public about the contents and implications of the NSDS?

1.9 What has been the role of the private sector (business, unions) and civil society in sustainable governance? Do they have sustainable development strategies and/or targets of their own? Have they been implemented in their respective fiends of competence? What was the level of cooperation with government and major groups in this process?

Section 2 Specific themes/sectors/actors

2.1 With reference to relevant national indicator sets, which are the themes, sectors or actors where performance in relation to NSDS targets is most impressive, and most disappointing? (The answer to this question could determine the selection of a small number of themes, sectors or actors for detailed review).

2.2 What policy approaches have been developed or tried to bring the themes/sectors/ actors in line with sustainable development?

2.3 Do their targets and timetables match the seriousness of the issue?

2.4	Do other government strategies or policies run counter to/support the objectives of the sustainability policy in place?
2.5	How far is the implementation of these policies or plans co-ordinated through inter-departmental working groups? Are there inter-sectoral policy institutions to steer the process? If not, which other institutional mechanisms have been developed and/or implemented? Are they effective?
2.6	Which stakeholders have been involved in the development and implementation of the action plans, and what is the kind and extent of their involvement?

Chapter 4 MONITORING, REPORTING, EVALUATION AND REVIEW

Section 1 Institutional arrangements

1.1 Which government and civil society institutions are responsible, respectively, for

- Monitoring trends and performance against SD targets
- Reporting monitoring data
- Evaluating the effectiveness of the strategy and the policies induced by it?
- Reviewing NSDS priorities and processes?

1.2 Are each of these functions undertaken

- internally, by the responsible government department?
- by an inter-departmental committee?
- by civil society, for example through an SD advisory council?
- externally, by an independent body?

1.3 Have sufficient budgetary resources been made available to undertake these functions successfully?

Section 2 Reporting

2.1 To which institution are reports addressed (e.g. Prime Minister or President; Parliament; stakeholder consultative council)?

2.2 How frequent is the reporting cycle, and has it been met?

2.3 Are all reports published?

Section 3 Evaluation

3.1 Does evaluation focus mainly on processes, on implementation or on effects and effectiveness?

3.2 In relation to effectiveness, does evaluation focus on the achievement of NSDS targets and timetables or progress in addressing wider economic, social and environmental problems?

3.3. To what extent are stakeholders involved in both the design and the execution of the evaluation?

3.4 Do national sustainable development indicators exist? Do they cover the main themes or sectors of the NSDS and the EU SDS? Are the data available for public scrutiny?

3.5 How are the findings of evaluation disseminated to stakeholders and the wider public?

Annex I
General approaches to National Sustainable Development Strategies

1 Guidance for National Sustainable Development Strategies

1.1 A definition of NSDSs

The most commonly used definition of sustainable development is the Brundtland definition from 1987, which states that sustainable development is 'development that meets the needs of present generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'. Underpinning the concept is the idea that social, economic and environmental priorities are interdependent and need to be made complimentary in the development process.

According to United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), a national sustainable development strategy (NSDS) is 'a coordinated, participatory and iterative process of thoughts and actions to achieve economic, environmental and social objectives in a balanced and integrated manner'. It is a cyclical and interactive approach of planning, participation and action, emphasising progress towards sustainability goals.

This cyclical approach contrasts with earlier views of NSDSs as static, single master plans, involving a one-off initiative developed by the State with limited involvement of stakeholders. Plans were seen as presenting a set of concrete ideas that were centrally owned and which led to adoption of sectoral laws or policies.

1.2 Elements of an effective NSDS

The development of a NSDS involves analysing the current and future situation, formulating policies and action plans, implementation, monitoring and regular review.[3] There is no single type of approach or method that can be applied to developing a NSDS (see insert). There are, moreover, several different types of strategies that any one country may have in place, including poverty reduction, environmental protection or regional development strategies. Every country should therefore determine the best approach in NSDS preparations and implementation on the basis of the prevailing political, historical, cultural, and ecological situations.

[3] UNDESA (2002) Guidance in Preparing a National Sustainable Development Strategy: Managing Sustainable Development in the New Millennium, Background Paper No. 13, DESA/DSD/PC2/BP13

Overview of the content of NSDSs in the EU[4]

Member States' NSDSs take quite different approaches, as might be expected. Some are designed as framework plans, setting out general policy directions and guidance for SD, with broad lines of actions for specific problem areas; others contain more concrete, short and medium term objectives; others still combine these two approaches.

Most country strategies cover the three dimensions of sustainability – social, economic and environmental, though many countries place most emphasis on the environmental dimension. Some NSDSs emphasise additional issues, such as culture, education and training, the international dimension and governance.

The NSDSs cover sectoral and cross-sectoral issues, as well as taking a territorial perspective to the three dimensions. Issues are often clustered into a limited number of categories, for example, falling under the heading of broad cross-cutting objectives, types of actors, or the three dimensions. Despite their diversity, NSDSs show similarities in terms of the key themes present and the ways identified to increase policy coherence.

Areas often lacking however include prioritisation of issues, interlinkages (and trade-offs) between social, economic and environmental dimensions, estimation of the financial and budgetary implications of the NSDS, and how its priorities can be integrated into budgetary processes.

Although a 'blueprint' approach to NSDS is not desirable, experience suggests that sound and effective NSDSs have certain common elements or defining features, as follows.[5]

a. Broad participation and effective **partnership**

- Institutionalized channels for communication
- Access to information for all stakeholders and effective networking
- Transparency and accountability
- Trust and mutual respect
- Partnerships among government, civil society, private sector and external agencies

b. **Integrated** economic, social and environmental objectives across sectors, territories and generations, and policies designed to achieve them

- Linking local, national, regional and global priorities and actions
- Linking the short term to the medium and long term
- Linking the national, regional and global levels
- Linking different sectors
- Coherence between budgets and strategy priorities

c. Clear objectives and responsibilities

[4] European Commission (2004) Review of National SDS in the European Union, Staff Working Paper http://europa.eu.int/comm/sustainable/pages/links_en.htm#_6

[5] UNDESA 2002

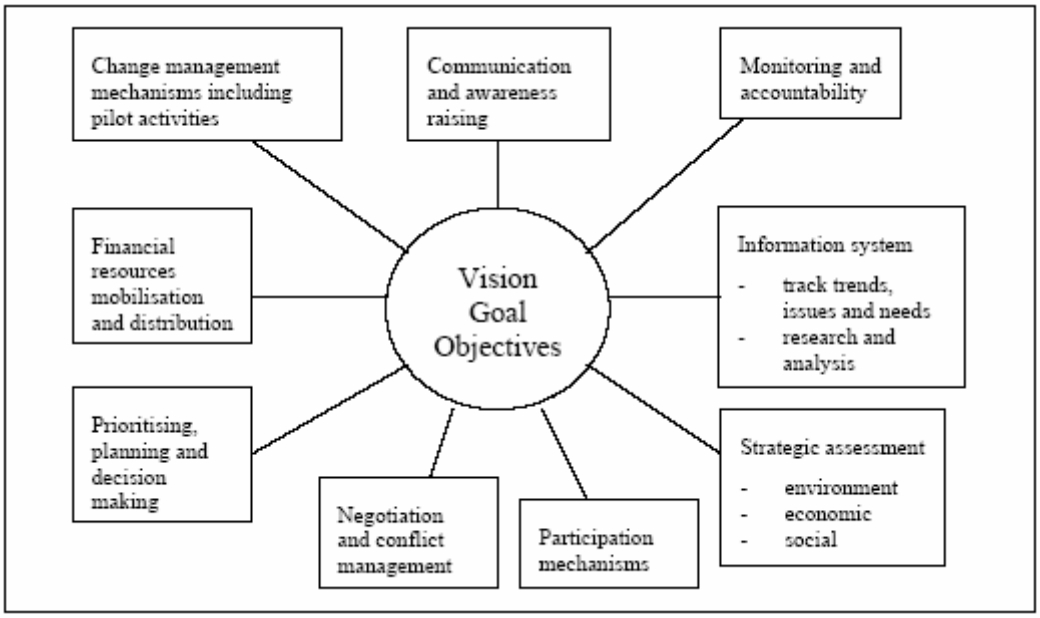
- clearly defined objectives, actions, responsibilities, timetables and integration mechanisms

d. Country ownership and **commitment**
   - Strong political and stakeholder commitment
   - Sound leadership and good governance
   - Shared strategic and pragmatic vision
   - Strong institution or group of institutions spearheading the process
   - Continuity of the national sustainable development strategy process

e. Developing **capacity** and enabling environment
   - Building on existing knowledge and expertise
   - Building on existing mechanisms and strategies

f. Focus on **outcomes** and **means** of implementation
   - The means to assess and agree priority issues in place
   - Coherence between budget, capacity and strategy priorities
   - Realistic, flexible targets and timetable
   - Linked to private sector investment
   - Anchored in sound technical and economic analysis
   - Integrated mechanism for assessment, follow up, evaluation and feedback

Figure : **Mechanisms contributing to sustainable development strategies**



2 Monitoring and evaluating progress

2.1 Principles of successful monitoring and evaluation

To ensure effective implementation there is a need to monitor what is happening and understand what works and what does not. Monitoring and evaluation systems must be able to track systematically the key developments and processes over time and space, and see

how these have effected change. This involves measuring and analysing trends relating to sustainability, monitoring and evaluating the strategy development process, outcomes and impacts, and reporting and disseminating the findings. The results should feed back into preparations for a revised strategy.

Effective monitoring and evaluation needs to be participatory and practical. Various NSDS stakeholders should be involved in designing and undertaking monitoring and evaluation, so that their concerns are considered in the process. Arrangements should be practical and relevant, with specific methodologies identified to support a country's needs. Reflection should be secured by organisations looking at their own objectives, capacity and successes and failures, with monitoring and evaluation seen as a beneficial tool for improvement.

2.2 Monitoring trends in relation to sustainability

Monitoring trends in relation to social, economic and environmental sustainability is clearly important in order to determine the state of society, economy and environment, the main weaknesses and strengths, and underlying drivers affecting sustainability. One of the more effective ways to undertake such monitoring is by reference to indicators. Indicators should seek to identify and track trends, change and progress.

Indicator-based assessments[6]

Indicator based assessments can include text, maps, graphics and tables, but they are organised around indicators. Indicators – both qualitative and quantitative - enable assessments to be comprehensive yet selective, covering a wide range of issues to capture human and environmental conditions. Employing the same set of indicators over time and across different NSDSs and related assessments allows comparisons to be made, as well as ensuring a consistent coverage and more objective anchoring of assessments. Comprehensive and consistent coverage enables priorities and weaknesses of performance to be identified clearly.

Existing SD indicators differ mainly in the number of subsystems into which they divide, normally covering environment, society and/or economy. There can be a number of levels between the sub-systems and indicators. Some indicators also generate compound indicators of the state of the systems and its subsystems. Relevant international SD indicator initiatives include those developed by UNEP, World Bank, UNDP, and the common indicator set developed by Eurostat (European Commission). (web-link: http://epp.eurostat.cec.eu.int/

2.3 Reviewing the strategy process, content, outcomes and impacts

Monitoring the implementation of NSDSs should cover:

- The level and quality of the inputs in the NSDS **process**, i.e. financial, physical and human;
- the quality of the mechanisms and **processes** for developing the strategy – compared to the indicative principles for NSDS outlined above, e.g. people-centred, participation, integration, commitment generation, etc;
- the **content** of the strategy and the state of its implementation, i.e. focus, approach, priorities, level of horizontal and vertical integration, etc.
- **outputs and outcomes** generated by the strategy – including policy changes.

The specific mix of process, outcome and impact assessment will necessarily vary to reflect the particular stage in the development and implementation of the NSDS. Thus, a focus on outcomes will need to wait until processes have been put in place, strategies adopted and implementation begun. A focus on process will be especially suitable in the early days of the strategy.

The final point - evaluation of the NSDS outputs and outcomes - requires the identification of specific changes in society and environment, and correlating such changes with the strategy, its component mechanisms and activities, and the implementation of these. This can involve focused case analysis to evaluate more directly the impacts of the strategy,

[6] Dalal-Clayton B & Bass S (2002) Sustainable Development Strategies: A Resource Book. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Paris and United Nations Development Programme, New York. Earthscan Publications Ltd, London.

including impacts on values, habits, practices, knowledge, technologies, infrastructure and institutions. It may be difficult to attribute specific changes to the NSDS, for there are of course many other factors that influence sustainability, as well as there being less than perfect baseline data at the start of the process.

Monitoring and evaluation can be undertaken by several types of organisations, including scientists and agencies, experts and sustainable development councils. Monitoring and evaluation undertaken by the government can be an important way of supporting institutional learning, with an organisation analysing its own objectives and its capacity for achieving them, by reflecting on experiences.

Internal or in-country exercises can be complemented by external independent analysis which can make an important contribution to understanding in areas where special expertise and/or impartial judgement are needed. External assessment can also overcome conflicts of interest and bring new insights and perspectives.

2.4 Reporting and disseminating findings

This is crucial if key messages are to be fed back to stakeholders to inform and further improve their understanding and behaviour, as well as the strategy itself. A feedback system can disseminate information so that organisations and individuals can learn from progress or problems and can make informed choices. The impact of such information is influenced by who prepares and disseminates it, and how it is distributed. Channels for distribution include meetings, written reports and the media including the internet. Information should also be provided consistently and regularly.

Annex II Existing review methodologies and experiences to inform a common framework

1 Introduction

A number of methodologies have been developed and used to support strategy, programme or broader performance evaluation, including those based on peer review. These have generated recommendations and insights that have helped to inform the NSDS review framework set out in Part III of this Guidebook.

This section presents some of the main approaches considered (see box below) and key lessons learned. The review of methodologies is necessarily partial, given time and resources available. It is intended simply to give a flavour of different approaches and experiences.

Member States are encouraged to add to the list of key review approaches and methodologies, with a view to reflecting key lessons in future iterations of the Guidebook.

2 Background documentation on NSDS development, monitoring and review

2.1 UNDESA *Guidance in preparing a national sustainable development strategy: managing sustainable development in the new millennium*, Background Paper No. 13, DESA/DSD/PC2/BP13

The paper outlines what SD and NSDSs are, and what key elements of effective NSDSs are. Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are part of a cyclical process. They should include: a) process/system based evaluation measuring/assessing the implementation of activities; b) assessing outcomes by for example measuring the effect of activities (more tangible/observable than process evaluation); and c) impact assessment looking at long term consequences.

Monitoring and evaluation should be participatory, involving various stakeholders etc, practical using e.g. checklists and workshops, and reflective by looking at both failures and successes, and promoting institutional learning. Monitoring and evaluation should be both external/collaborative as well as internal.

The paper notes a number of difficulties of strategy assessment:

- Lack of a culture of assessment, and often a negative attitude toward assessment;
- Assessments are often undertaken by external sources – these can be politically difficult to internalize as well as involve assessment skills not conducive to participatory assessment by local stakeholders (for example stressing third party assessments because of the need to ensure accountability for funds);
- Fear that assessment may lead to inappropriate comparisons internationally;
- Lack of agreement on definitions and indicators, which would result in inconsistency of data;
- Obtaining access to data and (especially for process assessment) access to concerned stakeholders;
- Integrating different assessments carried out by different organizations, e.g. civil society and government assessments, or those of different ministries and ensuring complementarities between them;
- Framing the assessment in ways that reduce the risk of it being 'buried' because of political opposition.

2.2 Dalal-Clayton B & Bass S (2002) *Sustainable Development Strategies: A resource book*, OECD/UNDP. Earthscan, London.

This comprehensive resource covers all the major aspects of NSDS development and review, including examples from countries around the world. On monitoring, four tasks are specified: (1) measuring and analysing sustainability; (2) monitoring implementation of the strategy; (3) evaluating the results of the strategy; and (4) reporting and dissemination of the above findings. Monitoring implementation of the strategy is necessary to ensure standard management oversight and accountability. Regular monitoring is needed of the following factors to assure that strategy activities are proceeding well:

- *inputs* in terms of financial, physical and human resources applied to the strategy and its related activities;
- *process quality* in terms of how strategy principles are satisfied (e.g. people-centered, participation, integration, commitment generation, see Box 3.1);
- *outputs* in terms of the generation of strategy products (goods, services and capacities) by agencies involved in the strategy;
- *outcomes* in terms of access to, use of, and satisfaction with strategy products (which are not necessarily under the control of agencies involved in the strategy);
- *performance of individual strategy actors* in implementing the strategy, in terms of the effectiveness and efficiency of their service provision and management.

To ensure ongoing assessment, there needs to be capacity for repeated measurement to determine trends; assessment needs to be iterative, adaptive and responsive to change and uncertainty because systems are complex and change frequently; goals, frameworks and indicators need to be adjusted as new insights are gained; the development of collective learning and feedback to decision-making needs to be promoted. Continuity of assessing progress towards sustainable development should be assured by clearly assigning responsibility and providing ongoing support in the decision-making process; providing institutional capacity for data collection, maintenance and documentation; supporting development of local assessment capacity.

2.3 Swanson DA and Pinter L et al*: National Strategies for Sustainable Development: Challenges, Approaches and Innovations in Strategic and Co-ordinated Action* International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) 2004

The research demonstrates that there is no single recipe for pursuing strategic and coordinated action toward sustainable development at the national level. There is diversity in the approaches and tools available to governments. To be effective, approaches and tools need to be rooted in local political culture and reflect principles of sound strategic management.

One of the key weaknesses noted includes feedback mechanisms, including monitoring, learning and adaptation. While most countries assessed have statistical offices that monitor various aspects of the economy, society and environment, only a few countries have developed an integrated set of indicators to allow analysis of the inherent trade-offs and interlinkages between the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. Even more elusive to detect from the research were formal and informal approaches and tools to learn from this type of integrated monitoring and make critical and necessary adaptations. Until there is systematic monitoring using integrated sets of sustainability indicators, and a mix of formal and informal approaches and tools are used to learn and adapt accordingly, nations will not be acting strategically.

National approaches and tools for monitoring include audit agencies and reports, spending reviews and minister's reports. Some countries have formal approaches and tools to monitor and report on economic, social and environmental trends. The approaches and tools consisted of national SD indicator systems and regularly reporting on trends, national accounts statistics, audit agencies and committees, independent advisory bodies and Internet databases

There are no clear examples of the establishment of formal mechanisms for learning from SD indicator trends in order to adapt SD strategies. This was explained by the fact that a certain degree of informality is inherent in learning. All countries studied employed various approaches and tools for institutionalizing participation, including national councils for SD, cross-sectoral councils or networks, independent advisory bodies, place-based councils, and *ad hoc* participation.

3 Approaches to specific NSDS reviews

3.1 *French NSDS experimental peer review*

The pilot peer review of the **French NSDS** was launched in 2004, following a commitment made by Jacques Chirac at the WSSD in 2002. Four countries acted as peers: Belgium; Ghana; Mauritius; and the UK, and the Institute for International Environment and Development (IIED) in the UK was engaged as independent consultant. Four key steps were involved in the review process.

1. Preparation of a background report, based on questionnaires to key actors and structured interviews, to inform peer reviewers of the national situation.
2. Methodology workshop to review and agree on the methodology. This agreed that the focus should be on process, content, outcomes and monitoring and indicators.
3. Peer review workshop (one week) – involving two representatives from each peer country (one governmental and one from civil society), 35 participants from the French government and civil society, and observers from the European Commission, UNDESA and Francophonie. The workshop generated a set of recommendations.
4. Revision of methodology – based on lessons learned in the French process, an updated methodology was produced for future use.

The peer review workshop brought together governmental and non-governmental actors, from France and the peer countries, to reflect on developments in France in a balanced way, drawing on experiences and perspectives from the group. An added benefit of this approach was that it gave peer countries access to information, lessons and expertise beneficial to their own SD strategy processes. The role of the peers was to observe, ask questions and then to help distil the information.

3.2 *Austrian NSDS review*

A peer evaluation of the **Austrian NSDS** is being conducted in 2005. The focus of the evaluation is primarily on the implementation *process* rather than the strategy and policy goals themselves, with a distinction made between implementation mechanisms (institutions and instruments) and implementation activities (measures and projects to reach milestones). A scientific approach is being taken to the evaluation, comprising assessment on the basis of questionnaires, on-site interviews and detailed research into the Sustainability Strategy's specific mechanisms and instruments. It is structured around a participatory process, involving internal and external representatives.

4 Selected peer review and policy learning mechanisms

4.1 *OECD Environmental Performance Reviews*

The OECD EPRs aim is to help member countries improve individual and collective performances in environmental management. Primary goals are to help individual governments judge and make progress by establishing baseline conditions, trends, policy commitments, institutional arrangements and routine capabilities for carrying out national evaluations; promote continuous policy dialogue through peer review and transfer of information; and stimulate greater accountability from member countries' governments towards public opinion within developed countries and beyond. The key stages involved are:

- **Preparation stage** – formulation by the Secretariat, in consultation with the review country, of topics to be examined. This includes standard plus country specific topics. Review teams typically include experts from three reviewing countries, OECD Environment Directorate staff and prominent consultants, and often an observer. Data and information are gathered by the Secretariat in cooperation with the reviewed country. Information is also gathered by the reviewed country. Discussion themes are prepared to act as an agenda during the team mission.
- **Review mission stage** – the expert team meets with government and non-government representatives of the review country. Discussions focus on the evaluation of environmental performance. Each team member provides a first draft of a chapter of the review report during the mission. Participation of reviewing country experts in the teams brings transparency and experience. Further drafting, compilation, harmonisation and editing of the consolidated draft text are done by the Secretariat. A min of 4 months is needed from the review mission until completion of final document.
- **Peer review by the Working Party on Environmental Performance (WPEP)** – the report is sent to capitals six weeks before the WPEP peer review meeting. One day is allocated to examination of the country. The delegation of the reviewed country is usually headed by a deputy minister or Secretary-General of the environmental administration, and includes representatives of other relevant administrations. Reviewing countries lead in opening the debate; all countries participate in the debate. In order to encourage dialogue, no minutes are taken of this meeting. The meeting concentrates on issues that are significant or sensitive. It helps deepen understanding of the main issues under discussion, probe the ground of any draft conclusions that are challenged, look for a balance between criticisms and recommendations and aims for fairness in judgement between one review or another. The conclusions and recommendations chapter is amended and approved by the WPEP.
- **Publication stage** – the secretariat deals with factual matters, updates facts and figures and makes any changes needed from the WPEP conclusions and recommendations. Ministerial press conferences are organised at the time of publication. Seminars and special distribution efforts are common.

- **Follow-up and monitoring** – can be in the form of formal voluntary 'government responses' and informal oral reports by reviewed countries to the WPEP.

4.2 *OECD (2003) Peer Review: An OECD tool for co-operation and change.*

The report examines the use of peer review in the OECD, with reference also to other peer mechanisms. Peer review can be described as the systematic examination and assessment of the performance of a State by other States, with the goal of helping the reviewed State improve its policy making, adopt best practices, and comply with established standards and principles. The examination is conducted on a non-adversarial basis, and it relies heavily on mutual trust among the States involved in the review, as well as their shared confidence in the process. When peer review is undertaken in the framework of an international organisation – as is usually the case – the Secretariat of the organisation also plays an important role in supporting and stimulating the process. With these elements in place, peer review tends to create, through this reciprocal evaluation process, a system of mutual accountability.

Although each peer review has its own procedure, it is possible to identify a common pattern, consisting of three phases:

- The preparatory phase: the first phase often consists of background analysis and of some form of self-evaluation by the country under review. This phase includes work on documentation and data as well as a questionnaire prepared by the Secretariat.
- The consultation phase: the examiners and the Secretariat conduct the consultation. The Secretariat and the examiners maintain close contact with the competent authorities of the reviewed country, and in some cases, they carry out onsite visits. The examiners and the Secretariat are free to consult with interest groups, civil society and academics. The Secretariat prepares a draft of the final report, following a standardised model comprising an analytical section, where the country performance is examined in detail and individual concerns are expressed, and an evaluation or summary section with conclusions and recommendations. The Secretariat normally shares the draft report with the examiners and the reviewed country and may make adjustments it considers justified before the draft is submitted to the members of the body responsible for the review.
- The assessment phase: the draft report is discussed in the plenary meeting of the body responsible for the review. Following discussions, and in some cases negotiations, the final report is adopted, or just noted, by the whole body. Generally, approval of the final report is by consensus. In some cases, the procedures may call for the final report to state the differences among the participants. In some cases, non-governmental organisations also have the opportunity to influence the discussion by submitting papers and documents. The final report and particularly its recommendations form an important basis for follow-up monitoring of the performance of the State and, ultimately, for a subsequent peer review. Often, the final report is followed by a press release, which

summarises the main issues for the media, and press events or dissemination seminars are organised to publicise the findings of the review.

4.3 *IMPEL*

The **IMPEL Network** has undertaken reviews of the inspectorates and inspection procedures in several Member States. To date reviews have been published for Spain, France, the Netherlands, Ireland and Belgium. Currently it is undertaking a review of Sweden. These reviews are undertaken by an expert team from selected other IMPEL members which examine the practices in the host country. The final report makes recommendations for improvement. These recommendations can not only benefit the host country, but also others with similar practices, etc.

IMPEL does not have systems for systematic regular review and benchmarking, even given the above review projects. Having said this, the individual projects do highlight the nature of systems within the Member States which does place some peer pressure on their activities, although this remains informal.

This type of activity is interesting in relation to the wider consideration of OMC-type activity. The focus is on the implementation of the Recommendation on minimum criteria for environmental inspections, but this also has to take account of specific Directives, such as IPPC. In this case, other Member States are taking an in depth examination of how to improve the implementation of aspects of EU law in another Member State in a way that the Commission rarely (if ever) does. It is also not undertaken in the context of any legal status, so that the host country is generally welcoming of what it views as a capacity building exercise, rather than an attempt at compliance monitoring. These can be summarised as:

- IMPEL results in co-ordination of the Member States to compare practice. Thus it is an important learning process for the implementation of EU law. The lessons learnt assist in enhancing the Community Method.
- IMPEL does result in some forms of benchmarking of Member State activity. Where this relates to less prescribed issues (eg on inspection) this is widely accepted, but some members are concerned if this activity would result in quasi assessments of EU law implementation.
- IMPEL focuses on peer-learning, but a by-product is peer-pressure on those Member States with less progress in selected areas.

There is a regular review of progress (on individual activities and work programme).

4.4 BRICS+G - *Dialogue About Sustainability And Growth In Six Countries - Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa (the BRICS) and Germany*

This project offers a platform for exchange among experts from government, the economy and civil society of the BRICS-Countries and Germany about their experiences with sustainability and growth. The dialogue will focus on examples from the areas of energy,

resource management and the social dimension - for the BRICS-countries and Germany equally relevant issues. While for the BRICS-countries it is foreseen that they will overtake the currently industrialised countries economically in the next 50 years, Germany is looking for a new type of growth.

BRICS+G offers a platform for exchange among experts from government, the economy and civil society of the countries involved about their experiences with national strategies for sustainability. A focus is placed on concrete experiences with designing, managing and implementing national strategies for sustainability or comparable approaches.

Four lead questions will guide the discussions of the national conferences:

- What is the current state of the National Strategy for Sustainable Development (Overview/Stocktaking)?
- How is the National Strategy for Sustainable Development linked to Sector Policies (evaluating experiences from at least two exemplary sectors: Energy, Natural Resources and /or the Social Dimension)?
- What were factors for successes and failures of the national Sustainable Development Strategy and why? What consequences are being drawn?
- What are the conclusions regarding the relation of the national Sustainable Development Strategy, sustainability and growth?

The results of the national conferences will be documented on this Internet site: http://www.bricsg.net/en/home

4.5 *DG Employment and Social Affairs Mutual Learning Programme*

The Mutual Learning Programme was launched at the beginning of 2005 and incorporates the former Peer Review Programme (launched in 1999). Its main objectives are to encourage mutual learning at all levels and to enhance the transferability of the most effective policies within key areas of the European Employment Strategy. A further aim is to encourage stakeholders to promote the wider and more effective dissemination of information about the European Employment Strategy and its implementation. The Mutual Learning Programme focuses on specific relevant labour market themes which are treated in the framework of three strands of activities:

- Twice-yearly EU-wide 'Thematic Review seminars' on key challenges or policy priorities
- 'Peer Review meetings' in individual Member States, focusing on specific policies and measures within the broad policy priority
- 'Follow-up and dissemination activities' to involve a broader group of national stakeholders and further the co-operation and exchange of good practices between Member States

In the framework of the Mutual Learning Programme, within the six-month cycles, the Peer Review meetings cover a number of single initiatives relating to selected employment

policy practices in line with the priority themes of the European Employment Strategy. The objectives of Peer Reviews are:

- to identify, evaluate and disseminate good practice according to the relevant priority theme;
- to assess whether and how good practices can be effectively transferred to other member states;
- to provide a learning opportunity throughout Europe about the implementation process or policy approaches and programmes in the field of the thematic priority;
- to follow-up and implement the objectives of the European Employment Strategy.

Member states (in co-ordination with the Employment Committee of the EU) submit proposals of good practice examples to be the subjects for Peer Review meetings in relevant areas according to the priority theme. They are typically based on existing evaluations or early monitoring data. Each Peer Review meeting is hosted by a member state (host country) which presents the selected good practice. It is attended by a group of peer countries with a special interest in the experience, and in the potential transfer of the policy. The participants in a Peer Review are government representatives, independent experts and representatives from the European Commission.

http://www.mutual-learning-employment.net/

Annex III Eurostat SD Indicators

Eurostat's list of sustainable development indicators has been developed by the Sustainable Development Indicators Task Force of national experts to reflect the priorities of the EU SDS and the WSSD Plan of Implementation. They are organized around the ten themes listed in Box 1

Box 2: Eurostat's 10 key SD themes

1. Economic development
2. Poverty and social exclusion
3. Ageing society
4. Public health
5. Climate change and energy
6. Production and consumption patterns
7. Management of natural resources
8. Transport
9. Good governance
10. Global partnership

Within these themes, there is a hierarchy of different types of indicators, serving different purposes and audiences:

Level I – 'headline' indicators for high-level policy makers and the general public;

Level II – sub-theme indicators for policy-makers and the general public;

Level III – more detailed indicators for more specialist audiences (eg academics).

Level I and II indicators for each of the themes are as follows. Level III indicators (not listed here) are organized according to the level II sub-themes. The complete list of Eurostat's SD Indicators can be found at http://epp.cec.eu.int

1. Economic development

I: Growth rate of GDP per capita

II: Investment

Competitiveness

Employment

2. Poverty and social exclusion

I: At-risk-of-poverty rate after social transfers

II: Monetary poverty

Access to labour markets

Other aspects of social exclusion

3. Ageing society

I: Current and projected old age dependency ratio

II: Pensions adequacy

Demographic changes

Public finance stability

4. Public health

I: Healthy life years at birth, by gender

II: Human health protection and lifestyles

Food safety and quality

Chemicals management

Health risks due to environmental conditions

5. Climate change and energy

I: Total greenhouse gas emissions

Gross inland energy consumption, by fuel

II: Climate Change

Energy

6. Production and consumption patterns

I: Domestic material consumption

II: Eco-efficiency

Consumption patterns

Agriculture

Corporate responsibility

7. Management of natural resources

I: Population trends of farmland birds

Fish catches outside safe biological limits

II: Biodiversity (under development)

Marine ecosystems

Fresh water resources

Land use

8. Transport

I: Total energy consumption of transport

II: Transport growth

Transport prices (under development)

Social and environmental impact of transport

9. Good governance

I: Level of citizens' confidence in EU institutions

II: Policy coherence

Policy participation

10. Global partnership

I: Official Development Assistance

II: Globalisation of trade

Financing for sustainable development

Resource management