

**Department of Economic and Social Affairs
Division for Sustainable Development**

FINAL REPORT

**REGIONAL WORKSHOP ON NATIONAL SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES AND INDICATORS OF
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT FOR THE ARAB REGION**

Cairo, Egypt

12-14 December 2004

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Background

1. Agenda 21, the main outcome of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, called upon countries to adopt national sustainable development strategies (NSDS), which would build upon and harmonize the various sectoral economic, social and environmental policies and plans operating at the national level. UNCED also recognized the important role that indicators can play in helping countries to make informed decisions concerning sustainable development, and called upon countries and international governmental and non-governmental organizations to develop such indicators.

2. The 1997 Special Session of the UN General Assembly set a target date of 2002 for the formulation and elaboration of NSDS. It also reaffirmed that all sectors of society should be involved in their development and implementation.

3. In November 2001, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN/DESA) convened an International Forum on National Sustainable Development Strategies in Accra, Ghana. The meeting identified a list of key characteristics constituting a sound national sustainable development strategy and provided a first international understanding of what constitutes such a strategy. A Guidance Document¹, outlining key characteristics of an NSDS, was prepared based on the recommendations of the meeting. The meeting also agreed that an NSDS is a tool for informed decision-making that provides a framework for systematic thought across sectors and territory. It should not be seen as a new plan, or as a separate planning process outside existing ones, but rather as the adaptation of existing processes in compliance with sustainable development principles.

4. The World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), held in August 2002, urged states in the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (JPOI) to take immediate steps to make progress in the formulation and elaboration of NSDS and begin their implementation by 2005. Furthermore, both the JPOI and the 11th session of the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) re-affirmed the importance of indicators of sustainable development and encouraged further work on those indicators by countries at the national level, in line with national conditions and priorities.

5. Since Rio 1992, governments have been making progress in integrating environmental, economic and social objectives into decision-making, either by elaborating new policies and strategies for sustainable development or by modifying or adapting existing policies and plans. Many national-level comprehensive or sectoral strategies on economic growth, improvement of social welfare and environmental conservation have been elaborated, and countries have pursued a diverse range of approaches in the design, formulation, and implementation of these strategies. Technical consultants led some strategies, governments produced others, and still others sought the wider participation of civil society. Some were

¹“Guidance in preparing a national sustainable development strategy: Managing sustainable development in the new millennium”. Background Paper No. 13, Commission on Sustainable Development acting as the preparatory committee for the World Summit on Sustainable Development, Second preparatory session, 28 January -8 February 2002.

prepared on the basis of national needs and many, particularly in developing countries, were either sponsored by multilateral financial institutions or advocated by global conventions with financial support for their formulation provided. Many of these existing strategies would provide an excellent entry point for the development of an NSDS.

6. Many countries are currently endeavoring to reach the goal of developing NSDS by 2005. The present Workshop on National Sustainable Development Strategies and Indicators of Sustainable Development was organized to support countries from the Arab region in these efforts. The Workshop was held in Cairo, Egypt from 12-14 December 2004 and was hosted by the Government of Egypt. It was organized by the Division for Sustainable Development, Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DSD/DESA) in cooperation with the Economic Commission for West Asia (ESCWA) and in coordination with the UN Development Programme (UNDP).

B. Objectives

7. The objectives of the Workshop were as follows:
- a. Provide participants with an in-depth view of the process involved with the development and implementation of national sustainable development strategies, including technical aspects;
 - b. Build inter-regional and national capacity for managing progress towards sustainable development through cooperation, networking and exchange of experiences and lessons learned in NSDS;
 - c. Provide options for decision-making through monitoring and assessment of sustainable development at the national level, including through the use of indicators.

C. Participants

A list of participants is attached as an Annex to the report.

II. WORKSHOP PROGRAMME

8. The Workshop opened with a welcoming address by H.E. the Minister of State for Environmental Affairs of Egypt and statements by the co-organizers of the meeting, including UNDP, ESCWA and UN/DESA. The opening was followed by special presentations, country-specific presentations, panel discussions, and a final session on the way forward. Ms. MaryPat Silveira, UN/DESA, served as the Chairperson of the Workshop.

A. Opening Session

9. Ms. Maissa Elgohary, Under-Secretary of International Relations and Technical Cooperation, Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency, welcomed participants to Egypt and wished them success in their work.

10. Ms. Mary Pat Silveira, UN/DESA, extended her sincere appreciation to the Ministry of State for Environmental Affairs of Egypt for hosting the Workshop, noted the importance of this meeting as the first in the region since the WSSD in 2002, and highlighted the agreed target date of 2005 for development and implementation of NSDS. All aspects of the NSDS development process would be addressed by the Workshop, including increased policy coherence, integration of sectors toward common goals, and inclusion of civil society. Representatives from ESCWA, ECA, UNDP, UNEP/Mediterranean Action Plan (MAP), UNEP/Regional Office for West Asia (ROWA), and the League of Arab States (LAS) would provide panel presentations to launch discussions. She thanked ESCWA for co-coordinating Workshop and UNDP for its cooperation, and stressed the importance of the participants' role in contributing their national perspectives and offering shared knowledge in identifying concrete actions to be taken at national and regional levels to meet the goal set for 2005.

11. Dr. Hosny Khordagui, ESCWA, offered a welcoming statement. He noted the shift in environmental thinking in the Arab region over the past three decades, which has led to more integrated sustainable development efforts, and stated that although many countries in the Arab region have been engaged in some level of sustainable development planning, significant gaps remain in the ability of these countries to manage the sustainable development process effectively. He encouraged active contributions from participants in the Workshop to identify gaps, constraints, challenges and opportunities in building national-level capacity in NSDS and indicators for sustainable development. Over the years, ESCWA has been actively supporting its member countries in developing their NSDS, NSDAP, NES and NEAP, and has played a major role in introducing the concepts of sustainable development indicators in the region. He emphasized that with collective effort, continuous collaboration and coordination with other regional and international organizations operating in the ESCWA region, the successful formulation of sustainable development policies and strategies could be achieved. The present workshop is yet another example of such cooperation.

12. Ms. Linda Ghanime, UNDP, said that the goal of implementing NSDS by 2005 was connected to the goal of reversing current losses of environmental resources by 2015, a target that is a component of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and was reaffirmed in the JPOI. In addressing how sustainable development principles could be incorporated into sustainable development policies, the Workshop should examine weaknesses of NSDS, envision steps forward to give a stronger meaning to these strategies, and avoid equating NSDS with environmental strategies, which deprive social and economic sectors of being fully engaged in the process. Embracing sustainable development principles involves transforming development plans into an iterative and continuous learning process, with synchronized time horizons of different instruments decentralized to the most effective level of governance. In the Arab region, a variety of approaches exist at the national level that could be harmonized and built on in creating NSDS.

13. H.E. Mr. Maged George, Minister of State for Environmental Affairs of the Arab Republic of Egypt, expressed his appreciation for the opportunity to host the Workshop and for the sincere efforts of its participants. He said the Arab region has arrived at a crucial stage, having suffered the woes of war and crossed into victory, and is working now to build a new society and improve the lives of its citizens in implementing sustainable development policies. Through training for state-of-the-art experts, increasing diversity of government authorities and inclusion of a range of community-based associations, problems of poverty

and environmental protection are being addressed through an integrated continuum to achieve sustainable development goals. He underscored that a participatory approach to activating and implementing NSDS initiatives is essential to support and maintain natural resources, stressed that environment transcends national boundaries, and urged participants to help build national and regional capacities for a bright future.

B. National Sustainable Development Strategies

1. Global overview of national sustainable development strategies, their development and implementation

14. Ms. Birgitte Alvarez-Rivero, UN/DESA, provided a brief introduction to NSDS from a global perspective, highlighting the targets and initiatives taken by the United Nations and outlining the overarching characteristics of an NSDS. Key principles include integration of economic, social and environmental objectives in policy design and implementation; coordination and balance between sector and thematic strategies, among levels of government and across generations; broad participation, effective partnerships, transparency and accountability; capacity building within existing knowledge and processes; country ownership and a clear timeframe; a focus on priorities, outcomes and coherent means of implementation; linkage with budget and investment processes; and continuous monitoring and evaluation. She presented country observations on key issues for successful development and implementation of NSDS that had emerged from a recent series of regional meetings, and concluded by discussing the current global status of NSDS implementation.

15. In the discussion that followed, participants stressed the need to differentiate NEAP and NSDS. It was generally agreed that NSDS is holistic, addressing social, economic and environmental conditions and impacts. There is an existing need to clarify the distinction between NSDS and other plans, and one of the results of the Workshop was to identify the distinctions among plans.

2. National experiences in developing and implementing national sustainable development strategies

16. Mr. Arab Hoballah, UNEP/MAAP, moderated the session on country presentations. He introduced the topic by underscoring the need to clarify the differences among NEAP, NSDS, and other strategies, and to examine the engagement of Governments in NSDS development and implementation. New challenges must be studied and defined in order to foster a culture of change adequately and to balance the trade-offs among environmental, economic and social issues to reach sustainable development. Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) are often perceived as NSDS because poverty alleviation is akin to sustainable development. Integration, coordination, and public participation are an essential part of the process. He then introduced a series of national presentations made by Egypt, Sudan, Yemen, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Comoros and Djibouti on their experiences in developing and implementing NSDS.

17. Egypt presented its history of sustainable development efforts and outlined the preparation and implementation of sustainable development plans at the state and local levels. The framework for sustainable development includes many distinct plans based on

environmental, social and economic strategies. Stakeholders are regularly consulted by relevant ministries, and are also adequately represented in a number of national and local councils and local communities. Accomplishments include new laws and regulations, signing of international treaties and conventions, providing support for economic and social development, and restructuring government agencies to include Agenda 21 implementation. The goal is to raise awareness on strategies to be implemented at the local, regional and national levels. Policies and operational activities brought all parties together in monitoring and evaluation in an integrated manner through different government plans, including Government Environmental Action Plans (GEAP), NEAP and Local Agenda 21. Housing and water issues are commonly addressed in this way, moving through the local level to integrate national-level policies. Outcomes include improvement of resource distribution, increased standards of living, and sustainability of ecological systems. He reported that 130 indicators were developed with Ministries of industry, agriculture, trade, finance, urban indicators, foreign affairs, population, and others, but also noted the need for relevant institutional structures to prepare, develop and implement NSDS and other plans successfully, and to develop indicators.

18. Sudan outlined its quarter-century plan for economic and social growth and environmental protection, which resulted in a holistic growth approach with a focus on rural development. Municipalities, ministries, and civil society were all engaged in developing the strategic plan. Sudan was able in a previous comprehensive ten-year strategy to begin exporting oil, which brought increased revenues, enabled citizens to become more autonomous at both local and national levels and expanded the educational base through establishment of new universities. The quarter-century strategy is administered by the national strategy planning council beside councils headed by the governor of each state taking into account the balance among sustainable development pillars. Working sessions of the interest groups, stakeholders, and other community groups and governments came up with an NSDS. Sudan has succeeded in establishing new infrastructure capacities and enhancing economic and social conditions despite wartime conflict.

19. Yemen discussed the development of its national plans since the 1960s, noting periods of difficulty due to changes in economic and social conditions. Adoption of economic reforms since 1995 have included sustainable development goals, and economic performance and stability has improved. The sustainable development plan to 2020 prioritizes action in education, health and water. Challenges of development in Yemen are inherent in the restructuring of the economy and compounded by an increasing population. Costs of achieving the objectives of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and other targets are high due to resource constraints, and the goals set for 2015 may not be met.

20. Morocco highlighted its 1995 national strategy, which was updated following the WSSD to focus on poverty reduction, environment, economic growth, rehabilitation of rural zones, and biodiversity conservation. It based its plans on action at the national, sub-national and local levels, involved both social and environmental aspects, and included scientists, academics, trade unions, environmental unions, and the private sector. The country also enacted legislative and fiscal reforms and established local councils within municipalities. It organized sustainable development workshops and involved major groups, including the private sector. Difficulties related to finance and external debt, agricultural products and free trade, drought and health services, education, and rural exodus all present challenges to sustainable development in Morocco. The country has developed indicators for sustainable development and assessed their compatibility with national conditions. Coordination

mechanisms include representatives from all Ministries and private sectors concerned with these indicators. Updating data and information is a continuing challenge. Cooperation with regional organizations in capacity building has helped to assess the status of sustainable development and upgrade the information available. The NSDS is currently being updated in cooperation with UNEP/MAP.

21. Saudi Arabia noted that experts from different government sectors and Ministries have participated in formulating NSDS, including sectoral objective and policies, short- and long-term plans of action and a final review phase. Subcommittees comprised of representatives from each sector prepared the strategic policy of that particular sector in collaboration with Ministry of Planning. The strategy aims to develop and enhance welfare, conserve biodiversity, combat pollution, develop environmental capacities, ensure the best utilization of human resources, provide clean water, manage waste, and protect natural resources. The objectives of the 13 sectoral strategies within the Kingdom encompass issues related to water provision, finance, power and energy, reducing pollution, cleaner mining and industrial activities, urban development, and agriculture.

22. In Qatar, special consideration of sustainable development is contained in the constitution and the country vision for 2004-2024. Legislation guarantees social justice for environmental programs and attention has been given to obstacles in legislative development and sustainable development since 1992. Sustainable development has become an institutional assignment, and the mandate is to circulate policies for comment among all ministries to achieve sustainable development through laws and decrees. Statistics are gathered and distributed annually for use in planning among the planning council, the supreme council for environment, and supreme council for foreign affairs, and studies of future trends in economic and social development enhance their planning efforts. Cost-efficient strategies for water and energy production are used to maximize production and meet needs of all generations. A supreme council for family affairs oversees efforts to improve employment prospects for women and protect their rights through a strategy for women's role in society. There are also strategies that address issues of environmental protection. Obstacles exist despite social progress, including lack of integrated data and poor awareness of environmental changes.

23. Comoros described its economic situation as one of the least developed countries in the region, which contributes to difficulties in implementing sustainable development. Deteriorated conditions and extreme poverty impede development efforts, although partnership efforts are being made in managing natural and human resources. Difficulties of coordination between Ministries of Environment and of Planning led to the creation of a general council for planning of sustainable development that now oversees all sustainable development activities. Comoros participates in the UN process addressing the needs of small island developing states (SIDS), and adheres to the Barbados Programme of Action and the outcomes of the recent regional meetings leading up to the Mauritius International Meeting to be held in January 2005.

24. Djibouti presented its activities in implementing a national strategy that focuses on the development and expansion of port services. In response to the WSSD, the strategy works to combat poverty and ensure peace and security in the region. Primary focus is given to health, education, overcoming water shortages, housing, desertification, biodiversity, and protection of natural resources. Enhancement of sustainable development sectors promotes the role of

women in public life and includes civil society in efforts to support research and raise awareness on sustainable development issues.

25. Syria outlined the elements of its comprehensive environmental strategy from 1992, including annual plans, a five-year development plan, and prospective twenty-year plans. Planning is done on a consultative basis. The main challenges include high population growth, water scarcity, food security, sanitation, and meeting educational needs. Government programs extend water and electricity to remote areas; support civil service, education and literacy; and address family planning. Projects for water make use of both rainwater and ground water. Security has attracted foreign investment, projects have attracted a return of capital, and laws on foreign investment resulted in better economic performance. Since the discovery of oil in 1988, Syria has been working to find substitutes to oil to ensure energy needs.

26. The Panel Chair noted common needs across the region for education and capacity development, and identified key issues of governance, integration and culture, poverty reduction, conflict, peace and security, and development of a clear vision. In many cases, the list of national priorities needs to be refined and better focused, with clear indication of trade-offs. Key objectives must be measurable with performance and impact indicators, and still gaps may exist.

27. In the ensuing discussion, the representative of the League of Arab States (LAS) stressed the progress that is being made in the region through the Arab Initiative for Sustainable Development, adopted by the Arab Summit, which is mandated with following up on regional sustainable development principles and plans. The LAS has been participating in roundtable discussions in partnership with the private sector, and is exploring the potential of establishing an Arab Environmental Facility for financing sustainable development plans.

28. The Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) recalled that environmental issues have historically been sidelined in the development process, hence the emphasis placed on their integration into the process during the 1992 Rio Summit. Success in raising awareness on environmental issues should not lead to equating environmental protection to sustainable development. She said that she understood the emphasis on economic gains being placed by Sudan on oil revenue, but recommended that the country consider establishing an intergenerational fund and integrating sustainability principles in foreign direct investment (FDI) received by the country.

3. Panel discussion on national sustainable development strategies in the region: a UN perspective

29. This panel was moderated by Mr. Arab Hoballah, UNEP/MAP, and included a presentation of a regional baseline study by ESCWA and short statements by representatives from ECA, UNDP, and UNEP followed by general discussion. Mr. Hoballah presented the challenges to NSDS in the region in relation to the vision of the UNEP Mediterranean Action Plan: environment and development integration; poverty and inequality; innovation and entrepreneurship; building and preserving cultural diversity; governance and ethics; and peace and security. He also identified some of the common priority issues in the region:

energy and climate, water, transport, urban waste, air pollution, coastal and marine management, rural and agricultural development, and tourism.

30. Dr. Hosny Khordagui, ESCWA, presented the outcomes of several ESCWA studies on sustainable development in the Arab region. He outlined the evolution of sustainable development concepts at the national and regional levels, noting the continuing challenge of articulating and applying an adequate definition of sustainable development that moves beyond an environmental management culture at the operational level. Within institutional frameworks, he described the shift from municipalities to national-level responsibility for environmental matters from 1960-1980, the strengthening of environmental agencies in the 1990s, and the recent rethinking of institutional arrangements revolving around WSSD preparations and outcomes. As a result, most national environmental institutions are currently facing challenges posed by restructuring, power politics, limited capacity and budgets, as well as overlapping jurisdictions. Such challenges are compounded by common characteristics among governance systems in the region, including limited decentralization and public participation, a top-down political culture and resistance to institutional change. On the positive side, most of the NES and NEAP, particularly in the ESCWA Region, were prepared using the participatory bottom-up approach with the involvement of most stakeholders and relevant sectors. He highlighted the role of Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs), Local Agenda 21, and inter-ministerial and cross-sectoral engagement as factors for success. Overall, he concluded, sustainable development in the Arab region requires further development of a broader, more complex vision that is process-oriented, strategic and participatory, and goes beyond environmental management to encompass the range of institutions addressing sustainable development issues.

31. During the ensuing discussion, many speakers stressed the importance of expanding participation of civil society. In addition, private sector investments in the region's key industrial fields could potentially serve to support sustainable development platforms through cooperation with national and local authorities as well as with implementing agencies such as UNEP and UNDP, where relevant.

32. Participants also emphasized the need to:

- Expand public participation in decision making;
- View sustainable development as an ongoing process, moving toward specific targets, with continuous evaluation and assessment;
- Respect cultural diversity.

33. Ms. Isatou Gaye, ECA, highlighted ECA perspectives on NSDS in Africa, noting that NSDS in the region are many and varied, and as diverse as the problems and challenges they address. Key principles include: rationalization of and integrative building on existing processes; monitoring and evaluation and continuous learning and improvement; clear goals and targets; effective and efficient institutions; broad based and effective participation; and decentralization to appropriate levels. Capacity issues include capacity building, institutional strengthening and prioritization; rationalizing and synergistic implementation; capacity retention; resource availability and predictability; well-targeted support and innovative financing. There is a continuing need for clearly defined priorities and mechanisms for donor

coordination and prudent fiscal management. Peace and security, good governance, and political will are also essential to financing successful sustainable development strategies.

34. Ms. Linda Ghanime, UNDP, New York, outlined additional regional challenges and progress in implementation, noting that the UNDP perspective on NSDS is one of tailored strategies that are country-based and country-led and that focus on links with core development plans and budget allocation. Clear identification of priorities and targets when issues require trade-offs for progress toward results requires continual learning, and NSDS must move forward on turning into learning systems. PRSPs may provide a good basis for developing national sustainable development strategies if prepared in a comprehensive and integrative manner. They should also be a way of operationalizing the MDGs, with an agenda that is domestically driven. The MDG Review in 2005 will provide an opportunity to review progress and ensure that the MDG framework can be integrated with sustainable development principles.

35. Mr. Adel Abdel Kader, UNEP, noted that sustainable development remains an abstract idea that requires a clearer vision and includes practical tools that are doable, achievable and measurable. There is no clear legal mandate for NSDS; ownership and commitment require more than good will to be seriously considered. Interlinkages between sectors do exist, but are not yet fully reflective of the concept and elements of sustainable development. He reiterated that governance for sustainable development is problematic; nevertheless it is necessary to bridge gaps between commitments and actions. Assessments are a key element to identify priority issues and priorities for action and providing crucial information on which policies and decisions are based; NSDS must be policy relevant and intuitively easy to grasp and communicate; and human, financial and coordination capacity is still lacking in this process.

36. Mr. Mersie Ejigu, consultant, summarized some of the issues raised during the discussions on NSDS development and implementation. He asserted that strong and effective institutional leadership is essential within and among ministries. He stressed the importance of good, thorough assessment work; and reviewed issues related to the relevance, harmonization and integration of economic, social and environmental objectives as well as such challenges to implementation of NSDS as financing, monitoring and sustaining the process. He concluded that a great deal of progress has been made in the region to promote understanding of sustainable development and establish frameworks and processes towards NSDS, and the way forward would entail increased public participation, a better balance among sectors, and technical cooperation.

C. Indicators for National Sustainable Development Strategies

37. Mr. Mersie Ejigu, consultant, discussed the linkages between national sustainable development strategies and indicators for sustainable development. Indicators are needed at all stages of NSDS development and implementation. They should permit rigorous technical analysis, setting of targets, development of knowledge on NSDS priorities, and effective communication to external actors.

38. Ms. Birgitte Alvarez-Rivero, UN/DESA, presented experiences from the work programme of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) on indicators of sustainable development and their relevance to national sustainable development strategies.

She highlighted key challenges and recommendations made by countries that had participated in the development and refinement of the CSD indicator set, including: lack of basic data and capacity to develop indicators at the national level; the need for coordination at both national and international levels; the need for further indicator development in areas such as coastal zone management, biodiversity, disaster mitigation and reduction, as well as in relation to conflict; and the need for improved training and integrated information management related to sustainable development. Recommendations included adopting a pragmatic approach based on current capacity; establishment of a national coordinating mechanism; preparing a baseline assessment and dissemination strategy; as well as ensuring periodic evaluation and re-assessment.

39. Mr. Hosny Khordagui, ESCWA, emphasized the need for indicators balancing economic, social and environmental dimensions, but noted that in the Arab region primary environmental data is lacking. In many cases where environmental indicators were in place, they were inadequate, of questionable quality, or inaccessible for scientific, institutional, political or personal reasons. He stressed the need for a comprehensive regional knowledge-mapping effort to assess the development and implementation of indicators for sustainable development, which would facilitate identifying gaps and capacity building needs in the region. He recommended support for national efforts and provision of technical support to integrate different components of sustainable development indicators and the development of aggregated measures.

40. Mr. Kwadwo Tutu, ECA, emphasized the need for a sustainable development index for comparing countries' performances. He informed the meeting that ECA would be publishing a State of Sustainable Development in Africa report by the end of 2005.

41. Mr. Adel Abdel Kader, UNEP, informed the meeting of a regional workshop on priority environment indicators held in Bahrain in 2003, which was based on the CSD indicator methodology and decisions, and which led to a selection of themes and key indicators based on priority areas such as water, coastal and marine areas, energy, land, agriculture and health. UNEP is currently in the process of developing standardized guidelines for preparation of each indicator, based on specific needs of the region and utilizing standards set by the United Nations Statistics Division, to the extent they are available.

42. Mr. Arab Hoballah, UNEP MAP, briefly informed participants of work on indicators in the Mediterranean region, which had been made possible due to funding from the European Commission. A list of 130 indicators had been developed, of which 40 were drawn from the CSD list, and a large number of countries, including, in particular, the Mediterranean Arab States, were receiving support for their adaptation to specific national conditions. He noted that a workshop was planned in May 2005 to review the current indicator set, to assess progress in implementation and to use at the national level. In conclusion, he highlighted the need for performance indicators, and noted that the UN, UNDP, UNEP and the World Bank had recently undertaken a joint activity in this area.

43. Key points that emerged during the discussion included how to overcome difficulties in collecting, measuring and aggregating data; the need for agreement on standards and harmonization in definitions; the need for development of indices for sustainable development; as well as how to incorporate indicators effectively into the decision-making

process and consider measures from social, environmental and economic issues in a balanced way.

44. The representative from the LAS informed the meeting of an initiative planned for 2005 in the context of the framework on sustainable development for the Arab region, to agree on a framework and set of indicators of sustainable development. This would be followed by a meeting in 2006 bringing environmental and statistical offices together to discuss viability of indicators.

D. The Role of Intergovernmental Organizations in Supporting National Sustainable Development Strategies in the Region

45. Representatives from UNDP, UNEP, ESCWA, ECA, and LAS gave a series of presentations on the role of intergovernmental organizations in supporting NSDS in the Arab region.

46. Ms. Linda Ghanime, UNDP, defined UNDP's role in the region as focusing on areas of democratic governance, poverty reduction, crisis prevention and recovery, energy and environment, and HIV/AIDS. Capacity development is a cross-cutting issue that entails the process by which individuals, institutions and societies develop abilities to perform functions, solve problems, and set and achieve goals. Principles of capacity development ask societies to be patient, respect value systems, reinvent locally, challenge mindsets, think and act in terms of outcomes, establish positive incentives, integrate external inputs into national priorities, build on existing capacities, stay engaged under difficult circumstances, and remain accountable to beneficiaries. Her presentation highlighted lessons learned from Capacity 21; regional projects in energy and environment services; UNDP's support for sustainable development frameworks and strategies in the Arab region, including support in national capacity self-assessment for integrating commitments to MEAs in national policy; and examples of GEF regional programs.

47. Ms. Isatou Gaye, ECA, presented ECA's perspectives on NSDS in Africa and its role in supporting their development and implementation. She noted key principles, highlighted capacity issues and discussed ways in which ECA could support NSDS in the region, including by: sensitizing policy makers to the objective, purpose and scope of NSDS; rationalizing parallel planning processes, promoting complementarities and building synergies; undertaking advisory missions to member States to address country-specific issues; establishing a learning group forum on NSDS including a dedicated webpage on the ECA website; conducting an inventory of agencies engaged in supporting NSDS; and engaging in constructive dialogue with development partners. A study on NSDS would be conducted in the Africa Region in 2006-2007.

48. Mr. Hosny Khordagui, ESCWA, discussed the role that international, regional, sub-regional and non-governmental organizations play in the formulation and implementation of sustainable development plans in the Arab Region. He reviewed national initiatives in planning for sustainable development and technical and financial assistance for NES and NEAP preparation, providing country examples for Egypt, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen. He highlighted regional initiatives and strategies of donor institutions; cited research and studies on regional priority issues such as agriculture, water and health; and described means for assessing progress in achieving goals.

49. Mr. Adel Abdel Kader, UNEP/ROWA, underscored the importance of establishing and maintaining linkages through collaborating centers that can undertake assessment processes, pool resources, and develop resources such as regional knowledge networks. Intergovernmental organizations have a role in linking NSDS to the regional and global context. Identifying and working with resource centres could help to support and build national capacities on sustainable development; assistance in providing tools and materials that help in developing strategies and exchanging best practices and knowledge, including development of web portals for knowledge dissemination.

50. Mr. Arab Hoballah, UNEP/MAP, discussed the objectives of the Mediterranean Action Plan and the establishment of the Regional Environment and Development Observatory. UNEP/MAP has assisted countries in the region to prepare and establish National Observatories for Sustainable Development, and most countries are receiving technical and financial assistance for collating missing data and adapting indicators to national specificities. Working with countries in an interactive and iterative process, UNEP/MAP has developed a vision and framework for a Mediterranean Sustainable Development Strategy (MSDS) and is in the processing of identifying the objectives and targets. UNEP/MAP is also working with Morocco, Egypt and Syria in preparation and implementation of their NSDS. In this context, countries are requested to take the necessary steps to secure adequate political support, mobilize relevant partners, establish appropriate and operational consultation mechanisms, and launch the preparation of the NSDS starting with an objective stock-taking analysis.

51. Ms. Fatma El-Mallah, LAS, said that the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment (CAMRE) is the highest environment and sustainable development body in the Arab region. It involves civil society and relevant UN agencies and discusses issues of environment and sustainable development in 22 Arab countries. CAMRE participates as observers in the recently-established Union of Arab Supreme Courts for Environment Protection, which in turn has observer status with CAMRE. She said that CAMRE succeeded in placing environment and sustainable development high on the agenda of the Arab Summit. She outlined a detailed programme of implementation of the initiative for sustainable development in the Arab region and the implementing bodies and timeframes involved. She emphasized that a joint technical secretariat, composed of LAS/CAMRE, UNEP/ROWA, and ESCWA is entrusted with implementation of the Arab Initiative. She stressed the importance of strengthening cooperation with UN agencies in Africa, namely ECA and UNEP's Regional Office for Africa.

III. CONCLUSIONS

52. Following these presentations, the general discussion revolved around five main issues: the enabling environment, strategy development, monitoring and assessment, financing and capacity-building. Participants agreed on the following:

1. An enabling environment is essential to the process of developing NSDS, which requires both strong leadership and public participation, for a combined top-down and bottom-up approach. It also calls for government commitment, creativity in society, thinking in a more integrated manner and transparency in participatory decision-making. Building consensus through consultation is intrinsic to the development of

an NSDS, and this may call for changes in the conventional approach to strategy development.

National sustainable development strategies also require institutional support for coordination, integration, consultation and continuity. In most countries with successful NSDS this has meant the establishment of national sustainable development councils, commissions or committees. These are generally executive in nature. To be fully functional, these bodies require strong political leadership with authority (*e.g.* over natural resources and the capacity for coordination), broad participation from national ministries, and representative stakeholders. The mandates for the councils should be clear, and they should have well-defined terms of reference.

The legal framework in the country is also an essential part of the enabling environment, not only at the strategy development stage but also, and especially, to support strategy implementation. This may include, *inter alia*, economic instruments both to influence a more “sustainable” behavior and to provide financing.

2. Strategies for sustainable development need to be “demystified.” Many of the elements of an NSDS are common to any good strategy. It is therefore important to identify what is unique about an NSDS in order both to improve understanding and to map out the best way forward. Most countries do not need to invent a new strategy. They should look at what they have now and see how it could be reformulated into an NSDS.

Participants agreed that the essential and often unique elements of an NSDS include the following:

- The strategy’s goal, which should recognize all dimensions of sustainable development and the interlinkages among environment, social and economic domains, should be guided by intergenerational equity
- An integrative approach across all sectors
- Comprehensiveness
- Initiated and owned by the country, the council of ministers and the people

The strategy, as all strategies, should also be feasible and should include the means for evaluation, institutional support and financing. One of the most important elements for the success of sustainable development is sensitizing the country’s decision makers, including the council of ministers and civil society.

The strategy should be directed by a vision of where the country would like to be over the long term (*i.e.* 25 to 50 years). This vision not only helps to lead the strategy, but it also serves as a means for raising public awareness and commitment to the process.

The strategy itself may be for a period of, for example, 15 to 25 years. The length of the time frame is not as important as ensuring that it is cyclical. Actions plans with two, five, or ten-year time spans need to be developed on the basis of the strategy. They should clearly define the timeframe and identify both activities and means of implementation, including the legal framework. To the extent possible, activities should be elaborated in phases in order to support continuity of the process.

These plans should contain specific, measurable targets in all three pillars (environmental, social and economic), and these should be evaluated every two years. Evaluation needs to consider not only the degree to which targets have been achieved but also the balance among the targets. If, for example, progress has been made in only one or two of the “pillars,” then adjustments will need to be made to ensure an equitable and sustainable outcome.

3. Monitoring and assessment are essential to national sustainable development strategies to ensure a cyclical process and continuous learning and adjustment. One of the most important tools to achieve this is the development and application of indicators of sustainable development appropriate to the conditions of each country. Greater attention needs to be given not only to the indicators, but also to the collection, measurement, systematization and aggregation of data.
4. Financing sustainable development and the strategy process is the responsibility of each country. Funding may be derived from economic instruments, debt swaps, trade, and public-private partnerships. Where national resources are not sufficient, ODA may be sought for this purpose. International partnerships may also serve as a source of both financial and technical assistance. In 2005, the United Nations and the Arab League will meet under the auspices of FAO to collaborate on funding implementation of MDGs and sustainable development through trade and exchange. However, it was clear that the process cannot be sustainable if it is dependent on external funding.

The potential of an intergenerational fund was discussed. This involves, wherever possible, allocation of a part of a country’s main revenue to be invested for use by future generations. There are a number of examples of countries that have established such funds.

5. Capacity-building should be needs-based. It should therefore begin with a national needs assessment. For national sustainable development strategies, needs assessment is best done at each stage of strategy development; that is, for information-gathering and analysis, consensus-building, coordination, drafting and implementation. Capacity building may also be necessary to establish the appropriate legal base.

Once the needs are assessed and identified by each country, the most appropriate tools for capacity-building can be selected. These may include manuals and guidelines; exchange of experience among countries; training and facilitation.

Important recommendations for capacity-building are contained in the plan of implementation adopted by CAMRE for the “Initiative of Sustainable Development in the Arab Region” (ISDAR), launched as a Partnership Initiative during the WSSD and later endorsed by the Arab Summit in 2004. ISDAR covers eight main areas, namely: peace and security; institutional framework; poverty reduction; population and health; education, awareness, scientific research and technology transfer; resource management; consumption and production; globalization, trade and investment. Capacity building programs and activities should take place under each of these areas during the period 2005-2007. One of the most important activities related to sustainable development strategies is a capacity building program in establishing and

developing institutional frameworks for sustainable development in the Arab Region, including at the local and district levels.

IV. NEXT STEPS

53. The Workshop proposed a number of activities to be carried out at the national level and by regional and international organizations that could support the process of developing national sustainable development strategies. Among these, attention was given in particular to undertaking the following, as appropriate:

- Country reviews of existing national strategies to determine whether or not they could be revised to conform to the principles and characteristics of national sustainable development strategies;
- Revision of existing strategies or preparation of new NSDS, as appropriate, and establishment of the requisite institutional framework;
- Organizing meetings between representatives from countries with mature NSDS and those from countries that are just beginning the process. In this respect, Egypt invited representatives of the Arab States to participate in its upcoming meeting on environmental management, in Cairo, 7-9 February 2005;
- Comparative studies of country experiences with intergenerational funds;
- Compilation and comparison of examples of NSDS from countries around the world with an emphasis on elaboration of the elements that make them responsive to national needs and characteristics;
- Preparation of modular manuals for countries to guide them through the process of preparing NSDS;
- Preparation of a regional comprehensive study on both data availability and the action required for capacity-building in the area of data generation and collection, data quality and the development of indicators for sustainable development. In this regard, the meeting emphasized the importance of coordinating with the Abu Dhabi Environmental Data Initiative;
- Increased allocation of national resources to develop national data for sustainable development, with support from regional and international organizations, as appropriate.

**Arab Regional Workshop on National Sustainable Development Strategies
and Indicators of Sustainable Development**

Environmental Cultural and Educational Center, Cairo -Egypt

12-14 December 2004

No.	Country	Name and Title	Organization	Address
1.	BAHRAIN	Mr. Abdullellah Al-Qasimi Assistant Undersecretary for Training	Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs	Kingdom of Bahrain
2.	COMOROS	Mr. Said Nassur, Said Tohir Special Advisor on SD	Foreign affairs and Cooperation	P.O.Box: 428 Comoros
3.		Mr. Mohamed Said Charif Head of Social Department	Ministry of Finance	Comoros
4.	DJIBOUTI	Mr. Ali Saïd Amareh Director of Economics	Ministry of Finance and Economy	P.O.Box: 2535 Djibouti
5.		Mr. Aden Hassan Elmi Chief of the Arabic Department	Ministry of the Environment	Djibouti
6.	EGYPT	Mr. Atwa Hussein Head of NGOs/GGPs units	Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency	30 Tareek Helwan Zerai Maadi, Cairo Egypt
7.		Ms. Nayyerra Abdesalim Deputy Minister, Undersecretary of State	Ministry of Planning	15, El Hakam Street Helmiet El Zaitoun 11321, Egypt
8.	MOROCCO	Mr. El-Mahrari Abdellatif Engineer	Ministry of Land Management, Water and Environment	Rabat, Morocco
9.	QATAR	Mr. Rashid Al-Khalifa Director, Follow-up and Evaluation Department	The Planning Council	P.O.Box: 18656 Doha, Qatar
10.		Mr. Hamada Marwan Technical Advisor	Supreme Council for the Environment and Natural Reserves	P.O.Box: 2007 Doha, Qatar
11.	SAUDI ARABIA	Mr. Sameer Ghazi DG, Impact Assessment General Directorate	Presidency of Meteorology and Environment	P.O.Box: 1358 Jeddah 21431 Saudi Arabia
12.		Mr. Hatem Al-Motairi Manager of Water Quality Standards Department	Presidency of Meteorology and Environment	P.O.Box: 1358 Jeddah 21431 Saudi Arabia
13.	SUDAN	Mr. Sidahmed Abdallah AlSheikh Deputy Director	National Council of Strategic Planning	15 Nile Avenue Khartoum, Sudan
14.	SYRIA	Mr. Khaled Alahmed Governor of Deir Azzour	Ministry of Local Administration and Environment	Syria
15.		Mr. Mohamad Omar Olabi Establishment Affairs Manager	Ministry of Finance	Jamal Street Damascus -Syria

No.	Country	Name and Title	Organization	Address
16.	YEMEN	Mr. Abdullah Ahmed Al Gaithy DG, Regional Policies and Programmes	Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation	Al Hurriyah St. P.O.Box: 175 Sana'a, Yemen
17.		Mr. Al-Zandany Mohammad Mahmoud Deputy Secretary	Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Sana'a, Yemen
18.	UNDESA/DSD	Ms. Mary Pat Silveira Chief, National Information, Monitoring and Outreach Branch	United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs/Division for Sustainable Development	UN Secretariat 2 UN Plaza NY 10017, USA
19.		Ms. Birgitte Alvarez-Rivero Sustainable Development Affairs Officer		
20.		Ms. Tonya Vaturi Sustainable Development Affairs Officer		
21.	ECA	Ms. Isatou Gaye Environmental Affairs Officer	Economic Commission for Africa Addis Ababa, Ethiopia	P.O.Box 3001 Addis Ababa Ethiopia P.O.Box 3005 Addis Ababa Ethiopia
23.		Mr. Kwadwo Tutu Environmental Affairs Officer		
24.	ESCWA	Mr. Hosny Khordagui Leader of Water and Environment Teams	Sustainable Development and Productivity Division Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia P.O. Box 11-8575 Beirut - Lebanon	P.O. Box 11-85 Beirut, Lebanon
25.		Ms. Julie Abou Arab Research Assistant Water Issues Team		
26.		Ms. Hanan Atallah Research Assistant Environment Team		
27.	UNDP	Ms. Linda Ghanime	United Nations Development Programme	304 E, 45 th Street NY, NY 10017 USA
28.	UNEP	Mr. Arab Hoballah Deputy Coordinator	United Nations Environment Programme/Mediterranean Action Plan (UNEP/MAP)	48 Vassileos Konstantinou A Athens, Greece
29.		Mr. Adel Abdel Kader Regional Coordinator, Early Warning and Assessment	United Nations Environment Programme/ Regional Office for Western Asia.	Vila 2113, Bloc P.O.Box: 10880 Manama, Bahra
30.	Islamic Development Bank	Mr. Ghassan Al Marzouki Country officer	Islamic Development Bank	P.O.Box: 5925 Jeddah 21432 Saudi Arabia
31.	League of Arab States	Ms. Fatma El-Mallah Director, Department of Environment, Housing and Sustainable Development	League of Arab States	Cairo, Egypt

No.	Country	Name and Title	Organization	Address
32.		Ms. Shahira Wahbi Department of Environment, Housing and Sustainable Development		
33.	Consultant	Mr. Mersie Ejigu		1120 19th Street Suite 600, Wash DC, USA