

United Nations Division for Sustainable Development

**Expert Group Meeting on
Reviewing National Sustainable Development Strategies
New York, 10 – 11 October 2005**

UNSD/EGM/NSDS/2005/CRP.6

**LINKING NATIONAL AND LOCAL SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: ISSUES
AND CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT IMPLICATIONS BASED ON THE
GHANAIAN EXPERIENCE**

By: Seth Doe Vordzorgbe
National WSSD Facilitator, Ghana

Presentation at a Side Event: Linking Local Actions with Strategies and
Mechanisms for Sustainable Development

Co-hosted by the Government of Indonesia and the Government of Bolivia

In Partnership with

Capacity 21/UNDP, the Earth Council and IIED

World Summit on Sustainable Development Prepcom IV
Bali, Indonesia

May 27, 2002

1. Introduction

Sustainable development depends on many factors, a key one being the effective integration of the economic, social and environmental dimensions. To achieve this cross-sectoral integration, as well as intra-sectoral completeness, it is critical to ensure linkages between local actions and strategies and mechanisms for sustainable development. Indeed, within the context of country-level sustainable development, we need to think nationally and act locally. Developing and nurturing sound horizontal and vertical linkages between stakeholders, sectors, spatial aggregations, political or public administrative levels and units, and various development strategy processes are essential in ensuring the effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, ownership and sustainability of development policies, strategies and initiatives. In particular, localization, through linking the national to the local, is critical in ensuring sustainable national development in this era of globalization.

Within the Ghanaian context, recent efforts at development administration, have sought to address the dichotomy between local actions and national-level development programming. Based on this experience and emerging practice, this presentation will highlight some essential requirements for effective linkages between dimensions of local and national development, indicate some breakdown points in the linkage, identify some implications for capacity development for sustainable development, and highlight some issues for discussion on how to ensure that concerns related to strategies for sustainable development and capacity development are captured in the WSSD process.

2. Towards effective linkages: lessons learned from the Ghanaian experience

2.1 Pursue strategic, integrated and coherent processes for development programming: Effective linkages are nurtured within the context of comprehensive development approaches that allow for integration of various strategic process and ensures coherence in development programming. Ghana has had a very long history and tradition of planning for national development, and is reputed to have completed the first development plan in

the world, the Guggisberg Plan, in 1919¹. The first attempt at ensuring vertical and horizontal linkages in development programming was the Ghana-Vision 2020, initiated in 1995 as an umbrella process that provided a broad vision of long-term development goals to be achieved through complementary strategies and established the overall setting for the evolution of the institutional framework for sectoral and other plans.

The Ghana Vision 2020 adopted the strategic and long-term view, utilized a participatory process of preparation, covered all sectors and included cross-sectoral issues, provided for roles and linkages between various levels of public administration, and provided umbrella for other development processes. However, its defects in facilitating effective linkages included the following: it failed to adequately engender broad-based and local level ownership countrywide, there was no scenario analysis as part of the framework for integrating various strategy processes and an overall and integrative model that integrated macroeconomic, sectoral, spatial/physical, and, financial aspects of planning. Also, trade-offs in integrating environment, social and economic issues were not specified or agreed while sectoral priorities were not adequately reflected in budgetary allocations.

The post-Rio landscape of development strategies in Ghana is littered with many processes that have not been integrated to achieve development coherence development framework². None of the mainly donor-driven frameworks, the World Bank's Comprehensive Development Framework and the UN-Development Assistance Framework, is as comprehensive as the Vision 2020.

¹However, this was a public investment programme, not a comprehensive development plan, that was developed by the colonial administration without any participation by the people and was implemented largely by the administrative service. Historically, the most influential national plans have been the 7-Year Development Plan (1963/64-1969/70), the first integrated and strategic, albeit top-down, process and the Economic Recovery Programme (1983-1987) that was largely a macroeconomic stabilization and structural adjustment process.

²Post-Rio national development frameworks include the Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy (initiated in 1995, updated in 2000/2001 as the Interim GPRSP and reformulated as the GPRS 2002-2004), the UNDAF (the second covering 2001-2005) and the CDF (initiated in 1999). Cross-sectoral frameworks include the Environmental Action Plan (1991), Forest and Wildlife Policy (1994), Forest Protection Strategy (1995), Forestry Development Master Plan (1996-2000), National Biodiversity Strategy (1998), Environmental Sanitation Policy (1999), National Land Policy (1999), and the EPA Strategic Plan (1999-2003).

The most recent attempt at catalyzing development linkages is within the framework of the Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy (2002-2004). The GPRS addresses some of the defects of the Vision 2020, by for example, improving the links between strategy priorities and national budgetary allocation outcomes, enhancing monitoring of the process, undertaking more extensive stakeholder consultations, and, devising a more coherent approach to addressing poverty in the short-term. However, the GPRS and the other frameworks also suffer from many of the shortcomings of Vision 2020 in ensuring effective full and effective linkages between sectors, stakeholders, development strategies and spatial elements.

Regarding the GPRS (2002-2004), a critical constrain to its ability to promote effective linkages is its essentially short-term duration. This due to the programmatic requirements of the World Bank and IMF sponsored PRSPs. However, the government is preparing to design a national long-term development framework, in place of the Vision 2020, building on the GPRSP as the leading strategy mechanism, which will offer more room for linking local and national development in a coherent development framework. Ghana's quest to design an effective national strategy for sustainable development was underscored by the hosting of the International Forum on National Sustainable Development Strategies in Accra.

2.2 Institutionalize development linkages: Earlier attempts at achieving linkages between stakeholders, public administration units and sectors have been hampered by policy reversal and failure that undermined efforts at sustaining the linkages envisaged. An approach at institutionalizing the process has been to legislate decentralization of development planning and management since 1988 and make it a constitutional requirement since 1992 in Ghana under which district assemblies are the deliberative, legislative, development programming and budgeting authorities at the local level. This establishes a de jure linkage between local and national levels but in reality the linkage is very far from being effective due to perception, financial, managerial capacity, bureaucratic, infrastructural and institutional constraints.

2.3 Balance top-down with bottom-up approaches to strategy formulation and development implementation: This is a critical requirement in ensuring effective linkages between local actions and national development by promoting multi-stakeholder participation and ownership. The emerging trend is clearly towards the adoption of this mindset by addressing the bias

towards top-down development approach. This is exemplified by the use of the participatory approach in national-level development strategy processes such as the Vision 2020, Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy (both versions), the National Economic Forum (1997) and the National economic Dialogue (2001). At the programme level, the application of the demand-driven approach, through relying on the local level for the source and implementation of project ideas, is growing as shown in the cases of the Ghana Capacity 21 Programme, the Village Infrastructure Project and the Northern Ghana Biodiversity Conservation Project.

Despite these efforts, the level, scope and quality of participation has been low, as it has been constrained by the following factors: (a) dominance of public agencies in participatory processes, (b) inadequate time for stakeholders to prepare for participation in forums held to elicit their support, (c) inability to completely or affectively implement outcomes of consultative processes to assure effective and continuous participation, (d) the use of methods of multistakeholder processes, such as ‘brainstorming’ that have limitations in ensuring total participation, (e) lack of timely and equitable access to advance information, education and communication on the processes, objectives, methodology and expected outcomes of consultations by all potential participants.

2.4 Enhance the human focus of development strategies: Deepening, broadening and strengthening the human dimensions of development strategies increases the potential for sustainability and effective linkages between sectors and administrative levels, at least at the planning stage. Promoting human-centered frameworks requires local action and involvement, thereby fostering local-national links. This is evident in comparing the Economic Recovery Programme that focused on macroeconomic aggregates to the Vision 2020 and the new GPRS.

2.5 Act at both national and local levels and ensure feedbacks between the two levels: It is essential to ensure a linkage between the two levels by directly working the both levels. At the strategy level, the decentralized planning system in Ghana requires that District Assemblies prepare their development plans based on planning guidelines emanating from national strategy processes and provided by the National Development Planning Commission. This is aimed at ensuring linkages, feedback and synchronicity between local and national level development strategy processes. However, the good intentions of the system have been hampered

by untimely release of planning guidelines, inadequate understanding and application of them by several Assemblies, and inadequate attention to and integration of district plans in national development strategy work.

At the programme level, the Ghana Capacity 21 Programme supported the development of the District Environmental Resource Management Information System (DERMIS) that was a component of the Environmental Information System Development (EISD) under the Ghana Environmental Resources Management Project that operationalized the Environmental Action Plan. The DERMIS will be integrated in a national participatory sustainable development and poverty reduction monitoring system to be designed under a new UNDP-supported Programme to Support Promoting National Strategies for Environmental Resource Management. Similarly, the Cap21 Programme supported the development of District Environmental Bye-laws that will be extended to all districts by upstreaming them in the capacity development programme of the Institute of Local Government Studies. The main challenge is to ensure feedback between activities at the two levels

2.6 Effective linkages and feedback require adequate monitoring: The Ghanaian experience with monitoring strategy process has generally been inadequate. For example, the NDPC developed monitoring formats for data collection to monitor Vision 2020 but was unable to implement this system while most of the indicators developed to monitor the First Step framework were implementation steps or output variables that could not be used to track progress on achieving the main Vision 2020 goals and targets.

2.7 The existence of the requisite capacity for development strategy formulation and implementation is one of the most important factors in ensuring effective linkages: One of the major constraints to the effective linkage among stakeholders, sectors and administrative levels, and between socio-economic frameworks and spatial planning is the inadequate capacity at both national and local levels and within both public sector and major groups for development strategy work.

2.8 Utilize prominent national champions: Promoting sustainable development as a rubric for institutionalizing local – national linkages requires local and national champions of NSSDs, individuals and institutions. In the case of Ghana, the NDPC which should have been in the business of sustainable development has been hampered by knowledge,

resource and visibility constraints. The National Committee for the Implementation of Agenda 21 (NACIA) has been ineffective. It is only now that efforts are underway to assemble high-profile individuals as patrons of Agenda 21. However, within the narrow confines of building links between local and national development, there is some advocacy support from local government officials, civil society groups, such as religious groups, traditional authorities and groups, the press and other special interest groups.

2.9 Show commitment to the linkages: It is essential that parties to the linkage show commitment to the underlying strategy process and the resultant linkage relationship to nurture it and prevent regression. The pace of Ghana's development has not matched the depth of its experience with development programming because very few of the previous development plans were fully implemented over their planned timeframes, partly due to relatively little commitment by most previous governments to the development plans they themselves formulated. This breeds cynicism among local stakeholders, alienates them from the development process and weakens their sense of ownership of development processes.

2.10 Effective linkages require the use of local knowledge: In promoting multi-stakeholder and local-national linkages, it is essential to encourage the application of indigenous knowledge systems that allow local circumstances to inform the linkage relationship. Effective application of this principle in the implementation of the National Wetlands Conservation Project has yielded positive results in several project areas.

3. Key breakdown points

The Ghanaian experience in developing effective and lasting linkage relationships has brought to the fore some areas of breakdown in the process. These relate to defects in: the approach to the design of the development strategic framework, extent of participation of major stakeholders, local and national capacity, information issues, public resource allocation and incentives, and, monitoring.

4. Implications for capacity development

Work done over the past 3-4 years in understanding NSSDs and agreeing on guidance for undertaking them has concluded that three of the key principles for effective NSSDs relate to ensuring: (a) that development processes are

strategic, (b) requisite linkages, and (c) adequate capacity. Without adequate capacity, it would be impossible to undertake strategic analysis and planning, and forge the necessary linkages. Thus the need to develop capacity for effective strategic planning is paramount to ensuring that countries adopt national sustainable development strategies in the post-WSSD era.

Developing capacities to link the national to the local, and, in turn, the national to the regional and global requires, among others, addressing the breakdown points in the two linkage relationships. In the former case, there is the need to include issues relating to multi-stakeholder participation, local technical capacity in various areas, and, information management and monitoring. In general, based on the Ghanaian experience, capacity development is required in key areas such as: (a) multi-stakeholder process design and management, (b) strategic planning, (c) technical analysis of development issues, (d) advocacy, and (e) monitoring and evaluation.

Within the context of the Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy, it is necessary to tailor capacity development needs to the strategy and policy content of the national development framework. Areas of capacity development pertinent to ensuring effective linkages include those related to: (a) ensuring economic stability through increased fiscal management underpinned by a national identification system, (b) increasing production and promoting sustainable livelihoods, (c) developing human resources, (d) addressing needs of vulnerable and excluded groups, and (e) enhancing governance through capacity rationalization and development of local and traditional authorities, and strengthening the role of major groups in both administrative and economic governance.

Effective capacity development for promoting strategic linkages required for sustainable development is a multi-faceted process that depends on many factors, including the following. First, this requires adopting the systemic, integrative and multi-modal approach in addressing any given capacity development situation. This will help ensure that capacity development is sustainable and accountable and promotes ownership by partners in the capacity development initiative. Second, based on the Ghanaian experience with capacity building under structural adjustment, it is important that effective capacity development has to balance the need for detailed up-front preparation and more incremental approaches to learning by doing through small initiatives that are sensitive to the national context. Third,

development partners need to develop effective mechanisms for pooling resources to support capacity development processes.

On their part, partner countries requiring assistance for capacity development need to: (a) ensure the existence of development frameworks from which capacity needs can be derived, (b) undertake realistic needs assessment based on sound and comprehensive capacity analysis, (c) show willingness to modify their legal, regulatory, institutional and policy frameworks as required to make capacity development work, (d) agree to provide counterpart resource and other requirements to ensure that capacity development programmes are implemented as planned, (e) provide conducive environment and incentives for individuals, institutions and systems to exercise their developed capacities, (f) assure locational and gender balance in capacity development initiatives, and, (g) political stability, transparency and long-term commitment to agreed capacity development goals.

5. Implications for the WSSD process

The importance of coherent national development strategies and effective capacities in ensuring sustainable development, as envisaged under Agenda 21, has been re-emphasized during the preparatory processes leading to the WSSD. The implementation challenge of the WSSD can only be met in the decades ahead by ensuring global commitment to ensuring that capacity development needs of developing countries are fulfilled through the re-affirmation of political commitment to the task ahead backed by clear, result-oriented implementation programmes and resource indications. It is essential to ensure that, *at a minimum*, the final text of the WSSD preparatory process provides for provision of financial and other resources for: (a) expanding capacity development initiatives and partnerships tailored to the needs of developing countries, (b) strengthening the knowledge capacity of developing countries, and (c) developing national capacities to effectively design and implement sustainable development policies and strategies to meet the requirements of Agenda 21 and globalization.

To ensure that we achieve the above objectives, it would be instructive to discuss the following leading questions during this side-event:

- a) How do we popularize information on, and institutionalize the design and practice of, national sustainable development strategies?

- b) How do we address trade-offs in seeking linkages, integration and coherence among strategy processes?
- c) How do we address tensions in linking the local to the global, either directly or indirectly through national and regional intermediation?
- d) What approaches, resources and initiatives will it take to address capacity development needs related to the design and implementation of strategies for sustainable development? What specific commitments are necessary at the WSSD to ensure this?
- e) How do we ensure that developing countries do not lose access to the benefits of improved and expanded capacities embodied in enhanced manpower resources in a globalizing world?