

Summary report

16th Annual Conference, 9-10 October 2008

European Environment and Sustainable Development Advisory Councils, EEAC

Introduction

1. The annual conference of EEAC was held in Bordeaux, France on 9-10 October 2008. This year, a proposed statement on “***Sustaining Europe for a Long Way Ahead***” was discussed and debated during the main conference on 10 October 2008.
2. This report contains a short summary of the presentations and discussions in the three sessions open for non-EEAC members including *Presentations of Selected EEAC Members Recent Advice and Activities*, *Special Session on Governance for Sustainable Development in Asia-Pacific and Europe*, and *Main Conference*. All presentations in each session and the 2008 statement paper are available on the EEAC website (<http://www.eeac-net.org/>).

Presentations of Selected EEAC Members Recent Advice and Activities

3. There has been an attempt to develop SD strategy of Pyrenees-Mediterranean, an area consisting of five sub-regions across border of France and Spain. Prior to a process of strategy formulation, some activities were undertaken such as identification of institutional prerequisites, building up relationships of relevant stakeholders, and SWOT analysis of strategy development.
4. In Ireland, sustainable transport was identified as one of measures to reduce green house gases emission which has been targeted at 3% reduction per year. To attain the target, Sustainable Travel and Transport Action Plan (STTAP) was developed through public consultation. Five “I” measures including information, institutional arrangement, incentive, infrastructure, and integration with planning were proposed in the action plan. All the five “I” measures are needed to be implemented immediately in an integrated manner.
5. To respond to Lisbon Strategy, one of the two major regional strategies in Europe which aims at boosting European economic growth and employment, Federal Council for SD of Belgium has set up National Reform Programme (NPR). Along implementation of the Belgium NPR, lack of such an integrated policy to balance the 3 dimensions on SD and isolation between the Lisbon and EU SD strategies in practical implementation were clearly observed. Some recommendations to overcome those constraints were arisen such as applying Impact Assessment, introducing environmental fiscal reform, and developing sustainable public procurement. Integration of the two regional strategies into only one overarching strategy for EU needs to be taken into consideration for further discussion.
6. German SD council has introduced traffic light symbols to communicate with public on monitoring delivery of the national strategy. Based on the monitoring results, there were more red lights than the others indicating of a serious problem in achieving objectives of the

strategy. This kind of reporting could draw great attention from the public as using proper symbols is more understandable in communicating with citizens.

Special session: Governance for Sustainable Development in Asia-Pacific and Europe

7. This session aimed at sharing experience on SD strategies and councils between Europe and Asia - Pacific regions. Four Asian delegates delivered presentations which were corresponded by the other four presentations from EEAC members. The session was divided into two blocks which were the overview of SD strategies and councils in the two regions and experience on national SD strategies and councils in two selected countries from each region.

8. *Overview of SD strategies and councils in Asia-Pacific* – More than fifty percent of the countries in Asia-Pacific have developed and implemented national SD strategies. Some countries are more advanced than the others in terms of translation of the strategies into action plans and adoption of the strategies by the governments. Although the strategies formulation and implementation in the region have progressively developed, there remain a number of challenges that include lack of national ownership, inadequate interconnection among SD concerns, lack of effort to further develop action and sectoral plans on the ground, weakness in monitoring and evaluation, and financial constraints.

With assistance of United Nations Environment Programme, a number of National Councils for SD (NCSDs) in the region are growing. All existing councils in the region have been set up by the governments, hence run by them. This is obviously different from many councils in Europe, which are independent from their governments. Key factors that hinder the establishment of NCSDs in Asia and Pacific include weakness of civil society, lack of interest from business sector, and lack of knowledge and low capacity to initiate the NCSD establishment process. Existing NCSDs also encounter a number of challenges such as (a) limited understanding of SD and its attendant issues, (b) inadequate financial resources that affect organizational operations, (c) lack of technical and administrative support, (d) conflict and confusion in roles and representations vis-a-vis other existing bodies.

9. *Approaches of SD strategies and types of SD councils in EU member states* – Although nearly all the countries in Europe have developed SD strategies, only half of them were actually adopted and implemented. Although SD peer reviews have been encouraged in Europe, the comments or results of the reviews have not been executed in a systematic way. Several strategies have remained heavily directed at environment. In some, the long term vision is not clearly spelled out and translated into strategies and programs. Weak governance, ownership, leadership and policy coherence, which are key concerns in SD implementation in Asia-Pacific, are also continuing challenges among the member states of EU.

EEAC member councils have diverse stakeholder composition and a variety of scope of interest. The councils has evolved from limited involvement of scientists and technical experts and oriented towards environment to broader stakeholder participation and

expanded their interests in various aspects of sustainable development. The institutional structure of individual council is formed and directly influenced by the political context of the country. Currently, more than 30 councils in Europe are independent from the governments so that proper functions of advisory body to the government would be fully performed.

10. *Vietnam specific experience with sustainable development councils and strategies* – Vietnam developed its Agenda 21 consisting of five chapters with technical assistance from several international organizations. The country established Agenda 21 Office (VA 21) under the Ministry of Planning, which was made in charge of formulating SD policies, allocating resources, developing capacity, mobilizing participation, and providing advice on SD matters to the government. In the process of VA 21 implementation, the country faced several challenges including lack of technical and institutional capacity, institutional gaps and duplication of duties among government agencies, limitation of monitoring and evaluation system, and poor awareness in SD. Political will is needed to overcome these challenges.
11. *Central Asia: issues and perspectives for SD strategies implementation* – The region is moving towards unsustainable directions witnessed by a lot of serious problems. Conflict in water resource usage among the countries is the biggest environmental issue nowadays. Lack of capacities to prevent the conflict and weakness of civil society to improve governance are identified as the two main barriers to overcome those challenges. The SD process in Central Asia began in 1995. From 2000 to 2005, the region had a lot of progress on the establishment of NCSD and preparation of national Agenda 21. Under current circumstances of high corruption, poor governance and democracy, low public involvement, SD process may not have a bright future. New approaches are needed to accelerate the SD process such as administrative management based on ecosystem, integrated resource management, and cooperative management among authorities.
12. *The SD Commission's experience in UK with involving stakeholders and interacting with government* – At present, one of the concerns of the SD commission in UK is how to engage people in sustainability. How to get the government away from the typical approach and persuade a higher degree of engagement is a great challenge. Despite the fact that the main challenges to engaging people in the SD process are the need to spend a lot of time and limitation in financial resources, it is worthwhile to pay for a proper engagement rather than move back and forth with making wrong decisions and backtracking in changing policies to meet citizen's needs, which could turn out to be more expensive.
13. *The Netherland's SD policies' Peer Review* – The Netherlands conducted an international peer review of its NSDS in 2007. The country invited 12 peers from Finland, Germany and South Africa and more than 80 national experts. Convening the peer review included four steps which are: (i) developing background documents for the peers; (ii) organizing scoping meeting; (iii) conducting peer review meeting; and (iv) editing a final report and presenting the review results to some government leaders. The peer review generated main conclusions and recommendations including (i) misunderstanding a current action program on SD as a strategy, (ii) emphasizing importance of SD as a process, not a document, (iii)

pursuing SD strategies under Prime Minister Office, (iv) and embedding some rights regarding SD in the constitution. Overall, the peer review was considered a successful intervention which brought many positive changes.

Main Conference: Sustaining Europe for a long way ahead: Making long-term sustainable development policies work

14. Key eight themes including Governance, Social Justice, Demography, Markets, Education, Culture, Diversity, and EU Budgets were identified as vital foundation for sustaining future for Europe. Through the EEAC's lens, a number of practical suggestions for each different stakeholder in the society were proposed to cope with identified SD challenges.
15. *Governance* – Existing form of governance in EU rarely takes all aspects of sustainability into consideration. Therefore, it was recommended to bring in comprehensive ways to integrate sustainability criteria into all policy making and implementation, and to introduce effective monitoring and evaluation. To better incorporate the long term in present day decision making, restructuring of the current governance institutions may be needed.
16. *Social Justice* – The past efforts seemed insufficient to flourish social well-being to majority of the population. Poverty and inequality are still increasing. In this relation, EEAC recommended practical ways to move towards social justice.
17. *Demography* – Demographic trends in Europe have shifted to aging society and diverse population patterns due to migration and spatial changes. To balance public services provisions and energy supply at sub-regions, urban and rural areas, encouraging decentralization as well as promoting demand-side management, would be powerful solutions. Involving the social dimensions of businesses like charity and active civil society may begin to take on hold.
18. *Markets* – Long term sustainability has not been fully considered in modern market processes. Market instruments can be powerful tools for integrating the different SD aspects and preserving natural resources and ecosystems. Innovative mechanisms for sustainable sourcing and disposal of all goods and services like standard setting and labeling are required. In terms of pricing, true cost with adjustment of social and ecological costs is now unavoidable.
19. *Education* – Education must be a platform to link people from different sectors. Caring and self-aware society that recognizes local uniqueness and diversity could be developed through education. Ultimately, schools should be experimental laboratory in sustainable living, learning, and training for all occupations and all citizens. Media and information technologies are essential tools in promoting sustainable education.
20. *Culture* – Culture and long experience of European societies could provide a way for strengthening social cohesion and advancing environmental integration and innovative market mechanisms. In particular, bringing about social cohesion and linking it with the

ecological functioning of local environment and economy are likely to move to sustainable consumption and production.

21. *Diversity* – EU SD strategy has relatively high diversity. Among others, institutions, biological resources, local practices and culture are key concerns. Diversity of functions, roles and economies as well as cultures may be promoted or recreated as a tool to sustainability in balance with uniformity and unity. Moving towards globalization, balancing among the need for multi-lateral guiding frameworks for policy and financing, national policy making and budgets, and autonomy and flexibility at the local level needs to be deliberated.
22. *EU Budgets* – Instead of the present intergovernmental bickering about short-sighted budget, EU budgetary system should be changed towards output oriented approaches which keep track on EU strategic goal. Transparency needs to be an overall guiding principle of this new financing system. It was recommended to introduce sustainability assessment for all EU expenditures which would be beneficial to avoid costly counteracting measures.