

Sustainable Development: A Review of Progress by the Scottish Government (2008)

Annexe Four: Sustainable Development Stakeholder Survey

Sustainable Development in Scotland - Autumn 2008 survey

Last year the Sustainable Development Commission undertook an assessment of the Government's progress on sustainable development in Scotland. The [findings](#) were published in September 2007.

In 2007 stakeholder input proved a valuable part of the assessment, as a broad range of over 150 people were consulted in various ways- including an online survey. Therefore as part of our second annual assessment, another short questionnaire was devised to gauge stakeholder thoughts and opinion.

This survey was undertaken via the online survey tool, 'SurveyMonkey'. The purpose was to invite opinions about Scotland's sustainable strategy, particularly in light of the new administration's Government Economic Strategy with its Central Purpose and accompanying performance framework.

The questionnaire ran in Autumn 2008. The survey was circulated to the Scottish-based panel of the Sustainable Development Commission (SDC), as well as publicised via the SDC Scotland website, and Scottish e-bulletin. It was also circulated through the Sustainable Scotland Network, the Scottish Sustainable Development Forum, Forward Scotland and the Poverty Alliance network.

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1. Over what time scale do you expect sustainable development to influence policy delivery in Scotland?

	Response Percent	Response Count
It is already influencing delivery of policy and will continue to do so in the future	42.6%	75
It will influence delivery over the next 2 years	9.7%	17
It will influence delivery over the next 5 years	14.2%	25
It is not influencing delivery now and I do not expect it to in the future	9.7%	17
Don't know/hard to say	12.5%	22
Other (please specify)	11.4%	20
answered question 176		
skipped question 1		

Conclusion

Just under half of respondents feel that sustainable development is influencing policy delivery. 25% felt it would influence future delivery whilst 10% were sceptical of any influence now or in the future. A number of commentators felt that the terminology used is too vague to allow meaningful discussion, and that this is more rhetoric without the necessary concrete definitions and actions in place to achieve SD aims.

Representative Quotes

'The key themes underpinning the government's sustainable development strategy tend to be couched in general terms rather than in measureable outcomes. Some targets are set but these do not provide a strategic focus for all the government policy sectors.'

'It is influencing delivery of policy now, but to nowhere near the extent it must to achieve a) sustainable development, and b) the targets set out in Scottish Government policy.'

'Sustainable development means different things to different people, but some progress is being made'

2. To what extent are you seeing sustainable development mainstreamed in the work of the Scottish Government and its agencies

	Response Percent	Response Count
Not at all	0.6%	1
Not really, just token actions	29.8%	50
Some mainstreaming but not across the board	50.6%	85
Mainstreaming in the Government but not its agencies	3.6%	6
Mainstreaming in the agencies but not in the Government	0.0%	0
Clear mainstreaming throughout the Government and its agencies	3.6%	6
Don't know/hard to say	5.4%	9
Other (please specify)	6.5%	11
answered question		168
skipped question		9

Conclusion

The majority of respondents think that sustainable development is mainstreamed in the work of the SG and its agencies, but not equally across the board. A significant minority (30.4%) believe it is not mainstreamed at all, or only in a token way. Only 3.6% thought it was clearly mainstreamed throughout. Commentators again raised the vagueness of the terminology and the problem this presents with interpreting and assessing action.

Representative Quotes

'I think that there is little real understanding of what sustainable development really means. Government still talks of continued economic growth. Having said that there is some mainstreaming of some aspects of sustainable development across some parts of the Government and its agencies.'

'Excellent background work done but need to contest market freedom in order to see SD implemented effectively.'

'The language of sustainable development has been "mainstreamed" but this is not reflected in action.'

3. Overall, to what extent do you feel action taken by the Scottish Government since May 2007 demonstrates commitment to sustainable development?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Not at all	3.1%	5
Not much	42.9%	70
Don't know/hard to say	19.6%	32
Quite a lot	19.6%	32
A lot	2.5%	4
Other (please specify)	12.3%	20
answered question		163
skipped question		14

Conclusion

A significant minority (45%) feel that either not much or no action has been taken to display commitment. A fifth of respondents don't feel able to comment yet, whilst another fifth (22.1%) do feel that quite a lot or a lot of action has been taken. It seems there is scepticism about to what extent the Scottish Government's stated aims and purposes around SD will be translated into action.

Representative Quotes

'My own perception is that the purchase of the sustainable development agenda in Scotland has diminished considerably since the change of Government last May. Although the current administration expresses its overarching goal as increasing the rate of 'sustainable economic growth', I see little evidence that it is really serious about the sustainability component. Even action to tackle climate change seems to be viewed as at least as much an economic development opportunity as a means of averting environmental catastrophe. Discussion about whether current measures of economic activity really bear much relation to actual human well-being seem almost totally absent. All in all, I think we have reverted to a pretty old-fashioned view of development, driven substantially by a political agenda which is about creating the economic conditions in which Scotland might make the transition to independence without too much pain and in which people might vote for the move.'

'Clearly a very different approach being taken with significantly bolder structural moves with attempts to slim down unnecessary duplication of effort and to at least introduce the sustainability concept as a driving force rather than the previous administration who bastardised the language and appeared set only on ensuring endless pretty reports with very little changes of substance being required.'

4. The Scottish Government has established a Purpose of Government: "to focus Government and public services on creating a more successful country, with opportunities for all of Scotland to flourish, through increasing sustainable economic growth." Were you aware of this *Purpose*?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	64.2%	104
No	34.6%	56
Don't know	1.2%	2
<i>answered question</i>		162
<i>skipped question</i>		15

Conclusion

Around two thirds of respondents were aware of the Scottish Government's central purpose. (Two respondents did not know whether they were aware of it or not.)

5. Are you clear what the Government means by '*Sustainable Economic Growth*'?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	35.8%	58
No	56.8%	92
Don't know	7.4%	12
Further Comment		53
<i>answered question</i>		162
<i>skipped question</i>		15

Conclusion

59.2% of respondents either did not know, or were unclear on the Scottish Government's meaning of sustainable economic growth. Many people (one third) commented on this question that the terminology is vague and can be considered a contradiction in terms.

Representative Quotes

'There is considerable debate about what exactly is meant by sustainable economic growth and indeed if it is possible at all. The NPF mentions GDP, which is worrying, as I feel it is a poor indicator of sustainability of an economy. For example the GDP can be increased by causing more pollution and spending money on cleaning it up. There are alternative metrics that are more important. Moreover it is quite possible for GDP to decline but well-being to increase due to the disparities in income between groups.'

6. To what extent do you feel the *Purpose* is contributing to sustainable development?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Not at all	16.5%	26
Not much	40.5%	64
Don't know/hard to say	37.3%	59
Quite a lot	4.4%	7
A lot	1.3%	2
Further Comment		25
answered question		158
skipped question		19

Conclusion

Over half (57%) felt that the purpose does not contribute to sustainable development much or at all. A further 37% did not think it possible to say yet. 5.7% thought it did contribute quite a lot or a lot. Comments again indicated that people find the language vague and unhelpful.

Representative Quotes

'It is helping in some ways as the language allows engagement with some who might otherwise be antagonistic to core sustainable development principles and what is really required. From that perspective, it is allowing some limited progress as opposed to no progress at all.'

'It is serving as a rallying cry to focus public sector investment, but we are still waiting for the joined up approach and the synergies that can come from a clear strategy of how the economy can be made more sustainable. When we have this understanding we need all public sector actions to help deliver the vision.'

'A lot depends on how you drill down into the aims, targets and indicators; look at the legislation being developed, and casework managed by Ministers. The purpose is only as good as the leadership required to embed and model it throughout policy and practice.'

7. Were you aware of the National Performance Framework?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	61.5%	96
No	35.3%	55
Don't know	3.2%	5
Further comments		16
<i>answered question</i>		156
<i>skipped question</i>		21

Conclusion

61.5% of respondents were aware of the national performance framework, only slightly fewer than were aware of the central purpose (104 vs 96 people). Comments indicated that several had heard of the framework but were not familiar with the detail of it.

Representative Quotes

'This is clearly having a major impact on local authorities and through them on bodies such as ours - but there does not seem to have been much debate over the NPF - and most people will be totally unaware of it and the effect it is already having.'

'Good to see them all, but I am still concerned that agencies, departments, businesses etc will see particular bits as 'theirs' and not see the need to deliver on all of them.'

'Definitely a clearer and more articulate vision with prospect for a more coherent delivery; BUT ... not there yet by any stretch of the imagination.'

8. To what extent do you feel the National Performance Framework's outcomes and targets help to show whether Scotland is becoming more sustainable?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Not at all	8.5%	8
Not much	28.7%	27
Don't know/hard to say	42.6%	40
Quite a lot	18.1%	17
A lot	2.1%	2
Further Comment		19
answered question		94
skipped question		83

Conclusion

Almost half of respondents did not feel they know or can say to what extent the outcomes and targets will show progress towards sustainability. Comments indicated several felt it was too early to tell. A fifth felt they would help either quite a lot or a lot, whilst 36.2% thought they would not help much or at all.

Representative Quotes

'The main focus is on growth and fully participating in the current global economic model. As K. E. Boulding said "Anyone who believes exponential growth can go on forever in a finite world is either a madman or an economist." To which you could add politician, but then they may be a subset of the madmen. A focus purely on emissions is too narrow for sustainable development - it needs to make clearer the social and economic issues and how these are also core elements of sustainable development. The National Indicators on Greener Scotland are very weak compared with the emphasis on socio-economic indicators. If previous strategies have been superceded by the NPF, why develop a Climate Change Adaptation Strategy?'

'Too early to say. a lot will depend on the climate change bill and how effectively it determines action thereafter across government and the public sector.'

'They cover a whole variety of issues, many of them of only limited direct relevance to sustainable development. Moreover the local authorities in each area across the country have negotiated their own individual 'Single Outcome Agreements' with Government where they can pick and choose what they focus on, so sustainable development indicators and outcomes may have dropped out at this stage in many areas.'

9. Has the Government's *Purpose* or *NPF* helped you make a case for supporting sustainable development in your organisation or the organisations with whom you work?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	26.7%	40
No	58.7%	88
Don't know	14.7%	22
Further Comment		29
<i>answered question</i>		150
<i>skipped question</i>		27

Conclusion

The majority of respondents (58.7%) did not feel that the Government's *Purpose* or *NPF* helped them make a case for supporting sustainable development in their areas. More than a quarter felt it did, however. A minority (14.7%) did not know so presumably had not tried this approach for various reasons, as comments suggested.

Representative Quotes

'Because I wasn't aware of its existence until now!'

At this stage it seems to have possibly reduced the importance of the environment and sustainability in that these have become just one part of one output out of 15 in the local SOA rather than a key horizontal theme cutting across all outputs.

'I work in Education, so SDE is already prominent. The Government's Purpose or NPF has helped raise prominence of SDE and strengthened argument for it to permeate curriculum rather than be an 'add on.'

'I don't use the term 'sustainable economic growth' as it doesn't help my case in promoting the theory or requirements of sustainable development. I had already done sufficient work in-house in promoting sustainable development principles for non-specialists to recognise weaknesses in the NPF with regard to SD, and particularly the 'Greener' elements. However, as non-specialists having to engage with the Scottish Government they accept the language and use it more readily than I can.'

10. How do you feel Scotland's priorities and action for sustainable development compare to the rest of the UK?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Substantially ahead	5.9%	9
Slightly ahead	34.2%	52
About the same	33.6%	51
Slightly behind	10.5%	16
Substantially behind	3.3%	5
Don't know	12.5%	19
Further Comment		22
answered question		152
skipped question		25

Conclusion

The majority of respondents (34.2) thought that Scotland is slightly ahead of the UK, whilst almost an equal proportion thought it was about the same. 14% thought we were slightly or substantially behind. A significant number (12.5%) did not know and comments again suggest that a lot of people think it is too soon to make these judgements.

Representative Quotes

'There appears to be a lot of focus on catching up with other countries, rather than having faith in the implementation of sustainable principles. We need to enhance our innovation and design skills through encouraging a new generation to think through Factor 4 and Factor 10 principles - just as the Swedes are doing.'

'It's a mixed bag really. By rejecting nuclear power and ramping up effort on renewable technologies, Scotland is streets ahead. By adopting the NPF in preference to the Shared Framework for SD, we're going backward.'

'Bit of a mixed bag as Climate Change Bill and carbon accounting more ambitious but procurement and practical actions are behind.'

'Comparing intentions is not the point. You have to look at what people are doing.'

ABOUT THE RESPONDENTS

11. What type of organisation of you work for?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Scottish Government	2.6%	4
Public Sector (including local authorities and Govt agencies)	33.1%	50
Private Sector (including Business)	13.9%	21
University/Academic/Student	9.3%	14
NGO/Charity	28.5%	43
Not working	1.3%	2
Other (please specify)	11.3%	17
	<i>answered question</i>	151
	<i>skipped question</i>	26

12. Whereabouts are you based?

	Response Percent	Response Count
East Lothian, Mid Lothian, West Lothian and Edinburgh	33.8%	51
Central and Mid Scotland, including Fife	20.5%	31
North East Scotland, including Aberdeen	12.6%	19
Highlands and Islands	7.3%	11
Scottish Borders, and Dumfries and Galloway	4.6%	7
West of Scotland, including Glasgow	17.2%	26
Outside of Scotland	0.0%	0
Other (please specify)	4.0%	6
	<i>answered question</i>	151
	<i>skipped question</i>	26

Conclusions

The majority of respondents were from the public sector which is to be expected due to the subject matter. A significant number of respondents (28.5%) came from an NGO/charity background. All respondents were from within Scotland, with all areas well represented, though the majority lived in the central belt- perhaps not surprisingly.

13. What is your main area of interest/expertise?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Buildings/Built Environment	10.7%	14
Education/Behaviour Change	18.3%	24
Energy/energy efficiency	6.1%	8
Economics/economic development	6.9%	9
Climate Change	6.9%	9
Conservation/Biodiversity	6.1%	8
Business/CSR	5.3%	7
Food, consumption and procurement	2.3%	3
Land use	9.9%	13
Health	4.6%	6
Society/Community, Housing	3.8%	5
Services	0.8%	1
Transport	6.9%	9
Waste, Waste Management and resource efficiency	11.5%	15
Other (please specify)		33
	<i>answered question</i>	131
	<i>skipped question</i>	46

Conclusions

Education and behaviour change was by far the greatest area of interest (18.3%) followed by waste and resource efficiency (11.5), and buildings and the built environment (10.7). Only one respondent was interested in services. The majority of comments said that either they had multiple interests (sometimes all of them) or could not choose a main one.

14. Please use this box if you have any feedback or comments.

	Response Count
	21
answered question	21
skipped question	156

Conclusions

21 people provided further comments and feedback. Respondents took this opportunity to again raise their reservations about the vague language used around sustainable development, particularly by government. Many felt that the potential for great progress exists within the new economic strategy, but were sceptical about what action and outcomes it would lead to. Several also said we need more engagement around sustainable development, possibly through a national debate.

Representative Quotes

'Rather closed survey questions. However - despite my concerns about lack of genuine deliverables on the road to a Sustainable Scotland - the overall impression of the new government is one of opportunity for change and for a slightly better understanding of the issues with political leaders at least addressing some of the issues ... even if not yet allocating serious resources to doing things differently. Our taxes still appear to mainly support investment s likely to make the problems worse rather than to deliver real change.'

'The words "sustainable development" have been incorporated into Scottish government objectives for several years now. At first they were purely cosmetic and, indeed, it is doubtful if the meaning was understood by most civil servants. Sadly, it is difficult to see any real change in attitude other than that being forced on government by economic circumstances. The present SNP administration does sound as though it is taking the concept of a sustainable Scotland more seriously than it predecessor but progress is limited and slow. The opportunities for Scotland are substantial; the reality is still disappointing.'

'Low carbon economy through resource efficiency and innovation is key to success.'

'Scottish Government should put more pressure on, and resource local authorities to deliver the SD actions. For instance Fife Council planning allows a 15% carbon reduction by better insulation to meet SPP6. There is no requirement for "equipment". Councils should have more pressure to work with stakeholders for traffic reduction, energy reduction across communities.'

'Looks like, as usual, spending a lot of time re-badging and re-naming the importance of doing something, at the expense of actually doing anything. But I still find it hard not to be optimistic because it does sound like they're actually going to do something - but then they did with Choosing our Future and Local Agenda 21 and even Plant a Tree in '73...'