



**Strategic Assessment:**

# **FCO Sustainable Development Strategy 2005**

**Summary of key findings**

## Overall assessment

- I. The FCO has set a good standard with its first sustainable development strategy and implementation plan. The department took an inclusive approach to their development and can point to a wealth of related activity in delivering its objectives this year. The Strategy is clear and comprehensive, **links well to core business systems**, complements the UK Government's Sustainable Development Strategy and is underpinned by strong accountability structures.
- II. The FCO has set out a clear rationale for the need for sustainable development to underpin foreign policy which is being increasingly reinforced by country action plans in priority posts.
- III. The department acknowledges the need to **lead by example** in its own operations around the world. The SDC is impressed with the initiatives that FCO is undertaking in relation to developing a more systematic approach to environmental management across the FCO estate as well as incentivising, supporting and encouraging more sustainable practices.
- IV. The SDC is keen to see the department maintain and build upon this excellent start. To do so, the FCO will need to continue to pursue its sustainable development "mainstreaming" activity across all functions whilst also actively orientating future action plans and strategies around key **priorities** where the department's particular role adds value. These priorities need to be supported by corresponding targets with clearly specified outcomes which link back to the UK Sustainable Development Strategy as well as core business systems.
- V. To ensure that the Strategy continues to provide the strategic direction intended, it is vital that it is **owned and supported** across the department, at all levels, utilising the department's highly skilled teams and networks. To date, staff and stakeholders have largely been made aware of the Strategy as a new document. They now need to fully understand how they are supposed to act on it and to see it constantly reflected and incentivised by the department's policies and activities both at home and abroad.

# Headline Conclusions and Recommendations

## Getting the basics right

1. The positioning of the FCO's sustainable development team in a policy group along with global and economic issues sends the right signal that sustainable development is a core business issue for FCO. It will be important that the FCO's sustainable development outcomes reinforce this signal rather than undermining it.
2. Future sustainable development plans and strategies need to make more effective links to the **UK Sustainable Development Strategy (UKSDS)** – its four priorities for immediate action, guiding principles for policy making, and commitments.
3. The FCO needs to ensure that its own Strategy is reinforced through focussed action plans and work programmes with SMARTer targets which specify intended outcomes and which are reinforced throughout the organisation and in Country Action Plans.

## Adding value

4. The SDC supports the FCO's focus on **climate security**. This approach ensures that the climate change debate is rooted in the overarching context of sustainable development. i.e. if climate change is the problem then sustainable development is the solution.
5. The FCO now needs to build upon its **sustainable tourism** work in line with its Strategy objective to raise the profile and engagement of the UK Government in sustainable tourism. The SDC supports the department's efforts to highlight the opportunities of integrating sustainable tourism into the business of other government departments.

6. The SDC recommends that the FCO continues to explore the opportunities for joint working with the Ministry of Defence (MoD) in relation to **natural resource protection and conflict** and reflects these in future action plans.
7. Sustainable development presents a good, strong **value** that is internationally recognised as a positive force. The SDC recommends that the FCO should actively promote UK support for sustainable development overseas as a UK value and ensure that it can be observed in action in British Embassies and High Commissions.

## Delivery through overseas posts

8. The SDC very much supports the FCO requirement for priority countries to prepare **Country Action Plans (CAPs)** for sustainable development. This is a key mechanism for ensuring that sustainable development is promoted consistently as a cross-cutting government policy both at home and abroad.
9. The SDC recommends that the FCO reviews the current effectiveness of separate Country Action Plans for climate change and sustainable development and considers whether it needs to enforce a more integrated approach in order to achieve the objectives of its Sustainable Development Strategy.
10. The key themes and objectives that have been chosen for the **Global Opportunities Fund (GOF)** fit with the focus of the FCO's Sustainable Development Strategy and it is an important programme which can effectively demonstrate the FCO's sustainable development objectives in action.

## Leading by example

### Policy-making and delivery

11. The SDC would expect to see future sustainable development action plans include targets relating to policy making skills and sustainable development and some kind of measure of the FCO's "mainstreaming" success. The department should indicate how it is going about sustainable development "proofing" of its work. Much of the department's work centres around support, co-ordination and negotiation and staff need to be clear how sustainable development should influence their operating context in these roles.

### Operational Activity

12. In developing future action plans it will be important to set out the key operational priorities for sustainable development on the FCO Estate and ensure that these align with specific initiatives and funding and support for posts. These priorities need to recognise the challenging requirements of the new, cross-government targets for sustainable development on the Government Estate – in particular the mandate for carbon neutrality by 2012 and the mandating of BREEAM excellent for all major builds or refurbishment.
13. The FCO's overall approach to environmental management also needs to broaden beyond a traditional environmental protection/financial savings approach. The department should consider how its operations policy might also reinforce its foreign policy objectives. For example, by contributing to local economies and communities through its procurement and employment policies at overseas posts.

## Ensuring it happens

### Monitoring and reporting

14. The FCO's Strategy sets out a comprehensive system for regular monitoring, review and reporting across all levels of the organisation. The department will need to ensure that future SDAPs and strategies are informed by the FCO's own assessments of progress and those commissioned from independent parties as well as linked to PSA reporting mechanisms.

### Developing clear and engaging messages

15. The current communications approach of the department in relation to sustainable development and mainstreaming is very much orientated around raising awareness of the Strategy and Plan as a document rather than in relation to its content and potential impact on the ground. The FCO's future action plans will need to make it clear what kind of outcomes the department expects from the Communications activity outlined and the kind of messages that the department is seeking to convey and to whom. These messages need to be consistently presented and reflected across Country Action Plans, post websites and in staff and stakeholder communications.

### Empowering existing networks

16. The FCO has demonstrated that it is keen to build strong networks as a means of facilitating the exchange of information and expertise to support its sustainable development strategy. It is important that the role of these networks are fully recognised in the department's sustainable development communications plan as key engagement mechanisms.



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