Sustainable Development Action Plan

Sustainable Development Commission

Department for International Development

Sustainable Development Minister:
Gareth R Thomas MP

SDC Assessment

Gaining momentum

Checklist

Sustainable Development Action Plan

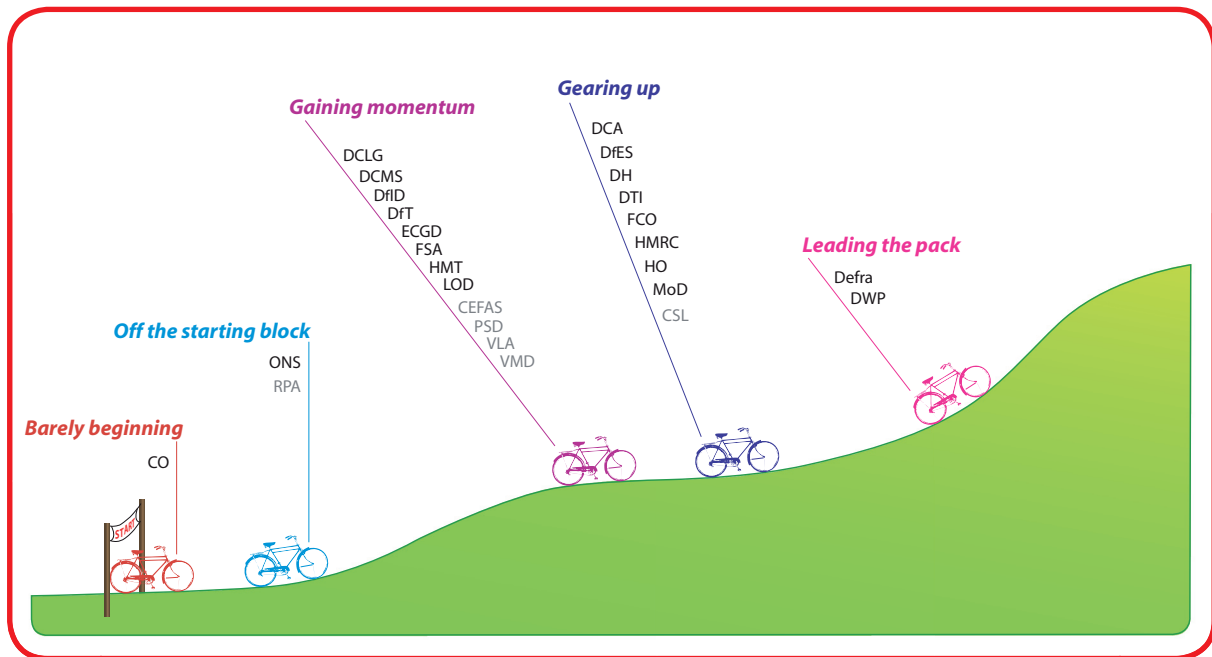| #	Question		Notes
1	Does the plan specify the period of time it will cover?	✔	
2	Does the plan specify which organisations it covers?	n/a	
3	Has the organisation articulated what SD means for them?	✔	
4	Does the plan describe the benefits of having an SD approach to the organisation?	✔	The SDAP recognises that taking a sustainable development approach at an early planning stage enhances DfID's development work. However, the SDAP does not expand on the benefits of taking a sustainable development approach to the organisation itself.
5	Does the plan acknowledge the Government's sustainable development goal?	✔	
6	Does the plan acknowledge the priorities of *Securing the Future*?	✘	Mentions, acknowledges & demonstrates links to the International priorities set out in the Strategy but does not acknowledge the four priorities for immediate action. The SDAP does however mention climate change.
	Does the plan mention one or more of the priorities of *Securing the Future*?	✔	
7	Does the plan identify links to the priorities of *Securing the Future*?	✘	Demonstrates links to International priorities but not the four priorities for immediate action which apply to all departments.
8	Does the plan acknowledge the principles of *Securing the Future*?	✘	The plan does not acknowledge or mention the five guiding principles.
	Does the plan mention one or more of the principles of *Securing the Future*?	✘	
9	Does the plan identify links to the principles of *Securing the Future*?	✘	The plan does not make any reference to the principles.
10	Have the organisation's relevant executive agencies produced their own plan?	n/a	
11	Does the action plan contain a work programme?	✔	
12	Does the plan include actions relating to commitments from the SD strategy?	✔	
13	Does the action plan cover government policy?	✔	
14	Does the action plan cover operations?	✔	
15	Was the plan publicly available by 13th January 2006?	✔	

16	Does the plan outline any arrangements for strengthening SD capacity in the organisation?	✔	The SDAP undertakes to keep "under review skills and capacity and encourage sustainable development training...". However, the SDAP does not include any specific targets aimed at strengthening SD capacity or provide the reader with a clear indication of what actions the department will take in 2006 to do so.
17	Does the plan describe the infrastructure in place to deliver the plan?	✘	The plan does not set out the infrastructure in place relating to the delivery of the SDAP.
18	Does the plan make it clear who signed it off?	✘	DfID explained in bilateral discussions that the Sustainable Development Minister signed off the plan. However, this is not made clear in the SDAP itself.
19	Does the plan designate who is accountable for the delivery of the overall plan?	✘	DfID explained that different parts of the department will be responsible for different commitments. However, the SDAP does not indicate who has responsibility for the overall delivery of the plan.
20	Does the plan explain how the organisation will monitor progress against the plan?	✔	The plan specifies how the department will monitor the commitments, but does not outline how DfID will monitor overall progress to ensure delivery.
21	Does the plan describe how the organisation will report against the plan?	✔	Each commitment will be reported on separately, but plan does not specify where overall progress will be reported. The bilateral meeting revealed overall progress will be reported in the annual report.
22	Does the plan describe how it links in to other reporting mechanisms within the organisation? E.g. the annual report	✔	Refers to Statistics and International Development report. DfID explained that updates on progress will be provided in the departmental report.
23	Does the plan commit to reporting against the plan on a defined regular basis?	✔	The plan commits to reporting annually.

How is DfID doing?

Gearing up

DCA
DfES
DH
DTI
FCO
HMRC
HO
MoD
CSL

Gaining momentum

DCLG
DCMS
DfID
DfT
ECGD
FSA
HMT
LOD
CEFAS
PSD
VLA
VMD

Leading the pack

Defra
DWP

Off the starting block

ONS
RPA

Barely beginning

CO

Background

The Department for International Development (DfID) manages Britain's aid to poor countries and works to eradicate extreme poverty.

Context

DfID prepared the plan by coordinating existing activities and commitments and presenting them in a sustainable development context. It was explained in bilateral discussions that developing the plan provided the department with the opportunity to demonstrate its contribution to sustainable development by collating a cross-section of the department's international sustainable development commitments into one document.

The Department felt that *Securing the Future* did not require them to particularly re-orientate their policy direction. DfID was one of only five departments to submit its Sustainable Development Action Plan (SDAP) in time to meet the December 2005 deadline as per the Prime Minister's commitment in *Securing the Future.*

Coverage

The SDAP covers the core department. DfID has no executive agencies.

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Departmental view of Sustainable Development

DfID's plan outlines how it sees sustainable development as a vital component in helping the department to meet the challenge of fighting global poverty and explains that "development is more sustainable if economic, social and environmental aspects, including cumulative and long-term impacts, are considered together and as early as possible in the planning process."

The department has a Public Service Agreement (PSA) which relates to poverty reduction by ensuring environmental sustainability[1]. DfID failed to embed this in its SDAP. However, it emerged in the bilateral that this appeared to be an omission. The SDC would expect links to all relevant PSAs to be made clear in the SDAP.

The department explains in the plan that it has a major role to play in taking forward sustainable development across the UK Government, and is working with other government departments to ensure that their policies support DfID's international sustainable development objectives.

Benefits of a Sustainable Development approach

The plan explains that taking an integrated approach to development is more sustainable. It also acknowledges the benefits of taking an integrated approach to its programme planning (as referred to above). However, the SDAP does not give a sense of how outcomes are improved in this way. The SDC would not expect to see a detailed analysis in the SDAP but it is important that SDAPs make clear how a sustainable development approach supports core business and where the department recognises that it reduces risk. This may only require cross-referencing appropriate corporate documents or programmes.

Link to *Securing the Future*

Guiding Principles

The action plan does not acknowledge the five guiding principles of *Securing the Future*. The SDC would expect to see future plans indicating how the department is accounting for and using the five guiding principles which should now underpin all policy making in the UK, whether applied at home or abroad.

Shared priorities for UK action

The action plan does not acknowledge the four shared priorities for immediate UK action. Instead, DfID explained that it based its plan on the international priorities in *Securing the Future* as the department saw this as its key link with *Securing the Future*. The SDC does not view the four priority areas as only applying to UK-focused departments and would therefore expect DfID's future plans to demonstrate the department's contributions to these key areas from their international perspective.

Policy priorities

The plan contains many international commitments and actions but does not make clear why the department has decided to focus its efforts on these commitments and why other international commitments have been left out. DfID explained in the bilateral that it had thought about what to include carefully and had set clear boundaries. The plan is intended to highlight a cross-section of the department's international sustainable development commit-

ments as set out in *Securing the Future*. These include: promoting international efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), increase the effectiveness of aid, tackle illegal, unlicensed and unregulated fishing, and support environment projects overseas. The department also commits to:

- Supporting developing countries to integrate sustainable development principles into policies, planning and programmes as well as encouraging other donors to do the same. The SDC welcomes this commitment. However, this approach is inconsistent with DfID's own SDAP which does not refer to the five guiding principles. The SDC would expect future plans to indicate how the department is using the five guiding principles in the policy making process

- Helping developing countries to give water and sanitation sufficient importance in national development plans – this can be done through seconding staff to African Governments and the African Development Bank, as well as supporting the lead donor to coordinate donor activities in the water sector

- Help developing countries (e.g. Bangladesh, India and Kenya) adapt to climate change by piloting a programme of climate-proof investments in development. Whilst the

recently published DfID White Paper[2] shows a great deal of promise in integrating sustainable development into poverty reduction strategies, the attention it pays to economic growth within environmental limits is poor. It notably omits any reference to the need for developing countries to have low carbon economic growth, concentrating instead on how these countries can adapt to the consequences of climate change. In addition DfID has yet to clearly state how it intends to implement this White Paper given the finite resources within the department.

Whilst the Commission appreciates DfID's active sifting of programmes to include in its SDAP, this thinking is not explicit in the plan. The plan should set out the department's key priorities for action against precise timescales, and clearly explain how the department has chosen its priority areas and why – it does not need to try and include or showcase all aspects of the department's work. If a department's work is already well aligned with sustainable development priorities and principles, then the department can indicate the key areas where most progress towards contributing to *Securing the Future* can be made.

In future plans, the Commission would like to see DfID explain how it has prioritised its SDAP commitments in this way.

Leading by example

DfID achieved a three star rating in the SDC's 2005 review of government performance against the Framework for Sustainable Development on the Government Estate (SDiG) and has demonstrated solid progress against the Framework.

The department's SDAP includes actions on energy, carbon emissions and travel, but does not explain why the department has decided to concentrate its efforts on these areas. DfID explained in the bilateral that they are working to a programme of continual improvement as part of their Environmental Management

System (EMS). The department is working towards the Framework but did not wish to duplicate the Framework targets in the SDAP.

The SDC would not expect plans to list all Framework targets. However, plans should clearly set out operational priority areas and acknowledge any SDiG weaknesses that the department is aware of with associated actions to improve these.

The department explained that it met with FCO recently to discuss the extension of Framework targets to its overseas estates. DfID are currently investigating the feasibility

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of putting in place certified EMSs, which will depend on local conditions and the number of measures already in place. The department is also in the process of developing a sustainable procurement strategy.

Securing the Future commitments

Departmental commitments

The department has made a good attempt at demonstrating how it is contributing to the international commitments in *Securing the Future*. It is the lead department across government for many of these. The department however has not explained how it has prioritised the key commitments in its plan to indicate the clear focus for the life of the plan.

Cross-government commitments

The plan does not address the cross government commitments identified in *Securing the Future* such as ensuring that an understanding of how to apply sustainable development principles is a key part of policy skills. Nor does it address how the department will build leadership capacity in sustainable development, for example, by providing civil servants with sustainable development training and support. The Commission would expect to see future DfID plans acknowledge the department's contribution to these wider *Securing the Future* commitments.

Target setting

The plan attempts to allocate SMART targets to all actions in Table 1. Commitments are clearly grouped with associated actions in the table. However, it is not always clear as to the intended outcome of the listed actions and their particular contribution to the commitment. For example, it is not made clear what specific outcome the action to 'pilot principles for good international engagement in fragile states' is intended to achieve or how it will contribute to the commitment to 'increase effectiveness of aid'.

Policy making

Sustainable Development "proofing"

The plan explains that DfID's procedures and guidance encourage assessment of policy and programmes early in programme development to ensure that economic, social and environmental opportunities and risks are identified and addressed. The range of tools described include: risk management, strategic environmental assessments, environmental screening and impact assessment as well as cost-benefit analysis.

The SDC explored in the bilateral whether such assessments were indeed 'encouraged' rather than mandatory. It was explained that there are mandatory guidelines for the whole project cycle regarding evaluation, the quality of which can depend on the individual. The SDC would expect the department therefore to take a much more systematic approach to capacity development and support on sustainable development within the department in order to underpin such processes.

The action plan does not address how this commitment will be taken forward. DfID explained in the bilateral that the department felt that the five principles were already very much built in to the way DfID works.

Country programmes and project appraisals all consider the sustainable development impacts. However, as DfID's SDAP provides no evidence that the five guiding principles are integrated into the department's approach, the SDC remains to be convinced that the principles are applied consistently across the department and that all of DfID's policies promote sustainable development.

Sustainable Development Skills

The department acknowledges that ensuring sufficient capacity (number of staff with relevant skills) remains a challenge. The SDAP commits to "keep under review our skills and capacity and encourage sustainable development training in staff who are not experts in sustainable development." Surprisingly however, the plan does not include any future actions related to developing skills and capacity building. SDC sees this as a priority area for action.

The plan does illustrate the range of training courses already available to staff, such as modules on environmental screening procedures and stakeholder assessment. DfID also has partnership agreements with various organisations that provide training such as the National School for Government (NSG) and the University of East Anglia. It was explained in the bilateral that other means of capacity building in the department have been employed to promote sustainable development thinking. For example, advisory retreats, lunchtime seminars and themed sessions. However SDC believes a methodical approach to capacity building for sustainable development will be necessary to thoroughly embed sustainable development into departmental policy development and implementation in the field.

Achieving Sustainable Development outcomes

Infrastructure

The plan does set out the internal infrastructure in place to ensure the delivery of the plan. It was explained in the bilateral that different parts of the department will be responsible for the delivery of specific commitments as per their usual work programme mechanisms. DfID explained that ultimately the Management Board will ensure the cross-section of commitments included in the plan will be delivered.

Engagement

DfID recognises that the participation of stakeholders around the world is critical to making sure plans and activities reflect the priorities of the poor and that the people of a country take ownership of the development purpose. The SDAP also provides examples of the stakeholders which DfID engages with, but does not set any actions relating to stakeholder engagement.

It was explained in the bilateral that DfID announced the launch of its plan to staff via the intranet. The department used this opportunity to draw staff attention to the international commitments of *Securing the Future*. It was explained that the internal communications group are was starting to get involved in communicating sustainable development messages, for example, on energy efficiency.

Monitoring and reporting

The plan sets out actions to the end of 2006 (some with specified timescales) and milestones to 2015. The SDC assumes that the milestones provide longer term context to the plan. However, the plan does not specify what timescale it is intended to cover.

The plan identifies in Table 1 where the department will report on progress against

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specific commitments and explains that DfID will "report annually on progress against these commitments and make the report available on our website."

DfID explained in the bilateral that the department will report on progress against the plan through their its Departmental Report as well as through the SDiG annual report for their operational targets. As there is likely to be limited room in the departmental report for a comprehensive SDAP progress report, we would expect the department to make such a report available, perhaps on the web cross-referencing to the Annual Report and SDiG report and vice-versa. (See also SDC's main report for recommendations on reporting).

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1. DfID's PSA AIM: Eliminate poverty in poorer countries in particular through achievement by 2015 of the Millennium Development Goals:
    i. Eradication of extreme poverty and hunger
    ii. Achievement of universal primary education
    iii. Promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women
    iv. Reduced child mortality
    v. Improved maternal health
    vi. Combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
    vii. Ensuring environmental sustainability
    viii. A global partnership for development.
2. *Eliminating world poverty: making governance work for the poor*, July 2006

Strengths to build upon

✔ **Demonstrate DfID's contribution to the four priority areas in *Securing the Future* not just the international priorities.**

✔ **Clearly articulate the links between sustainable development and DfID's core business (linking to all relevant PSAs) in future iterations of the plan and work to ensure staff are aware of how sustainable development impacts on their work.**

✔ **Review quality of sustainability assessments to ensure compatibility with *Securing the Future*.**

✔ **Be clear which operations-based areas are priorities for improvement.**

Challenges for 2007

Actively engage with internal and external stakeholders to decide priorities of future plans and explain how the department has prioritised its SDAP commitments.

Include actions aimed at strengthening sustainable development capacity and skills by devising a forward plan for sustainable development capacity building in the department.

Indicate how the department is accounting for and using the five guiding principles which should now underpin all policy making in the UK.

Ensure all targets are outcome focused.

Include actions relating to constructive stakeholder engagement in relation to ensuring "people of a country take ownership of the development purpose" as explained in the SDAP.

Learning points

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