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Applications of Sustainability Evaluation at the National and International Strategic Policy Level

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Introduction

This paper describes two applications of evaluation techniques for the promotion of sustainable development in national and international policy-making. The first is based on a programme of work being undertaken for the European Commission, to carry out Sustainability Impact Assessments of the current round of WTO Trade Negotiations (Kirkpatrick et al 2002). The second application described is the development of a framework and criteria for evaluating the effectiveness of national sustainable development strategies, undertaken for the UK Department of International Development and the OECD Development Assistance Committee (Kirkpatrick, George and Curran 2001).

1. Sustainability impact assessment of WTO trade negotiations

Any evaluation of the implementation of sustainable development requires interdisciplinary expertise covering all three of the concept's social, economic and environmental pillars. This is particularly so for the complex task of evaluating the impact on sustainability of world trade negotiations. The work described here has been carried out by a consortium led by a multi-disciplinary team in the University of Manchester's Institute for Development Policy and Management, which includes the CarlBro Group, the Overseas Development Institute, the British Institute of International and Comparative Law, the Centre for Agriculture, Food and Resource Economics, the Environmental Impact Assessment Centre and BMT Cordah. Contributions to the project have also been made by individual specialists in many other organisations.

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Background

Sustainable development has been adopted as a fundamental pillar of the European Union's development policy:

All [EU] policies must have sustainable development as their core concern...careful assessment of the full effects of a policy proposal must include estimates of its economic, environmental and social impacts inside and outside the EU...

European Commission, A Sustainable Europe for a Better World : A European Union Strategy for Sustainable Development com (2001) 264

... mechanisms to ensure that all major policy proposals include a sustainability impact assessment covering their potential economic, social and environmental consequences

Göteborg European Council meeting
June 2001

[a] system of SIA should be in place within the Commission by end 2002

SECGEN paper to be presented to the Seville European Council
June 2002

In accordance with these general policy statements, sustainable development has been embraced as main objective of the EU's trade policy. The work described has been carried out for the Commission's DG Trade, which has committed approximately ten percent of its budget to sustainability impact assessment.

Sustainability impact assessment

In this context, sustainability impact assessment is a systematic process for the ex-ante assessment of the potential economic, social and environmental impacts of policy proposals, carried out in parallel with policy development and approval. The prime aim is to identify potential impacts in all three spheres, such that positive effects may be enhanced, and action taken to counter negative ones, either through selection of appropriate policy alternatives, or through parallel mitigation and enhancement measures.

In the first instance, this type of evaluation does not require impacts in one sphere to be balanced against impacts in another, nor any detailed interpretation of the sustainable development context. A degree of balancing is necessary in the evaluation of alternative policies and mitigation measures, but the prime aim of the assessment is to identify potential impacts.

The assessment is based on consultation of relevant stakeholders, and requires involving the public in the development of policy, with the aim of enhancing transparency and better governance.

Both the USA and Canada have also undertaken strategic impact assessments of trade policy, in relation to the North American Free Trade Agreement. These assessments

have focused on environmental impacts, under the countries' laws and policies for environmental impact assessment. However, even these assessments have required an evaluation of economic and social impacts as well as environmental ones. The high degree of inter-dependence between effects in the three spheres is such that it is generally not possible to assess impacts in one without evaluating all three. This an integral part of the approach adopted by the European Union.

European Commission's SIA of WTO trade negotiations

The work described began in 1999, as part of the EC's preparations for the World Trade Organisation's Ministerial Conference in Seattle.

Phase I of the project consisted of the development of a methodology for undertaking a preliminary SIA, which was carried out in Phase II. Both phases were completed in advance of the Seattle meeting in November 1999. The difficulties encountered at the Seattle conference delayed further work, but the EC subsequently commissioned the further development the SIA methodology, as appropriate for more detailed studies to be undertaken in Phase III.

Following the WTO's fourth ministerial conference in Doha in November 2001, Phase III of the programme has now started. Its aim is "to provide an analysis of the sustainability impacts of agreed policy options or scenarios, and to present this analysis in such a way as to give a concrete input for negotiators in their search for a balanced set of policies, including any necessary flanking measures".

The Phase III SIA programme is intended to consist of:

- a preliminary global SIA
- detailed sector studies
- a global SIA of provisional agreements

Because of pressure of the negotiation timescale, some of the sector studies have begun in parallel with initiation of the preliminary global SIA. Otherwise, this global overview study will contribute to defining the depth of investigation needed in the sectoral studies. The second global study at the end of the programme is intended to draw together the results of the sectoral studies, investigate cross-sectoral effects, and provide an overview of the impacts of the full set of proposals before final agreements are made.

Four sector studies have been initiated to date:

- Agricultural products
- Market access
 - pharmaceuticals
 - non-ferrous metals (especially aluminium)
 - textiles
- Environmental services
 - water
 - waste treatment
- Competition policy

The first of these studies (agricultural products) was carried out by the Stockholm Environment Institute in parallel with finalisation of the Phase III methodology, and is now complete. The other three sector studies and the preliminary global SIA are being undertaken by the Manchester led consortium.

Main stages in the assessment process

Screening and Scoping

The first stages of the SIA process are intended to target the available resources onto those aspects the proposed trade measures whose impacts are likely to be most significant.

Screening involves an initial review of each measure, to determine which measures, and which components of each measure, are most likely to give rise to significant impacts.

Scoping is undertaken to determine the terms of reference for the assessment of each measure which is to be appraised, based on the likelihood of significant impacts. It examines the components of each measure to identify impacts that are likely to be significant, and excludes those which are unlikely to be of serious concern. Scoping involves simplified forms of causal chain analysis to identify the cause-effect routes by which significant impacts may occur. It may also identify assessment methods, consultation procedures etc. which could be used at later stages in the assessment process

Detailed Assessment

Causal Chain Analysis (CCA) is used to trace the links between trade measure/policy change and final sustainability impacts.

Judgements need to be made on the 'best' procedure for detailed assessment, based on:-

- the needs of the effects being studied
- appropriate assessment methods (qualitative, quantitative)
- data availability and quality
- time and budget constraints.

Although time and budget constraints are fairly severe, tied to the timescale of negotiations, the principal constraints on the evaluation are the availability of reliable data, along with a limited understanding of cause and effect relationships between an initial change in the trading regime and its ultimate consequences, and uncertainty in predicting the policy responses that may be adopted in the different countries likely to be affected. Even with an infinite budget and no constraints on time, the level of uncertainty in impact predictions would remain high. It is therefore essential that the assessment acknowledge and identify the degree of uncertainty inherent in its results. This can then be taken into account in identifying those potential impacts that require mitigation, or a programme for impact monitoring and contingency planning.

The findings of the evaluation are summarised in assessment matrices, indicating the anticipated significance of the impacts, in terms of core indicators (themes). It is

important that these matrices are supported by textual explanation and an evidence-based justification for the principal findings.

Mitigation and Enhancement Analysis

One of the main aims of the SIA is to identify and assess types of mitigation and enhancing (M&E) measures that might be used and ameliorate or enhance the significant impacts identified by the detailed assessment.

M and E measures include:-

- trade-related measures which might be built into a WTO agreement itself
- side or parallel agreements between WTO member countries or in regional agreements
- collaborative agreements between international organisations and relating to relationship between WTO agreements and other types of international agreements
- international and regional initiatives to promote technical cooperation and capacity building in developing countries
- measures by national governments

The SIA is expected to be of particular value to the EC in identifying measures in the fourth group, which it can incorporate into its development aid programme and those of member states, to assist developing countries' capacity to implement measures in the last group. Measures in this last group are the responsibility of individual governments, to ensure that the net benefit which they expect to gain from a trade agreement is distributed in such a way as to avoid adverse impacts on particular sections of society or the environment.

Causal chain analysis can be used to identify where M and E measures are likely to be cost-effective, feasible and effective in mitigating/enhancing impacts.

Assessment of 'best' M and E measures in each of the core economic, social and environmental themes should be introduced into the detailed assessment findings, as a modified scenario for the relevant trade measure.

Monitoring and Post Evaluation

Where uncertainty in impact prediction remains relatively high, monitoring and evaluation can be an important mitigation and enhancing measure. It may include:

- monitoring implementation of the provisions of WTO agreements
- monitoring and ex-post evaluation of the sustainability impacts of the New Round agreements, as implemented
- contingency plans to mitigate impacts identified by monitoring.
- ex-post evaluation of the SIA studies

Assessment components and methods

Scenario Analysis is used to identify those sets of trade policy measures which should be assessed, in order to indicate the likely effects of alternative agreements.

Country Grouping is necessary to identify the different impacts likely to occur in different types of country. For an SIA conducted for the European Union, the EU itself is one group. Developing countries and least developed countries receive particular attention in negotiations, and form two other important groupings. For the purpose of assessment it is also necessary to distinguish between net importers and net exporters for a particular product or service, and other country characteristics may also need to be taken into account.

Individual Country Analysis enables a detailed evaluation of causal chains in specific circumstances, and provides case studies of actual impacts. Countries chosen for this analysis give an indication of the impacts which may be expected in the country groups to which they belong.

Sustainability Indicators need to be selected with two purposes in mind. First, they serve to present the SIA findings in a readily assimilable form. For this purpose, nine core indicators (or themes) have been identified, three for each of the economic, social and environmental spheres. A specific impact identified in the assessment (e.g. a gender effect) is then reported under the appropriate theme (e.g. equity).

Core indicators or themes

Economic	Social	Environmental
Real income	Poverty	Biodiversity
Fixed capital formation	Health & Education	Environmental quality
Employment	Equity	National resource stocks

Within each of the detailed SIA studies, a number of second tier indicators is identified, to give greater precision in the reporting of potential impacts. These may also be used for a second purpose, the subsequent monitoring of impacts. For the purpose of monitoring, indicators may be chosen according those impacts identified in the assessment as being of particular importance.

Significance Criteria

The significance of a predicted impact is judged according to the influence it is likely to have on the negotiation decision, ranked on a scale of:

- 0 non-significant,
- +/-1 marginally significant to the decision, but if the impact is negative, a potential candidate for mitigation
- +/-2 likely to be significant to the decision, and if negative, merits serious consideration for mitigation.

In judging significance, the following factors are taken into account:

- extent of existing economic, social and environmental stress, in affected areas
- direction of changes to base-line conditions

- nature, order of magnitude, geographic extent and reversibility / duration of changes
- regulatory and institutional capacity to implement M and E measures

Causal Chain Analysis is a central component of the assessment, providing an understanding of the cause-effect links between a proposed change in an existing trade agreement and its eventual economic, environmental and social impacts.

Modelling. The results of econometric modelling studies reported in the literature are an important source of information, and may be augmented by specific studies carried out within the assessment. Such models are however highly simplified representations of reality, which, along with limitations in data availability and reliability, requires that their results be used with caution.

Statistical Estimation tests for statistically significant relationships between parameters related to a proposed trade measure, generally from a wide range of countries. This can inform the assessment by giving a broad indication of possible causal links.

Case Studies of observed impacts provide a valuable source of information. It is however important to recognise that the observed effects may have multiple causes, which may entail a high degree of uncertainty in identifying those that can be ascribed to the trade measure being analysed.

Expert Opinion can make effective use of methods, knowledge and data already available, to help fill gaps in knowledge and data within the components of a comprehensive SIA methodology.

Data Sources suffer from limitations in availability, quality and compatibility. Available data will typically be an approximation of the ideal data requirements for SIA.

Consultation Arrangements. The Doha Ministerial Declaration provided a mandate for consultation, transparency and the effective participation of civil society in the negotiation process. This is implemented in the SIA methodology by incorporating consultation as an integral element of the process, through the use of stakeholders as experts through network established for the purpose, the publication of reports on the programme's website (<http://idpm.man.ac.uk/sia-trade>), the encouragement and analysis of comments received, and public meetings held at key stages of the process (after publication of scoping and mid-term reports).

2. Evaluating the effectiveness of national sustainable development strategies

Although sustainable development is widely regarded as requiring bottom-up processes, it is strongly conditioned by strategic policy-making at the national level. All aspects of development, from the local to the global, are both enabled and constrained by national policy decisions. Evaluation at the national level can therefore, in principle, make an important contribution to making sustainable development a practical reality.

The work described in this part of the paper was commissioned by the UK Department for International Development, in its role as lead institution of the OECD Development Assistance Committee's working group on national sustainable development strategies.

The work is a contribution to the preparations for the 2002 UN World Summit on Sustainable Development, to be held in Johannesburg.

International commitments to national sustainable development strategies

At the Rio earth summit of 1992 (the UN Conference on Environment and Development), governments committed to “adopt national strategies for sustainable development [which should] build upon and harmonise the various sectoral, economic, social and environmental policies and plans that are operating in the country” (Agenda 21).

At the UN General Assembly Special Session of 1997 (Rio plus 5), this commitment was confirmed, and a target date of 2002 was agreed (Rio plus 10) for introducing national sustainable development strategies.

In 1996 the OECD established a number of International Development Targets, one of which required that “there should be a current national strategy for sustainable development in the process of implementation in every country by 2005, so as to ensure that current trends in the losses of environmental resources are effectively reversed at both global and national levels by 2015”.

The second part of this OECD target, for reversal of environmental losses, appears to offer promise of a practical goal against which national strategies might be evaluated. It has not however been adopted by the UN, and cannot be implemented without much more detailed international agreements. The target depends for example on a wide range of enforceable agreements under both the Climate Convention and the Biodiversity Convention, neither of which has reached this level of ambition. The OECD target cannot therefore be used as a basis of evaluation, and the prime definition of a national sustainable development strategy is the original one set out in Agenda 21.

Objectives of the evaluation

The first step in developing the methodology was to clarify the objectives of the evaluation:

1. to provide a common framework by which countries can report progress in developing strategies for sustainable development
2. to help countries identify and address shortcomings in their own processes for achieving their own objectives for sustainable development

In the first instance, it was intended that evaluations be carried out by countries' own governments, with a view to identifying shortcomings in their sustainable development strategies and improving them. No framework currently exists for carrying out independent evaluations or peer reviews, but should such a framework be established, a similar approach may be used.

In this context, the assessment approach is designed to be supportive of national efforts, not critical of them.

Characteristics of an effective national strategy for sustainable development

The Rio commitment requires national strategies for sustainable development to “build upon and harmonise the various sectoral, economic, social and environmental policies and plans that are operating in the country”. The OECD has reinforced this:

Putting a sustainable development strategy into operation would, in practice, most likely consist of improving existing strategic planning processes and their co-ordination rather than establishing a new process. The latter is not recommended.

OECD/DAC 2001

This was taken as a key requirement against which strategies would be evaluated.

Beyond this, both OECD and the UN have developed a number of principles which nssds should follow if they are to be effective:

OECD and UN principles of strategic planning for sustainable development

OECD principles of strategic planning for sustainable development	UN principles for effective national sustainable development strategy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consensus on long-term vision 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shared strategic and pragmatic vision. • Link the short to the medium and long term. • Ensure continuity of the strategy development process.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comprehensive and integrated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrated and balanced across sectors and territories.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targeted with clear budgetary priorities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set realistic but flexible targets. • Coherence between budget and strategy priorities.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Based on comprehensive and reliable analysis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anchor the strategy process in sound technical analysis.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incorporate monitoring, learning and improvement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build mechanisms for monitoring follow up, evaluation and feedback.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Country-led and nationally-owned 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nationally owned and country driven process.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High-level government commitment and influential lead institutions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong political commitment at the national and local levels. • Spearheaded by a strong institution.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building on existing processes and strategies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Built on existing processes and strategies.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective participation • People-centred 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participatory and the "widest possible participation" ensured.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Link national and local levels 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Link national and local priorities and actions.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and build on existing capacity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Built on existing knowledge, expertise and

	capacity.
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There is a high degree of correlation between the OECD and UN principles, which between them provide a basis for evaluation. However, all the principles are strongly process-oriented. If the evaluation were based on these principles alone, it would be difficult to demonstrate that the strategy would be effective in delivering sustainable development objectives.

This potential difficulty was addressed at a conceptual level, by identifying two distinct requirements of an effective sustainable development strategy. The development must be sustainable, and the strategy must be effective.

Principles of sustainable development as a process

Development is a process. Sustainable development is distinguished from other forms of development by the nature of the development process.

An effective strategy for development must deliver clearly defined objectives for development, in the social, economic and environmental spheres.

On this basis, the first of these requirements could be tested against the internationally agreed OECD/UN principles, while the second could be tested against nationally defined objectives for development. The evaluation need not itself define development objectives. It should instead check that such objectives have been defined, and that the strategy is likely to be effective in delivering them.

The effectiveness of planning - comparison with ISO 9000

In order to evaluate whether the strategic planning process is likely to be effective in achieving its goals, reference was made to the international standard for quality systems, ISO 9000. This is a generic management standard, applicable to any set of management processes, which must be such as to achieve identified objectives

The combination of the OECD/UN principles for a sustainable development strategy, and the ISO criteria for an effective planning process, provided the conceptual framework within which a set of evaluation criteria could be developed.

Development of criteria for an effective nssd

In order to undertake an evaluation of a nssd, a set of criteria were developed to ascertain whether the principles outlined above are complied with effectively. To do this, direct use was made of the Rio Declaration and Agenda 21, for further elaboration of the principles of sustainable development. Additionally, a literature review was carried out of previous evaluations or reviews of national sustainable development strategies. This

provided many useful lessons from evaluation experience, both in the criteria used, and the methodology of the evaluation itself.

In developing the criteria, reference was again made to ISO 9000, as a well established example of how a relatively complex set of evaluation criteria can be set out. As in ISO 9000, a distinction was drawn between the criteria themselves, and guidance on their interpretation.

The various inputs were collated into five key themes:

Principles of sustainable development

- A. Integration of economic, social and environmental objectives
- B. Participation and consensus

Principles of strategic planning

- C. Country ownership and commitment
- D. Comprehensive and coherent policy process
- E. Targeting, resourcing and monitoring

A total of twenty criteria were developed, four for each theme. Each of these includes a number of requirements, as in the examples below.

Example criteria: Principle A - integration of economic, social and environmental objectives

Criterion A1 - integration

Strategic planning in the country is based on a comprehensive and integrated analysis of economic, social and environmental issues, which clarifies links between the three spheres, resolves conflicts between them where practicable, and negotiates appropriate trade-offs where conflicts remain.

Criterion A2 - social and poverty issues

Strategic planning in the country integrates poverty eradication, gender issues and the short- and long-term needs of disadvantaged and marginalised groups into economic policy.

Criterion A3 - environmental and resource issues

Strategic planning in the country integrates the maintenance of sustainable levels of resource use and the control of pollution to maintain a healthy environment into economic policy.

Criterion A4 - international commitments

Measures are in place to ensure compliance with international agreements which the country has entered into, on environmental and social issues.

Within the particular circumstances of any individual country, evaluators need to use a high degree of judgement in deciding what information they need to gather, and in deciding whether a criterion is met. To assist with this, a number of guidance questions

were developed for each criterion, again drawing on the experience of previous evaluations.

Example of guidance on application: criterion A1

A1.1. Do planning systems define priorities in environmental, economic and social terms, and are these systems compatible with those for analysis and participation?

A1.2. Are there mechanisms for dealing with trade-offs between environmental, economic and social objectives, including poverty eradication and the needs of future generations?

A1.3. Do fiscal and regulatory incentive frameworks internalise external environmental and social costs in order to correct market or policy failure, without choking off desirable private investment? Are these frameworks adequately enforced?

do effective laws and regulations exist for building permits, land-use permissions, environmental standards, pollution permits and environmental impact assessment?

are appropriate non-compliance penalties enforced?

are there local environmental by-laws established by local consultative processes?

A1.4. Has action been taken to identify and adopt appropriate economic instruments and other policy tools to integrate economic, social and environmental objectives, including action to identify and undertake appropriate reforms to economic policies, resource allocation and property rights policies, and sectoral policies and practices for environmental protection, natural resource management and development?

Reporting evaluation results for each criterion

A simple scheme for reporting was devised, in order to ensure consistency between different evaluations. The evaluation of each criterion is reported as follows:

- A all of the requirements are fully met
- B all of the requirements are satisfactorily met, although some further improvements are desirable
- C some requirements have been satisfactorily or fully met, but others have not yet been satisfactorily met
- D few of the requirements have, as yet, been satisfactorily met

Further guidance was also developed on how evaluators should form judgements on whether a criterion is met satisfactorily. In particular, the assessment should take into account the following factors:

- is the action being taken relevant?
- is it appropriate?
- is it effective?

Organisation of the Evaluation

The effectiveness of the evaluation depends critically on how it is carried out. Guidance was therefore prepared on undertaking an evaluation, based on the literature review, and on the project team's own experiences of conducting similar assessments. This is summarised below.

Evaluation methodology

steering committee

high ranking representatives of ministries most involved in strategic planning processes

assessment team

senior experts: economic, environmental, social

desk study of key documents

national strategies, budget policies, laws, state of the environment reports etc.

interviews and discussion fora

cover full range of stakeholders

examination of further documents

development plans, by-laws, planning procedures, monitoring data etc.

supporting evidence

departmental records, numbers and qualifications of responsible staff etc.

attendance at planning meetings

observe the process in action

draft assessment report

sent to all participants and published for comment,

public consultations

incorporate results and responses into final report

Much of this guidance is based on established practice for evaluating any type of planning process. The first item in the above table, the establishment of a high level steering committee to oversee the evaluation and approve the reports that are published, is considered critical for this type of assessment. The prime aim of the evaluation is to identify shortcomings within the country's strategic planning processes, such that they can be rectified. There is no international "policing" body which can enforce such action, and so the success of the process depends entirely on the commitment and determination of high level decision-makers to improve national planning processes. Without such commitment, the evaluation cannot succeed, and the goal of achieving sustainable development cannot be met.

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Full reports on both applications are available on the websites of the trade impact assessment programme and IDPM's Impact Assessment for Sustainable Development Unit.

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