

## SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

### A POLICY PAPER

#### 1. Background

Regional governments are crucial to the strategic implementation of sustainable development thanks to their relative scale and responsibilities. Regions are able to engage people and design specific policies but are also strategic enough to make connections across wider areas.

The founding Gauteng declaration therefore commits all members of the Network to prepare sustainable development strategies for their regions. This note sets out the expectations for such strategies as developed in discussion within the Network.

#### 2. Purpose

A sustainable development strategy should:

##### *1) provide a common framework for action*

The first role of a strategy is to set a **guiding vision** for sustainable development within the region.

*This is important as it provides a framework for the different institutions and spheres of government who need to co-operate to deliver sustainable development as well as helping to enthuse and engage civil society as a whole.*

##### *2) mainstream sustainable development in decisions*

The second role of a strategy is to provide mechanisms to ensure the vision and principles for a sustainable region are **embedded in all decision-making** processes and that effective connections are made between policy areas.

*Sustainable development is about all the processes of government and of society working consistently to make positive links between economic, social and environmental goals, so a strategy must be able to inform and guide all parts of government and society.*

##### *3) provide consistency of definition and appraisal*

The third role of a strategy is to ensure that **common principles** of sustainable development underpin action by the different institutions involved.

*Sustainable development is a broad term which can be easily interpreted in different ways. The strategy can provide a firm basis for testing whether institutions are acting in accordance with basic principles or not.*

#### **4) explain the opportunities, strengths and concerns for the region**

The fourth role of a strategy is to explain why action is needed and how it builds on the **needs of the region**.

*What needs to be done to pursue sustainable development will differ greatly between different regions depending on their location, character and needs – that is one of the reasons why action at the regional level is so vital. Setting the vision in a clear regional context ensures that the vision is relevant and help institutions and the public to understand how it relates to their needs and fears.*

#### **5) provide common indicators and measures**

The fifth role of a strategy is to provide a basis for **measuring progress** and appraising policies for their impact on sustainable development.

*Without indicators of progress it is difficult to tell whether progress is being made and where different or more action is needed.*

### **3. Principles**

The following core principles have been identified by the Network for use in regional strategies:

#### **a) integration** of economic, social and environmental objectives

*The essence of sustainable development is finding solutions that benefit the environment, the economy and society at the same time. This is only possible if decisions and decision-making processes reflect all three aspects, and track the impact of decisions from regional to global level.*

#### **b) intergenerational equity**, looking to the long term and the needs of future generations;

*Sustainable development needs to take a long term time frame. Too often, short-term decisions in the past have sown seeds of major problems in the future. Sustainable development means planning for tomorrow as well as today.*

#### **c) promoting a sense of place** and valuing and enhancing cultural and physical **identity**;

*At the regional level it is the sense of identity which perhaps most defines an approach to achieving sustainable development. Sustainable development means building on distinctiveness, so that economic goals support cultural and environmental character.*

**d) meeting basic needs, tackling poverty and promoting equity**

*Sustainable development should meet the fundamental needs of all the population, providing employment opportunities, schooling, access to clean water and sanitation; and health care. The Gauteng declaration commits the Network to supporting the Millennium Development Goals.*

**e) good governance and participation**

*Sustainable development strategies must be prepared transparently on the basis of partnership with wider civil society and engage with people so as to reflect their needs and aspirations and to ensure that the programme is understood and owned. Strategies should promote and strengthen civil society and people's ability to engage meaningfully, including promoting awareness and education for sustainable development. Strategies should also reflect the need to work at different levels of governance.*

#### **4. Action for regional governments**

Regional governments and associations are encouraged to follow and refer to these guidelines when preparing their own strategies. Member regions will be guided by this policy note in developing and refining their own strategies and will share best practice in taking the principles forward.

#### **5. Action for partners**

Partners in other sectors and spheres of governance are invited to reflect on the policy note and to take it into account in their own work with regional government (and others as relevant), and also to propose ways in which it could be strengthened in the future.

#### **6. Useful References**

**Sustainable Development Strategies: A Resource Book**

Barry Dalal-Clayton and Stephen Bass  
2002

**Checklist on Improving Policy Coherence and Integration for Sustainable Development**

OECD  
8 August 2002

*Cardiff, 25 March 2004*