

**EEAC series**  
**Background study no. 2 (2005)**

## **Sustaining Sustainability**

a benchmark study on national strategies towards  
sustainable development and the impact of councils  
in nine EU member states



**EEAC**  
the network of  
European Environment and  
Sustainable Development  
Advisory Councils

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*January 2005*

## 8 Sweden

WITH A STRONG BACKGROUND IN ECOLOGICAL SUSTAINABILITY THE COORDINATION FOR SDS WAS RECENTLY MOVED TO THE PM OFFICE; SOCIETAL “COMITOLGY” AS TRADITION FOR CONSULTATION

- Original approach to SD(S) with environmental focus, i.e. a program for environmental integration, which was based on a government declaration in 1994 for “ecological sustainability”: a group of Ministers responsible; influential investment program of 0.56 Mill € (1997 – 2000), followed by a smaller program (climate focus) in 2000; in 1999 Parliament adopted 15 overarching environmental quality objectives to be achieved within one generation, i.e. by 2020, interim targets and actions were adopted in 2001 and subsequently, and an Environmental Objectives Council, comprising government agencies and (some) stakeholders, was established to monitor and report on overall progress towards the objectives.
- With this background it was hence not the first SDS that was adopted in 2002, but the first overall compilation of all government objectives, targets and action in the area of SD policies with 8 core areas; the 2004 revision of this strategy shows further prioritisation of fields of action.
- With broadening out the SDS it became more apparent that it is difficult to get other Ministries committed, despite a structurally favourable situation: a coordination unit in the PM office was therefore established in 2004.
- Government encouraged the local level, right after Rio, to set up local Agenda 21 processes (and supported it with grants), which resulted in having around 70% of the municipalities engaged.
- Strong tradition in broad consultation, with a Swedish speciality to establish for broader/ fundamental policies a preparatory committee comprising MPs of all political parties, and stakeholders as experts; the consultation on the SDS 2002 and its revision 2004 though has fallen a bit short in this respect.



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## ABBREVIATIONS

- PM* Prime Minister (the position of the Head of Government is called Prime Minister, in Swedish: "statsminister")
- MinE* In Sweden it is the Ministry for Environment<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> A recent government re-organisation (November 2004) broadened it to "Ministry for Society Planning and Environment", which covers also housing, energy and sustainable development (cf. also ch. A.1.2), and has two Ministers in charge: one for environment, one for the other fields.

## A Actors and Process

### 1 GOVERNMENT: SDS PROCESS, GOVERNMENT COORDINATION AND REVIEW

#### 1.1 SD STRATEGIES' DEVELOPMENT

##### *Predecessors of a SD strategy*

- 1992 Government encouraged Local Agenda 21 processes including funds: start for local commitment
- 1994 *New government declares aiming at an “ecologically sustainable Sweden”*
- 1996 – 1998 “Delegation” of five Ministers responsible for “ecological sustainability” (roughly equals a strategy for environmental integration), with MinE chairing
- 1998 – 2003 Government’s Local Investment Program for SD (LIP) of around € 560 Mill (total over 6 years) for adjustment to SD and creation of more jobs, managed by MinE, with government grants covering 30% of the total costs; this program triggered a welcomed competition among municipalities for the funds, and together with co-financing by local communities and enterprises led to a total investment of € 2.9 bn by 2002. For 2002/2003 the program was redesigned to concentrate on climate change actions, managed by the Swedish EPA.
- 1999 Parliament unanimously adopts 15 Environmental Quality Objectives to be achieved within one generation, i.e. by 2020; interim targets, timescales and actions were set out by different bills in 2000-2002, and an Environmental Objectives Council, comprising government agencies and (some) stakeholders, was established to annually monitor and report on overall progress towards the objectives. The first report was published in 2002.

##### *SD strategy*

- 04/2002 National SDS adopted by government. The SDS was prepared by an inter-departmental working group, led by the MinE, which also conducted around 10 conferences/workshops in the regions that included a broader stakeholder involvement. The secretariat of the National Committee on Agenda 21 and Habitat cooperated in the preparation and conduct of the regional workshops.
- 06/2002 National SDS is debated in plenary of the Parliament, which comments upon it.
- 04/2004 Revised version of the SDS adopted by government and handed over to Parliament, who held a debate in November 2004. It was again an interdepartmental group chaired by the MinE, who conducted this revision, because the new coordination unit for SD in the PM Office was only fully established in

May 2004 (government/PM decided on that in 2003). Stakeholder consultation was done via internet during a relatively short time period.

*Assessment:*

The commitment of the Swedish government for SD, at least in the first phase of ‘ecological sustainability’ during the second half of the 1990s, is probably the strongest among the countries investigated, and it is among the countries that took early action after Rio.<sup>2</sup> Concentrating then on the environmental aspect of SD was due to the perception that the “Swedish model for a social welfare state” (established in the 1930s) had achieved a lot on the social and economic side already, and had gone through quite a reform process due to an economic crisis during the first half of the 1990s. Already then there was the political belief that environmental modernisation would enhance the economy. Impressive achievements in this context were

- the adoption of the 15 long-term environmental quality objectives (one generation, i.e. 2020), together with the subsequent interim targets and measures, and
- the large investment program for local SD measures.

Other more ambitious goals, like the –4% CO<sub>2</sub> reduction (burden sharing agreement for Sweden: +4%), are to be seen against the background of both wanting to be a driving-force, and taking global responsibility and hence aiming at being a role-model for developing countries. Following this, one objective in the 2004 SDS is “environmentally driven growth and welfare” (cf. ch. B).

The commitment of UN members at the Rio+5 conference to preparing a SDS for the WSSD 2002 triggered Sweden to follow this and to broaden its previous work. This effort, and also the 2004 revision, seem to fall short a bit in terms of

- stakeholder consultation (compared to Swedish ‘standard),
- lacking targets in other than the environment field, and overall, that non-environmentalists to some extent do not yet perceive the SDS as a “living document” that plays a strong role, - it is perceived as if the non-environmental parts are just added, i.e. the holistic view is not yet there,
- linking targets and indicators.

It was also realised that coordination at the higher level would be useful, which finally came into place in May 2004 (cf. next ch. A.1.2).

## **1.2 LEAD RESPONSIBILITY AND HORIZONTAL COORDINATION MECHANISMS**

Coordination mechanisms of the past included a “delegation of Ministers” from 5 Ministries, chaired by the Minister of Environment, between 1996 and

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<sup>2</sup> Sweden considers itself a bit as “best in class” regarding environmental policy, and has (at least: had) the intention to be a frontrunner in this field; current discussions question this approach regarding its benefit for the economy (while other EU countries are not complying). There seems to be a slight discomfiture about the share of nuclear power, especially in electricity consumption (cf. ch. D.2).

1998. This mechanism faded out, and the MinE kept the overall responsibility for SD policies, including the management of the local investment program, up to 2002. Besides the cabinet there is no other coordination mechanism at Ministers' level. Sweden has a rather fortunate setting for integrated approaches in policy making, as government only decides as a collective, i.e. compared to other Western European countries the power of an individual Minister is relatively small.<sup>3</sup> Despite this situation, and an overall cooperative attitude, experience over time has revealed that it was rather difficult to get other Ministries committed to the SD agenda, which also applied to drawing up the SDS of 2002.<sup>4</sup>

The new Environment Minister in place from 2002 strongly supported the idea of installing a coordination unit in the PM office for

- coordinating SD efforts in the government offices, bringing forward SD goals in Ministries, and leading the work of further developing the national strategy; the link to the other levels and actors is implied, as the unit is available for presenting the SDS and government activities to e.g. the local level and business;
- functioning as a think-tank;
- developing Sweden's action in sustainability issues internationally (both EU and UN CSD).

It comprises senior staff from the Ministry of Finance, Industry (including regional development and transport), Social Affairs, Foreign Affairs (including development aid) and Environment.<sup>5</sup> At the same time the PM has entrusted the Minister for Environment with the overall responsibility for SD<sup>6</sup>. This could be seen as a contradiction to the establishment of a coordination unit, but in Sweden it is not: It is normal that one Minister gets such a responsibility, which e.g. implies presenting a bill to Parliament, even if the PM takes up the coordination task. The PM office's 'identity' increases the profile of the policy field.

#### *Assessment:*

The coordination unit in the PM office is widely welcomed among the Ministries and also by stakeholders (NGO and Trade Union confederation):

- the former point out that it is difficult to prioritise in working groups on a civil servant level;
- for the latter (the Trade Union confederation) it is appreciated that now SD can be better communicated to their affiliates as being not only environment;

<sup>3</sup> Jahn, 2003, p. 100.

<sup>4</sup> This also indicates the degree of obstacles vis-à-vis (environmental) integration and SD policies.

<sup>5</sup> Other interested Ministries were Agriculture and consumer affairs, Education and Culture, but it was decided against, at least for the time being, in order to keeping the unit small.

<sup>6</sup> A recent re-organisation of government broadened the MinE to "Ministry for Society Planning and Environment", with a (cabinet) Minister for each field. The former portfolio also comprises sustainable development, i.e. the responsibility for SD moved to another Minister, but not to another Ministry. It remains to be seen how the relationship to the PM coordination unit will be: So far there is a personal union of the State Secretary of the new Ministry (branch) responsible, and the Head of the PM coordination unit.

- also the local level supports this initiative as a sign of broadening SD policies, and for improving government cooperation that so far has not reached up to the need to deal with horizontal problems.

This unit started its work in May 2004: its senior staff are seconded from Ministries concerned, with a background in coordination tasks.

### 1.3 MONITORING, REGULAR REVIEWING AND LONG-TERM PERSPECTIVE

The first revision of the 2002 national SDS took place between October 2003 and April 2004. This was a commitment in 2002, and it was also felt that the results of the WSSD and the National Committee for Agenda 21 and Habitat as well as some government bills (e.g. public health, global development) should be included. The 2004 SDS version hence is not a review in the 'normal' sense, but more an update and further prioritising of objectives: From the previous eight core areas four strategic issues were developed for the following two years.

The next revision will take place in 2006. It seems that agreeing on priorities will be a continuous challenge, as the process of opening up towards a holistic view shows tendencies (also on the stakeholder side) to finding their own interests the most important to be included.

#### 1.3.1 Indicators, targets and timetables

Overall, there is not yet a decision on (headline) indicators, neither for the objectives and quantified targets in place (environment, and some for health), nor for those to come:

- The first progress report 2002 on the 15 environmental quality objectives uses several indicators per objective, and there are several indicators to follow up on the 71 sub-targets for 2010.<sup>7</sup> So far there has been no aim to reduce to one indicator per objective, but an ongoing discussion on a set of fewer indicators. A systematic review process takes place for these 15 objectives, also using the 'traffic light' method.<sup>8</sup>
- In 2001 a first set of 30 SD indicators was published<sup>9</sup>, but these were not linked to the objectives of the SDS 2002 and not used for the revision (cf. above: not a 'normal' revision with progress report).

This decision on indicators (15 headline indicators are nowadays aimed at) and their link to the SDS has still to be undertaken; it is intended to achieve this for the next revision by 2006.

#### 1.3.2 Review terms, long-term perspective and role of the Parliament

The link of government and Parliament seems to be relatively strong. One structural factor is that Sweden mainly has had minority governments, supported by another party (or by more than one), but not necessarily in all policy fields, i.e. governments depend on potential support from several sides.

<sup>7</sup> Swedish Environmental Objectives Council/Swedish Environmental Protection Agency (2002).

<sup>8</sup> The Environmental Quality Objectives Council reports annually to government, and every four years more in-depth, which is at the same time the starting point for overhauling the Environmental Policy Bill.

<sup>9</sup> A proposal of the MinE, the Statistical Office and the EPA.

Another is that the integrative, consensus-oriented style of policy-making led to the Sweden-specific way of “comitology”, which is even called “the core of Swedish politics”: For certain issues (often broader and more fundamental policies) the government asks all political parties to appoint a representative to a special *committee* (“utredning”) for preparing a policy proposal. These committees mostly also involve academia and stakeholders as experts (cf. ch. A.2), or have solely an expert composition. The purpose of this system is to involve all parties early, sounding out the potential for support, and eventually achieving common solutions. It is also aimed at broadening the knowledge basis and to have a deeper look at a certain question than would be possible within a small Ministry. Members of the ‘mixed-parliamentary committees’ are at the same time typically also members of parliamentary standing committees, the main task of which is to discuss bills (often more specific) from the government and make suggestions on them to the Parliament. So the work of a ‘mixed-parliamentary committee’ – if one is established - comes earlier: their proposals are discussed in a hearing, then the government elaborates a bill, which is treated by a standing committee and then discussed and decided upon by the Parliament.

The Environmental Objectives *Council* in contrast, that was established with the adoption of the 15 environmental quality objectives, is composed of representatives of government agencies and regional bodies, and has a reporting and monitoring task (cf. footnote 8). The Environment Advisory Council (MVB, cf. ch. A.3) saw different phases of functions and work style, one being similar to the tasks of a ‘mixed-parliamentary committee’.

The number of such *committees* has been reduced over the last decades from some hundreds<sup>10</sup> to nowadays around 100.

The 15 environmental quality objectives with their 2020 time-horizon are an example of a long-term approach: they were elaborated by the related Committee, and also adopted by Parliament: not only supported by a bigger majority than the social-democrats plus its two supporting parties, but adopted unanimously by the Parliament.

In case of the SDS no such ‘committee’ was established (but an interdepartmental working group drafted the SDS). This was mainly due to a rather short time frame for elaborating a SDS prior to the WSSD, and to the situation that there was already a related committee in place (National Committee for Agenda 21 and Habitat). It might also be relevant that the first SDS 2002 was considered more as a compilation of existing policies than a further agreement of priority fields, targets and actions.

Parliament discussed the first SDS 2002 prepared by government (as a communication) and commented upon, as well as the revised one of 2004. Regarding long-term goals, another stabilising factor is a consensus-oriented style of politics and the fact that there have been mainly social-democratic governments in Sweden. Overall consensus about the importance of environmental policies, though, tends to maintain a rather

<sup>10</sup> There is no recent data available; the last still counting 270 in 1994, but stating that afterwards much fewer committees have been established. Some years ago it was decided that the committees shall only work temporarily, i.e. around 2 years at a maximum (Jahn, 2003, p. 103).

progressive approach also during liberal-conservative governments. Also international goals and commitments, like the Millennium targets, are considered as stabilising the long-term track, which would also apply for EU targets.

The SDS itself doesn't have a time horizon (e.g. four years, as in other countries). The relatively short review phases of the SDS (every two years) stems from considering the SDS as a "living document", which is illustrated by the approach taken for the 2004 revision, i.e. without a systematic review/assessment of the 2002 SDS.

### 1.3.3 Approach for a SD strategy

Sweden's approach towards a SD strategy seems to be a balanced mixture of planning, in terms of targets and timetables, and flexibility, in terms of SDS as "living document". Also, a link to actions is in place, at least for the 15 Environmental Quality Objectives for 2020, with underpinning interim targets and actions. Those became part of the SDS, whilst in other priority areas there are objectives but mostly not yet concrete targets. In this respect the SDS will have to catch up for a more holistic tackling of SD, but within the environmental dimension an approach of breaking down from vision and strategic goals to objectives and targets with timetables and actions has been successfully put into place. In this field - and also in the others where there are no targets yet - the link between targets and indicators is not yet completed.

It is considered as a success on the indicator side that key indicators for ecological SD, proposed by the Environmental Advisory Council (MVB, cf. ch. A.3.1), have been included in each finance plan since 1998<sup>11</sup>.

Targets are taken seriously in Sweden, i.e. there is only target-setting with a commitment for measures. It is perceived with a self-evident attitude, as an instrument that is widely used in business and which government politics is increasingly taking up. It is not perceived as a top-down approach, because it is meant to be an incentive for bottom-up actions: a precondition is that "smart" targets are chosen<sup>12</sup>.

## 1.4 VERTICAL COORDINATION: LINK TO THE REGIONAL AND LOCAL LEVEL

Local authorities traditionally have a strong position in Sweden. The geographical situation of being sparsely populated, and people having moved relatively late to the cities, has caused a deep rooting of Sweden's citizens to the countryside. Furthermore, and a success factor for SD, the paradigm of inter-generational justice is a key trigger for Swedish citizens. Government hence, after the Rio conference, visited the counties to prompt municipalities to start Local Agenda 21 processes. These regional conferences were organised by the Environmental Advisory Council (cf. ch. A.3.1). As a start up there were grants provided by the government for supporting

<sup>11</sup> The finance plan is an analysis of the economic situation published bi-annually by the Ministry of Finance together with the budget.

<sup>12</sup> Another anecdote from Russian politics is given (as in Finland): The objective was defined to produce 2.000 tons of nails, with the result that 2 nails each weighing 1 ton were manufactured.

LA 21 activities (€ 1.9 Mill in 1994 and € 0.7 Mill in 1996). In 1995 the National Committee for Agenda 21 was established for monitoring the process, and preparing a report for the Rio+5 conference in 1997 (when the committee terminated).

This strong bottom-up approach has shown quite some success: Around 70% of the municipalities have LA 21 processes, and roughly half of those have developed their own SD/local action plan. Even if 40% of local authorities reduced their budget for LA 21 activities between 1998 and 2001, 20% allocated more resources and 40% kept the same as before<sup>13</sup>. These figures might also confirm an assessment about the state-of-art LA 21, which says that in many cases the Agenda 21 activities are now integrated into the regular work, i.e. there are no more special staff. It is difficult to judge this, as it may mean both cutting down the driving force, and successful integration. The LA 21 processes have also involved societal groups, though it is criticised that these attempts still fall short with respect to groups considered as important by Agenda 21.

There is no independent regional level, but regional government authorities, which were involved in the regional conferences during the development of the 2002 SDS. This administrative level has functions of implementing government policy, and – as an agency – monitoring e.g. the state of the environment.

With the inclusion of the UN Habitat agenda in 2000 a new National Committee on Agenda 21 and Habitat was established for also preparing Sweden's contribution to the WSSD in Johannesburg. As mentioned above, there was a link between the secretariat of this committee and the preparation of the national SDS: some personal involvement in the interdepartmental working group and in organising the regional conferences.

Apparently so far no mutual adaptation of the national SDS and the Local Agenda 21 activities has taken place. The Agenda 21 processes in a way came first, though they will have been influenced by the national environmental policy focus and by the investment program for SD and employment. When developing their own SD strategies, local authorities asked government to revise the vast number of international, European and Nordic objectives existing at this time. Local authorities see the national SDS as a background paper.

Currently some new attempts are going on:

- a Government in the 2004 SDS asks all local authorities to develop their own SD strategies by 2005 (which is supported by the local level, in order to make the SDS more concrete);
- b the Ministry for Regional Affairs will hold its annual conference on SD, and present the revised SDS.

## 2 NON-GOVERNMENTAL ACTORS

In general the political culture is apparently rather open to stakeholder involvement, which is reflected in:

- stakeholder consultation for policy proposals is standard,
- the tradition of government/parliament committees in which mostly academia and stakeholders are invited as experts (permanent or one-off).

The NGOs (environment and development) are rich in members, well organised on national, regional and local levels, and some receive government funds (e.g. for organising projects in developing countries). One of the three larger ones also has strong standing rights.

The Trade Union confederation is traditionally involved and plays an active role in policy formulation and commenting. There are difficulties though in making their affiliates aware of SD as an important policy approach, and its overarching character.

### 2.1 CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY (CSR)

The attitude of industry towards CSR seems to be rather reserved: They tend to be predominantly occupied with environmental problems, and more social issues “have to come later”. Nearly all Swedish companies (> 40.000) are organised in the Confederation of Swedish Enterprise, which is regarded as more “conservative” in terms of environment and SD policy than the 300 biggest companies, some of which are engaged in CSR.<sup>14</sup> As yet, no connection tends to be drawn between CSR as a new framework and the SD strategy. The engagement of the Confederation of Swedish Enterprise in environment and SD policy in general seems to have significantly slowed down - as one indicator it is mentioned that only two staff are left working in these fields. As a core problem it is mentioned that the CEO level determines the policy of the Industry Federation, which is determined by rather short-term thinking, and that it is apparently difficult to find agreements among all companies. At the same time there is an interesting network of environmental managers that has officially been established by industry, cooperating on the senior staff level and apparently comprising the most extended knowledge on SD within business. Their objective is to exchange experience and best practice, and they are not meant to comment externally on policy proposals (hence they are not consulted).

There is a new initiative of the government, which established a Swedish Environmental Technology Centre with the task to advise SMEs.

### 2.2 STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION

Despite the generally open policy style, sometimes, as in the case of the SDS, consultation is considered as too short in time and/or too passive: it is e.g. criticised that the revision of the SDS was not well announced, consultation took place only via the internet, and no feed-back was given.

Government’s attempts at better involvement by organising around 10 regional conferences and a (national) one in December 2001 for discussion

with the Minister, followed by a questionnaire to which many people answered, were hence not well acknowledged. It is also stated (by environmental NGOs) that the government is not sufficiently aware that any attempt at learning processes and raising awareness takes much longer than usually provided for, as earlier examples have shown.

Also, there was no preparation committee for the SDS (cf. ch. A.1.3.2). These committees are partly considered as a bit “passive” regarding stakeholder involvement, because it is mainly the MPs discussing, and stakeholders are invited as experts to give input to that: sometimes permanently, sometimes for individual meetings only. In the case of the National Committee for Agenda 21 and Habitat e.g. during its second phase of 2000-2002 stakeholders were not invited anymore, because the group of interested parties was too big (and a selection was not considered), but informed as a “reference group”. The attitude towards stakeholders also depends on the respective Ministry having the lead: Outside of the MinE it is e.g. not so natural to invite (environmental) NGOs. The committees are also criticised for their short life span and being not very transparent about their internal procedures. Altogether, in contrast to the general attitude towards stakeholder consultation, the processes for developing and revising the SDS were rather government centred. Also for the new coordination unit within the PM office managing stakeholder consultation is not a task for a pro-active approach. Government though considers ownership and participation as vital for SD. Overall the environmental NGOs find that there was more involvement 10 years ago, including the strong role of local Agenda 21 processes, and it has decreased since.

### 3 SD/ENVIRONMENT COUNCIL

There has so far been no SD council in Sweden, probably due to the open political culture, including self-evident stakeholder consultation, a relative closeness of government and non-governmental actors, and the tradition of establishing ‘mixed-parliamentary committees’ for certain policy proposals. The National Committee for Agenda 21 and Habitat, as such a *committee* involved in the SDS preparation process, was terminated when its mission was completed with a report to the government with proposals for the future<sup>15</sup>. These included that a “Forum for SD” should be set up (cf. ch. A.3.3 below).

The National Committee for Agenda 21 and Habitat, as such a *committee* involved in the SDS preparation process was terminated, when its mission was completed with a report to the Government with proposals for the future<sup>16</sup>. In this report it proposed that a “Forum for SD” should be set up (cf. ch. A.3.3 below).

The *Environmental Advisory Council (MVB)* is rather an exception in the landscape of the parliamentary-expert committees, as it

- has had mainly external members (academia, stakeholders and other personalities as experts),

<sup>15</sup> Swedish National Committee on Agenda 21 and Habitat (2002).

<sup>16</sup> Swedish National Committee on Agenda 21 and Habitat (2002).

- has existed for a long time, and is the oldest environment council in Europe, having been established in 1968 already.

During its time of existence several functions and work style have been assigned to it, ranging from

- a platform for intensive discussion with the Minister with no decisions taken as council (1986-94, 2002-03), to
- working similarly like a ‘mixed-parliamentary committee’ (1994-2001), which included preparing background reports, to
- a mixed version of discussion with the Minister and having working groups which give independent advice (since 2003).

In contrast to other models of more independent environmental/SD councils, it has most of its time (besides the phase in the 90s) been chaired by the Minister responsible for environment, which is meant to have the council operating closer to policy-making. Such a constellation seems to be possible in the Swedish context with the above outlined closeness of government and non-governmental actors, and the relatively stable political situation. Hence it is not perceived as a risk that, e.g. with a government change, environment policy would face a drawback, and the council would be confronted with difficulties in its work: It has worked under governments with different political colours, and there has been a broad support for ecological sustainability across all parties. For stakeholders it is an interesting constellation because it provides the opportunity to talk directly to the Minister (on top of possibly existing bilateral talks). In any constellation the council has had a think-tank character, and the recently combination seems to be an interesting approach.

### **3.1 ROLE, FUNCTIONS AND INTERNAL ASPECTS OF OPERATION OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL ADVISORY COUNCIL (MVB)**

*Role vis-à-vis the SDS:*

The MVB played an important vital role in the earlier phases of ecological sustainability; outcomes of that time are partly still relevant in the context of SD policy and the SDS: e.g. the advice on key indicators for ecological SD, on environmental management systems in government agencies, on sustainable mountain regions and archipelagoes (all 1990 – 2000), on resilience, decoupling, energy efficiency, research policies for sustainable development, eutrophication (after 2000).<sup>17</sup>

It also organised, together with the government and the association of local authorities, a series of seminars in different parts of Sweden at an early stage in order to promote Agenda 21 (cf. ch. A.1.4).

It was not officially involved in the development and review of the SDS.

*General functions, - views are shared by the council and government:*

- (personal) advisor to the Minister for Environment, and indirectly to the government;

- think-tank;
- stakeholder/expert dialogue “among each other”, including that consensus building among the members should take place: this nowadays applies to its working groups, which prepare (independent) recommendations to the government. In Plenary there is open dialogue with the Minister;
- stakeholder members quite naturally take the council’s views into their organisations;
- (in certain phases) promoting environmental/SD policies to interested parties, e.g. by organising seminars.

*Council members operate on an equal footing:*

- Plenary meetings are open informal discussions on specific themes, often with invited speakers, which do not result in decisions. The new style of elaborating independent recommendations in working groups is undertaken in an overall consensus-oriented approach. So far consensus has been achieved.
- Government – non-government members: Besides the Minister as chair in plenaries there are no government members, but officials from other Ministries are often invited to meetings which cover themes they are responsible for. The council aims at supporting the government work with strategic advice.
- “Double-hat” of Council members: The council has a deliberative style with members appointed in a personal capacity. With its recently started work method of independent advice from working groups this issue has been debated, with the conclusion that having two “hats” lies in the nature of a council and should not be a problem.

*Relation to and role of socio-economic partners:*

There is no social-economic council: Negotiations on e.g. wages take place bilaterally between the sectoral industry and the respective trade union, with the confederations of trade unions setting the scope and framework.

*Relation to government departments:*

The MVB directly advises and discusses with the (chairing) Minister for Environment, and also the relationship with the Ministry is very open and transparent, which also applies to other departments.

Also with the new PM office’s coordination unit there are good communication lines, and the MVB is involved in future work on the SDS (review).

### **3.2 ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE COUNCIL (MVB)**

- 1 Government’s view  
(not covered)
- 2 MVB’s view
  - Agenda setting and raising strategic issues for inter-ministerial discussion (during its entire existence since 1968);
  - High-lightening strategic issues for inter-ministerial discussion and giving independent advice papers (since 2002);

- Raising public interest;
- Being a linkage to the scientific society before and after the WSSD; publishing scientific synthesis reports which were given attention to at the Summit in Johannesburg; follow up conference for the Swedish scientific audience (2001-2002);
- Dialogues with business on SD, resulting in voluntary agreements between Minister and CEOs of 36 big companies from the construction sector and some 20 companies from retail and transport sector (1999-2002 in MVB, thereafter handled by MinE);
- Proposing the establishment of the Institute for Ecological Sustainability (IEH), a coordinating center between practitioners and researchers for ecologically sustainable development (1998-2000), and supporting its setting up (cf. ch. A.3.3 below);
- Advice on Green Headline indicators: achievement that some of them were included in the annual Swedish Finance Plan (1998-99);
- Advice on sustainable archipelagoes and mountain regions (2000).

#### *Success-factors of the MVB*

- Independence: council members should not represent their organisation but act as individuals with the experience of their organisation as a background;
- Think-tank function: cross-cutting discussions possible as members are both from scientific society from different disciplines (half of the council) and more stakeholder based;
- Gaining acknowledgement of the government and the wider political community by long-term strategic thinking combined with ideas on short-term measures to be taken;
- Engaging in overarching strategic discussions and underpinning those with deeper looks into specific themes through working groups;
- Having both open informal discussions with a flexible agenda with the responsible Minister and persons (political and civil servants) from other Ministries, and giving independent advice in the form of written reports through the working groups, where consensus is aimed at;
- Well-acknowledged personalities as council members; positive to include members who have not been engaged in environment/SD policies before;
- Reliable links into government;
- Providing a budget for communication efforts;
- Linking national to global views; avoid a purely national perspective.

### **3.3 AN SD COUNCIL AS ADDITION?**

As stakeholders so far perceive the SDS as a rather top-down process, and the stakeholder involvement as deficient, a permanent SD council/forum as a platform for stakeholder dialogue is partly a welcomed idea. Interestingly, and possibly an indicator for the political culture, no-one expressed the need for stakeholder dialogue among each other. It could well be that this takes place anyhow, be it in the parliamentary-mixed-expert committees or on any

other occasion, and maybe hence would not need a certain format for such multilateral dialogue. Bilateral discussion between e.g. Trade Unions and environmental NGOs are considered as a possible next step.

The MVB is perceived by some as too close to government, and the desire for a council with members on the same footing, including the election of its own chairperson, is expressed.

Another typical role of a SD council is the watchdog function for the holistic view, and as a driving-force for government policies: the MVB partly has this function for the long-term aspects of environmental policy, providing vision and strategic approaches. For the more holistic view both government and non-governmental actors seem to rather rely on the capabilities of the government itself to move in this direction, which is indeed finally shown by establishing the coordination unit. Recently there have been new developments: Several Sweden-type committees, including the National Committee for Agenda 21 and Habitat in 2002, recommended establishing a "Forum for SD". This proposal has now been taken up: The "Institute for Ecological Sustainability", established in 1999 with a bridging function between practitioners and research, will be converted to a basis for such a Forum, with the task to communicate SD into society and organise dialogue with stakeholders. It remains to be seen how this attempt will evolve.

## B Themes and scope

Sweden put an emphasis on ecological sustainability in the years 1994 to around 2000.

The first comprehensive SDS of 2002 selected eight core areas from the relevant policy fields, covering the three dimensions:<sup>18</sup>

- the future environment (repeating the previous environmental quality objectives);
- limitation of climate change (emphasising the climate change target; some overlap with the environment chapter);
- population and public health (later on, more concrete objectives were developed in this area);
- social cohesion, welfare and security; employment and learning in a knowledge society;
- economic growth and competitiveness;
- regional development and cohesion;
- community development.

The SDS revision 2004 identified four strategic issues (from within the previous eight core areas, which are kept):<sup>19</sup>

- environmentally driven growth and welfare (with energy as a key area);
- good health (as the “most important future resource”);
- coherent policies for sustainable community planning;
- child and youth policies for an ageing society.

Overall it is said that the SDS is still perceived as a “green” policy, though actors are becoming more and more familiar with the overarching concept.

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<sup>18</sup> Regeringskansliet, 2002.

<sup>19</sup> Regeringskansliet, 2004.

## C Relation to the EU (SDS) and other international strategies

### 1 CONSIDERATION AND IMPACT OF THE EU SDS

The commitment of the Gothenburg Summit, that all EU member states would elaborate a SDS for the WSSD, triggered the formulation of the Swedish SDS in 2002, which is seen as a “complement” to the EU SDS. At the same time though it is said that Sweden wants to maintain its high national profile in its efforts towards SD “with its long tradition of thinking in terms of sustainability”.<sup>20</sup>

The 2002 SDS does not refer explicitly to the EU SDS, but it was supposedly reflected as much as possible when drafting the eight core areas. The Swedish SDS is considered as taking a broader approach and going further than the EU SDS. The 2004 revised SDS lists the four priority fields of the EU SDS without further commenting, whereas the WSSD outcomes are considered as a basis, *inter alia*, for the national strategy.

The WSSD agenda, the Millennium goals, the EU SDS and the Lisbon strategy are typically mentioned together as international initiatives that play a role in Sweden, and the Nordic SDS has a special relevance<sup>21</sup>. For the local level the UN activities are less important than the EU.

The goals of the Lisbon strategy are considered as important. The EU SDS partly receives criticism because it is hard to understand what it is.<sup>22</sup>

Overall, the attitude towards Europe seems to be ‘distant-constructive’ with often more ambitious policies than the community, and criticising EU policies that are important for Sweden, but have been weakened at EU level (e.g. chemicals policy, cf. below).

### 2 SD/ENVIRONMENT COUNCIL (MVB): EUROPEAN AND INTERNATIONAL DIMENSION

The MVB has been involved in European cooperation through EEAC since the mid-90s, and more intensely again since 2001: During the Swedish Presidency it organised the conference “Greening SD Strategies” at which the EEAC input to the EU SDS process, which resulted in the Göteborg summit several months later, was presented and discussed.

It also cooperates through several other mechanisms, and organised e.g. a side-event on decoupling at the WSSD.

### 3 LISBON PROCESS: PREPARATION OF SPRING SUMMITS

The EU unit within the PM office coordinates the input to the Spring Summit, and by that has been involving all Ministries concerned (cf. also: only collective government decisions).

<sup>20</sup> Regeringskansliet, 2002, p.8/9.

<sup>21</sup> *Sustainable Development – Bearings for the Nordic Countries* (2001); *There are two other multi-national SD strategies: the “Agenda for the Baltic Sea Region – Baltic 21” (1998) and “Arctic Sustainable Development Action Program”, approved by the Arctic Council Ministerial meeting on 24.11.2004.*

<sup>22</sup> *Others see the role of the Swedish Presidency in preparing the Gothenburg Summit, where this ‘architectural defect’ was decided upon, as a driving force for adopting a EU SDS at all.*

So far there hasn't been a good link to the national SDS, but improvement is expected for the future: there can be a pro-active link between the new SD coordination unit and the colleagues next door, which will be favourable for the link between the national and the EU SDS (and the Lisbon process).

#### **4 POLICY FIELDS UPSTREAM AND DOWNSTREAM**

*Upstream action - EU activity is desired/required*

- environmental taxation (internal discussion: MinE wants Sweden to go ahead, the Ministry for Industry says it should be done internationally only);
- chemicals;
- environmental technology: ETAP is important, - most technologies should be "environmentally adjusted";
- energy: targets for energy efficiency and renewables.

Also, it is desired that the four strategic areas identified in the 2004 SDS should become important for the EU SDS as well.

The Common Agriculture Policy receives credit for going in the right direction, but more needs to be done.

*Downstream impact - EU policies hampering national SD processes*

EU chemicals policy remains a crucial field, with the national chemicals industry roughly in favour of the Swedish government's position, whereas the "continental" industry is regarded as stumbling block.

CFP is also considered as a problem: Sweden e.g. wanted a moratorium on cod, but this was not agreed.

*Overall assessment*

Sweden has played a strong role in EU environmental/integration policies that are important for the country, e.g. chemicals policy. The EU SDS plays a role, but other international goals and commitments seem to be more important.

## D Achievements and shortcomings in the national SD agenda

### 1 SUCCESSES AND SHORTCOMINGS

*Successes* of the first phase (without an SDS in place) 1995–2001 are:

- 15 environmental quality objectives in place (progress report: four are difficult, cf. 2.);
- CO<sub>2</sub> objective for 2012 stricter than the burden sharing agreement, and a long-term CO<sub>2</sub> objective (2050);
- Key ecological indicators to be included in the finance plan;
- Significant progress in decoupling.

*Shortcomings:*

No particular one is mentioned, besides the SDS being so far too “bureaucratic” and government centred, and that the method and length of consultation was not sufficient.

### 2 MOST DIFFICULT POLICY FIELDS

The progress report 2002 on the 15 environmental quality objectives identifies four areas that are very difficult to be met within the time-frame:

- reduced climate impact,
- a non-toxic environment,
- zero eutrophication,
- sustainable forests.

For the latter two this is mainly due to the long-term duration of recovery of the eco-systems. It is not expected that the long-term objectives will be changed, but some interim targets might. The objective of a non-toxic environment is tackled both nationally and at EU level, with the latter playing the crucial role. A closer look is taken at climate change:

**Climate change/energy:**

Though something has been achieved in terms of energy efficiency in industry and housing, and the share of renewables has increased, much more can be done in the building sector.<sup>23</sup> Increased subsidies for energy efficiency in public buildings are decided in the budget of autumn 2004.

Rising emissions from **transport** is the main driver for not meeting the CO<sub>2</sub> objective. Parliament in 1998 decided to decrease CO<sub>2</sub>-emissions of road transport to the levels of 1990 by 2010; no further information on the impacts of this decision is available.

(Similar to Finland) industry criticises the (more) ambitious CO<sub>2</sub> reduction target, because of competition with companies from countries with lower targets.

Sweden’s electricity production depends 50% each on water and nuclear energy: A referendum in 1980 decided both to use existing reactors and to

<sup>23</sup> In a recent advice (December 2004) the Swedish MVB proposes that halving the energy use in building can be achieved by 2050.

phase them out in a certain time span. The interpretation of this decision has been debated. Since then the capacity of nuclear plants has been expanded, resulting in low prices for electricity, which is on the one hand an advantage for industry, but has on the other hand also led to overuse; e.g. the share of electricity consumption for heating has increased<sup>24</sup>. This situation will cause problems regarding CO<sub>2</sub> emissions if Sweden eventually phases out nuclear energy, which is again mentioned in the 2004 SDS. Steps are being taken to get an agreement with that industry<sup>25</sup>, and also on increasing other renewables (wind). There will be further efficiency increases, particularly in buildings including the public sector (cf. above), and it is aimed that knowledge about low/zero-energy building construction should increase.

**Transport:**

Transport is difficult to tackle because of the geographical situation, and the attitude of citizens. Shifting freight transport from road to rail has obstacles not differing from other countries (the knowledge about road and rail is very much separate). More should be done in advancing technology and using this in e.g. public transport (e.g. buses with hydrogen cells). Metropolitan areas have to make more efforts to increase public transport.<sup>26</sup>

**3 IMPROVEMENT POTENTIALS FOR THE NATIONAL SDS**

Procedural: improve coordination (measures taken) and consultation (measures not yet taken).

Overall: Improve ownership in the SDS as overarching strategy.

**4 ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE NATIONAL SDS: SUCCESS FACTORS AND CHALLENGES**

Achievements and challenges are assessed in a summarised way as follows<sup>27</sup>:

- + Strong background in “ecological sustainability”, now having successfully widened out;
- + SDS as a “living document” with at the same time strong underpinning objectives, so far in the environment field (also in place also for health);
- + PM office now leading and meant to be the driving force, MinE with overall responsibility;
- +/(◆) Getting all concerned departments committed; as well as overall

<sup>24</sup> Swedish Environmental Advisory Council, 1998, p.6.

<sup>25</sup> More or less following the German role-model.

<sup>26</sup> After the last election government proposed to introduce a congestion charge for Stockholm, which was not accepted because of the top-down character, but is now planned for 2005.

<sup>27</sup> + achievement  
 (+) partial achievement  
 +/◆ mixed: achievement and challenge  
 (◆) partial challenge  
 ◆ challenge

- ownership for the SDS;
- +/◆ Further prioritising will be a challenge (for the coordination unit), inter alia as stakeholders tend to regard their own field as the most important;
- +/◆ Not losing the traditionally strong role of the local level in SD (Local Agenda 21); improve the link of national and local activities/strategies;
- +/◆ Getting back to better stakeholder involvement and consultation;
- (◆) Agreeing on (headline) indicators, and streamlining the ones used in different processes, will be a challenge.

## E Recommendations for the EU SDS review

Not covered.

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## Colophon

*Sustaining Sustainability* is the second background study of EEAC and the first of this EEAC series.

The first background study, *Environmental Governance in Europe*, was published as RMNO series, Preliminary studies and background studies, nr. V.02 (December 2003), Lemma, Utrecht.

ISBN 90-77893-01-6

### Publication

Uitgeverij Lemma bv, Utrecht

### Copyright

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### Design and Layout

A10plus grafische vormgeving & illustratie, Rotterdam

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