

Chapter 1

A New Strategy

1. Why sustainable development?

The past 20 years have seen a growing realisation that the current model of development is unsustainable.

On the one hand we see the increasing burden our way of life places on the planet on which we depend:

- ▶ the consequences of already unavoidable climate change
- ▶ increasing stress on resources and environmental systems – water, land and air – from the way we produce, consume and waste resources, and
- ▶ increasing loss of biodiversity from the rainforest to the stocks of fish around our coast.

“We know the problems. A child in Africa dies every three seconds from famine, disease or conflict. We know that if climate change is not stopped, all parts of the world will suffer. Some will even be destroyed, and we know the solution – sustainable development.”

Rt. Hon. Tony Blair MP, Prime Minister, speech to the World Summit on Sustainable Development

On the other hand we see a world where over a billion people live on less than a dollar a day, more than 800 million are malnourished, and over two and a half billion lack access to adequate sanitation. A world disfigured by poverty and inequality is unsustainable. While increasing wealth is most

often associated with depletion of environmental resources, extreme poverty can also leave people with no option but to deplete their local environment – so sustainable poverty eradication depends on the poor having access to adequate natural resources and a healthy environment.

Unless we start to make real progress toward reconciling these contradictions, we all, wherever we live, face a future that is less certain and less secure than we in the UK have enjoyed over the past fifty years. We need to make a decisive move towards more sustainable development both because it is the right thing to do, and because it is in our long-term best interests. It offers the best hope for securing the future.



Our starting point

At the Rio summit in 1992, governments around the world committed to sustainable development. The UK government was the first to produce its national strategy in 1994. In 1999, the UK government then outlined how it proposed to deliver sustainable development in 'A Better Quality of Life'. This set out a vision of simultaneously delivering economic, social and environmental outcomes as measured by a series of headline indicators.

Since 1999 progress has been measured every year against these indicators. Some have moved very much in the right direction: the UK has maintained strong economic performance, enjoying an unbroken period of economic growth throughout. A strong economy can bring many benefits – it supports jobs, pays for the public services on which we rely, and is key to poverty eradication. Economic stability also helps to avoid the waste of human and physical resources that comparatively sluggish economic performance inevitably brings. It is a factor in achieving a more just society, and directly contributes to personal wellbeing.

But we cannot be complacent about the positive trends. Income is not the only component of people's wellbeing. Good health, a safe environment and strong communities are also very important. In some areas, the indicators have moved in the wrong direction – the amount of waste we generate continues to rise, although the trend is slowing. Reducing the impacts of road traffic remains a significant challenge, despite some weakening in the relationship between road traffic and economic growth. Farmland and woodland bird populations, proxies for the wider state of our wildlife, show signs of stabilising, but recovery is needed.

Our performance to date can be summed up by the comments of the Sustainable Development Commission in their review of the progress since 1999, published in April 2004: 'Shows Promise, But Must Try Harder'. The Commission applauded our progress in many areas but also identified twenty key areas in which we need to take more decisive action for the new strategy and in the years to follow.

This new strategy responds to that challenge. It takes account of developments here since 1999: the changed structure of government in the UK with devolution to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland; greater emphasis on delivery at regional level and the new relationship between government and local authorities. It takes account of new policies announced since 1999, in particular the 2003 Energy White Paper that sets a long-term goal of achieving a low carbon economy. It also takes account of the renewed international push for sustainable development from the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002, and the Millennium Development Goals set out in 2000, due for review later this year (2005).

It has been developed within a common framework for the UK, agreed between the UK government and the Devolved Administrations for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Within this framework they will set out their strategies for delivering sustainable development in the areas for which they are responsible. This UK strategy sets out what the UK government proposes to do in England and in the areas for which it retains responsibility in the UK, including international relations.

We have benefited from the many responses received from the consultation 'Taking it on'¹. These took many forms and included 900 written and electronic responses to the document, more than twenty themed workshops organised for us by organisations with an interest in sustainable development from across the UK, nine regional dialogue events in England, and local community consultations assisted by trained facilitators. We are indebted to everyone who took time to contribute their thoughts and ideas, which they will see reflected in this document.

This strategy has been developed across government – both central government departments and with regional and local partners. We have also benefited greatly from the advice and help of the Sustainable Development Commission throughout this process.

The key message emerging from the consultation was that this strategy needed to make a real change from talking about sustainable development to delivering it on the ground. This new strategy shows how we propose to do that to secure the future – for all of us.

2. The strategic framework

In the consultation on the new UK Sustainable Development Strategy we committed ourselves to produce a UK strategic framework for sustainable development covering the period up to 2020. This has been agreed by the UK Government and the Devolved Administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, to provide a consistent approach and focus across the UK.

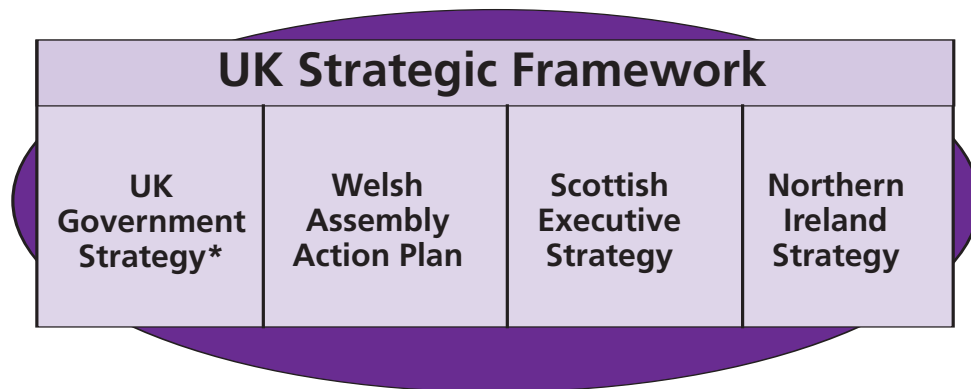
This framework, launched in conjunction with the UK Government Strategy, includes:

- ▶ a shared understanding of sustainable development
- ▶ a vision of what we are trying to achieve and the guiding principles we all need to follow to achieve it
- ▶ our sustainable development priorities for UK action at home and internationally, and
- ▶ indicators to monitor the key issues on a UK basis.

Delivering the Framework

The strategic framework will be supported by separate strategies for each administration. These will build on existing work and translate the framework's aims into action, based on their different responsibilities, needs and views. The strategies of the UK and Devolved Administrations will include further priorities, and be supported by further measures and indicators.

¹ A Defra summary report of the consultation is available on the Government's sustainable development website: www.sustainable-development.gov.uk/taking-it-on/finalsummary.htm



*Covers England and all non-devolved issues, including international relations

3. A common purpose

“Living on the earth’s income rather than eroding its capital”

quotation from the ‘Taking it on’ consultation response from e3 Consulting

To set the United Kingdom on a more sustainable track, we must know what we are aiming for. The 1999 strategy set out clearly that sustainable development means “a better quality of life for everyone, now and for generations to come”, and used the widely used international definition “development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”²

The four central aims of the 1999 strategy were:

- ▶ social progress which recognises the needs of everyone
- ▶ effective protection of the environment
- ▶ prudent use of natural resources, and
- ▶ maintenance of high and stable levels of economic growth and employment.

These aims effectively captured the simple priority areas at the heart of sustainable development. However, although the 1999 strategy stressed that these objectives had to be pursued at the same time, in practice, different agencies focused on those one or two most relevant to them. So a new purpose is needed to show how government will integrate these aims and evolve sustainable development policy – to develop the earlier Strategy, not depart from it. It needs to paint a picture of what things should look like if we achieve sustainable development, while maintaining continuity with the aims of the 1999 Strategy.

The following ‘purpose’, which has been agreed by the UK Government and the Devolved Administrations, has now been adopted as the new framework goal for sustainable development:

² From ‘Our Common Future (The Brundtland Report)’ – Report of the 1987 World Commission on Environment and Development.

The goal of sustainable development is to enable all people throughout the world to satisfy their basic needs and enjoy a better quality of life, without compromising the quality of life of future generations.

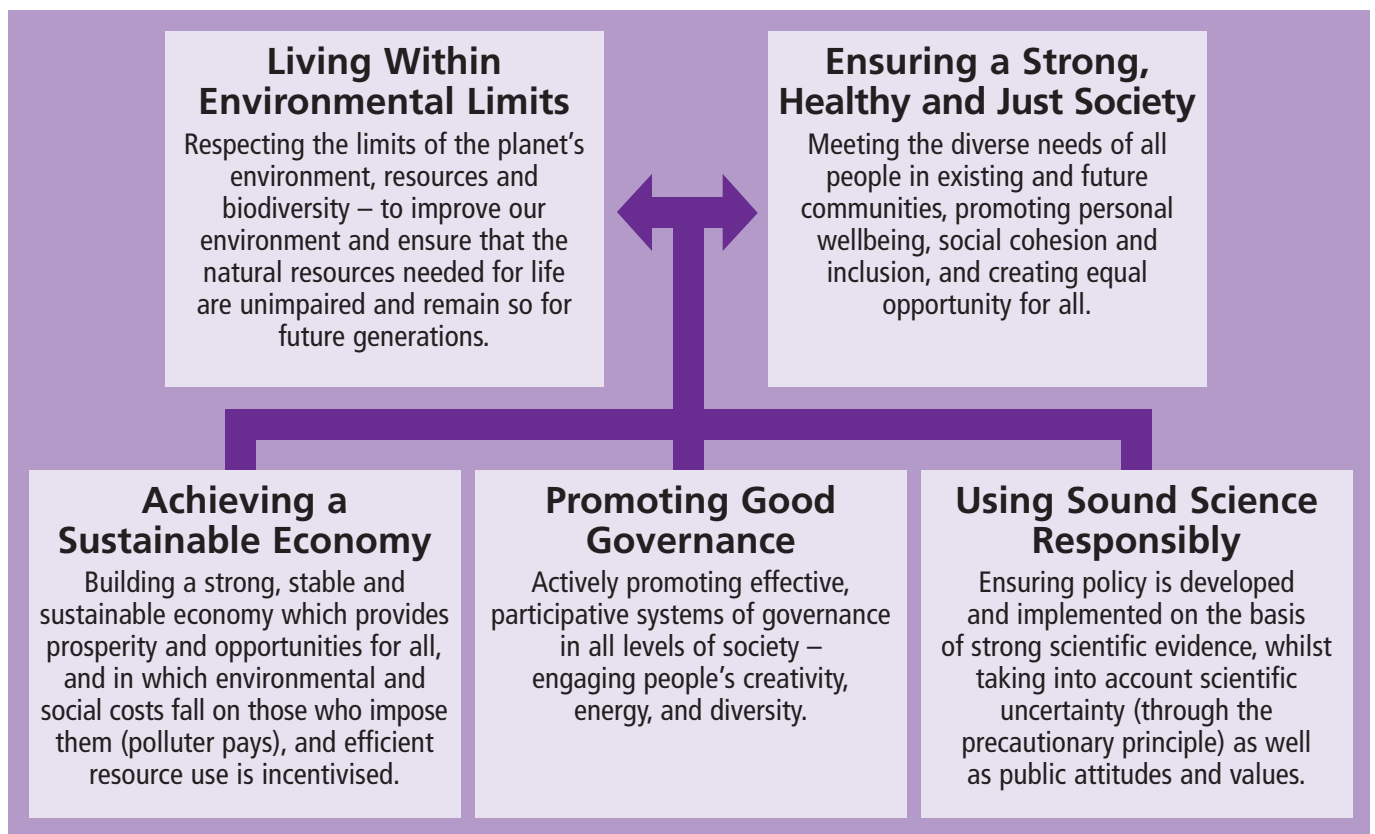
For the UK Government and the Devolved Administrations, that goal will be pursued in an integrated way through a sustainable, innovative and productive economy that delivers high levels of employment; and a just society that promotes social inclusion, sustainable communities and personal wellbeing. This will be done in ways that protect and enhance the physical and natural environment, and use resources and energy as efficiently as possible.

Government must promote a clear understanding of, and commitment to, sustainable development so that all people can contribute to the overall goal through their individual decisions.

Similar objectives will inform all our international endeavours, with the UK actively promoting multilateral and sustainable solutions to today's most pressing environmental, economic and social problems. There is a clear obligation on more prosperous nations both to put their own house in order, and to support other countries in the transition towards a more equitable and sustainable world.

4. Guiding principles

The following is the set of shared UK principles that we will use to achieve our sustainable development purpose. These have been agreed by the UK Government, Scottish Executive, Welsh Assembly Government and the Northern Ireland Administration. They bring together and build on the various previously existing UK principles to set out an overarching approach, which the four separate strategies can share.



"[The revised sustainable development strategy] should provide a framework of principles which are applied to every area of policy in every department – a lens through which all proposals are viewed."

quotation from the 'Taking it on' consultation response from WWF-UK

These principles will form the basis for policy in the UK. For a policy to be sustainable, it must respect all five of these principles, though we recognise that some policies, while underpinned by all five, will place more emphasis on certain principles than others. Any trade-offs should be made in an explicit and transparent way. We want to achieve our goals of living within environmental limits and a just society, and we will do it by means of a sustainable economy, good governance, and sound science.

5. Shared priorities for UK action

As a result of the consultation the priority areas for immediate action, shared across the UK are:

Sustainable Consumption and Production – Sustainable consumption and production is about achieving more with less. This means not only looking at how goods and services are produced, but also the impacts of products and materials across their whole lifecycle and building on people's awareness of social and environmental concerns. This includes reducing the inefficient use of resources which are a drag on the economy, so helping boost business competitiveness and to break the link between economic growth and environmental degradation.

Climate Change and Energy – The effects of a changing climate can already be seen. Temperatures and sea levels are rising, ice and snow cover are declining, and the consequences could be catastrophic for the natural world and society. Scientific evidence points to the release of greenhouse gases, such as carbon dioxide and methane, into the atmosphere by human activity as the primary cause of climatic change. We will seek to secure a profound change in the way we generate and use energy, and in other activities that release these gases. At the same time we must prepare for the climate change that cannot now be avoided. We must set a good example and will encourage others to follow it.

Natural Resource Protection and Environmental Enhancement – Natural resources are vital to our existence and that of communities throughout the world. We need a better understanding of environmental limits, environmental enhancement and recovery where the environment is most degraded to ensure a decent environment for everyone, and a more integrated policy framework.

Sustainable Communities – Our aim is to create sustainable communities that embody the principles of sustainable development at the local level. This will involve working to give communities more power and say in the decisions that affect them; and working in partnership at the right level to get things done. The UK uses the same principles of engagement, partnership, and programmes of aid in order to tackle poverty and environmental degradation and to ensure good governance in overseas communities.

These priorities for action within the UK will also help to shape the way the UK works internationally, in ensuring that our objectives and activities are aligned with international goals.

6. Priorities for international action

Our strategic objective for international sustainable development is to support multilateral and national institutions that can ensure effective integration of social, environmental and economic objectives to deliver sustainable development, especially for the poorest members of society.

“Sustainable development is about much more than just bringing the environment into development. If things are going to change, what we need is not abstract notions, nor doom and gloom, but practical, effective and above all fair principles for the sound management of the planet. Because development that’s sustainable has to work for the poor as well as for the planet”.

**Rt. Hon. Hilary Benn MP, Secretary of State,
Department for International Development**

The UK’s international priorities on sustainable development since the UK’s 1999 Sustainable Development Strategy have principally been framed by the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the Doha Development Agenda of the World Trade Organisation, the Monterrey Consensus on Financing for Development and the Plan of Implementation of the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD). These built on pre-existing commitments including those from the Rio Earth Summit of 1992 and other international processes including Multilateral Environmental Agreements.

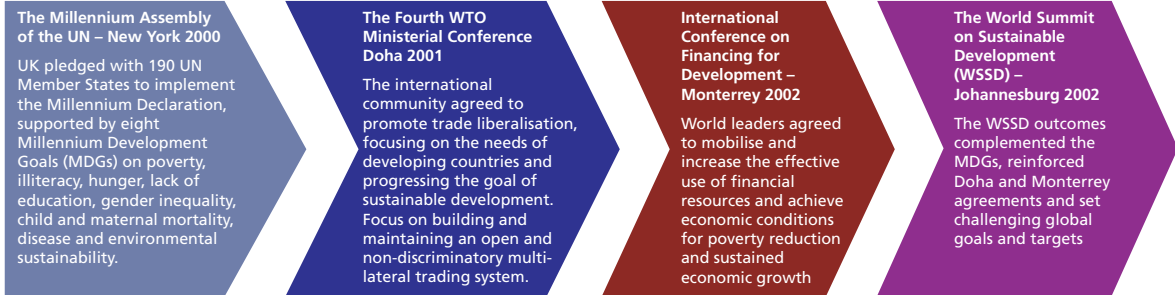
The WSSD outcomes complement the MDGs, reinforce Doha and Monterrey agreements and set challenging global goals and targets on accessing water, sanitation and modern energy services; increasing energy efficiency and use of renewable energy; sustainable fisheries and forests; reducing biodiversity loss on land and in our oceans; chemicals management; and decoupling environmental degradation from economic growth – that is, achieving sustainable patterns of consumption and production.

International commitments must be followed up and implemented as a matter of urgency. This must be done through addressing the international impacts of our domestic policies and by working with developed and developing countries, and international institutions, to spread good practice and maintain political pressure for change.

The diagram opposite outlines the international priorities, drawing a distinction between goals, targets and the means of achieving them. UK policies and actions to help achieve these international objectives are set out in later chapters.

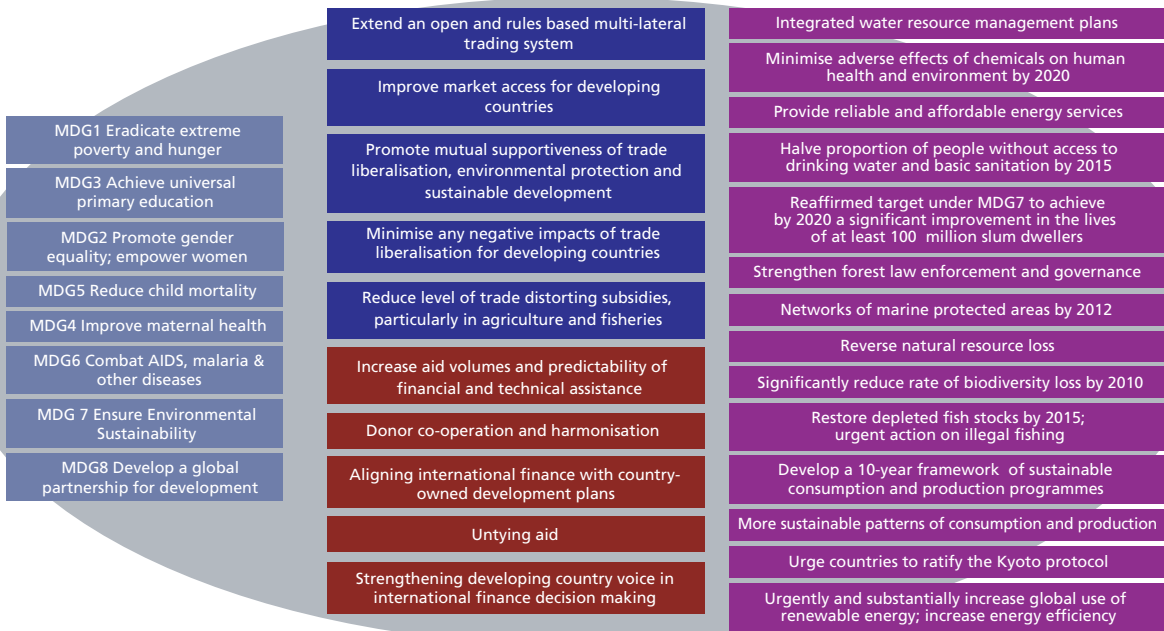
Priorities for Action on International Sustainable Development this Millennium

Key International Summits



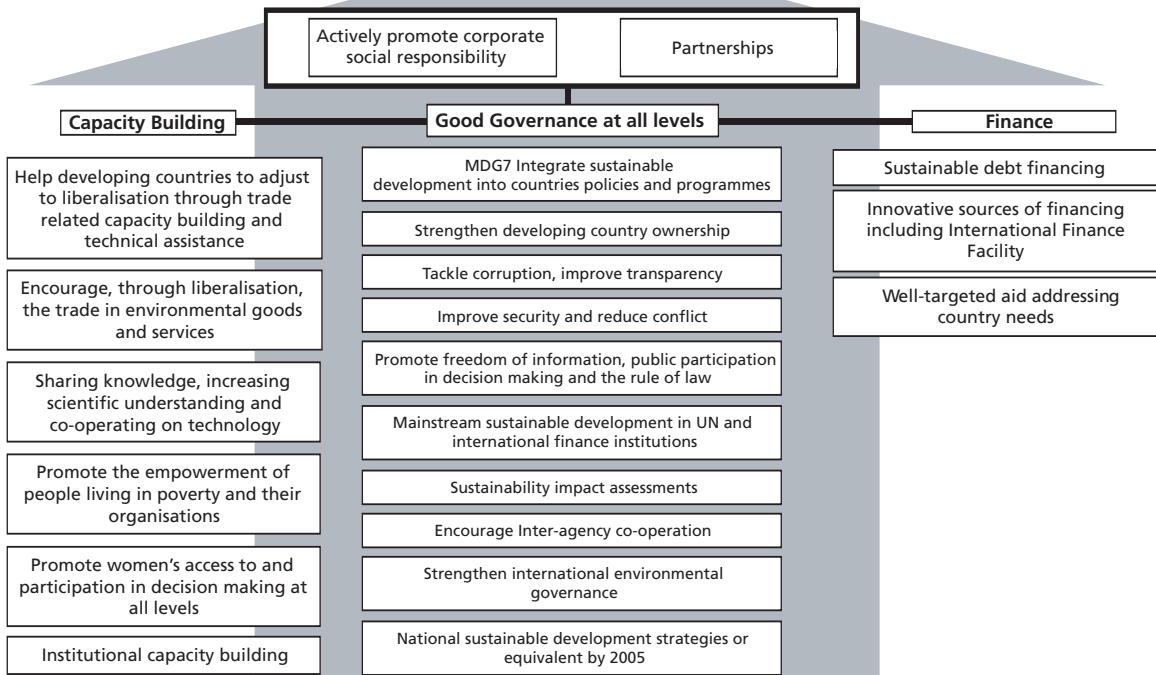
The commitments/targets are interdependent. Many were agreed upon at one summit but were reinforced and built upon at subsequent events.

Commitments / Targets



Tools/Actions to deliver the above commitments are mutually supportive and cross cutting

Key Tools



Sustainable development at the EU level

The key objectives that the European Union's Sustainable Development Strategy (EU SDS) has set out to tackle are climate change, natural resource protection, sustainable transport, ageing population, public health and the global dimension of sustainable development. We are committed to addressing these objectives through the UK Strategy and other domestic programmes.

In Europe our aim, which will be a focus for our presidency in the second half of 2005, will be to take forward efforts to deliver sustainable development and to forge links between the economic, social and environmental agendas. The current review of the EU SDS is an important opportunity to take this agenda forward and to provide a framework for integrating sustainable development into all EU processes and policies. We want to see a strong and ambitious EU Strategy that delivers an innovative, highly competitive, resource efficient, low carbon economy that provides an excellent quality of life for all its citizens and a mutually beneficial relationship with its trading partners. This should be achieved in harmony with the protection of human health and the environment, and can be delivered by:

- ▶ a more effective integration of global commitments and actions into the core of the strategy
- ▶ measurement of progress against a core set of priority targets, most of which are already in place
- ▶ a focus on delivery of existing commitments plus reform where indicators continue to show that we are not moving in a sustainable direction
- ▶ measures to embed sustainable development at all levels of decision-making and across all policy sectors
- ▶ encouragement of more effective learning between Member States, and
- ▶ commitment to a more active involvement of stakeholders, especially in the impact assessment of new policies.

The UK will deploy its resources in order to promote sustainable development across the full range of the EU's policies.

7. Indicators for the UK Government Strategy

We are introducing a new set of high-level indicators: the **UK Framework Indicators** to give an overview of sustainable development and the priority areas in the UK.

Responses from the consultation 'Taking it on' showed that there remained strong support for an overarching set of UK 'headline' indicators, even though since devolution there have been separate indicators sets for Wales and Scotland and a set under development in Northern Ireland.

The UK Framework indicators are intended to cover key impacts and outcomes that reflect the priority areas shared across the UK.

In addition to the shared UK Framework Indicators there will be a mix of indicators, targets and performance measures in the individual strategies for the UK Government, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. These will underpin the shared framework priorities while reflecting the respective priorities of each administration.

Indicators for the UK Government Strategy include all 20 of the UK Framework Indicators and a further 48 indicators related to the priority areas. Relevant indicators are listed at the end of each chapter. The full list of 68 indicators is presented in Chapter 7, along with related Public Service Agreement targets, and national strategies.

We will assess and report annually on progress against the indicators and use this assessment, together with other evidence from monitoring and evaluation, to determine whether we are succeeding in our goals or whether we need to develop different policies and act accordingly.

Criteria for the set of indicators

In selecting the new UK Framework Indicators, we have chosen measures that wherever possible:

- ▶ are **linked** to the purpose and priorities within the UK Framework
- ▶ are **agreed** as high priorities by the UK Government and Devolved Administrations
- ▶ have **UK coverage** (though there are some data constraints)
- ▶ have **trends** available
- ▶ highlight **challenges**, and
- ▶ are statistically **robust and meaningful**.

The same criteria apply wherever possible to the indicators of key drivers and other factors within the UK Government Strategy, except that they are not necessarily applicable across the whole of the UK.

Further developments on indicators

There was some support among consultees for aggregated indices, and in particular an 'ecological footprint' indicator within the consultation responses. We appreciate that an ecological footprint, which some consider provides a measure of global impact, may have potential as a future communication tool, especially as the Welsh Assembly Government has already adopted it as an indicator. The UK Government has therefore commissioned

research to establish whether an ecological footprint could be constructed for the UK that overcomes concerns regarding transparency, robustness and meaningfulness. We are in addition looking at means of estimating indirect carbon dioxide emissions, including those embodied in the production and transportation of our imports from abroad.

Ideally, we should also be able to produce indicators of our global impact – to ensure that progress at home is not at the expense of the wider world. However, establishing meaningful and reliable measures that encompass economic and social, as well as environmental impacts, is a considerable challenge, owing to data constraints and other practicalities. Work will continue in this area, in particular by international organisations such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

We will build on the current indicators within the UK Government Strategy, and establish some measures for international sustainable development. These will include:

- ▶ showing how the UK compares internationally by setting UK indicators against comparative trends in other countries
- ▶ reporting on indicators of global and EU trends, and
- ▶ exploring the feasibility of indicators to measure UK impacts overseas. This would be on a pilot basis, looking at specific countries and key sectors (like timber or mineral extraction).

Within the UK Framework and UK Government Strategy there are several indicators where it is not yet possible for us to be precise about how they will be measured. For some of these there is already work underway which should enable us to define the indicator, and start reporting on progress within a short period. In other cases, the indicators represent an aspiration for those issues we wish to monitor. It may take longer to define them properly and establish routine data collection – not least as the indicators need to be established within a well-defined policy context and in some cases the policy development is also at an early stage. For all the indicators to be developed, we will expand on what might be measured, and specify a timetable, as part of the first monitoring report on the UK Framework and UK Government Strategy Indicators.

In particular, the Departments for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), and for Education and Skills (DfES) are actively seeking to develop an indicator to show the impact of formal learning on knowledge and awareness of sustainable development. Further work is needed on this, but the Government hopes that a suitable indicator will be agreed later in 2005.

Environmental equality and social justice are key areas for which we may need to establish further indicators, and the recent Sustainable Development Research Network Environment and Social Justice Rapid Research and Evidence Review provides a useful foundation for further work.³

The 1999 Strategy contained a commitment to develop an indicator of wellbeing. In response to this commitment, Defra's 2001 survey of public attitudes to quality of life and to the environment in England (Defra 2002) asked a series of new questions about reported life-satisfaction. Further progress on this issue has been made by a Prime

³ See www.sd-research.org.uk/documents/ESJ_final_report.pdf

Minister's Strategy Unit report on life-satisfaction and by more recent work on wellbeing in this country and elsewhere.⁴ The issue of wellbeing lies at the heart of sustainable development, and it remains important to develop appropriate wellbeing indicators.

Many of our existing indicators cover issues that affect people's wellbeing, for example employment, community participation, education, housing conditions, health, income, and the environment more generally.

What is missing is a means of making sure that wellbeing issues are being tackled consistently, in the right way, and that we are genuinely making a difference to people's lives. Some appreciation of this may in part be provided by extending our indicators to include such issues as mental health, access to sport and culture, green space, neighbourliness, which we will explore.

► **In order to get a better understanding and focus on wellbeing, by the end of 2006 the Government will sponsor cross-disciplinary work to bring together existing research and international experience and to explore how policies might change with an explicit wellbeing focus**

Depending on the strength of the evidence base, such work could be used to inform future policy development and spending decisions, as this sustainable development strategy is implemented. It could also provide the basis for developing a more comprehensive set of wellbeing indicators to support the Framework and our separate sustainable development strategies.

⁴ PM Strategy Unit, November 2002, 'Life-satisfaction: the state of knowledge and implications for government'; The World in 2005, The Economist, December 2004, 'The Economist Intelligence Unit's quality of life index'; Richard Layard, February 2005, 'Happiness: lessons from a new science'; New Economics Foundation, 2004, 'A Wellbeing Manifesto for a Flourishing Society'; Australian Centre on Quality of Life, August 2004, 'Australian Unity Wellbeing Index'.