

Bridging the Knowledge Gap in SD Strategies:

Research Partnerships for Sustainable Development

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'Strategy fever' – an opportunity or a threat?

Most countries, both North and South, have some form of national strategy for sustainable development (SD) in place or in progress. However, there are varying degrees of ownership and commitment by stakeholders in the country. Many strategies tend not to address the whole scope of SD, but focus only on environmental or (increasingly) poverty issues. Over the last decade, a large number of strategy exercises in developing countries have proven to be little more than rapid, top-down 'translations' of external policies – or conditionalities for receiving aid. And strategies tend not to reflect local conditions and priorities – in Northern as well as Southern countries – because they have invested little in identifying, mobilising and building local knowledge and analysis, or in follow-up research. Consequently, many SD strategies could be characterised as mere documents responding to external policy initiatives, e.g. Agenda 21 or World Bank HIPC requirements, rather than local policy processes responding to stakeholder problems and opportunities for SD.

An 'epidemic' of strategies on poverty, environment & sustainable development

Even the largest countries today are facing a form of 'policy inflation' through the sequential performance of multiple strategy exercises. In brief, these include:

For poverty alleviation – Poverty Reduction Strategies (PRSPs) are the predominant approach, promoted by the World Bank (as part of requirements for securing debt relief). Many bilateral development agencies have accorded PRSPs a central place in their support to developing countries. The World Bank's particular requirements have meant that existing 'home-grown' poverty strategies may have been revived, displaced and/or superseded by the PRSP. (ODI, 2001)

For environmental conservation – the environmental conventions spawned by UNCED each demand some form of national response. The predominant frameworks include National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans under the CBD, National Communications under the FCCC, National Action Plans under the CCD, and National Forest Programmes to implement the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests' Proposals for Action. In some countries, frameworks that were developed in the 1980s and early 1990s – National Environmental Action Plans and

KEY CHALLENGES:

- The breadth and complexity of issues involved in PRSPs, NSDSs and similar SD strategy processes call for a learning approach – to generate robust strategies and continuously improve them.
- The core of this learning approach is inter-disciplinary and participatory research that can also mobilise local knowledge.
- Several constraints need to be tackled if such research is to make SD strategies work. Currently, there is often low policy demand for research. Resulting poor availability or quality of information skews policy priorities. The necessary participatory research involving local groups has high transaction costs. Research capacities and resources are limited or fragmented in many countries. There are also challenges relating to the organisation of research, and its financial, professional and policy independence.
- However, there are also good opportunities to design effective research programmes within the new generation of SD strategies – making use of the current emphases on participatory approaches, on setting up good baselines, on multistakeholder partnerships, and on international collaboration.

National Conservation Strategies – are still in operation. These do not relate to international obligations, but NEAPs are often strongly associated with the World Bank. (OECD/UNDP, 2002)

For an integrated approach to sustainable development – three recognised frameworks are predominant, and one ‘organic’ option has emerged in practice:

- At local level, *Local Agenda 21s* have been developed in over 6400 local districts or municipalities, as means to put Agenda 21 into action. Some of these have led to significant innovations and changed behaviour.
- The national-level equivalent is the *National Sustainable Development Strategy (NSDS)*, but far fewer of these have been developed. There has never been a strong international political push for NSDSs, in spite of their centrality to Agenda 21 recommendations and being made an international target in 1997 at a UN Special Session (Rio+5). Indeed there were no official UN guidelines until 2002. (UN DESA, 2002)
- Finally, in 1999, the World Bank introduced the concept of the *Comprehensive Development Frameworks (CDF)* as means to ensure integrated development, and initiated CDF pilot projects in 12 countries. But this approach has now been largely subsumed under the international focus on PRSPs (CDF principles applied in HIPC countries). (OECD/UNDP, 2002)
- Other integrated approaches to SD have developed more organically, most notably through the evolution of those environmental strategies (for example, Pakistan) which have progressively had to deal with social and economic issues during implementation, or through the evolution of national development plans, which have had to face up to pressing social and environmental concerns (as in Thailand).

A recent global study reveals key problems with most strategies

The above two examples came from an important study by eight developing countries¹ and the OECD Development Assistance Committee of many strategy types. (OECD DAC, 2001) This study revealed remarkably similar problems, which may be summarised as:²

- A large number of strategies were not *country-led* but were induced or even imposed by external agencies. They took the form of *rapid, one-off* processes of document formulation. (‘A long form to fill in if we are to get aid’ was how one minister described one major strategy process.)
- In developing countries, different external agencies pushed their own strategy ‘brands’, leading to *competition*, ‘policy inflation’ and overburdening of local capacities.
- Consequently, many strategies were not *integrated* into a country’s mainstream decision-making systems (notably government economic planning, and private

sector investment decisions). Potential incentives for effective local institutions and mechanisms to contribute to the strategy, or make use of the strategy, were missed. The results, therefore, were frequently mere ‘planners’ dreams’, with little political, civil society or business commitment and demand for further action.

- There were often few links between *policy* and *on-the-ground realities*, so that policy debate did not learn from the field, and people in the field did not participate in debate. As a result, opportunities to link progress in both areas were missed.
- Very many strategies were little more than wish lists, lacking clear *priorities* or achievable targets. The strategies’ determination to be comprehensive was a source of both strength (awareness of linked issues) and weakness (lack of focus). This was partly due to inadequate research to inform priorities and solutions – or the progressive removal of the researcher from the priority-setting process. As a result, no-one was interested in – or felt responsible for – the complete wish-list, and those at the ‘centre’ felt paralysed by too many proposals.
- There was often a very narrow base of *participation*, usually due to lack of time and resources, no recognised means to identify the stakeholders that counted most, and weak rules on participation processes and outcomes. Any participation was often late in the process. As a result, *consensus* was forced, fragile or partial; and few people felt a sense of ‘ownership’.
- *Information* employed was often out-of-date, repeating old analyses and not challenging existing assumptions, with inadequate time and resources available. *Analytical methodologies* were not often up to the holistic tasks, or were inadequately tried, tested and trusted. Existing *sources of (local) knowledge* were often overlooked in favour of the analyses of (external) strategy consultants. As a result, credibility has often been low because the knowledge produced was not measured in terms of its relevance, utility and accountability to local stakeholders. In the earliest strategies – such as some NCSs and NEAPs – analysis was quite innovative as there were fewer imposed norms and frameworks. But in the worst cases, pieces of ‘analysis’ have even been cut-and-pasted from one country strategy to another: these served more to push the point of view of the external ‘drivers’ of the strategy than to assess local needs and solutions. Most strategies of all types have given less attention to these issues than others: as a result, strategy decisions were light on new information and innovation.

These common failings have discredited the concept of ‘strategies’, and the term has begun to be synonymous with external documents rather than locally-owned policy processes and commitments. Yet the transition to sustainable development *will* require some kind of co-ordinated, structured – i.e. strategic – response that deals with priorities, that can manage complexity and uncertainties, and that encourages innovation. Tackling the knowledge limitations will be key.

A case study on information, analysis and research in PRSPs

A study by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) concluded that, in the majority of PRSPs, 'data quality and research capacity utilisation/development has been very weak', although this is beginning to change, for instance with the setting up of longer-term PRSP research studies on key themes. (ODI, 2001)

Most of the PRSP development processes to date have been relatively rapid affairs, with little chance to do anything more than bringing together existing data. For example:

"[In the Senegal PRSP,] due to the compressed time frame, the thematic groups had only about two months to formulate terms of reference, analyse findings, and submit their final report... As a result, the quality of the analysis ... was not very high."

(Phillips, 2002)

"Even full PRSPs have significant deficiencies in their poverty profiles, including lack of specificity about key categories of poor people"

(Thin *et al.*, 2001)

In some countries, much data exists but is under-utilised, e.g. in Rwanda and Ghana – in the latter the statistics bureau has not been involved in the PRSP. The Pakistan PRSP has not used research material from the parallel Participatory Poverty Assessment, feeding accusations that the process is intended to impose knowledge, rather than to generate it. (Zehra, 2002) Where data has been used, it has often been old, for example in Tanzania, where household survey data was ten years old. (Whaites, 2002) Its deficiencies are not always being tackled:

"A blind eye is being turned to ... the unreliability of the official reporting systems and administrative data... The potential for using known shortcut techniques, such as participatory beneficiary assessments and facilitated staff self-assessments, to provide quick feedback ... is not being explored creatively enough"

(Booth and Lucas, 2001)

Where economic changes are rapid, communities can enter or leave conditions of poverty over a short time. Frequent monitoring and research, to correlate conditions of poverty with policies and other interventions, are needed to develop and improve strategies. But PRSPs have not adequately assessed the available capacity to do this, or provided resources to utilise and build capacity. (ODI, 2001; Whaites, 2002)

Most PRSP processes are now aware of the need for improving the quality of data gathering and poverty mapping, for capacity building, and for participation in monitoring and evaluation. Many have commissioned new household surveys (to help with outcome assessments). Some will complement these with 'lighter' survey instruments including participatory approaches (to pick up evidence on intermediate processes). These participatory approaches are part of the PRSP programme in several countries, for instance Mali, Mozambique, and Tanzania. In the medium term this will significantly improve the prospects for diagnostic work during PRSP implementation. (ODI, 2001)

It is also vitally important to develop research programmes that can, over time, understand the dynamics of linked poverty and environment problems, and the processes that work in solving them. The need for continuing research is barely covered in documents addressing PRSPs to date. Poverty '*observatoires*' are being established in some African countries, but the issue is whether they are set up in such a way as to stimulate demand for data use and analysis. In Uganda, the location of a technical poverty research unit close to the Ministry of Finance (responsible for the PRSP – itself a useful strategic decision) has helped. (ODI, 2001)

A case study of research in Pakistan's National Conservation Strategy

A highly comprehensive Mid-Term Review of Pakistan's NCS was conducted eight years into its implementation. (Hanson *et al.*, 2000) In relation to research, it revealed some progress:

- Pakistan's NCS formulation marked perhaps the first major effort to research the environmental aspects of national development.
- Recognising the need for a continuing research programme linked to the NCS, the Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) was established in 1992 to serve as a source of expertise and advisory services for government, private sector and non-governmental initiatives in support of their work on the NCS.
- SDPI has encouraged stakeholders to take an inquiring approach to sustainable development, and it has trained policy researchers in interdisciplinary methods.
- SDPI is also facilitating the flow of international institutional knowledge and research on sustainable development into Pakistan in addition to contributing research in the programme areas recommended by the NCS.

However, it also revealed failings – mainly in the absence of a baseline, consistent monitoring, recording and evaluation (MRE) of NCS performance. Consequently:

"The NCS cannot learn and adjust, a considerable weakness in today's climate of rapid change... Good MRE likely would have changed the prevailing perception of the NCS being a static reference 'document' to appreciation of its potential as a dynamic process to improve future economic, ecological and social well-being."

(Hanson *et al.*, 2000)

The review stressed the need to invest more in research in the planned process of transforming the NCS into a full sustainable development strategy. It suggested:

- A network of research institutions, centred on SDPI.
- A regular state of environment report coupled with a national conference.

- ‘Regular ‘state of environmental stakeholders’ surveys of awareness, commitment and judgments of priority issues.
- An independent ‘watchdog’ (or report), perhaps involving SDPI.
- A ‘balance sheet’ of environmental assets related to the costs of inaction.
- Regular macroeconomic scrutiny and strategic environmental assessment.

“Research should now form a real driver of the strategy, the challenge being to strike a balance between ‘pushing advice’ on important upcoming issues that are not fully appreciated yet by stakeholders, and reacting to the ‘demand pull’ of routine policy processes when they call for advice.”

(Hanson et al., 2000)

SD is knowledge-intensive, covering a vast terrain

Sustainable development is knowledge-intensive.

The case studies have indicated how SD requires a continually updated understanding of many issues. Much knowledge already exists, but needs to be identified, applied and kept under review. Underlying assumptions or ‘myths’ need to be tackled. Gaps in knowledge need to be identified. Processes of innovation need to be generated when new problems emerge. Particular research programmes need to be put in place to organise the exploration of this vast terrain, which covers:

Understanding poverty in its various dimensions:

poor people’s access to financial, physical, natural, social and human assets; their conditions of vulnerability, resilience and opportunity; their associated rights and powers; and well-being relative to others. Both aggregate and stratified information is needed. Of particular importance is understanding the nature of chronic poverty, i.e. identifying those people or groups who seem ‘immune’ to development efforts from one generation to the next.

Understanding environmental conditions: the extent of particular ecosystems, and their productive capability (yields or waste assimilation capacity), diversity, and current use; and both the potential hazards they face and the actual degradation being caused. It is especially important to identify the status of ecosystems of importance to human well-being and to the main economic sectors (e.g. farm systems, or air and water quality), and to identify those under most threat.

Understanding multiple links between poverty and environmental conditions. There are few simple, linear and one-way relationships. While at one time it was felt that poor people destroyed the environment, it is now generally realised that people are poor because they do not have effective access to environmental benefits and to means to sustain them. Simple development myths are bandied about in the absence of dynamic and

locally specific information. Isolating the major causes is nearly always a matter of long-term research, independent from any vested interests, coupled with transparent debate processes and a high-level mandate to get to the (sometimes ugly) truth.

Understanding change and possible future scenarios.

Uncertainties abound, but one thing is certain: sustainable development will *not* be described by the end-point illustrations offered by the average SD strategy. Change is constant in economic, social and environmental systems, and disequilibrium is often on the increase, especially in small and vulnerable communities and countries. Sustainable development requires the ability to assess vulnerabilities and sources of resilience in relation to uncertain changes. Scenario planning provides rigour to test resilience (it is not a forecasting exercise). Yet SD research too often bases its conclusions on existing conditions or (at best) an extrapolation of current trends.

Understanding stakeholder powers, capacities, needs and motivations:

An assessment of the particular powers (or lack of them) of stakeholders is crucial both to an understanding of each sustainable development issue (who are the dominant and the marginalised), and to the structuring of strategy processes (who needs to be involved to remedy problems and realise opportunities).

Understanding policy and decision-making processes,

including the institutional, legislative and administrative drivers and dynamics of development. In sustainable development strategies, for example, stakeholders establish an intention to undergo a participatory process to renegotiate goals and their own roles in achieving them. Research is needed to identify which are the most promising existing mechanisms for this. Subsequently, the strategy process itself, and all of its components, need to be well understood for the strategy to keep on track.

Understanding practice – the impacts of ‘solutions’:

There is a vast range of field-based innovation at the interface between economic, environmental and social systems. Much more effort is needed to assess such innovations, their impact, and the conditions that make them a success. This helps to avoid the cult of the ‘local success story’, the ‘miracle cure’, or the ‘demon to be exorcised’. It is too easy to say ‘this local project is good, so we’ll have a hundred more of them’ without understanding the particular context and enabling policy and institutional conditions. Policy should be improved by knowing what works on the ground, why, where and when.

Understanding and testing theories of the development process:

Development agencies tend to favour fashions and miracle solutions, which are replete with assumptions. ‘Sustainable development’ itself can be viewed as a hypothesis – requiring research to establish the right integration and trade-offs, to assess impacts, to review whether the process has worked, to make adjustments as necessary, and to revisit assumptions, fashions and theories.

Key issues to be addressed

- **Breadth and complexity of issues:** Some challenges arise from the broad extent and multiple dimensions of the many themes on which knowledge is required – their inherent complexity, their frequently wide geographical extent, their multiple interactions, and the speed, scope and uncertainty of change. There is potentially so much that could be investigated. This calls for inter-disciplinary (and not just multi-disciplinary) ways of working, for prioritisation, for sampling, for multi-stakeholder partnerships (to surface different kinds of knowledge and apply comparative advantage), and for international collaboration (both to tackle global problems and to get to grips with common local problems).
- **Key strategy drivers exhibit an urge to simplify and to spend money quickly – and ‘forget’ research’:** There is frequently a call to ‘get on with it, and not to waste time on further research’ – especially in the international ‘development business’. Research is frequently supported only so far as it supports the prevailing paradigm or improves its efficiency; research on local conditions for success and failure is a rapid affair at best.
- **Baseline/change information is not collected:** As touched on above, there are practical supply-side problems for research. These include information availability, reliability and currency. The right kind of information (especially time series) tends to be unavailable, because it has not been a policy priority or has been difficult to obtain.
- **Methodologies:** There are problems of both methodology availability for complex issues and process monitoring, and adequate understanding, experience and skills in them. Many of the methodologies promoted for researching SD issues (e.g. OECD/UNDP, 2002) are themselves at the forefront of research and are not yet routinely applied.
- **Participatory research – transaction costs:** Participatory approaches, combining stakeholders’ knowledge and reflection with organised research programmes, should be the core of strategy research. But they are expensive to put in place (even though systems are often available, they are unused by many strategies).
- **Researchers are uncoordinated:** Research capacities and resources available for SD research are often limited or fragmented in many countries. There are also challenges relating to its organisation and its financial, professional and policy independence. The poverty research community and the environment research community tend to be very separate, with different political- and pay-masters, and there are few incentives and methodologies to enable working together.
- **Low policy demand for ‘research’:** Any lack of poverty, environmental or SD information, or biases in it, tends to reflect skewed policy priorities. Low demand tends to be for three reasons:

- The *status quo* is favoured, and change is feared (common with local elites, who may prefer myths to be perpetrated than truths revealed)
- Change is favoured, and local reality is ignored (common with external parties such as the development bank economists and others driving the strategy process, who prefer their prevailing paradigms to prevail over local knowledge and innovation)
- All stakeholders agree on ‘higher’ priorities – in the case of strategies, participation is agreed as a priority but is often undertaken in a way which squeezes out the room for genuine inquiry (as a token or a fashion)

A ‘continuous improvement’ approach can link SD strategies with research and action

It is becoming clear that there are both mutual needs, and potentials, for improved research–policy–practice links. *Strategy processes* that effectively link all the centres of debate and decision-making – government, business and civil society – on a continuing basis, will lead to demand for relevant SD research. *Research programmes* that bring together many sources of knowledge in effective inter-disciplinary methodologies – on a continuing basis, will lead to better strategies.

A practical approach for doing this is the ‘continuous improvement’ framework. This integrates research and policy actors in a step-by-step, learning and adaptation process of change driven by multi-stakeholder groups – see **Figure 1**. (OECD/UNDP 2002) There is emerging political agreement that this is the right approach to strategies, through both the NSDS policy guidelines developed by the OECD and eight developing countries (OECD DAC, 2001) and guidelines developed by the UN. (UN DESA, 2002) These apply to all forms of strategy aiming at sustainable development, including e.g. poverty and environmental strategies.

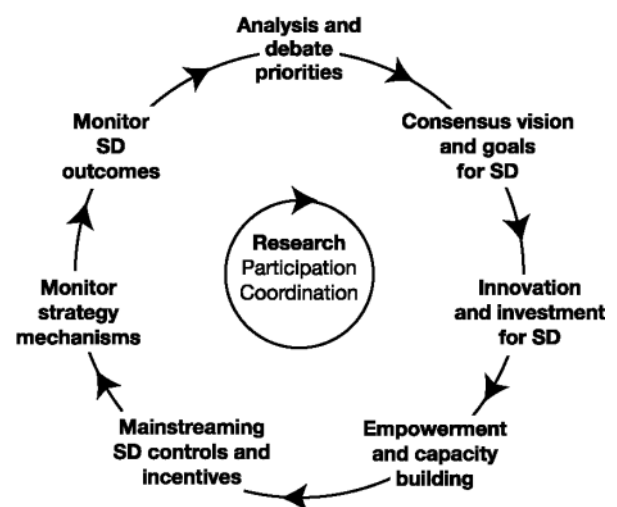


FIGURE 1:

A ‘continuous improvement’ approach to sustainable development strategies

(Source: OECD/UNDP 2002)

TABLE 1:*Changing approaches to strategies*

FROM	TO
Develops and implements a single 'master plan' for SD (that gets increasingly out of date)	Builds a system of co-ordinated mechanisms & processes dealing with SD priorities step-by-step
Fixed ideas and solutions	An adaptive, learning system offering coherence between activities
One-off initiative	A continuous process
Management based on precedent or evidence only	Also experimentation and managing uncertainty
State alone is responsible	Society as a whole is responsible
Narrow participation	Multi-stakeholder approach
Focus on outputs (projects, laws, etc.)	Focus on outcomes (impacts) and the quality of participation and management processes
Sector-based research and planning	Partnerships and integrated research and planning
Focus on costly 'projects' (and a consequent dependence on external assistance)	Focus on cost savings and domestically-driven and financed investment and development

Sources: Adapted from OECD/UNDP (2002) and Dalal-Clayton and Bass (2002)

Key differences between the older 'master plan' strategies and the new 'continuous improvement system' thinking, derived from OECD and UN reviews, are summarised in **Table 1** above.

Some principles for strategy research, based on 'what works'

The continuous improvement approach to strategies offers greater scope for research – and vice versa. But it has implications for how research is done. Drawing principally on OECD/UNDP (2002), a number of research principles for SD strategies can be proposed:

1. **A coherent, continuing programme:** SD research should be a central component of the strategy, and reflected in the strategy's formal mandate.
2. **Ownership:** Multi-stakeholder groups should design the information gathering, analysis and research process themselves, to ensure ownership of the strategy and its results.
3. **High-level support:** The research programme should be commissioned, agreed and endorsed at the highest level, involving recognised policy and research authorities – thus increasing the chance that the research will be used.
4. **Good research co-ordination:** Many players should be involved, sharing the knowledge they gain. If one research institution co-ordinates the work, there should be considerable space for others to contribute from the poverty and environmental research communities and sources of local knowledge.
5. **Stakeholders doing their own analysis:** Groups affected by key issues should be enabled and encouraged to engage in research and analysis themselves. Special efforts should be made to identify 'who counts most' and involve them, with a focus on groups who are often marginalised from policy- and decision-making but who may hold critical (and often ignored) knowledge.
6. **Existing capacities:** Most of the research tasks should be implemented through bringing together, and supporting, existing local centres of information, technical expertise, learning and research.
7. **Criteria for prioritising research:** Priorities should be addressed, to avoid the number and type of issues addressed in the strategy expanding beyond any ability to handle them. The issue may be a priority if it:

- Is an opportunity/threat to poor people's livelihoods and/or key economic sectors;
- Is an opportunity/threat to key ecosystem assets and processes;
- Reflects established public concerns and is visible to them;
- Has a major learning/extension/multiplier effect;
- Is an international obligation;
- Is timely in relation to a pending decision;
- Is 'researchable' – can be defined in terms of clear questions, with a good chance of coming to swift completion, successful conclusions, and adoption of results

8. Accessible and participatory methods of research:

These should be selected to bring multiple dimensions together and, where relevant, to engage decision-makers in local 'learning by doing'. Examples of those that are conducive to interdisciplinary ways of working include:

- Environmental and social impact assessment
- Strategic environmental assessment
- Multi-criteria analysis
- Decision analysis
- Scenario development and foresighting
- Cost-benefit and cost-effectiveness analysis
- Risk assessment methodologies
- Participatory and action research approaches

9. **Partnerships:** Partnerships between researchers should be established to enhance economies of scale; to pool research, participation and communications capacities; to undertake interdisciplinary approaches; to share intellectual resources; and to attain a higher policy profile. The utility of different models of research partnerships should be compared, especially those that were designed to link closely with policy.

The political move towards 'participation' can help

Moves towards strengthening research in strategies have been far less prevalent than the strengthening of participation. Today's strategy initiatives are invariably more multi-stakeholder, and more consultative, than even the recent past. But the full utility of participation in each of the many tasks in an SD strategy has not always been recognised. The OECD and UNDP studies have shown that *effective* participation is, in fact, closely bound up with knowledge utilisation and generation – it brings together more people in uncovering knowledge and researching problems and solutions. This reality needs to be considered in future strategy initiatives. In other words, 'knowledge

generation matters' as much as the current paradigm of 'participation matters', and they are connected.

Outside the confines of formal research commissioned by policy-makers, improvements in policy are frequently made through various forms of participation that alter the language and perceptions of decision-makers, and that introduce issues and innovations that were not anticipated. This occurs not just through 'supply-driven' partnerships of researchers with common research interests but also through demand-driven partnerships of researchers with other stakeholders. There is a considerable literature on the workings of policy communities, epistemic communities, advocacy coalitions, issue networks, etc, that describe these formal and informal partnerships (see e.g. Lindquist 2001). Such understanding needs to be brought into the concept of SD strategies, so that they can seek out such partnerships and give them the space and time to explore SD and develop innovations. This broader approach to SD knowledge identification, utilisation and learning could achieve greater efficacy and credibility than the short-term, externally driven strategy model of brief, commissioned analyses of pre-set issues.

"Strategies have to be grounded in the politics, the policies, the programs, the practices, the paradigms, the performance measures, and the pathologies that preoccupy both the populace and the policy-makers."

(Tariq Banuri, 1999)

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1. Bolivia, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Tanzania, Namibia, Nepal, Thailand, Pakistan
 2. Similar findings were made by ODI (2001) and the country studies for UN DESA (2002)
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About the Poverty and Environment Initiative

The Poverty and Environment Initiative (PEI) aims to help countries strengthen their own capacities to fight poverty through sound and equitable environmental management. By building partnerships and supporting learning and knowledge-sharing at local, national and global levels, PEI focuses on promoting more effective ways to integrate the environmental priorities of the poor into national strategies and policy processes for poverty eradication and sustainable development. In collaboration with country-level and international partners, PEI support focuses on three broad areas:

- (1) *participatory research and analysis of poverty-environment linkages and their cross-sectoral relationships;*
- (2) *multi-stakeholder processes for policy dialogue and design; and*
- (3) *indicators and monitoring of poverty-environment trends and policy outcomes.*

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The International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) is an independent, non-profit research institute working in the field of sustainable development. The **Regional and International Networking Group (Ring)** is a global alliance of research and policy organisations that seeks to enhance and promote sustainable development through a programme of collaborative research, dissemination and policy advocacy. There are currently 14 Ring member organisations based in 5 continents.

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