A Strategic Approach to Sustainable Development through Official Development Assistance

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Abstract: Adopting a Strategic Sustainable Development (SSD) approach to official bilateral development assistance could result in more effective development planning that yields lasting results in developing countries. A Framework for Strategic Sustainable Development Assistance (FSSDA) based on SSD and customised to the needs of a development agency offers guidance in planning for development towards sustainability. This it does by directing donor and recipient planners in generating holistic perspectives, setting the goal of development as an attractive and sustainable society, and providing a flexible decision-making framework to guide strategic planning. Development assistance donor agencies face several difficulties in ensuring aid effectiveness. The FSSDA offers support in addressing these challenges by: positioning the creation of sustainable societies as the fundamental goal of development; allowing progress against imminent sustainability threats while minimizing the risk of unforeseen negative impacts; balancing economic, environmental and social considerations; and providing a fairer basis for aid conditionality.

Keywords: Strategic Sustainable Development, Sustainable Development, Official Development Assistance, Sustainability, Donor Countries, Recipient Countries, Backcasting, Sustainability Principles, Bilateral Agencies
Statement of Contribution

We affirm that this study was completed in a friendly, collaborative style with each of the three team members bringing their experiences, strengths and perspectives to the entire process. Antonios' sharp analytical mind, keen attention to detail and wealth of real-world experience contributed a great depth to the project. Eduardo's admirable organizational skills, determined work ethic, and pragmatic optimism kept the process on track and moving forward. Tyler's intelligent fresh perspective, humanities base, and strong writing skills were instrumental in guaranteeing the concision, structure and polish of the work.

Throughout the process, the core ideas emerged through dialogue in regular group meetings. All members reviewed and revised each other’s work and contributed to all aspects of the thesis. Most of our work was done in daily group meetings.

While not without challenges, we are unanimous in our conclusion that the experience of writing a group thesis yielded far stronger results than any attempt to do so individually might have.

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Executive Summary

While the bulk of responsibility for creating the conditions that have led to a global sustainability challenge must fall to the wealthy industrial countries with their incredible levels of consumption and history of subjugating others, it is the poorest people in the poorest nations, those already living on the margins of subsistence, who have already begun to suffer the consequences most dramatically. Yet recent events have made it increasingly clear that in the modern globalized world, countries are interconnected at a level of complexity making it impossible for one country to confidently safeguard itself in isolation from the others. To mitigate the risks posed by mounting economic, political and environmental pressures, it is imperative that rich and poor countries find ways to cooperate more effectively in the pursuit of development towards sustainability.

Official development assistance has a critical role to play in this effort, and of even more fundamental importance than the scaling up of aid is the need to ensure that development assistance is employed effectively in the strategic pursuit of global sustainability. Attitudes and approaches to development assistance have undergone significant change over the past 60 years and aid flows account for approximately 100 billion USD annually. For almost a decade ODA has been characterized by the Millennium Development Goals, and donors' efforts to align with recipient goals. Reasons for donor countries to provide assistance include but are not limited to: commercial and political advantage; national security; immigration concerns; public opinion; and increasingly climate security.

Despite huge funds involved, experts and academics around the world generally agree that development assistance has not yet yielded the expected results. Several possible causes of development assistance's disappointing lack of effectiveness include: unfavourable conditionality, lack of recipient ownership, lack of recipient capacity, aid dependence, donors not meeting commitments, and donor fragmentation of development assistance. Both individuals and organizations from within the system and representing both donors and recipients recognize great potential and need for improvement.
Development agencies have long used the term sustainable development to refer to those initiatives aimed at solving known environmental issues. With the interdependence of the international system brought to the foreground by a global economic crisis, and under the looming threat of climate change, the need for an integrated and more effective approach to sustainability through development is becoming undeniable. Officials at the highest levels of international governance acknowledge the need for a holistic approach to development that adequately balances social, economic and environmental considerations.

Built around a set of clear, comprehensive, and scientifically based principles that define socio-ecological sustainability, Strategic Sustainable Development (SSD) addresses this need. It provides powerful decision-making support by supplementing a broad systems-level perspective with an organizational framework for information and a method for prioritizing actions strategically towards sustainability while allowing for economic and social viability to be well preserved.

**Purpose.** Undertaken in fulfilment of the international Masters programme in Strategic Leadership towards Sustainability at Blekinge Institute of Technology, Sweden, the primary aim of the study is to determine in what ways application of SSD can support bilateral donor country agencies in orienting official development assistance to best foster sustainable development in recipient countries.

In order to accomplish this task, three secondary objectives were set. These include:

- Creating a model to illustrate how a donor agency would work to foster and stimulate strategic development towards sustainability in recipient countries.
- Understanding how donor agencies currently plan and make decisions related to sustainable development in recipient countries.
- Discovering the gaps between the hypothetical model and current ODA donor agency approaches to sustainable development.

Though a sufficiently comprehensive understanding of the ODA system necessitated familiarity with multilateral aspects of the aid system, the results of current study focus specifically on bilateral development
assistance. Still, the authors see no immediately apparent reasons why most of the conclusions generated by the study could not be extrapolated to the multilateral organization situation.

Methods. Following an extensive literature review, the Framework for Strategic Sustainable Development (FSSD) (Robèrt and others 2002; Holmberg and Robèrt 2000) was used as a basis for the formulation of a model for ODA agencies to foster sustainable development in recipient countries. The resulting Framework for Strategic Sustainable Development Assistance (FSSDA) comprised a preliminary answer to the first secondary research objective. The initial FSSDA, along with a set of preliminary answers to the primary research question were then reviewed by a diverse group of experts representing a wide range of perspectives from across the ODA system. Informed by this feedback, the FSSDA was adjusted to better respond to the practical needs and wishes of donors and recipients.

Recent policy documents from eight bilateral development agencies were collected and organized according to a generic five level framework for strategic planning. This was undertaken in order to address the second and third secondary research objectives by allowing contrast of current agency goals, policies, strategies and processes with the FSSDA.

Addressing the three secondary research objectives and reviewing the expert feedback to initial results produced the knowledge and insight necessary to finally formulate meaningful responses to the primary research objective.

Results

The Framework for Strategic Sustainable Development Assistance (FSSDA)

The FSSDA provides guidance for utilization of the key components of SSD in the context of bilateral official development assistance. The model is organized and explained according to a five level framework for strategic planning and based upon the original FSSD.

Level 1: System. Describes society within the biosphere, including the ecological and social laws/rules/norms, governing this system and the
relationships between ecological and social systems. Conditions specific to
the various contexts in which development assistance initiatives will take
place are also described along with information related to the development
assistance system itself. Thorough understanding of the global system
informs all levels of strategic planning. The information can allow agencies
to diagnose of upstream environmental and social causes of poverty.

**Level 2: Success.** Identifies the ultimate goal of development as a society
within the biosphere, attractive to its people, and existing in compliance
with the principles defining socio-ecological sustainability. The
Sustainability Principles form a definition of socio-ecological sustainability
and are as follows:

In a sustainable society, nature is not subject to systematically increasing…

I. Concentrations of substances extracted from the Earth’s crust (e.g.
oil, gas, various metals...etc.);
II. Concentrations of substances produced by society (e.g. chemicals
that do not break down quickly...etc.);
III. Degradation of physical means (e.g. deforestation, loss of wetlands,
damage from mining...etc.);
   And in the society...
IV. People are not subject to conditions that systematically undermine
   their capacity to meet their needs (Robèrt and others 1997; Ny and
   others 2006).

**Positive Principles for an Attractive Society** outline features (values, rights,
etc.) of an attractive future society and should be produced through
dialogue between donors and recipients.

**Level 3: Strategic Guidelines.** Describe guidance for the process of moving
strategically towards the vision of success (level 2) in the system (level 1).
The strategic plan itself is created by prioritizing the actions (level 4)
according to the strategic guidelines (level 3) and creating a step-by-step
plan with a realistic timeline (Holmberg 1998, 39).

**Level 4: Actions.** Include but are not limited to development initiatives,
projects, and programs. They are oriented by the strategic guidelines (level
3) towards success (level 2).
**Level 5: Tools.** Tools support the actions (level 4) and strategy (level 3) to achieve success (level 2) in the system (level 1). Included are tools for monitoring, measuring, assessing, analyzing, building capacity, etc.

**Assessment of Current Agency Operations**

Agencies currently do not convey systems understandings of society within the biosphere comparable in comprehensiveness to that recommended by the FSSDA. Definitions of success follow from the perspective conveyed at the system level and strategies are formulated to stimulate incremental improvement in a range of development sectors.

**Systems Assessment.** A general lack of recognition of society's place within the biosphere was observed. Principles, rules and laws governing the biosphere were absent, but several of the examined agencies exhibit growing awareness of the importance of interdependence, either between society and biosphere, or between different sections of global society.

**Success Assessment.** Generally unaware of basic sustainability constraints, development agencies are limited in their capacity to frame robust principle-based definitions of success. Instead they operate with a range of more or less concretely defined goals focussed mainly on poverty reduction, economic growth and/or achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

Agencies do not explicitly identify the ultimate goal of development as the creation of sustainable societies. Some recognition of the need to live within environmental limits was observed, but such limits were not defined.

'Principles for an Attractive Society', to ensure the preservation and promotion of important values is largely missing from agency definitions of success.

**Strategic Guidelines Assessment.** Current strategies are oriented to improvement in sectors deemed important with an approach to sustainability that primarily recognizes downstream problems rather than framing upstream causes of socio-ecological unsustainability. None of the agency approaches to strategic planning currently bear close resemblance to a backcasting methodology of the kind recommended by the FSSDA.
Agency strategic guidelines generally place greater emphasis on social over ecological issues. Guidelines for Behavior are usually well-developed and carefully expressed in agency policy documents.

*Actions and Tools.* Actions and tools are oriented and organized by the strategic guidelines.

**Conclusion: Final Answers to the Main Research Question**

The FSSDA is a strategic tool intended to be employed by ODA agencies, in full co-operation with recipients. Sufficient evidence exists to support the claim that strategic sustainable development can strengthen agency efforts to foster sustainable development in recipient countries by:

- Pursuing socio-environmental sustainability as solid base from which to build lasting and sustainable economies and societies.
- Allowing for a great deal of flexibility and creativity in recipient-led development tailored to the needs and wishes of recipients themselves.
- Approaching environmental unsustainability and barriers to people being able to meet their needs as root causes of poverty.
- Providing decision-making support in pursuing poverty reduction from a holistic systems level perspective.
- Providing an integrated approach to tackling global sustainability threats such as climate change while minimizing other unforeseen negative sustainability impacts.
- Balancing economic and social considerations while maintaining progress towards a sustainable society.
- Providing a fairer basis for aid conditionality grounded in four sustainability principles.
- Placing sustainability as the fundamental goal of development provides context for various proximate development goals (such as the Millennium Development Goals) and the FSSD's decision-making support allows them to be aligned with each other towards success.
Glossary

**ABCD Tool**: a strategic planning methodology used for backcasting from principles. It includes four steps: (A) understanding the system, (B) assessing the current reality, (C) developing a vision of success and brainstorming solutions, and (D) prioritizing strategic actions (Robèrt et al. 2004).

**Backcasting**: a technique used to envision a desirable future in which success has been met so that a plan can be generated describing what must now be done to move towards that point (Holmberg and Robèrt 2000).

**Bilateral Donors**: are countries that provide development assistance directly to recipient countries. Bilateral donors also contribute to the financing of multilateral organizations, such as the UN (UNESCO 2008, 389).

**Five Level Framework (5LF)**: a generic framework for planning and decision-making in complex systems utilizing 5 distinct, non-overlapping levels: (1) System, (2) Success, (3) Strategic Guidelines, (4) Actions, and (5) Tools (Robèrt and others 2002; Robèrt 2000; Holmberg and Robèrt 2000).

**Framework for Strategic Sustainable Development (FSSD)**: describes how the Five Level Framework is used to understand and plan towards a sustainable society specifically, with Level 2 (Success) defined as adherence to the four sustainability principles (Robèrt and others 1997; Robèrt 2000; Holmberg and Robèrt 2000; Robèrt and others 2002; Ny and others 2006).

**Framework for Strategic Sustainable Development Assistance (FSSDA)**: a framework for strategic sustainable development customized to the needs of development assistance donors, produced as one of the main outcomes of this study.

**Official Development Assistance (ODA)**: is defined as “grants or loans provided by official agencies (including state and local governments, or by
their executive agencies) to developing countries (countries and territories on the DAC List of Aid Recipients) and to multilateral institutions for flows to developing countries, each transaction of which meets the following test: (a) it is administered with the promotion of the economic development and welfare of developing countries as its main objective; and (b) it is concessional in character and contains a Grant Element of at least 25 percent (calculated at a rate of discount of 10 percent). In addition to financial flows, Technical Co-operation is included in aid.” (The World Bank 2008a, 3).

Partner Country: ODA recipient.

Strategic Sustainable Development (SSD): a sustainable development planning approach based on scientific principles and a holistic understanding of sustainability designed to support decision making towards a sustainable society (Holmberg and Robèrt 2000).

Sustainability: a state in which the four principles for sustainability are not violated (Robèrt and others 1997; Ny and others 2006).

Sustainability Principles (SPs) or Four System Conditions: in a sustainable society, nature is not subject to systematically increasing…
I. Concentrations of substances extracted from the Earth’s crust;
II. Concentrations of substances produced by society;
III. Degradation of physical means;
and in the society...
IV. People are not subject to conditions that systematically undermine their capacity to meet their needs (Robèrt and others 1997; Ny and others 2006).

Technical Assistance or Technical Co-operation: is the action of supplying of expertise in the form of personnel, training, research, or the associated costs of these things (OECD 2008a).
Acronyms

5LF: Five Level Framework.

BMZ: German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development

CIDA: Canadian International Development Agency

DFID: UK Department for International Development

DUTCH MFA: Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs

EC-DGD: European Commission – Directorate General for Development

FSSD: Framework for Strategic Sustainable Development

FSSDA: Framework for Strategic Sustainable Development Assistance

MDGs: Millennium Development Goals

NORAD: Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation

NGO: Non-governmental Organization

ODA: Official Development Assistance

OECD: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

OECD-DAC (or DAC): OECD's Development Assistance Committee

SIDA: Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency

SP: Sustainability Principle

SSD: Strategic Sustainable Development

UN: United Nations

UNDP: United Nations Development Program

USAID: United States Agency for International Development
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1 Introduction

For over 50 years, the governments of wealthy countries have donated official development assistance (ODA) to recipient countries for the purpose of development and poverty reduction. In 2005, 2006, and 2007 overall ODA disbursements by national governments topped 100 billion dollars per year (The World Bank 2008a, 3-4). Through a variety of routes, much of this money finances development programs and projects in recipient countries (see Appendix A for list and categorization of ODA recipient countries).

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) defines official development assistance as government aid to developing countries designed to promote the economic development and welfare of recipient countries. Aid can include grants, “soft” loans\(^1\), and the provision of technical assistance. Only aid to countries designated by the OECD as developing countries and territories can be counted as ODA (OECD 2008b, 220).

1.1 History of ODA

The modern history of international development assistance began in 1947 with the USA-funded Marshall Plan to reconstruct Western Europe and Turkey. Security-related concerns between the two rival powers, the USA and the USSR played a significant role in motivating funding (McGillivray and others 2006, 1033). The success of the Marshall Plan encouraged optimism that technical assistance and capital could positively affect developing economies in a very short time (The World Bank 2008a, 31).

The 1960s heralded the notion of “development co-operation”; the idea that for assistance to be effective, not only the donor, but the recipient government would have to be involved in the process (Eyben 2003, 880). Through this era development assistance initiatives became most concerned

\(^1\) Soft loans are partial loans or loans with very low interest rates.
with economic planning, nationalization, government-led industrialization, and generally encouraged a strengthening of the state (The World Bank 2008a, 32).

During the 1970s there was an increase in the number of donors, but a decline in the amount of funding from some of the largest donors (The World Bank 2008a, 32). Assistance for the poorest demographics of recipient countries began to gain importance over technical assistance grants and government led industrialisation. ODA became more often specifically targeted towards “meeting basic human needs” and specific sectors such as agriculture, family planning and education (Mitlin and Satterthwaite 2007, 485).

With the financial crisis of the 1980s ODA donors largely re-shifted their attention from basic human needs to structural policy adjustment in developing countries (Green 2008, 210). Integration of developing countries into the world economy, and market-oriented strategies became a major focus.

During the 1990s development aid donors began to recognise the importance of environmental concerns, and the need for increased participation and ownership in beneficiary nations (Mitlin and Satterthwaite 2007, 485). International consensus was reached that the goal of aid included “sustainable development, poverty reduction, integration in the world economy and the building of viable economies and societies” (The World Bank 2008a, 34). Capacity building became a popular aid focus along with civil reform programs, private sector development and privatization.

Targets and commitments established throughout the 1990s resulted in the Millennium Development Goals\(^2\) (MDGs) (UNDP, n.d.). These comprise

\(^2\) The MDGs summarize the development goals agreed on at international conferences and world summits during the 1990s. At the end of that decade (September 2000), world leaders distilled the key goals and targets in the Millennium Declaration. The Goals, to be achieved between 1990 and 2015, include: 1) eradicate extreme poverty and hunger; 2) achieve universal primary education; 3) promote gender equality and empower women; 4) reduce child mortality; 5) improve maternal healthy; 6) combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and
clear development targets meant to address extreme poverty and lead to verifiable impacts (Mitlin and Satterthwaite 2007, 484). They are also intended to promote gender equality, education, and environmental sustainability (UN Millennium Project 2005, 1).

While the MDGs are meant to represent the aims of aid and provide clear targets, the High Level Forums on Aid Effectiveness in Paris (2005) and Accra (2008) focussed on how aid effectiveness might be improved through increased efforts in harmonization, alignment and managing aid for results with indicators and actions that can be monitored. These aims are summarized in the Paris Declaration, an international agreement to which over 100 Senior Officials committed their countries and organisations. (OECD, n.d.).

Somewhat in parallel with the agreements reached with regard to the MDGs and Aid Effectiveness Forums were the Monterrey Consensus, and the subsequent Doha Declaration addressing challenges related specifically to

other diseases; 7) ensure environmental sustainability; 8) develop a global partnership for development (UN Millennium Project 2005).

3 Paris Declaration is an international agreement endorsed in 2005 by over one hundred Ministers, Heads of ODA agencies and other Senior Officials. The declaration commits countries and institutions to continue to increase efforts in harmonisation, alignment and managing aid for results with specific and measureable actions and indicators, which can be accessed at http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/11/41/34428351.pdf (OECD, n.d.).

4 Monterrey Consensus was adopted by Member States of the United Nations at the International Conference on Financing for Development in 2002, Monterrey, Mexico, it addresses development financing issues under six themes: domestic resource mobilization, mobilization of foreign resources, international trade, development assistance, external debt and systemic issues of global governance with the aim of achieving the internationally agreed development goals adopted during the previous decade, including the Millennium Development Goals (UN Non Governmental Liaison Office 2006).

5 Doha Declaration on Financing for Development is the outcome document of review of the Implementation of the Monterrey Consensus (held in Doha, Qatar, on 29 November - 2 December 2008). The declaration calls for a United Nations Conference to examine the impact of the world financial and economic crisis on development. Officials from more
financing for development. Here heads of state declared intentions to take “immediate and decisive” action in addressing 21st century economic and sustainability challenges to development (United Nations 2008b).

1.2 ODA Architecture

Despite slips in 2006 and 2007, international aid has consistently risen since the late 1990s from 59 billion USD in 1997, to 107.1 billion USD in 2005 (The World Bank 2008a, 3).

The international aid system is complicated and often obscure. ODA financing generally begins at the level of national governments and can follow two main routes to its final use in projects and development initiatives in recipient countries.

Bilateral ODA is development assistance conferred on a recipient country by a donor country (see Appendix B for list and categorization of bilateral donor countries). The distribution of ODA by a donor country is usually managed by that country's international development agency. These agencies are attached to a greater or lesser extent to the government's ministry or department of foreign affairs. Examples of bilateral ODA agencies include the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), UK’s Department for International Development (DFID), etc.

Multilateral ODA is conferred on a recipient country by an international organization drawing on a pool of financing from a variety of donor countries. These organisations may be multi-purpose international organizations such as the World Bank, and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) or thematic/sector specific organizations such as the United Nations Children’s’ Fund. Multilateral ODA channels

than 160 countries, including nearly 40 Heads of State or Government, attended the conference (United Nations 2008a; UN Financing For Development 2008).
allow for focussed and coordinated use of funds and in theory offer some mitigation of the risks that development assistance can be too heavily influenced by the national interests of the donor country (The World Bank 2008a, 11-12).

Most ODA donor countries are members of the OECD and the OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC) (see Appendix B). The mandate of the OECD-DAC is to “consult on the methods for making national resources available for assisting countries and areas in the process of economic development and for expanding and improving the flow of long-term funds and other development assistance to them” (OECD 2008c). OECD-DAC member countries’ development activities are not determined by the OECD-DAC or OECD. Rather the OECD-DAC is a platform for dialogue between donor countries with regard to aid aims and strategy and a forum for entering into mutual agreements and coordinating efforts.

New donors, representing large and emerging economies all over the world are changing the balance of the global development scene. China, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, South Korea, Venezuela, India, Kuwait and Brazil, among others, do not belong to the OECD-DAC but have in recent years increased their aid to poorer countries. This trend seems likely to continue as the emerging economies continue to grow, and will have wide-ranging effects on all aspects of the international development assistance community (Woods 2008, 1205).

1.3 ODA: Motivations

Moral responsibility is a powerful motivation on its own, but it would be naive to understand ODA as charity. Several powerful incentives exist for developed country governments to become active donors. These very pragmatic and interconnected motivations include political-economic benefit, national security, better immigration control, expectations of the international community, popular public sentiment among its electorate, and global climate security.

While the official goal of ODA over the past decades has remained consistently the reduction of poverty, the motivating role of commercial
and political advantage often enjoyed by donors should not be underestimated (Mosley 1999, 19). Development assistance funding, especially bilateral assistance, has often been and in many cases still is granted upon economic and policy related conditions that, aside from whatever benefit or detriment might be accrued by recipients, often provide foreseeable benefits to donor governments or donor country companies (Abegaz 2005, 439). The imposition of policies through aid conditionality has become somewhat unfashionable in recent years, but it remains a significant part of many donor-recipient relationships (Bourguignon and Sundberg 2007, 320).

Physical security and the minimization of “security threats” are also major incentives for donor countries to provide development assistance (Commission of the European Communities 2002, 13). ODA can serve as a means of terrorism prevention and of building trust between donor and recipient countries. It can also be used as a point of influence in maintaining key political and military relationships. The following excerpt from the 2006 USAID Primer makes the connection between aid and security explicit:

Aid is a potent leveraging instrument for keeping countries allied with US policy while they win their own battles against terrorism. The tasks today are broader and more demanding than just winning the allegiance of key leaders. For example, while it is vital that US government help keep Pakistan allied with the United States in the war of terrorism, the United States must also help Pakistan move toward becoming a more stable, prosperous, democratic society. (USAID 2006a, 3)

Immigration concerns may also play an important role in where and how a donor country decides to spend its money. This is only likely to become more important as populations continue to expand and the changing climate leads to increases in migration pressures (Alguadis 2008). Spending to reduce poverty and improve quality of life opportunities in recipient countries can be seen as a sound investment for donor governments interested in reducing immigration or maintaining it at a manageable level (Solomon 2005, 13).
According to public opinion polls in 2006 approximately 91% of Europeans believe that it is important to help people in poor countries (Szczycinski 2009, 8). Americans too more than ever before “recognize the costs of not sufficiently tackling the challenges of global poverty” and want their country to engage the developing world in a positive way (Modernizing Foreign Assistance Network 2008, 2). Besides the purely economic, political or security related considerations that motivate ODA funding, donor governments and politicians are under considerable pressure to make grants or loans, because of the humanitarian concerns of the public and interest groups at home (Lockwood 2005, 779).

Emissions that drive climate change have the same effects no matter where they arise (Stern 2006, IV) and the economic costs including floods, droughts and storms, are already rising for all nations (Stern 2006, VII). Climate security is an important and growing focus of ODA. As the threat becomes more immanent this trend is only likely to gain momentum (ECORYS 2008, 109-110). In October 2008, ten countries pledged almost 6.1 billion USD to the Climate Investment Funds established by the World Bank to assist developing countries in mitigating the harmful effects of climate change (Ballesteros 2008). Whether or not this promise will be fully delivered on, it does demonstrate a growing recognition that climate change represents a host of very real threats to global security.

1.4 ODA: Effectiveness Challenges

While significant progress has been made in certain places and times towards the reduction of poverty and economic growth in poor countries, over the past half century “the effects of development aid on growth and structural transformation have given rise to an inconclusive debate”(Abegaz 2005, 439). Inequality between and within countries is increasing. In 1960, the income of the richest fifth of the world's population was 30 times larger than that of the poorest fifth, and as of 2002 it was 90 times larger (Commission of the European Communities 2002, 3). A growing body of evidence suggests a great deal of potential for improvement among ODA donor policies. In fact, some development experts are convinced that “in its current form, aid may actually be working to prevent political
transformations that could lead to much faster levels of growth, driven by committed leaders pushing through political and institutional change” (Lockwood 2005, 784). Several critical and fundamentally interconnected areas of challenge to increasing ODA effectiveness recur throughout the reports from the Paris and Accra High Level Forums on Aid Effectiveness as well as academic literature and studies reporting progress towards the Millennium Development Goals. These challenges include the need for recipient country ownership, the problem of aid fragmentation and the need for harmonization, concerns about aid conditionality and its sometimes undermining effect on normal democratic processes, the risk of fostering aid dependence, and the gap between donor commitments and expenditure.

A 2004 publication by the World Bank on supporting development programs states that:

> Development does not take place unless it is achieved by the country itself. It cannot be done for a country by development assistance agencies. Externally financed programs and projects might be reasonably well implemented during the period of external support but will not be sustained without country ownership. (The World Bank 2004, 7)

Echoing this, the Paris Declaration places a strong emphasis on the need for recipient countries to “exercise effective leadership over their development policies and strategies, and co-ordinate development actions”. Development goals and aims should not be imposed upon recipients by donors. Rather, with assistance thoroughly aligned to recipient country leadership and development strategies, initiatives have a better chance of building local ownership and momentum such that its effects can be sustained beyond the scope of active funding (OECD, n.d).

According to a 2006 survey monitoring progress on the Paris Declaration, “many developing countries may have more than 40 donors financing more than 600 active projects, and may still not be on track to achieve the Millennium Development Goals” (OECD 2007, 9). The OECD-DAC estimates that in 2005-2006, 38 countries had 25 or more multilateral and DAC donors (OECD Development Co-Operation Directorate 2008, 7). Though this may at first sound positive, the proliferation of implementers and donors combined with an increasing focus on recipient country
leadership demands a great deal of administrative capacity which may or may not always be available to developing country governments. In fact, donor fragmentation may place such a strain on government bureaucracy in recipient countries that it can lead to an “erosion of bureaucratic quality” (Knack and Rahman 2007, 178). Fragmentation also makes it more difficult for the myriad of development donors and implementers with various perspectives and focuses to harmonize their efforts and communicate among themselves.

One of the most serious challenges facing aid effectiveness is the problem of conditionality. By rendering recipient governments upwardly accountable to donors, rather than their own people, conditionality can have an undermining effect on that country’s democratic politics (Lockwood 2005, 779). Donors on the other hand, being accountable to their own electorate, have a legitimate interest in ensuring that ODA is used responsibly and effectively and so are hard-pressed to offer money completely free of conditions. Unfortunately, conditionality attached to technical assistance, and loans are too often used by donors to influence recipient policy in ways that reveal imperfect knowledge or even disregard for of the local environment. Also, though donors may be able to influence policy through conditionality, they are rarely able to control exactly how policies are implemented, so that unintended consequences are likely to result (Bourguignon and Sundberg 2007, 318). Echhard Deutscher, the chair of the OECD-DAC emphasized the need to address the conditionality problem in his concluding remarks at the Accra High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness. Progress, he argued, must be made on untying aid from unfair conditions, and conditionality must shift so that “donors will determine conditions jointly with developing countries and on the basis of their development plans” (Deutscher 2008).

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6 The Third High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness was hosted by the Government of Ghana in Accra from 2-4 September 2008. Based on a review of the Paris Declaration, the Accra Agenda for Action was adopted and reflects international commitment to support the reforms needed to accelerate effective use of development assistance and helps ensure the achievement of the MDGs. It also focuses on the main technical, institutional, and political challenges to full implementation of the Paris principles (Government of Ghana 2008).
Besides poverty reduction, ODA should help countries to reach a level of development such that further progress can be sustained independent of foreign assistance (USAID 2006b, 7). Whether or not increases in funding are required in the short term, as they may very well be, all uses of ODA should in some way reduce the need of the recipients. ODA remains a major source of development finance for most low income countries and make up about two-thirds of all capital inflow in Sub-Saharan Africa (The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development 2008, 11). The more a country's income relies on development assistance, the more sensitive is its economy to fluctuations in aid and the more vulnerable it will be in the event that donor countries are unable to live up to their commitments (Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission 2008, 11).

In 2005, the leaders of the Group of Eight (G8)\(^7\) agreed to increase global aid levels by around $50bn USD per year by 2010 and to write off the debts of up to 50 of the world’s poorest countries. So far they are not on target to meet these goals (Green 2008, 381). Donors are also not living up to the commitments they made only months ago to donate 6.1 billion dollars to climate change (Expatica Communications BV 2009). Failure to fully deliver on aid commitments and a lack of transparency as to what will actually be spent are quite common among donors. This makes it that much more difficult for recipient countries to effectively budget, plan and implement for development (OECD 2009, 16).

As of 2009, the combination of the food, fuel, energy, and financial crises is posing more severe obstacles for countries trying to use ODA in achieving their development goals. This is the case even where progress was being made only a few years ago (UN Development Group 2008, 2).

\(^7\) The Group of Eight (G8) Industrialized Nations includes Canada, United States, Russia, Great Britain, Japan, France, Germany and Italy.
1.5 ODA: The Need for an Integrated Approach Towards Sustainability

Besides these well acknowledged problems confronting aid effectiveness, there may be a more serious and basic contradiction that challenges fundamental aspects of the way that ODA agencies have pursued development and poverty reduction for the past 60 years (and may also offer some enlightenment as to its questionable success). Awareness builds around a crucial challenge threatening many countries and the international community at large. In recent years sustainability has been moving ever closer to the center of the development discussion and to the fore of many development agendas.

Environmental threats, the most pressing and universal being climate change, are largely the result of the industrialisation of wealthy countries and the consumption associated with it. In the latter half of the 20th century accelerating economic growth resulted in rapid diminishing of resources. Exhausting resources and significantly altering the chemical composition of the Earth's biospheric systems creates restriction of the very possibilities for future development (Robèrt and others 1997). Worry grows that as billions in Africa, Asia and South America strive to reach the living standards enjoyed by North Americans and Europeans, they will not only duplicate their triumphs, but also their failures (Strange and Bayley 2008, 23). The international community is becoming increasingly attuned to the potential danger posed by rapid industrial and economic development of recipients in an ever more interconnected and interdependent world.

Former Secretary-General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan at declared that: “...We are all influenced by the same tides of political, social and technological change. The ill winds and fouled waters of the earth's environment likewise show no regard for the niceties of borders. Pollution is our common enemy” (United Nations 1999). Thus “it is increasingly understood that global poverty, economic development, social aspects and environmental concerns need to be seen in a broader and holistic perspective” (ECORYS 2008, 110). Artificial compartmentalization of economic, environmental and social considerations tends to lead to errors in judgement and 'unsustainable' outcomes (Strange and Bayley 2008, 25). In fact, should development assistance be successful with regards to its
poverty reduction goals, without at the same time providing adequate support for sustainable management of natural and human resources, the side effects could fundamentally undermine the possibility of long-term benefit. A recent EU Sustainable Development report states that:

The Millennium Development Goals themselves are largely contradictory; the economic development needed to alleviate poverty will lead to an increase in industrial outputs, consumption of cereals and meat and above all else mobility. Reconciling these aims in an effective way is a vast challenge (ECORYS 2008, 114)

The economic, social, and environmental aspects of any action are interconnected, and there is a need for development to be pursued from the position of a comprehensive understanding of not only economic and social systems, but also the wider biospheric and environmental system upon which this structure is built (Cairns 2001, 40-41; DFID 2006a, 1-2; Solheim 2006, 4; Strange and Bayley 2008, 25; The World Bank 2008b, xi; DFID 2009, 4). Too often environmental sustainability is approached as a sector or a focus within the larger field of development. It is not enough for development to understand “the environment” as a sector separate from others. Rather “practical, effective and above all, fair principles for the sound management of the planet” (Benn cited by Crown 2005, 18) should form the basis of development assistance.

1.6 Strategic Sustainable Development

Strategic Sustainable Development (SSD) is an approach to development built around a simple, concrete, scientific definition of environmental sustainability and a flexible requirement for social sustainability which taken together comprise a super-ordinate goal that can be used to orient development strategy. In the context of development assistance such a definition of sustainability might also serve as a new basis for a fair and neutral approach to aid conditionality. SSD also possesses a framework (FSSD) to support development planning, decision-making and prioritization towards a principle-based definition of sustainability.
‘Sustainable Development’ as popularized by the Brundtland Commission is development that “meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs” (Brundtland 1987). This definition has been widely adopted by several development assistance donors and agencies. The OECD's Sustainable Development; Linking economy, society, environment puts it another way, saying that “resources, whether economic, environmental or social, should be utilized and distributed fairly across generations” (Strange and Bayley 2008, 26).

SSD enriches this understanding of sustainable development with a comprehensive and scientifically based set of principles defining socio-ecological sustainability for a society, called the sustainability principles.

1.6.1  Sustainability Principles

The SSD definition of sustainability is comprised of three principles that concretely and objectively define the minimum conditions necessary for environmental sustainability and one social principle describing the minimum necessary requirement for social sustainability. Taken together, these principles make up a holistic systems view of sustainability and offer the ability to spot in advance what might otherwise become unforeseen consequences of well-intentioned actions (Holmberg and Robèrt 2000). The sustainability principles were developed as the product of consensus involving principally scientists but also hundreds of individuals across all sectors including business, governments, non-profits and the general public (Holmberg and others 1996). The principles, formulated negatively, describe the natural operational boundaries of a sustainable society.

In a sustainable society, nature is not subject to systemically increasing...

I. Concentrations of substances extracted from the Earth’s crust (e.g. oil, gas, various metals...etc.);  
II. Concentrations of substances produced by society (e.g. chemicals that do not break down quickly...etc.);  
III. Degradation of physical means (e.g. deforestation, loss of wetlands, damage from mining...etc.);  
And in the society...
IV. People are not subject to conditions that systematically undermine their capacity to meet their needs (Robèrt and others 1997; Ny and others 2006).

The conditions for sustainability describe two basic pillars, a healthy biosphere, and a resilient social fabric. Ecological threats, leading to social instability resulting in deepening ecological threats, are the basis of fundamentally unsustainable patterns that often also represent the root causes of poverty (Crown 2005, 12). Development towards sustainability works to eliminate the root causes of these patterns. Rather than being prescriptive, basic sustainability principles are neutral descriptions of the constraints within which a sustainable society can exist.

1.6.2 Backcasting from Basic Sustainability Principles

When the minimum requirements for a sustainable society have been understood, planning can proceed by linking today with tomorrow in a strategic way: what shall we do today to get there?” (Holmberg and Robèrt 2000). Basic principles for a sustainability society provide a solid foundation for a planning methodology called backcasting which is best guided by principles of the result rather than principles describing the process. The future cannot be predicted, but principles of success can guide development towards a set of possible futures (Holmberg and Robèrt 2000).

For instance, though at the outset of a planning endeavour, it cannot be known exactly what path development towards a sustainable society will take, it can be understood from the conditions of sustainability that society must in some way gradually move away from economic dependence on:

- Mining to provide fossil fuels and scarce metals for consumption, especially those substances rising in concentration in the biosphere. (Sustainability Principle I).
- Production of persistent artificial compounds to be used outside tight closed-loop systems (Sustainability Principle II).
- Irreversible alteration and dissipative use of elements of the biosphere such that the natural productive capacity and ecological diversity are reduced (Sustainability Principle III).
- Misspending of resources while human needs are not being met (Sustainability Principle IV) (Holmberg and Robèrt 2000, 300-301).
When measures reduce dependence on these things, planners and implementers can be assured that the actions contribute to movement towards sustainability. Though it is chiefly important that progress is made in the right direction, at the same time economic, political, and social considerations must be balanced through the process of moving toward sustainability to minimize any shocks to the system and ensure that the process of development can continue.

1.6.3 Framework for Strategic Sustainable Development (FSSD)

To facilitate practical and pragmatic backcasting from sustainability principles, a Framework for Strategic Sustainable Development (FSSD) has been developed using scientific and practical input and by the merging of various fields including systems thinking and ecological sciences. The FSSD is an implementation tool of SSD and is used to facilitate planning and decision-making in complex systems by allowing for information to be organized into a Five Level Framework consisting of System (Level 1), Success (Level 2), Strategic Guidelines (Level 3), Actions (Level 4), and Tools (Level 5).

The FSSD provides decision-making support based on the conditions for sustainability by supplementing a broad systems-level perspective with an organizational framework for information. This framework includes a method for prioritizing actions strategically towards sustainability while allowing for economic and social viability to be well preserved. It has been employed in a wide range of community and business planning situations (Robèrt 1994; Holmberg and others 1996; Robèrt and others 1997; Holmberg and others 1999; Rowland and Sheldon 1999; Holmberg and Robèrt 2000; Robèrt and others 2000; Robèrt and others 2002; Korhonen 2004; MacDonald 2005; Byggeth and Horschörner 2006; Ny and others 2006; Byggeth and others 2007; The Natural Step, n.d.). The following diagram illustrates generally how the FSSD is used in the context of planning towards a sustainable society.
Understand, describe and analyze the dynamic relationships between the ecological and social systems.

Compliance with basic principles ("Sustainability Principles" or "System Conditions") for global socio-ecological sustainability are the minimum requirements for success.

Guidelines for the process of moving global society strategically towards meeting basic principles of socio-ecological sustainability (what to do and how to do it).

Actions that will effectively help move the global socio-ecological system (level 1) towards success (level 2) oriented by strategic guidelines (level 3).

Techniques, measurements, monitoring, management approaches, etc, which are relevant to assist in the movement towards conformance with basic socio-ecological principles.

**Figure 1. The Framework for Strategic Sustainable Development**
(adapted from Robèrt 2000, 249)

**Level 1: SYSTEM.** The first level of the Five Level Framework includes any information relevant to a comprehensive understanding of the system in which planning is to take place. In the context of planning for development towards sustainability a comprehensive system understanding includes descriptions of:

- the relationships between ecological and social systems, including: thermodynamics and conservation laws, biogeochemical cycles, basic ecology, photosynthesis, institutions, networks, society's interdependent pursuit of human needs, the importance of diversity (Robèrt 2000, 248), and...
- The framework can be readily scaled to organizations within society by adding relevant systems level information such as any
information relevant (key structures, institutions, and relationships) to the specific situational context in which planning is to take place (The Natural Step, n.d).

**Level 2: SUCCESS.** The success level describes the ultimate or superordinate goal of planning endeavour.

When planning for sustainable development, success describes society within the biosphere, existing in compliance with the conditions for socio-ecological sustainability (i.e. the four Sustainability Principles – see item 1.6.1). Commonly understood, this goal provides a basis for mutual planning and harmonization between stakeholders (Ny and others 2006, 64). Again the framework can be scaled to individual organizations within society by adding success criteria specific to that organization such as realization of its specific vision or purpose.

**Level 3: STRATEGIC GUIDELINES.** Having outlined a principle based definition of success, the user can plan strategically and prioritize actions to meet that success (Level 2). The strategic guidelines level describes this process of selecting the best (most strategic) actions from all available (Robèrt 2000, 249). The technique of backcasting is used to envision a desirable future where the principles for success have been met, and then a plan is generated describing what must now be done to move towards that point.

Backcasting from principles (Holmberg and Robèrt 2000) involves four general steps which should ideally be accomplished through cooperation with all stakeholders:

- First (A) a shared mental model of Success (Level 2) is defined as society within the biosphere, existing in compliance with the conditions for socio-ecological sustainability (i.e. the four Sustainability Principles – see item 1.6.1). The shared mental model also includes any particular overarching goals of the organization or user in question.
- Next (B) the current environmental, economic, and social situation is analyzed in relation to the conditions for socio-ecological sustainability. The gaps between the current and ideal situation are identified.
Thirdly (C) the conditions for sustainability (i.e. the four Sustainability Principles – see item 1.6.1) inform the generation of possibilities for future development initiatives/projects/programs towards sustainability and the overall aims of the organization.

Finally (D) Appropriate actions are identified to best move towards the envisioned desirable future by selecting from and prioritizing the possible solutions generated in 'C'. Guiding considerations for strategic prioritization of actions include but are not limited to the following:

- Measures should bring the venture closer to the vision within the sustainability principles.
- Measures should serve as flexible platforms for further advancing development to eventually reach ‘success’.
- Measures should bring capital (financial, social and political) back to the venture so that progress does not halt due to lack of resources.

These considerations combined with clear constraining principles (the sustainability principles) allow for effective long-term planning and creative solutions within basic constraints while avoiding the sorts of negative unforeseen consequences that often emerge when planning in complex systems.

**Figure 2. The ABCD Tool (The Natural Step 2008)**
**Level 4: ACTION.** The Action Level (Level 4) describes the actual operations that result from the planning and prioritization process described in Level 3. Actions should be selected using the strategic guidelines (Level 3) to lead towards success (Level 2) (Robèrt 2000, 248).

**Level 5: TOOLS.** The Tools Level describes the tools selected to strategically (Level 3) support actions (Level 4) towards success (Level 2) and to better understand the system (Level 1) (Robèrt 2000, 248). Tools can support the development process by monitoring and evaluating progress towards success, elaborating strategic guidelines, supplementing operational capacity, etc.

The FSSD is especially appropriate when: the problem to be studied is complex; significant change is needed; dominant trends are part of the problem; externalities are particularly relevant (Robèrt 2000, 244-245); and/or when there is real opportunity in terms of time and influence to make deliberate choices (Dreborg 1996). Many, if not all of these characteristics would seem to describe the situation presented by the international system of official development assistance (ODA). In the words of Douglas Alexander, the UK Secretary of State for International Development: “The challenges we face in making poverty history are large, complex and changing. Without new knowledge, scientific innovation, rigorous evidence, and new ideas we have no chance of success” (Alexander 2008).

As such, the authors hypothesize that the Framework for Strategic Sustainable Development, including the Sustainability Principles, and backcasting could provide a powerful support for the effective use of official development assistance towards sustainability.

### 1.7 Research Questions

This study aims to answer the following primary research question:

*In what ways can application of the SSD approach support bilateral donor country agencies in orienting official development assistance to best foster sustainable development in recipient countries?*
In order to achieve a fully realized answer to the primary question, the following secondary questions were addressed:

1. How would a donor agency work to foster and stimulate strategic development towards sustainability in recipient countries?
2. How do donor agencies currently plan and make decisions related to sustainable development in recipient countries?
3. What are the gaps between the hypothetical model and current ODA donor agency approaches to sustainable development?

1.8 Scope

To arrive at meaningful answers to the research questions, the study examines the development agencies of several Development Assistance Committee (DAC) members: USA-USAID, Canada-CIDA, European Union-EC-DGD, Sweden-SIDA, UK-DFID, Norway-NORAD, Germany-BMZ and Dutch MFA.

In many cases documents and consensuses (Paris Declaration, Agenda 21\(^8\), Accra Agenda for Action, Millennium Development Goals and others) facilitated by multilateral ODA organizations have been adopted and incorporated into the aims and operations of bilateral donors. These are relevant to the answering of the research questions, but multilateral ODA organizations themselves will not be examined in detail. Non-DAC donor countries and private donors also fall outside the scope of the study. The history of ODA will not be deeply examined, though a cursory understanding provides context to the study.

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\(^8\) Agenda 21 is a comprehensive plan of action to be taken globally, nationally and locally by the United Nations, Governments (countries, states and municipalities) and other major groups in every area in which human impacts on the environment. Initially, more than 170 Governments decided its implementation at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 3 to 14 June 1992 (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs 2004).
Donors (official or unofficial) allocate aid through both bilateral and multilateral channels. These funds are used to execute several functions including debt relief, emergency response, humanitarian aid and development assistance. This study focuses specifically on the use of funds allocated by official donor countries through bilateral channels (development agencies) for the purpose of development assistance (see Figure 3 and Figure 4).

![Figure 3. The Official Development Assistance System](image)

![Figure 4. Scope of the thesis](image)

(adapted from The World Bank 2008a, 14-15)
2 Methods

The following section describes the process undertaken in fulfilment of the research objectives of the study. See Figure 5 for visual representation of the methodology.

2.1 Research Approach

The research design was developed through dialogue among the authors, and strongly influenced by an Interactive Model of Research Design (Maxwell 2005). Initial background research came from different sources, such as the previous working experience of the authors, ODA agencies’ official documents, peer-reviewed articles and Strategic Sustainable Development training.

The Framework for Strategic Sustainable Development (FSSD) (Robèrt and others 2002; Holmberg and Robèrt 2000) was used as a basis for the formation of a model by which ODA agencies could best foster sustainable development in recipient countries. The result; a Framework for Strategic Sustainable Development Assistance (FSSDA) was then used to assess the current reality of the following agencies: USAID, CIDA, EC-DGD, SIDA, DFID, NORAD, BMZ and Dutch MFA. This assessment, along with expert feedback on the FSSDA was used to formulate answers to the primary research question.

2.2 Phases of the Research

To answer the research questions, the research was conducted in the following phases:

- Literature Review,
- Formulation of a Preliminary Framework for Strategic Sustainable Development Assistance,
- Formulation of Preliminary Answers to the Primary Research Question,
- Expert Feedback,
- Revision of the Framework for Strategic Sustainable Development Assistance,
- Organization of Agency Policy Documents into a Generic Five Level Framework for Strategic Planning,
- Assessment of Agency Perspectives, Goals, Planning Procedures, and Decision Making Policies; and,
- Formulation of Final Answers to the Primary Research Question.

Figure 5. Research Process
2.2.1 Literature Review

Appropriate sources were obtained and reviewed in the fields of international aid, developing countries national strategies for sustainable development, aid effectiveness, sustainability, sustainable development and strategic sustainable development. It was accomplished through:

- Review of international agreements related to ODA, such as the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, Accra Agenda for Action, Monterrey Consensus on Financing for Development and Doha Declaration on Financing for Development.
- Examination of institutional brochures, reports, policy statements, strategic plans, web sites, performance reports and other publications of the bilateral organizations examined closely during the study.
- Scrutiny of reports and evaluations conducted by multilateral organizations such as the United Nations, The World Bank and OECD which play key roles in coordinating debates about ODA.
- Review of a variety of analyses, assessments and other input from independent research centres and international development departments of universities served as reliable sources of information for the purposes of the study.
- Refamiliarization with published SSD literature, considering its application in regards to the ODA system.

2.2.2 Formulation of the Preliminary Framework for Strategic Sustainable Development Assistance

Based primarily on an understanding of the SSD but supplemented with a comprehension of the ODA system acquired during the literature review, the authors developed a summary containing a description of the SSD (see Appendix C). This description explains how the FSSD could be used by ODA agencies to focus development more strategically towards
sustainability, while addressing the current challenges of aid effectiveness. The objective of this initial application was to answer the secondary question number 1: “How would a donor agency work to foster and stimulate strategic development towards sustainability in recipient countries?”

This preliminary application comprised the basis for strategic guidelines included in the summary to experts.

The application can be seen in results section 3.4.

2.2.3 Formulation of Preliminary Answers to the Primary Research Question

Following the literature review and development of the initial FSSDA, preliminary answers were developed in response to the primary research question “In what ways can application of the SSD approach support bilateral donor country agencies in orienting official development assistance to best foster sustainable development in recipient countries?”

This was accomplished by maintaining a comprehensive system perspective based on careful consideration of the current reality of the ODA system as far as it was made apparent through the literature review and awareness of the known strengths of the FSSD (Robèrt 1994; Holmberg and others 1996; Robèrt and others 1997; Holmberg and others 1999; Holmberg and Robèrt 2000; Robèrt and others 2000; Robèrt and others 2002; MacDonald 2005; Byggeth and Horschorner 2006; Ny and others 2006; Byggeth and others 2007).

For this stage, results are presented on the section 3.1.1.

2.2.4 Expert Feedback

A summary of the preliminary answers to the primary research question and secondary research question 1 (see Appendix C) was sent to a group of experts in the field of international development (see Appendix D). These experts were selected by taking into consideration recent publications, discussion forum lists published on relevant websites, participation in
recent events concerning international assistance effectiveness, and previously established contacts.

An initial list of 136 experts was narrowed down to 57 to whom were sent by email the formulated summary and questionnaire that included questions and a general feedback request. Respondents included ODA agencies´ officials, multilateral organizations personnel, academics, consultants, researchers, UN staff, NGO workers and recipient countries´ public officials. Feedback was provided by either directly answering the proposed questions, or giving general comments. Specific structured questions outlined the author´s positions on the likely benefits of the use of the FSSD and solicited positive or negative response and justification. General questions left room for more open-ended feedback concerning the general validity of the study.

Summary of the expert feedback is presented in section 3.2. Appendix E contains the unedited responses in full.

2.2.5 **Revision of the Framework for Strategic Sustainable Development Assistance**

Recommendations for improvement received in response to the summary of preliminary guidelines were reviewed, grouped and utilized in the following way.

- The gathered feedback was organized according to the content of criticism and recommendations.
- Once organised, key learnings from the feedback served as a basis for reviewing and improving the guidelines in a variety of areas.
- The improved guidelines were elaborated to produce a Framework for Strategic Sustainable Development Assistance (FSSDA) to support ODA agencies in using aid to foster strategic development towards sustainability.

The ultimate intention of the authors in producing such a revised summary (FSSDA) is to contribute to the ongoing dialogue between ODA actors concerning aid effectiveness and sustainable development.

The finalized FSSDA is presented in section 3.3.
2.2.6 Organization of Agency Policy Documents into a Generic Five Level Framework for Strategic Planning

Here the policies, strategies, goals and practices described in recently published documents of eight OECD-DAC member country donor agencies (USAID, CIDA, EC-DGD, SIDA, DFID, NORAD, BMZ and Dutch MFA) were reviewed and organized into a generic Five Level Framework for planning in complex systems. Such a diverse group of bilateral agencies were selected in order to understand the ODA system in its completeness and reduce the importance of specific policies and practices.

According to this model, information was arranged based on whether it pertained to the degree of holistic system understanding conveyed (Level 1: System), the most over-arching success goals targeted by the agency (Level 2: Success), strategy and planning methodologies and approaches (Level 3: Strategic), concrete actions undertaken (Level 4: Action), and the tools that support agency operations (Level 5: Tools).

The task was undertaken in order to answer secondary research question number 2 “How do donor agencies currently approach sustainable development?” It was recognized that in order to make informed recommendations regarding future agency planning and operational organization it would be of utmost importance to have a firm grasp of current agency policy and planning frameworks.

The results of this ordering process formed the basis for synopses and because of space limitations are summarized in section 3.4.

2.2.7 Assessment of Agency Perspectives, Goals, Planning Procedures, and Decision Making Policies

Following the organization of information into five level frameworks described in the previous step, agency policies, strategies, goals and practices were assessed against the model provided by the Framework for Strategic Sustainable Development Assistance.

This was accomplished by careful comparison of a given level from the organized information with its corresponding level in the finalized FSSDA
model. Each agency was evaluated at each level of the Five Level Framework and the FSSDA.

These evaluations were then examined and compared with each other. Enough overlap and commonalities were found to justify combining the evaluations into comprehensive synopses of the current reality as they relate to the ideal model represented by the FSSDA.

The FSSD, based on a broad system perspective was used to conduct this analysis, as it can be used effectively to comprehend complex structures and identify casual relations, trends, weaknesses and strengths (Broman and others 2000). To accomplish this, the authors made use of bilateral organization’s official documents, strategy plans and policy statements.

The results of these analyses are presented in the section 3.14.

2.2.8 Final Answers to the Primary Research Question

Formulation of final answers to the primary research question was based on knowledge gathered through:

- initial literature review by understanding the challenges facing aid effectiveness, and the benefits of using the FSSD in other fields and types of organizations;
- expert feedback received in response to the preliminary answers to the primary research question;
- development of answers to each of the secondary research questions.

Each of these processes was integral to producing a satisfactory result in fulfilment of the ultimate goal of the study.

2.3 Validity

Given the limitations of the study, it was not possible to personally involve representation from all relevant levels of bilateral and multilateral organizational hierarchy. To pursue proper validation of the authors’
recommendations shown in the initial FSSD application, and initial answers to the primary research question, contacts were made with actors from within every sphere of the international development assistance community: 1) ODA agencies´ officials, 2) multilateral organizations personnel, 3) academics, 4) consultants, 5) researchers, 6) UN staff, 7) NGO workers and 8) recipient countries´ public officials (see Appendix D). The aim was to obtain as much meaningful feedback as possible from as wide a range of interests as possible, with regard to the viability and benefits of application of the FSSD to the ODA system.
3 Results

Following a presentation of the preliminary answers to the primary research question and the expert feedback to these preliminary answers, the section follows the chronology of the secondary research questions. The results section closes with the revised answers to the primary research question.

Results are presented through the following phases:

- Preliminary Answers to the Primary Research Question concern the ways in which SSD can support donor agencies in promoting sustainable development in recipient countries;
- Preliminary Answers to Secondary Research Question 1: investigation of how an agency would put into practice an SSD approach results in the initial FSSDA model;
- Feedback from Experts;
- Answering Secondary Research Question 1: expert feedback influences a revision of the Framework for Strategic Sustainable Development Assistance (FSSDA);
- Answering Secondary Research Questions 2 and 3: organization into a five level framework and assessment of ODA planning and decision making structures using the FSSDA. This allows for understanding of how donor agencies currently plan and the gaps between the FSSDA and current donor approaches to sustainable development; and;
- Answering the Primary Research Question: revision of answers to the primary research question based on expert feedback to the preliminary answers and knowledge gained through the answering of the secondary questions.

3.1 Preliminary Results

3.1.1 Preliminary Answers to the Primary Research Question

Preliminary answers to the primary question of the thesis were generated as a result of the authors' research and understandings of the ODA system and
SSD. In the summary these answers followed the preliminary guidelines and were formulated as statements to which expert contacts were asked to express either agreement or disagreement along with justification of the answer given.

These initial answers to the primary research question “In what ways can application of the SSD approach support bilateral donor country agencies in orienting official development assistance to best foster sustainable development in recipient countries?” are as follows:

- A principle based definition of socio-ecological sustainability, could serve as a superordinate goal that would help to orient the aims of development and result in greater ODA effectiveness.
- The four sustainability principles could be used to guide development related decisions and priorities, as they would provide a neutral, external set of criteria that are relevant to everyone.
- Understanding development from a systems perspective, which includes the four sustainability principles, is a holistic approach that could inform lasting results beyond the scope of individual projects or initiatives.
- Backcasting could be useful in allocation and planning for the effective use of ODA as it works back from a shared long-term vision and addresses the movement to get there in a way that can address root causes of poverty and unsustainability while aiming for a desirable future, rather than reacting to current issues and trends.
- Sustainability (defined by the 4 Sustainability Principles) as the focus of shared mental models for success would effectively encourage partner country ownership and development goal alignment, as well as inter-donor harmonization.
- The prioritization considerations (in section 5.3, of Appendix C) would be useful in balancing the progress towards sustainability, with social and economic concerns.
- A principle-based definition of success paired with strategic planning and a backcasting methodology can be helpful in managing for results and maintaining progress towards a concrete goal in the context of development assistance.
3.1.2 Preliminary Answers to Secondary Research

Question 1: Initial FSSDA

The preliminary guidelines outline the initial hypothetical application of the FSSD in the context of development assistance and comprised the basis for the summary (see Appendix C) distributed to expert contacts (see Appendix D).

The summary/survey document sent to experts (see Appendix C) consists of three main sections. The first describes background information relating to the current challenges and situation faced by the ODA system in general as well as a foundational basis for understanding the essential concepts of SSD.

Next the FSSD is tailored to the challenges, trends, and concerns of the development assistance community to create the initial Framework for Strategic Sustainable Development Assistance (FSSDA). This second section describes the system level information necessary to forming a comprehensive goal of sustainability as success, and how such an agency would orient its strategy, actions, and tools towards the attainment of success according to an FSSD approach, but customized to the needs of the ODA context.

The third and final section of the summary describes how the Strategic Sustainable Development might facilitate the effective use of development assistance toward sustainable development, and at the same time poses these possibilities as questions in order to solicit feedback as to their legitimacy and the viability of an SSD approach to development assistance.

3.2 Feedback from Experts

To evaluate the preliminary results, the practicality of the initial FSSDAAppendix C: Summary of Preliminary Results, and in order to make well-informed improvements, professionals and academics from several sectors related to the field of the sustainable development, and official development assistance were engaged. Contacts included NGO workers, UN officers, consultants and independent researchers, university professors,
PhD students, OECD officials, and both donor and recipient country representatives.

Questions were directed to assess both general impressions of guidelines as well as ideas and opinions related specifically to the research questions and preliminary answers advanced by the authors. The survey yielded 30 respondents, 14 of whom answered the questions directly as they were written while 16 answered reflectively to the whole document and included answers to some questions. Two respondents answered the questions and also inserted comments throughout the entire document.

What follows is a presentation of the questions solicited of these experts followed in each case by carefully balanced summaries of the answers, opinions and critiques that were returned. The received feedback can be found verbatim, organized but unedited in Appendix E.

*Question 1: Do you agree that this model (described in section 5) could be applicable in development partnerships?*

Most respondents (20/30) expressed general agreement with this statement.

Some felt that in the context of growing climate and environmental concerns this was a particularly timely and appropriate study. It was expressed a need exists within the development community for the sort of changes being proposed by the authors. Niederländer stated that the strength of the model was in its emphasis on maintaining a holistic perspective and capacity to support a balancing of environmental constraints with social issues (Niederländer 2009).

Opinions were expressed that the model could be applicable but that it might be too complex and abstract to be of much practical use. Though the model is strong, it was thought that it would be difficult to achieve true recipient country ownership. This might be partly solved by providing more room for negotiation. Concerns were raised that an overly scientific model could devalue local capacity, and that recipient countries might not care to prioritize environmental sustainability as much as social cohesion (Navrozidis 2009; Droeze 2009; Niederländer 2009; Härsmar 2009; Renzio 2009; McAvoy 2009; Hanspach 2009; Blewitt 2009; Barr 2009).
A minority (6/30) of respondents – including 3 anonymous – stated that the model would not be usable due to the entirely political and social nature of development and that scientific principles could not be used to handle social concerns (Hanspach 2009; Mitlin 2009; Droeze 2009).

Question 2: We believe that a principle based definition of socio-ecological sustainability, could serve as a superordinate goal that would help to orient the aims of development and result in greater ODA effectiveness. Do you agree? Why or why not?

Approximately half of the experts (17/30) responded positively to this statement, though some qualified their agreement.

Izmetiev, Thomas and Saleem agreed strongly, noting that problems are multi-faceted, national borders are artificial, and that a holistic approach like that displayed by the FSSDA is needed. Sustainability it was expressed is a much better goal than economic growth (Izmetiev 2009; Thomas 2009; Saleem 2009).

Droeze felt that the approach might take an overly scientific approach, and may not provide much support for addressing cultural, economic, or political issues (Droeze 2009). Questions were raised about the neutrality of science, and the difficulty of influencing domestic logics of power from outside. Niederländer pointed out that rich donors may not be credible enough themselves to suggest a sustainability oriented approach (Niederländer 2009).

Petropoulos raised an objection on the grounds that where the humanitarian problems are pressing, ecological issues become less important (Petropoulos 2009). Polsky felt that the SSD definition of sustainability was neither concrete nor holistic enough to be of much use (Polsky 2009).

Question 3: We believe that the four sustainability principles (see section 4.3) could be used to guide development related decisions and priorities, as they would provide a neutral, external set of criteria that are relevant to everyone. Do you agree? Why or why not?

Several respondents (9/30) agreed strongly with this statement. Petropoulos felt that the principles serving as neutral criteria could better ensure the
longevity of development interventions (Petropoulos 2009). It was noted that the principles might be an effective way to promote strong recipient ownership in societies more aware of their relationship with nature.

While the first three principles were overwhelmingly accepted, some experts (12/30) raised concerns about the 4th principle on the grounds that human needs cannot be easily defined.

Izmestiev felt that it was not clear whether recipients would see the principles as neutral, or as constraining conditionality never to be fully adopted. Translation into concrete actions, it was thought, might be complicated (Izmestiev 2009). McAvoy responded that it might be helpful for the authors to consider who would stand to lose from application of these principles and how they might create barriers (McAvoy 2009).

Navrozidis felt that the reality is too far removed from whatever frameworks donor agencies might want to put in place (Navrozidis 2009). McAvoy found the model to be unrealistic because culture, religion, denial, corporate, individual greed, short-term political interests would sabotage the implementation of any high level principles on the ground (McAvoy 2009).

**Question 4: We believe that understanding development from a systems perspective, which includes the four sustainability principles, is a holistic approach that could inform lasting results beyond the scope of individual projects or initiatives. Do you agree? Why or why not?**

A number of respondents (15/30) felt that maintaining a broad system perspective is very important and it was said that this is only approach from which effective development can take place. Saleem asserted that either a society is sustainable or not, and that only a system perspective based on principles can reveal this.

Concerns were expressed that though a system perspective is desirable, it would be it would be extremely difficult to change the system in such a fundamental way given the politics involved. This might make translation to the level of implementation a serious challenge. An anonymous respondent felt that there was a need for flexibility in negotiation. It was
also noted that the logistics of sustainability analyses might represent a barrier to effective implementation.

Navrozidis disagreed with this statement on the grounds that it is too difficult to implement holistic perspectives (Navrozidis 2009).

**Question 5:** We believe that backcasting could be useful in allocation and planning for the effective use of ODA as it works back from a shared long-term vision and addresses the movement to get there in a way that can address root causes poverty and unsustainability while aiming for a desirable future, rather than reacting to current issues and trends. Do you agree with this idea? Do you see any flaws in this argument?

The value of a backcasting approach to planning was widely acknowledged, but often such agreement was qualified.

One expert noted that such a methodology, even if it is not called backcasting, is already being used in the context of development planning. It was observed that backcasting might help in making resource allocation more strategic (Izmestiev 2009). Niederländer agreed that there is a need to work backwards from jointly set objectives (Niederländer 2009). Backcasting, it was stated by an anonymous respondent, could align short term flexibility inform negotiations.

One anonymous respondent felt that backcasting makes sense, but that such planning must not interfere with urgent humanitarian responses. Caution was expressed by Hårsmar that too much planning could limit flexibility and that learning and reorientation must be allowed throughout the process. Again it was thought that the translation from planning to implementation might be challenging (Hårsmar 2009).

Disagreements focussed on the idea that it might not be possible to build shared mental models and long-term visions between people from such different cultures especially where fundamentalism exists. Saleem's opinion was that even if a shared mental model is adopted, everyone will still disagree about how to get there (Saleem 2009).

**Question 6:** We believe that sustainability (defined by the 4 Sustainability Principles) as the focus of shared mental models for success would
effectively encourage partner country ownership and development goal alignment, as well as inter-donor harmonization. Do you agree? Why or why not?

Agreement with this statement was not as enthusiastic as with others and where experts agreed it was with significant qualification.

McAvoy responded that this could be the case when perceived interests are aligned (McAvoy 2009).

Melby and Saleem were concerned that while harmonization is easy to say at a high level of planning, the reality of implementation can be quite different (Melby 2009; Saleem 2009). Migliorisi and Izmestiev noted that recipient country capacity might limit possibility of such alignment (Migliorisi 2009; Izmestiev 2009). Initial agreement might be easy, but could be far removed from practices. Navrozidis and Niederländer agreed that recipients might see the principles as constraints to their growth (Navrozidis 2009; Niederländer 2009).

Petropoulos and an anonymous respondent agreed that donors are too politically motivated to effectively harmonize with each other (Petropoulos 2009). One anonymous expressed an opinion that the four principles are inadequate. Differences in worldview and clashes between donor and recipient values would prevent effective alignment.

Question 7: We believe that a principle-based definition of success paired with strategic planning and a backcasting methodology can be helpful in managing for results and maintaining progress towards a concrete goal. Do you agree? Why or why not?

Some respondents (8/30) including Niederländer and Thomas found that the model could be very useful as it provides strong support for translating a clear vision and strong values into concrete strategies with precise objectives (Niederländer 2009; Thomas 2009).

Navrozidis and Mitlin commented that though the model seems sound, it has yet to be tried in practiced and should be supported with a case study (Navrozidis 2009; Mitlin 2009).
Saleem objected that other effectiveness initiatives (such as Paris Declaration) have been promoted but have had little effect (Saleem 2009).

**Question 8: Where are the strong and weak points of this model?**

Several respondents found our model to be strong in several areas and it was felt that:

- Sustainability as a goal can serve to draw people together and so might be helpful with harmonization and alignment (Blewitt 2009).
- Backcasting towards a principle based definition of success and supported by strong prioritization considerations could be a powerful prioritization tool in the context of development assistance (Niederländer 2009; Barr 2009; Thomas 2009).
- The SSD approach addresses issues which are commonly recognized as very relevant and of paramount importance to donor debates and dialogues (McAvoy 2009; Izmostiev 2009). There is a significant political momentum promoting these issues (Izmostiev 2009).
- A strength of the proposal is that it contributes to a more concrete definition of sustainability. Better definition of this goal would certainly help to better prioritise actions and to agree on common strategies (Droeze 2009).
- Such a holistic approach, which puts far more emphasis on the preservation of the environment and social justice, is valuable (Niederländer 2009).
- The approach provides a concrete conceptual model for consideration of sustainability issues in relation to development (McAvoy 2009).
- Placing socio-economic sustainability as the superordinate goal and supplementing it with a systems approach should be very helpful (Saleem 2009).

Other respondents made critiques and identified the following areas of weakness:

- The difficulty of implementation and the significant capacity it demands from both donors and recipients will limit its effectiveness (Saleem 2009; Izmostiev 2009; Navrozidis 2009).
The abstract nature of the model will make it difficult to apply in practice (Niederländer 2009).

The first three sustainability principles are based on natural sciences, and may possibly be described as they are, but the fourth is more of a social or perhaps political principle. This makes it difficult to concretizing and measure (Hermele 2009).

The model has not been proved sufficiently neutral (Izmestiev 2009).

The proposal makes too many claims and is too ambitious (Droeze 2009).

Inherent assumptions of the model seem likely to undermine its relevance (McAvoy 2009).

The model is somewhat difficult to follow and poorly explained and therefore likely to be ignored by development practitioners (McAvoy 2009).

Donors will accept it like Paris Declaration but nothing will change on the ground (Saleem 2009).

Overly environmental approach (Renzio 2009).

The framework does not address real world issues (Satterthwaite 2009).

Aid effectiveness and sustainable development cannot be combined (Renzio 2009).

**Question 9: What are your recommendations for improving these guidelines?**

Respondents made several recommendations for how the framework might be strengthened. These included:

- Describing application in a more concrete way and providing more details for how the Sustainability Principles will translate to real life implementation (Thomas 2009).
- Widening the scope of research by involving other donors, and addressing all aspects of international aid, including humanitarian aid and private donor contributions (Ottinger 2009).
- Taking a less assured approach to the neutrality and benefits afforded by science (Polsky 2009; Migliorisi 2009, Hanspach 2009).
• Providing case studies (Migliorisi 2009; Navrozidis 2009; Hermele 2009).
• Developing a fuller understanding of social principles (Hårsmar 2009; Droeze 2009).

3.3 Answering Secondary Research Question 1: Framework for Strategic Sustainable Development Assistance (FSSDA)

Based on the responses received, and in the interest of better customizing the Framework for Strategic Sustainable Development to the needs of donor agencies, several additions and modifications were made to the preliminary guidelines, resulting in the formulation of a Framework for Strategic Sustainable Development Assistance.

A number of respondents (12/30) found the preliminary model to be somewhat rigid and emphasized the need for more flexibility and space for negotiation between donor and recipient. It was thought that this would render the model more effective in encouraging ownership in recipient countries and promoting more donor-recipient alignment in a way that better reflects the intentions of aid effectiveness efforts like the Paris and Accra initiatives.

Modifications to the preliminary guidelines that resulted in the final FSSDA model included:

• At the system level: a more flexible approach to defining human needs as the basis for the 4th Sustainability Principle. The model encourages donor agencies to engage in dialogue with recipient country stakeholders in order to build consensus around a conception of what fundamental human needs⁹ should be met beyond basic subsistence.

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⁹ Many models of basic human needs exist. Most donor agencies already possess a working definition of human needs. There is no conclusive definition of basic human needs, but the model of basic human needs conceived by Manfred Max-Neef is well-
At the success level: the principles of sustainability are supplemented with principles for an attractive society. Principles for an attractive society which are intended to capture the core values of the recipient society and ensure that they are preserved and promoted through the development process.

At the strategic level:

- To supplement the guidelines for strategic planning recommended by the FSSDA model, agencies are recommended to continue to use what guidelines for behaviour might already be in place.
- Experience, lessons learned, and best practices should support prioritization.

The following outlines a Framework for Strategic Sustainable Development Assistance (FSSDA) based on the FSSD but customized to meet the planning needs of an ODA donor agency. The model is organized according to a five level framework for strategic planning. The FSSDA provides guidance for application and utilization of the key components of the Framework for Strategic Sustainable Development (FSSD) in the context of bilateral official development assistance.

### 3.3.1 Level 1: SYSTEM

Describes society within the biosphere, including the ecological and social laws/rules/norms, governing this system as well as the relationships between ecological and social systems, and the conditions specific to the various contexts in which development will take place.

A thorough understanding at the systems level informs strategic planning with a holistic perspective. The information here allows for diagnosis of upstream environmental and social causes of poverty as well as helping developed and has informed a basic understanding of human needs (subsistence, affection, participation, identity, freedom, creativity, idleness, protection, and understanding) in other practical and theoretical applications of the FSSD (Max-Neef 1986).
agencies to better understand what sorts of strategic guidelines and actions
tend to work well in contexts.

Comprehensive systems level understanding involves:

**Ecological Principles:**
- Conservation laws; Laws of thermodynamics;
- Principles of biogeochemical cycles;
- Self-organization; Diversity; Interdependence;
- Dynamic equilibrium; Forcing; Feedback loops; Carrying capacity; etc.

**Social Principles:**
- Basic human needs;
- Self-organisation; Diversity; Interdependence.

Other system aspects relevant to the development assistance context:
- The key structures, institutions and relationships relevant to the ODA System including the budgets, politics, strategies, procedures, resources and motivations of donors and aid channels (such as OECD, DAC, UN agencies, etc.).
- The activities and aims of other aid donors that may be operating in the recipient country and the history of aid use in that country
- An understanding of relevant tools that will be used: ODA related agreements (Paris Declaration, Accra Agenda for Action, MDGs, Agenda 21, Monterrey Consensus, etc).
- The key structures, institutions, and capacity of the governance system in recipient country as well as the needs, beliefs and attitudes of the people within that country.
- Comprehension of the cultural historical, political, economic, institutional and physical context in which development work will take place.
- Perceived root causes of the poverty at the individual, societal, international and global levels.
3.3.2 Level 2: SUCCESS

Identifies the ultimate goal of development as a society within the biosphere, attractive to its people, and existing in compliance with the conditions for socio-ecological sustainability.


The Sustainability Principles. In a sustainable society, nature is not subject to systematically increasing…

I. Concentrations of substances extracted from the Earth’s crust;
II. Concentrations of substances produced by society;
III. Degradation by physical means;
and in that society...
IV. People are not subject to conditions that systematically undermine their capacity to meet their needs (Holmberg and Robèrt 2000; Ny et al. 2006).

Positive Principles for an Attractive Society. The definition of principles affirmatively defining an attractive future society should be a product of dialogue between donors and recipients (involving all possible stakeholders). These might include the values (political, religious, cultural) of the society, non-negotiable values of the donor country (the rights of women, homosexual rights, children rights, etc.), or rights that citizens of the country should reasonably be able to expect. International agreements such as the following might also serve a basis for dialogue around principles for an attractive society: Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Convention Against Torture, or Convention on the Rights of the Child.

It is important to note that:

- The vision: society existing within the sustainability constraints represents a target to work towards which will always serve to orient development (Holmberg and Robèrt 2000).
- By illuminating its constraints, the sustainability principles define what is not a sustainable society rather than what it is (Robèrt and others 1997). Any society that falls within the constraints can be
defined as sustainable, but from the current perspective it is impossible to know exactly what form such a society will take.

- A principle-based definition of sustainability as the overarching goal of development can be a neutral basis for a shared mental model relevant to all sides. This should provide a foundation for mutual planning and harmonization between donors and recipients as well as coordination between donors.

- Scenarios may complement a principle-based definition but cannot replace it in terms of its ability to provide flexibility throughout the creative process while maintaining a coherent direction (Ny and others 2006, 63).

### 3.3.3 Level 3: STRATEGIC GUIDELINES

Outline guidance for the process of moving strategically towards the vision of success (level 2) in the system (level 1). The strategic plan itself is created by prioritizing the actions (level 4) according to the strategic guidelines (level 3) and creating a step-by-step plan with a realistic timeline (Holmberg 1998, 39).

*Guidelines for Strategic Planning.* Having outlined a principle-based definition of success, the ODA agency and country can plan strategically and prioritize actions to begin moving in the direction of success. The backcasting methodology is used to envision a desirable future where the principles for success have been met, evaluate the current situation in relation to success and from there generate a strategic plan describing what can be done now to begin moving in the right direction.

Throughout the process of backcasting to create a strategic plan it is important to:

- Maintain a systems perspective (see level 1) in order to avoid unforeseen consequences.

- Involve political consensus: e.g. relevant international agreements, and legislation, such as the Millennium Development Goals, Agenda 21, Paris Declaration, Accra Agenda for Action, Monterrey Consensus, Doha Declaration on Financing for Development, etc.

- As much as possible ensure inclusion and cooperation of all parties and stakeholders, including; recipient government, business leaders,
other aid organizations, NGOs, representatives of civil society, religious leaders, etc.

- Exercise precaution in the face of uncertainties.
- Take a progressive and practical approach to science and innovation.

*Guidelines for Backcasting from Principles.* Backcasting from a co-created vision of success based on sustainability principles involves four general steps which in the interest of alignment should be accomplished in full cooperation with recipient country:

A) A shared mental model of Success is defined as the ODA recipient within the biosphere, existing in compliance with the conditions for socio-ecological sustainability (i.e. the Four System Conditions or Sustainability Principles) and upholding principles for an attractive society.

B) Current environmental, economic, and social situation is analysed in relation to the conditions for socio-ecological sustainability and to an attractive society.

C) Informed by the conditions for sustainability (4 SPs), possibilities for future development initiatives/projects/programs as solutions to the problems highlighted in 'B' are generated.

D) Appropriate strategies are identified to best move towards the envisioned desirable future by from and then prioritizing the solutions generated in 'C'.

*Prioritization Considerations.* Well defined prioritization considerations provide support for managing economic, social, and ecological strategic trade-offs towards success (Holmberg and Robèrt 2000). Since prioritization considerations should for the most part be the product of donor/recipient consensus, it is impossible to formulate an exhaustive and general list.

The following are some of the most basic prioritization considerations that tend to recur in most planning initiatives employing the FSSD model (Robèrt and others 1997; Holmberg and Robèrt 2000; Robèrt 2000; Robèrt and others 2002; Ny and others 2006) and are equally applicable (although
not necessary exhaustive) in the context of strategizing for the effective use of development assistance funding:

- Measures should bring recipient country closer to success.
- Measures should serve as flexible platforms for further advancing development to reach success.
- Measures should bring capital (financial, social and political) to the recipient country to ensure the continuation of benefits from development intervention during and after assistance has been completed so that progress does not halt due to lack of resources. This ensures that development assistance is always used in a way that aims to reduce the need for development assistance.
- Measures should take into account the urgency of the specific needs of the recipient country/community.
- Experience, lessons learned, and best practices should support prioritization.

Guidelines for Behavior. Donor agencies usually already possess behavioral guidelines for working with recipients and it is not suggested that they be replaced, but research has suggested that certain process guideline are more effective for engendering positive and effective decision-making. Examples of behavioral guidelines may be:

- Ensuring participation;
- Maintaining transparency and honesty;
- Guaranteeing responsibility and accountability;
- Communicating effectively through dialoguing;
- Building capacity and developing leadership: strengthening the social fabric.

3.3.4 Level 4: ACTION

Actions include but are not limited to development initiatives, projects, and programs. They are oriented by the strategic guidelines (level 3) towards success (level 2).

Agencies already possess a great deal of operational capacity and competence. The FSSDA provides context, direction and prioritization support for these competencies as well as possible direction for developing
new initiatives. Such a pragmatic approach to development initiatives highlights the inadequacy of a priori or universally applied actions.

The following examples are gathered from selected agencies as a representative but not exhaustive cross-section of the action sectors pursued by donors.

*General Mechanisms of Execution*: budget support, NGO cooperation, developing and deploying science and research for development, civil society cooperation, implementation, grants, technical assistance, inter-agency cooperation, etc.

*Sectors of Implementation:*

- Programmes and projects related to socio-economic development: such as rural development, support for economic and institutional reforms, etc.
- Societal capacity building and social fabric strength actions: including civil society, rule of law and human rights, health, education, social services, etc.
- Environmental capacity building actions: for instance climate change adaptation, sustainable use of natural resources, water, sanitation, etc.
- Security: including conflict prevention, conflict management and human security, social security; etc.

3.3.5 **Level 5: TOOLS**

Tools support the actions (level 4) and strategy (level 3) to achieve success (level 2) in the system (level 1). Included are tools for monitoring, measuring, assessing, analyzing, building capacity, etc.

Agencies already possess a myriad of various tools. The FSSDA provides context and orientation for the use of these tools, and support for these competencies as well as possible direction for developing new initiatives. Examples from various tools and practices for assessing monitoring and evaluating the work, already used by the ODA agencies and could be used within the FSSDA:
- International agreements (e.g. the Millennium Development Goals, Agenda 21, Paris Declaration, Monterrey Consensus, etc.).
- Country strategy papers (NSDS – National Sustainable Development Strategies), agreements with concrete goals and time-tables;
- Environmental and social impact assessments; Species counts, Total material flow, Toxicity level measurements;
- Reporting and monitoring mechanisms (e.g. Performance Report Activity Planning), Human Development Index, Statistics; etc.

3.4 Answering Secondary Research Questions 2 and 3: organizing and assessing ODA planning and decision making structures using the FSSDA

Here the policies and recently published documents of eight DAC member country donor agencies are organized according to a generic Five Level Framework for Strategic Planning and evaluated against the FSSDA model. This was undertaken in order to best understand how current agency practices and planning procedures compare to the hypothetical model outlined in the FSSDA.

Overall, it was found that no agency currently conveys a comprehensive systems understanding of society within the biosphere comparable in breadth to that recommended by the FSSDA. Agency definitions of success usually follow logically from the perspective conveyed at the system level. Strategies are formulated to stimulate incremental improvement with regard to a range of development problems or shortcomings. Without delving into case studies it is difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of specific actions or tools but they appear to be oriented towards proximate sub-goals in the strategic plan.

The following section mirrors the structure of the Five Level Framework and FSSDA by moving sequentially from 'system' to 'tools'. Each level begins with separate summaries of each agency's materials relevant to the given level of the 5LF. These are labelled 'descriptions' and are followed by assessments of how the agencies in general compare to the corresponding
section of the FSSDA model both in terms of commonalities and gaps. These are labelled 'evaluations'.

3.4.1 System Level: Agencies’ Description Summaries and FSSDA Evaluation

*USAID System Description.* Downstream violence and poverty result from lack of economic opportunity and lack of democratic governments in recipient countries. American and global security is affected by these deficiencies. Developed countries have a responsibility to help foster human health, economic growth and democracy (USAID 2006a; USAID 2006b; US Department of State and USAID 2007; USAID 2008).

*CIDA System Description.* Both developed and developing countries are interconnected through global environmental and social issues/challenges. The interdependence of society and the natural environment is recognized. All countries are responsible for addressing these challenges represented by global inequalities and environmental challenges (CIDA 1992; CIDA 1997; CIDA 2006).

*EC-DGD System Description.* Development challenges and opportunities are global. Rich and poor countries are interdependent. The results of imbalances between global market forces and global governance are global inequality and poverty. Poverty eradication and sustainable development will lead to greater stability, peace, and a more prosperous world (Commission of the European Communities 2002; European Parliament and others 2006; Commission of the European Communities 2008).

*SIDA System Description.* Countries are increasingly interdependent, particularly economically. Responsibility to address environmental and social challenges is shared by all countries (Persson and Karlsson 2003; Ringholm and Jämtin 2006; SIDA 2006).

*DFID System Description.* Social unsustainability is caused by global inequalities and poverty. These inequalities also fuel the depletion of environmental resources. Wealth is linked with over-consumption and leaves people with no choice but to exploit their environment (Crown 2005; DFID 2006a; DFID 2006b; DFID 2007).
NORAD System Description. Social welfare and wealth creation in both rich and poor countries depend to a large extent on sound environmental management. The poor rely most directly on their environment, so they are the most vulnerable to its degradation (Ministry of Finance 2003; NORAD 2006).

BMZ System Description. A great deal of inequality exists in the world, and globalization has not resulted in more equal distribution of wealth (Sand 2005; Beitz 2006; BMZ, n.d.).

DUTCH MFA System Description. People need safety and the opportunity to participate in their societies. Poor people are more vulnerable to the effects of environmental unsustainability. There are serious political, cultural and religious divisions (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2007).

Agencies System Level FSSDA Evaluation. Agencies differ widely not only in expression, but also in terms of the scope of system understandings they display. Still, their descriptions share considerable similarity and can be understood to exist along a spectrum of comprehensiveness.

The FSSDA recommends that to “efficiently handle complex systems” (Broman and others 2000, 14) and enable thorough framing of upstream causes of unsustainability, it is important for development agencies to maintain comprehensive perspectives that take into account the greater system in which they exist - society within the biosphere – and their place within that system. This includes the rules and laws so far as they are known, which govern both society and the biosphere. None of the assessed agencies possess such a wide system level perspective. They generally lack recognition of society's place within the biosphere, or principles, rules and laws governing the biosphere.

As a result, agency descriptions of the world often read like lists of problems lacking strong linkages to upstream environmental or social causes. Sometimes specific social forces or trends like globalization are identified as the causes of poverty, inequalities, or environmental unsustainability. Understandings of the causes of poverty are fragmented and there is little consensus between agencies. In some cases, the identified causes of societal and environmental problems appear to be influenced at least in part by political motivation so that the impression they are intended
to convey is of questionable credibility. This may be most easily seen in USAID’s strong insistence that violence and poverty result from lack of democracy and specific economic policies (USAID 2006a, 2). Thus USAID’s ability to link poverties with upstream causes other than economics or a lack of democracy is limited, as is its ability to recognize differing needs in different situations.

At the same time, a positive trend appears to be emerging. While descriptions of robust social or ecological principles are generally absent, several of the examined agencies exhibit a growing awareness of the importance of interdependence, either between society and biosphere, or between different sections of global society. DFID, CIDA and NORAD for example place a great deal of importance on the interdependence of society and environment (Crown 2005, 12; CIDA 2006; NORAD 2005). The European Commission recognizes the interdependence of countries and understands social unsustainability, inequality, poverty to be linked with inequalities which are the results of political/economic imbalances. Mentions of the need for development to be sustainable in agency literature seem to indicate at least partial recognition of the importance for society of maintaining a healthy biosphere, but this relationship is vaguely elaborated.

As members of the DAC, and OECD, these agencies are generally well aware of their positions within the community of aid donors as recommended by the FSSDA. This involves acceptance and integration of important guidelines, documents and tools like those developed at Accra and Paris, the MGDs, Agenda 21, Monterrey Consensus, etc.

The consequences of incomplete descriptions at the system level manifest at subsequent levels when agencies set success goals and orient their strategies as if society were somehow separate from the biosphere rather than an absolutely dependent subsystem of it, subject to the same inalienable natural laws. SSD is built on a constraint-based definition of sustainability because in order to set success goals and strategize in such a way that unforeseen negative outcomes are avoided, “it is helpful to first look for the principles that define the system and then, if necessary, move to higher levels of detail without neglecting these first order principles” (Broman and others 2000, 14).
3.4.2 Success Level: Agencies Description Summaries and FSSDA Evaluation

**USAID Success Description.** A political vision describes the advance of American foreign policy, political values and security. Such an advance will result in a more prosperous, secure and well governed global society with nations that will reduce poverty through growth, respond to the needs of their people and act 'responsibly' (USAID 2006a; USAID 2006b; US Department of State and USAID 2007; USAID 2008).

**CIDA Success Description.** Sustainable development meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. CIDA's poverty reduction activities require a balancing of a concept of needs, the limits of the natural environment, and social and technical innovation to meet these needs. CIDA's understanding of sustainable development rests on 4 core objectives: equitable economic development, social development, environmental management, and governance and human rights (CIDA 1992; CIDA 1997; CIDA 2006).

**EC-DGD Success Description.** Eradicating poverty through effective multilateral cooperation while balancing three pillars of sustainable development; social, economic and environmental considerations. EC is also interested in promoting common values of: respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms, peace, democracy, good governance, gender equality, the rule of law, solidarity and justice (Commission of the European Communities 2002; European Parliament and others 2006; Commission of the European Communities 2008).

**SIDA Success Description.** Eradication of poverty and improvement of quality of life for the poor. Pursuing equitable and sustainable global development. Contributing to achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (Persson and Karlsson 2003; Ringholm and Jämtin 2006; SIDA 2006).

**DFID Success Description.** Sustainable poverty eradication is impossible without a robust ecosystem and resources that are accessible to everyone. DFID has adopted the Brundtland definition of sustainability – meeting needs of the present without compromising those of the future. This is elaborated with 5 guiding principles: concentrating on living within
environmental limits, maintaining a healthy society, achieving a sustainable economy, promoting good governance and responsible use of science (Crown 2005; DFID 2006a; DFID 2006b; DFID 2007).

**NORAD Success Description.** Reducing poverty in all of its dimensions, promoting peace, democracy and contributing to sustainable development as defined by the Brundtland Commission (Ministry of Finance 2003; NORAD 2006).

**BMZ Success Description.** BMZ aims to contribute to the realization of the Millennium Development Goals, reduce global poverty, and distribute resources fairly while preserving the natural environment. They also aim to strengthen democracy, peace, the rule of law, and safeguard human rights (Sand 2005; Beitz 2006; BMZ, n.d.).

**DUTCH MFA Success Description.** Dutch MFA aims to contribute to the realization of the Millennium Development Goals, and the reduction of global poverty (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2007).

**Agencies Success Level FSSDA Evaluation.** In the absence of holistic systems perspectives encompassing both social and ecological rules and laws, development agencies remain generally unaware of basic sustainability constraints. As a result, their capacities to frame robust principle-based definitions of success are limited. Instead agencies operate with a range of more or less concretely defined goals focussed mainly on poverty reduction, economic growth and/or achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

No agency was found to identify the ultimate target of development as the creation of sustainable societies. Most (with the notable exception of USAID) have adopted the Brundtland definition of sustainable development, and while this demonstrates positive intent and attitude towards development, it is not a true success goal. Rather the Brundtland definition is more a guiding ideal, too general to provide much practical guidance in terms of planning (Hjorth and Bagheri 2006).

For the most part agencies are oriented towards lessening poverty and hunger, and promoting economic growth. The MDGs, which represent the current success goals common to all of these agencies do not define a
sustainable society, but rather are intended to describe a less bad or more desirable world relative to the reality in 1990. Whether or not reaching the MDGs would mean genuine positive progress for developing countries, the fact is that they aim at solving the downstream symptoms of unsustainability while not addressing root causes (Sandler and Arce 2007, 531). There is no assurance that progress towards the MDGs would not result in negative unforeseen consequences. In fact, some have reasoned that the MDGs are self-contradictory and all else being the same, reaching them would actually be disastrous. It is likely that achievement of the widespread improvements in living conditions outlined in the MDGs would drastically increase the collective environmental footprint of humanity and put even further strain on the biosphere’s capacity to sustain a global society (ECORYS 2008, 114). If the MDGs are indeed worthy goals, they can only be safely pursued in the context of a society moving towards sustainability.

DFID and CIDA recognize and state the need to live within environmental limits. Of all the agencies, these statements most closely resemble constraints-based descriptions of a sustainable society such as that recommended by the FSSDA. However, such recognition can only provide strategic guidance if the limits being referred to are clearly and comprehensively delineated, which they currently are not.

More often visions of success are lacking and instead agencies have identified directions in which progress should be made. There appears a tacit assumption that whatever is done will be good, but not be enough. There does not seem to be any foreseeable end at which point development assistance would no longer be necessary. Though the limits of a sustainable society as described in the FSSDA may seem incredibly far off, or even unrealistic, it serves to provide a concrete target for development.

Besides constraints for sustainability, the FSSDA recommends that positive ‘Principles for an Attractive Society’, be determined through donor-recipient dialogue or negotiation to ensure the preservation and promotion of certain values of great importance primarily to recipients, but also to donors. Such a component is largely missing from agency definitions of success with the partial exceptions of EC and USAID who state as part of their responsibilities to advance certain sets of political and social values identified as important by donor countries. Agreements made at Paris and Accra stress the need for greater leadership roles for recipient governments,
institutions and individuals in development cooperation, but when agencies arrive with a priori aims and promoting specific values, it becomes questionable to what extent such agreements can achieve meaningful results (Hyden 2008, 259).

3.4.3 Strategic Guidelines Level: Agencies Description
Summaries and FSSDA Evaluation

USAID Strategic Guidelines Description. USAID works to meet its goals of poverty eradication and advancing US foreign interests by pursuing a strategic plan that focuses on promoting: peace and security, just and democratic governance, 'investing in people', economic growth, intellectual property protection, market-based solutions, combating corruption, human health, US and international energy security, and management of environment and natural resources in ways that sustain productivity, etc. Several principles of development guide the execution of work towards these goals: Results, Partnership, Flexibility, Accountability, Ownership, Capacity Building, Sustainability (meaning design programs to ensure their impact endures), Selectivity, and Assessment (USAID 2006a; USAID 2006b; US Department of State and USAID 2007; USAID 2008).

CIDA Strategic Guidelines Description. CIDA works to meet its goals of sustainable development and poverty eradication by focussing on: economic development, social development, environmental management-and governance through practical, focussed targets and initiatives. Progress is measured with regard to economic well-being, social development, environmental sustainability, and governance. Program activity architecture is meant to ensure coordination of human and financial resources toward development initiatives. Several principles of guide the execution of initiatives towards sustainability and performance: promoting human development, promoting an enabling macro-economic and political environment, ensuring grass-roots participation, achieving better knowledge of the local context, building local capacities, supporting indirect activities in the context of poverty reduction strategies, promoting coordination among donors, improving the consistency of activities, increasing leverage, using Canadian expertise with comparative advantages, increasing the institutional, human resource and technological capacities of developing country governments, organizations and communities to plan and implement development policies, programs and activities that are
environmentally sustainable, and strengthening the capability of developing countries to contribute to the resolution of global and regional environmental problems, while meeting their development objectives. (CIDA 1992; CIDA 1997; CIDA 2006).

*EC-DGD Strategic Guidelines Description.* EC works to meet its goals of sustainable development and poverty eradication by promoting: democracy, human rights, good governance, transparency, anti-corruption, respect for international law, participation of civil society, understanding of interdependence, North-South solidarity, and environmental sustainability (which is intended to permeate all aspects of the EC's work). Attempts are made to continually increase the amount and efficacy of aid through the development of greater flexibility, more predictable aid mechanisms and promoting the untying of aid.

Central to EC's strategy are: policy coherence among member states, and the European Consensus which focuses and co-ordinates aid to where it most needed. Several principles of guide the execution of initiatives towards sustainability and performance: complementarity, ownership, partnership, in-depth political dialogue, co-ordination and harmonization, promoting development best practice (Commission of the European Communities 2002; European Parliament and others 2006; Commission of the European Communities 2008).

*SIDA Strategic Guidelines Description.* SIDA works to meet its goals of sustainable development and poverty eradication by promoting its fundamental values: respect for human rights, democracy and good governance, gender equality, sustainable use of natural resources and protection of the environment, economic growth, social development, conflict management, and security. SIDA also pursues global public goods and progress on global challenges including transboundary issues that require joint decisions and action on the part of the international community.

SIDA works continually to increase efficacy of aid by:

- Adapting cooperation to the perspectives, interests, capacity, conditions and needs of poor women, men and children in differing countries.
Basing efforts on the developing countries’ own national poverty reduction strategies and priorities.

Placing emphasis on the poorest countries.

Supporting learning and the development of knowledge on the basis of the developing countries’ own efforts. Development cooperation should be broad and flexible.

Maintaining a holistic, coherent perspective towards development cooperation within the EU framework.

Advantage should be taken of opportunities for implementing cooperation through other actors.

Central to SIDA's strategy are: a rights perspective based on international human rights conventions; and the perspectives of the poor. They also maintain that it is primarily the people of the country, not the donors, who should demand accountability by their governments. Democratization is therefore an imperative part of the new agenda.

SIDA takes a social approach to aid effectiveness and stresses the need for countries and people to guide their own development (Persson and Karlsson 2003; Ringholm and Jämtin 2006; SIDA 2006).

**DFID Strategic Guidelines Description.** DFID works to meet its goals of sustainable development and poverty eradication by focussing on: meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), targeting the poorest countries and populations, ensuring what they do fits developing countries’ own priorities, taking an integrated approach to development that balances economic, social, and environmental impact (both in the short and long term). DFID also places strong emphasis on the role of science in development and the importance of leading by example.

DFID's sustainable development strategy places priority on sustainable consumption and production, climate change and energy, natural resources protection and environmental enhancement, and developing sustainable communities.

Several principles of guide the execution of initiatives towards sustainability and performance:

- **Principle 1:** Take an integrated approach to environment.
Principle 2: Support country-driven processes that can handle local, national and global environmental priorities.

Principle 3: Support the local drivers of sustainable development and improved capacity for environmental management that benefits the poor in selected countries.

Principle 4: Manage environmental information, knowledge, and learning.

Principle 5: Enable developing countries to strike effective deals through multilateral initiatives.

Principle 6: Strengthen donor harmonisation and alignment on the environment.

(Crown 2005; DFID 2006a; DFID 2006b; DFID 2007).

NORAD Strategic Guidelines Description. NORAD works to meet its development goals by focussing on: natural resource management, with special emphasis on governance and sustainability, equality, inclusion, economic right, the rights of marginalized groups, conflict-sensitive development cooperation and peace building.

The importance of knowledge sharing, effective administrative support, using modern technology, quality assurance, and the importance of tangible results in development cooperation are all important to the execution of NORAD's goals (Ministry of Finance 2003; NORAD 2006).

BMZ Strategic Guidelines Description. BMZ works to meet its development goals (oriented largely by the Millennium Development Goals) by focussing on several sectors: economies, employment, governance, democracy, poverty reduction, education, health, social security, agriculture, fisheries, food, environment, infrastructure, and water.

Progress is measured by examining the results of development initiatives in their specific and broader contexts, the goal achievement of a project or programme, its relevance and cost-effectiveness, and its sustainability.

Several principles of guide the execution of BMZ's development initiatives:

- Broad societal consensus on a long-term vision;
- Reliable analysis of the present situation and future scenarios;
- Integrated planning comprising all dimensions of sustainable development;
- Building on existing strategies and processes;
- Increasing links between national and local-level strategies;
- Integration into financial and budget planning;
- Early monitoring to steer processes and track progress;
- Effective participation mechanisms.

(Sand 2005; Beitz 2006; BMZ, n.d.).

**DUTCH MFA Strategic Guidelines Description.** Dutch MFA works to meet its development goals (Millennium Development Goals) and poverty reduction by focussing its efforts on: wealth redistribution, increased competition on the global market, climate change, resource scarcity, global poverty, contradictory geopolitical interests, political and economic governance, HIV/AIDS, high population growth, coherence between trade policy and development policy on a global scale.

Dutch MFA works to continually improve its efficacy by monitoring and learning from past performance, coordinating with the private sector and civil society, and integrating the model of given by the Paris Declaration (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2007).

**Agencies Strategic Guidelines FSSDA Evaluation:** The FSSDA Strategic level consists of guidelines for strategic planning and guidelines for behaviour in development cooperation.

Most of the examined agencies possess and describe fairly well-developed and carefully expressed policies corresponding to what the FSSDA refers to as guidelines for behaviour. These guidelines concern how agency representatives, teams and the organization as a whole act towards and engage recipient country stakeholders throughout the process of planning and implementing development cooperation. Common to several agency behavioural guidelines are themes like the importance of maintaining transparency, effective participation (BMZ), knowledge sharing (NORAD), and supporting local drivers and capacity (DFID). Such behavioural ideals are reflective of those recommended by the FSSDA, so that agencies working to incorporate the FSSDA would likely be well advised to
maintain the content and expression of what policies or instructions currently serve this purpose.

On the other hand, none of the agency approaches to strategic planning currently bear strong resemblance to a backcasting methodology of the kind recommended by the FSSDA. Backcasting from a robust, principle-based definition of success allows strategy to be oriented towards a definite goal. Donor-recipient cooperation within such a framework also provides a basis for development prioritization considerations that better ensure endeavours do not result in unforeseen negative sustainability consequences.

Current agency strategies are oriented to improvement in sectors deemed important with an approach to sustainability that primarily recognizes downstream problems rather than framing upstream causes of socio-ecological unsustainability. These strategies are fragmented and oriented towards creating measurable actions, rather than towards a clearly defined vision of success, i.e. sustainability.

CIDA's commitments to foster progress with regard to economic well-being, social development, environmental sustainability, governance, and against known ecological sustainability issues are broadly representative of the areas of emphasis that most development agencies recognize. While progress in any of these areas is not bad on its own, affirmation that progress should take place within clearly defined sustainability constraints would provide better assurance that development initiatives in one area might not lead to problems in another. The more complex a system is, the more unpredictability it is likely to be. Risk can be seriously diminished by an approach that recognizes and consciously aims to operate within the objective constraints of the system (Holmberg and Robèrt 2000, 302). The sustainability principles illuminate such natural constraints and prioritizing considerations oriented mainly by these principles can serve to guide decisions such that development can trend towards compliance with these constraints.

A range of prioritization support is displayed throughout agency publications. Most make efforts to balance economic, social and environmental considerations in development. The OECD's approach to sustainable development focuses on 'Three Pillars of Sustainability' as economic, environmental and social (Strange and Bayley 2008, 25). Such
an approach has been widely adopted by development agencies striving to balance such considerations. None of the agencies however display an approach to prioritization of corresponding concreteness to the prioritization considerations recommended as part of the FSSDA.

Agency strategic guidelines generally place greater emphasis on social over ecological issues. The Millennium Development Goals play a strong guiding role in the strategies of most agencies and are a clear example of this. Seven of the MDGs are oriented to social wellbeing, while only one goal focuses on 'ensuring environmental sustainability'. This it does in a non-concrete way with two targets related to downstream societal impacts of unsustainability and one sweeping target to reverse the loss of environmental resources.

The implied reasoning behind such strong emphasis on social issues may be that only societies with strong democratic governance, economic and social institutions are capable of acting responsibly towards the environment. While such a position may not be strictly false, it reveals limited recognition of the complexity of the relationship between society and the biosphere. It is questionable whether the 'developed' countries, (who allegedly possess such institutions) are any closer to sustainability than their 'less developed' counterparts. Wealthy countries have had and continue to have primary roles in driving the worst sustainability challenges facing global society (Roberts and Parks 2007; Stiglitz 2006, 174-176). Poor countries may have good reason to question the authority of the wealthy countries whose consumption and industrial practices have largely driven threats like climate change (Satterthwaite 2009).

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10 Millennium Development Goal 7: Ensure Environmental Sustainability is comprised of “Target 9. Integrate the principle of sustainable development into country policies and programs and reverse the loss of environmental resources”, “Target 10. Halve, by 2015, the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation”, and “Target 11: Have achieved by 2020 a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers” (UN Millennium Project 2005).
3.4.4  Actions Level: Description

The specific mechanisms and sectors with which and in which strategies are translated into action vary with each agency, but reflect each other to a large degree and can be organized into general categories. These categories are displayed in section 3.3.4.

Actions and Tools are context-specific as they should be chosen and implemented according to the Strategic Guidelines, influenced by the System level understanding, and oriented towards Success. As such, a detailed examination of the appropriateness of specific actions and tools would not add value to an understanding of how these organizations plan.

3.4.5  Tools Level: Description

Appropriate tools support actions, strategies, monitoring, performance evaluation, and the work of the agency in general. Specific agency tools and procedures differ, but share many commonalities. A summary of these tools is displayed in section 3.3.5.

3.5  Answering the Primary Research Question

Expert agreement and criticisms regarding the preliminary answers (see section 3.2) obtained in response to the survey, as well as key learning gained throughout the process of answering the secondary research questions significantly affected the final formulation of the answers to the primary research question.

In answer to the primary research question, the Framework for Strategic Sustainable Development Assistance is a strategic tool to be employed by ODA agencies, in full co-operation with recipients. It can be used to facilitate development assistance planning by:

- Pursuing socio-environmental sustainability as solid base from which to build lasting and sustainable economies and societies.
• Allowing for a great deal of flexibility and creativity in recipient-led development tailored to the needs and wishes of recipients themselves.
• Approaching environmental unsustainable and barriers to people being able to meet their needs as root causes of poverty.
• Providing decision-making support in pursuing poverty reduction from a holistic systems level perspective.
• Providing an integrated approach to tackling global sustainability threats such as climate change while minimizing other unforeseen negative sustainability impacts.
• Balancing economic and social considerations while maintaining progress towards a sustainable society.
• Providing a fairer basis for aid conditionality grounded in four sustainability principles.
• Placing sustainability as the fundamental goal of development provides context for various proximate development goals (such as the Millennium Development Goals) and the FSSD’s decision-making support allows them to be aligned with each other towards success.
4 Discussion

4.1 Discussion of Research Limitations and Strengths

The most obvious limitation faced by the authors during the execution of the study was the impossibility of incorporating case studies to support research with direct empirical evidence. Time and resource constraints barred the possibility of practical application of the FSSDA model. Ideally a pilot project conducted in co-operation with a donor agency and recipient country could serve to highlight the practical strengths and weaknesses of the model, enabling further assessment as to its relevance and effectiveness.

In the absence of direct empirical evidence, evaluation and opinions were sought from wide range of professionals and academics representing a diverse cross-section of viewpoints from the fields of sustainable development and international development assistance (see Appendix D). Each according to his or her experience was able to provide unique insight into what challenges might be faced in applying the FSSDA at various stages of the development co-operation process, from high level decision-making, to recipient country buy-in, to field implementation. Such diversity in feedback and advice was thought to be essential in mitigating risk that the study might be too heavily influenced by specific interests. Of utmost importance to the authors was ensuring that a broad perspective be maintained throughout the project.

While contacting and involving a wide range of stakeholders made possible a great diversity of opinions, this extensive collaboration presented its own challenges and limitations. Detailing how the SSD approach might be applied in the context of development assistance requires a significant amount of background explanation including the Framework for Strategic Sustainable Development (FSSD), as the principle-based definition of sustainability (4 SPs) and its scientific basis, and the backcasting from sustainability principles methodology.
Effectively conveying the foundational information necessary to build sufficiently deep comprehension to grasp a specific application of SSD was a challenge made more difficult by the volume of experts contacted and the amount of commitment that could reasonably be expected of them.

The authors chose to dispatch a short, easily digestible summary which by necessity included SSD background information, preliminary results, and a sufficiently comprehensive range of detailed questions. The density of information communicated in the summary may in some cases have prevented the information to be digested as thoroughly as was desired, and this may have skewed the feedback. Extended discussion and interviews would likely have mitigated this risk, but because of the demanding schedules of so many of the essential contacts it would not have been possible to maintain the same level of balanced representation afforded by the summaries/questionnaire strategy.

In the evaluation of current agency policy it is possible that aspects of operation were missed or that agency policy documents do not closely resemble agency operations. The qualitative nature of this assessment left it somewhat open to the possibility that misjudgements could have been made, or details missed by the researchers. Mitigation of these risks was sought by examining a wide range of agencies and several documents from each agency. The agencies themselves were chosen to represent a diversity of approaches, and this was further supplemented by careful study of documents from other relevant organizations like the OECD and UN.

The combined experience of the authors, which added up to 15 years of working experience in the field of ODA was a valuable resource enabling insight into the topic which might otherwise not have been possible.

4.2 Possibilities of Future Application of an SSD Approach in ODA

4.2.1 Barriers and Challenges

The system of international development assistance is complex and made
up of a wide variety of players, each with their own sometimes contradictory approaches and motivations (The World Bank 2008a; McGillivray and others 2006; Eyben 2003; Mitlin and Satterthwaite 2007; Green 2008; Roberts and Parks 2007; Stiglitz 2006). Broadly speaking though, development assistance is the outcome of negotiation between donors and recipients (OECD 2009). Donors and recipients each represent challenges and barriers, but also opportunities for acceptance of an approach like that described by the FSSDA.

Official bilateral donors are members of the DAC. As members, donors work together to develop approaches, frameworks, targets, practices and even policies that while distinct, also bear significant resemblance to each other. DAC donors mainly possess strong administrative capacity and are characterized by a high degree of organization and structure (The World Bank 2008a). They are supported by international agreements and possess a powerful leverage because of the large volumes (relative to recipients, not donors) of financing at their disposal.

Donor agencies are governmental entities and usually subordinate to the ministry of foreign affairs. As such they promote home country foreign policy, and their budgets are allocated at a higher level. Policy revision is a bureaucratic process and as with many such activities, inertia is generated through indifference, and the vested interests of those in power to preserve the current configuration. Also, development agencies have well-established ways of working in place and adoption of the FSSDA would require a substantial shift in thinking. Such factors render the integration of new approaches more complicated than simply demonstrating that they would be effective.

Very different, but not less complex circumstances could confront attempts at introducing a new mode of utilizing development assistance to the recipients of aid (The World Bank 2008a; Abegaz 2005; Bourguignon and Sundberg 2007). To generalize about recipient countries can provide only limited insight because environmental, cultural, social, and political situations in these countries vary so widely. Still, the populations and administrations in these countries face many of the same problems and share enough of the same motivations that relevant similarities can be identified. In contrast to donors, strong administrative and institutional capacity is often lacking in poor nations. Nor can the stability enjoyed by
wealthy countries be taken for granted. Recipients of aid may face significant internal or external political, economic, social and environmental threats including corruption, ethnic tensions, resource scarcity, etc. In the face of such threats it is understandable that leadership in these countries may not be as concerned with 'environmentalism' as with building immediate economic and political strength.

Recipients of aid are often understandably suspicious of donor motivation and may be reluctant to pursue development objectives seen as inhibiting to growth, especially when political action in different fields interferes. Respondent Klaus Niederländer identifies a critical credibility problem on the donor side, pointing out that “We are trying to bring in a framework, which quite frankly we have not managed yet to apply in the developed countries ourselves. How do you want to convince recipient countries to restrain the extraction of their natural resources, when they represent their major income source? If we don’t restrain ourselves, why should they, unless there is compensation or better alternatives” (Niederländer 2009).

Such concerns reflect inadequate understanding of how the model is intended to be implemented but they are also indicative of how sustainability initiatives are often initially perceived. Proper application of the FSSDA would not force countries to immediately abandon major sources of income. Rather it would guide balanced and strategic progress towards compliance with the sustainability principles while preserving (and in fact strengthening) social and economic resilience. That this may not be immediately apparent highlights the need of initial introduction to be conducted by knowledgeable staff able to respond clearly to questions and allay such concerns.

Successful application of such a model could only occur if a high level of transparency were maintained on the part of the donor and every effort made to assist recipients in understanding how sustainability can act as a firm basis on which to build lasting and resilient economies. In order for such approaches to gain acceptance in recipient countries, it may also be necessary for donors to demonstrate willingness to lead by example and implement similar initiatives at home.

Referring to the Sustainability Principles upon which the FSSDA is based, Daniel McAvoy, respondent and lecturer in Development Studies at the
University of East Anglia, warns that “Clearly not everyone will support these principles. Culture, religious belief, denial, corporate and individual greed, narrowly conceived short-term political interest and personal agendas are likely to sabotage application of these principles” (McAvoy 2009). He also recommended that the authors attempt to imagine who stands to lose from application of these principles. In any case where such huge amounts of resources are at stake, and where such economic and political power is wielded, it is certainly important to consider where lies the power to either help or hinder initiatives aimed at stimulating positive change.

4.3 Opportunities

Though these challenges are real and even daunting, official development assistance donors and recipients represent enormous potential to address the sustainability challenge facing our global society, and many indications suggest that it is reasonable to expect that the time has come to realise this potential (OECD 2001).

Donor agencies are large sources of money, and possess legitimacy rarely equalled by private or unofficial development donors. At a number of high level forums, donors have officially recognised the need for improved aid and have demonstrated willingness to achieve this goal by signing agreements like the MDGs, Paris, and Accra (OECD 2008c; OECD 2009). Recipients wishing to realize promised improvements in their countries have long understood the need for improved aid modalities. Voices in every aspect of the development assistance network have called for change (Abegaz 2005; Alexander 2008; Bourguignon and Sundberg 2007; Commission of the European Communities 2002). As environmental, social and economic pressures intensify, so too will the need to increase the effectiveness of development assistance (The World Bank 2005; European Parliament and others 2006; OECD 2009). Conditions are in place today that may be accommodating to the implementation of approaches like the FSSDA which take holistic perspectives of development as an activity of society taking place within the biosphere and whose can only be sustained
if it is undertaken in a way that complies with the natural limitations imposed by the planet.

Most of the development agencies (notably CIDA, DFID, EC-DGD, SIDA) examined in this study already acknowledge critical linkages between poverty and socio-environmental sustainability issues (Crown 2005; DFID 2006a; CIDA 2006; ECORYS 2008; SIDA 2006) but do not appear to fully realize and incorporate an understanding of society is a subsystem within and dependent upon the larger biosphere.

Alignment of donor and recipient goals and strategies are one of the major challenges of aid and in recent years the OECD and DAC have been searching for ways to make improvements in this area (OECD 2009). The authors point to one of the most attractive characteristics of the FSSDA as its capacity to address this critical challenge. The framework has been specifically tailored to ease donor/recipient alignment and promote recipient ownership by providing a flexible framework that in a simple and transparent way orients development towards sustainability. The basic structure of the FSSDA and the sustainability principles upon which it is based can be fairly easily taught and serve as basis for dialogue around which consensus can be built concerning the ultimate aims of development in a given country.

While the understanding and application of science may not be strictly neutral, scientific law is at least a more neutral, universal and demonstrable foundation for bilateral negotiation than the political, economic, and social theory that have until now underpinned most development assistance approaches.

Much of the suspicion harbourd by recipients has originated from the political and economic conditions to which donors have traditionally tied aid, and the questionable effects they have produced (McGillivray and others 2006; Lockwood 2005). Recent years have seen the rise of debate surrounding conditionality and discussion concerning whether development assistance should be tied to any conditions at all. While such debate likely indicates growing positive awareness and a desire to promote the sovereignty of recipient countries, the notion that rich countries should freely and blindly donate huge sums to less developed nations betrays a rather superficial understanding of the forces involved. Large and regular
flows of free money to a government from external sources can have serious effects on the natural balance of power within a country and upset the relationship of accountability that must exist between a responsible administration and its population (Najam 2002). Rather what is necessary is a fair basis for conditionality which promotes balance in the use of funds so that they do not unfairly favour either donor or recipient but benefit both sides predictably. Whereas development agreements have often been based upon contestable and disputed economic theory and political interest, SSD offers the possibility of a scientific alternative and more objective basis for negotiation between donors and recipients. This, the study indicates would be the one of the greatest strengths of the proposed FSSDA.

Natural forces and resources do not obey national boundaries, and progress towards sustainability anywhere is beneficial to everyone. The most tangible illustration of this is represented by the most urgent threat to global sustainability and resilience: climate change. The climate forcing effects of increased concentrations of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere have nothing to do with where these emissions are emitted (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change 2007). Even countries that may be lucky enough to avoid the most disastrous direct environmental effects of climate change cannot assume they will be spared threats posed by geopolitical and economic instabilities resulting from food shortages and mass immigration (Dyer 2008, 4-5). Correspondingly, improvements in curbing carbon emissions anywhere benefit everyone everywhere. There is demonstrable self-interest incentive not only for rich countries to work towards sustainability but for them to help others too.

Connected with the issue of ownership, the ease of using the FSSDA has promising implications for reducing aid dependency. Following the initial adoption learning curve, the FSSDA is clear, concise and simple enough that once some demonstrable benefit has been realised, the framework can be easily internalised. Beyond the early phases, development assistance based on an FSSDA model can build momentum and would probably require less direct guidance than the practices currently in place. This has been borne out with applications of the FSSD in businesses and municipalities (Broman and others 2000; Holmberg and others 1996; Robèrt 1994; The Natural Step, n.d) and there is no reason to think that this could not be the case in the field of ODA.
The current approach of selecting a variety of social and economic sectors in which to provide assistance based mainly on donor perspectives is not sufficient to ensure that development is really moving in the right direction. An SSD approach such as is outlined in the FSSDA does not attempt to impose donor values on development or approach social and ecological issues separately. Rather it is a framework for preserving and indeed fostering recipient values (through the Principles for an Attractive Society) while moving towards an objective definition of socio-ecological sustainability (the Four Sustainability Principles) in a balanced manner. It allows planners to be free of predefined notions about development so that practical progress towards a clearly defined goal can achieved (Holmberg and Robèrt 2000). The detailed administration models and genuine motivation of those employed with these donor agencies could become powerful tools and forces in the move towards global sustainability if oriented in such a way.

That donor agencies have been working towards mutual harmonization strengthening communication channels with each other is another promising trend (OECD, n.d.; Commission of the European Communities 2008). Probably if one agency were to adopt and prove the effectiveness of a scheme such as the FSSDA, it could spread and even gain general acceptance.

Many high level officials have called for holistic approaches to sustainable development capable of integrating environmental, economic, and social considerations in a balanced way (Alexander 2008; BMZ, n.d.; CIDA 2006; Commission of the European Communities 2002; DFID 2006a; Ministry of Finance 2003; Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2007; SIDA 2006). In fact, donors have been testing new modes of addressing sustainability issues and several of the surveyed respondents replied enthusiastically about seeing such a model advanced (Petropoulos 2009; Izmestiev 2009; McAvoy 2009; Polsky 2009; Saleem 2009; Niederländer 2009; Barr 2009; Thomas 2009; Blewitt 2009; Droeze 2009). Even in recent months Han Seung-soo, the Prime Minister of South Korea and current chair of the OECD Ministerial Council has expressed the openness of the development community to new approaches (Seung-soo 2009).

Development assistance is an ever-evolving field with huge potential to mitigate the risks and address the threats posed to global society. The
authors are convinced that an approach such as that encapsulated in the FSSDA is exactly the kind of tool that these organizations need in order to realize this potential.
5 Conclusion

Official development assistance is a huge field with vast political and economic influence. As one of, if not the major factor guiding development in many poor countries, ODA represents an enormous potential force for positive change and progress towards sustainability.

At the same time, it is a field in which many of the actors are aware of its shortcomings and inconsistencies. Efforts are constantly being made at the donor agency level and at higher multilateral organization levels to make improvements, increase efficiency and better orient aid to promoting sustainable development.

An SSD approach such as is outlined in the FSSDA could be exactly what is needed to realize the potential of ODA, and improve the efficacy of development assistance by addressing the many challenges it faces.

The FSSDA can facilitate development assistance planning towards sustainability by:

- Setting principles for an attractive society as goals to promote flexible recipient-led development;
- Identifying root causes of poverty as environmental unsustainability and barriers to people being able to meet their needs;
- Providing robust decision-making support in development from a holistic systems level perspective;
- Allowing for progress against imminent global sustainability threats while minimizing the risk unforeseen negative impacts;
- Balancing economic and social considerations while progress is made towards sustainability;
- Making possible a more fair basis for aid conditionality;
- Positioning sustainable societies as the fundamental goal of development.

The research undertaken in this study was intended as a meaningful addition to the growing library of SSD by exploring the implications and possibilities of its application to a new field: Development Assistance.
As the first study to make extensive exploration of possibilities for incorporation of SSD into the international development assistance system, many related areas of interest outside the scope of the present study but relevant to the field have been discovered. The following topics are introduced as suggestions for further areas of research in which the prospects for links with SSD appear promising:

- National Sustainable Development Strategies;
- PRSP (Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers);
- Poverty reduction assessment – exploring the links between poverty and sustainability;
- The Millennium Development Goals;
- Private donors organisations.

Most obviously, the research presented here would be best supported by actual implementation of the FSSDA by a donor agency. Such a pilot project based on the proposed model would enable case studies to assess and verify the strengths and weaknesses of the approach as they appear in practice.

This study coincides with a global economic crisis the depth and severity of which is not yet clear. Concerns about climate change and looming water crises continue to swell. That growth and prosperity worth pursuing must be firmly grounded in sustainable approaches to development has never been more obvious or more widely recognized. Nor has the interconnected nature of modern globalized society been more starkly demonstrated.

Conditions are in place for acceptance of the new paradigms necessary to building the resilience our global society will need as it faces the challenges to come. According to the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon:

Dangerous social and political fuses have been lit. Facing crisis on many fronts, the world is coming to grasp the need for a transition -- to sustainable development, to new levels of cooperation, to a new multilateralism. (Ban Ki-moon 2009)
6 References


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USAID. 2006a. *USAID Primer - What we do and how we do*.


Appendix A: DAC List of ODA Recipients Countries

Effective for reporting on 2008, 2009 and 2010 flows.


Lower Middle Income Countries and Territories (per capita GNI $936-$3 705 in 2007): Albania, Algeria, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bolivia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cameroon, Cape Verde, China, Colombia, Congo, Rep., Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Georgia, Guatemala, Guyana, Honduras, India, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Marshall Islands, Federated States Micronesia, Moldova, Mongolia, Morocco, Namibia, Nicaragua, Niue, Palestinian Administered Areas, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Swaziland, Syria, Thailand, Tokelau, Tonga, Tunisia, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, Wallis and Futuna.

Upper Middle Income Countries and Territories (per capita GNI $3 706-$11 455 in 2007): Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Barbados, Belarus, Belize, Botswana, Brazil, Chile, Cook Islands, Costa Rica, Croatia, Cuba, Dominica, Fiji, Gabon, Grenada, Jamaica, Kazakhstan, Lebanon, Libya, Malaysia, Mauritius, Mayotte, Mexico, Montenegro, Montserrat, Nauru, Oman, Palau, Panama, Serbia, Seychelles, South Africa, St. Helena, St. Kitts-Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and Grenadines, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, Turkey, Uruguay, Venezuela.

(adapted from OECD Development Co-Operation Directorate, n.d.)
Appendix B: List of Bilateral Donor Countries

DAC Members. Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, United States.

OECD Members that are not part of DAC. Czech Republic, Hungary, Iceland, Korea, Poland, Slovak Republic, Turkey, Mexico.

EU Members that are not part of OECD. Bulgaria, Cyprus, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Romania, Slovenia (which donate through the European Commission).

Other non-DAC donors. Brazil, China, Chinese Taipei, India, Indonesia, Iran, Israel, Kuwait, Libya, Malaysia, Pakistan, Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, South Africa, Thailand, United Arab Emirates, Venezuela.

(source: The World Bank 2008a, 37)
Appendix C: Summary of Preliminary Results

Strategic Sustainable Development Assistance
Blekinge Tekniska Högskola, Karlskrona, Sweden
Antonios Balaskas, Eduardo Lima, Tyler Seed

“It is increasingly understood that global poverty, economic development, social aspects and environmental concerns need to be seen in a broader and holistic perspective. The belief in simple and straightforward solutions has decreased over time and the recognition that there is a strong need for strategic, longer term approaches which are taken forward by developing countries themselves – with the support of donors.”
(Progress on EU Sustainable Development Strategy, 2008)

This summary reflects the progress of our masters thesis research thus far in applying a Strategic Sustainable Development (SSD, see section 4) approach to the operations of bilateral development assistance agencies.

1. **Main Research Objective**: To discovery whether an SSD approach could support bilateral development agencies in more effectively fostering sustainable development in partner/recipient countries.

2. **Research Background**: Research spans the network of bilateral and multilateral development assistance channels and donor countries, as well as their relations with and within UN agencies (UNDP, UNDG, UNEP, etc) and OECD/DAC. Our application of the SSD approach is directed specifically towards bilateral official development assistance (ODA) agencies. Several individual donor agencies such as USAID, CIDA, EC-EuropeAid, DFID, SIDA, NORAD, BMZ (German Ministry of Foreign Affairs) and the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs have been selected to represent a diverse cross-section of the range of approaches.

3. **Challenges Facing Aid Effectiveness**: Improving aid effectiveness is a continuous priority of the international community and progress is ongoing. Several well-recognized areas of challenge to increasing aid effectiveness recur throughout the reports on the Paris and Accra forums as well as academic literature and studies reporting progress towards the Millennium Development Goals.

   3.1. **The need to build partner country ownership** - to build momentum such that its effects can be sustained beyond the scope of active funding, assistance must be thoroughly aligned with local development goals so that it can be owned and accepted by the recipient country government and civil society.

   3.2. **Reducing fragmentation and improving harmonization** – The proliferation of implementers and donors combined with an increasing focus on recipient country leadership demands a great deal of administrative capacity which may or may not always be available to developing country governments. Fragmentation also makes more difficult coordination and communication between the myriad of development actors with various perspectives and focuses.

   3.3. **The need for mutual accountability** – Both donors and recipients countries should be accountable for development goals and results. Ultimate accountability should be directed primarily towards partner country governments and civil society.

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3.4. **Conditionality** – Clear and substantial progress towards the untying of aid from unfair conditions is important. Establishing conditions upon which ODA is given should be accomplished jointly with partner countries and be based on their own development plans.

3.5. **The risk of fostering aid dependence** - Whether or not increases in funding are required in the short term, one of the ultimate aims of development assistance should be towards the reduction of need.

3.6. **Environmental threats** - The need to harmonize development with preserving the natural environment is gaining stronger acceptance as the threats represented by resource degradation, climate change, water scarcity and biodiversity loss and their interconnection with social wellbeing become better understood.

3.7. **Commitment vs. Expenditure** – Development aid must be more predictable and transparent to allow recipients to better budget, plan and implement.

4. **Effectiveness through Sustainability**: Improving aid effectiveness becomes even more imperative given an economic climate in which there seems little reason to expect budget pressure to decrease any time soon. The importance of sustainability to development is widely accepted by the international community, but definitions of sustainability and strategies for achievement vary a great deal. An SSD approach to development assistance should enable improvement in effectiveness by pursuing a concrete definition of sustainability as the superordinate goal and strategically prioritizing actions towards its achievement.

4.4. **Strategic Sustainable Development (SSD):** ‘Sustainable Development’ as first defined by the Brundtland Commission is development that “meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs” (Our Common Future, 1987).

SSD elaborates on this understanding with a clear, comprehensive, and scientifically based set of principles that define socio-ecological sustainability. SSD provides powerful decision-making support by supplementing a broad systems-level perspective with an organizational framework for information and a method for prioritizing actions strategically towards sustainability while allowing for economic and social viability to be well preserved.

4.5. **Principles of Sustainability:** Sustainability depends upon two basic pillars, a robust ecosystem and a resilient social fabric. Ecological threats, leading to social instability resulting in deepening ecological threats, are the basis of fundamentally unsustainable patterns that often also represent the root causes of poverty. Development towards sustainability works to eliminate the root causes of these patterns.

Basic sustainability principles are not prescriptive but rather neutral descriptions of the necessary constraints within which a sustainable society can exist. Adherence to clear constraining principles allows for effective long-term planning and creative solutions within those basic constraints while avoiding the sorts of negative unforeseen consequences that often emerge when planning in complex systems.

4.6. **Sustainability Principles (SPs)**:

---

In a sustainable society, nature is not subject to systematically increasing...

I. Concentrations of substances extracted from the Earth’s crust (e.g. oil, gas, various metals...etc.);

II. Concentrations of substances produced by society (e.g. chemicals that do not break down quickly...etc.);

III. Degradation of physical means (e.g. deforestation, loss of wetlands, damage from mining...etc.); and in the society...

IV. People are not subject to conditions that systematically undermine their capacity to meet their needs.

4.7. The Neutrality of Science: While scientific fact is often used to support what are essentially political disagreements, natural laws such as those governing the biosphere simply exist beyond the bounds of cultural belief, ideology or morality. As such, science provides the only ground upon which to build universal consensus as to the ultimate goals and strategies appropriate to development. Being directly derived from natural law, the constraints to sustainability are non-biased and allow for development to aim towards an apolitical and objective definition of sustainability.

4.8. Why Strategic Sustainable Development? SSD is an inclusive approach that makes possible strategic and complementary alignment of other tools, methodologies and frameworks. Its strength and potential for cross-cultural acceptance lies in its firm scientific basis. By providing a comprehensive systems level understanding of the constraints within which society must operate if it is to be sustainable, SSD informs a holistic approach to development assistance. It enables development to not address current problems in a reactive way, but instead pro-actively address inherently non-sustainable practices whose impacts would otherwise surface later.

5. Using a Framework for Strategic Sustainable Development (FSSD) in ODA: The Framework for Strategic Sustainable Development is the implementation tool of SSD and is used to facilitate planning and decision-making in complex systems by allowing for information to be organized into five distinct levels:

5.1. The SYSTEM level includes descriptions of:

- The relationships between ecological and social systems, including: thermodynamics and conservation laws, biogeochemical cycles, basic ecology, photosynthesis, institutions, networks, society's interdependent pursuit of human needs, the importance of diversity, etc.
- The key structures, institutions and relationships relevant to the ODA System including the budgets, politics, strategies, procedures and resources of donors and aid channels.
- The key structures, institutions, and capacity of the governance system in the recipient country as well as the needs, beliefs and attitudes of the people within that country.
- Such an understanding should be based on a comprehension of the historical, political, economic, institutional and physical space, and the root causes of the poverty at the individual, societal, international and global levels. A comprehensive understanding of the system allows for planning to be informed by a holistic perspective and enables diagnosis of upstream environmental and social causes of poverty.

5.2. Here SUCCESS is described as; society within the biosphere, existing in compliance with the conditions for socio-ecological sustainability (i.e. the four Sustainability Principles – see item 4.3):

- A principle-based definition of sustainability as the overarching goal of development can act as a neutral shared mental model relevant to all sides. This will provide a basis for
mutual planning and harmonization between donors and recipients as well as coordination between donors.

5.3. STRATEGIC GUIDELINES: Having outlined a principle based definition of success, the agency and country can plan strategically and prioritize actions to meet that success. The technique of backcasting is used to envision a desirable future where the principles for success have been met, and then generate a plan describing what must now be done to move towards that point. It is intuitive and frees planning from the tendency to be too heavily influenced by current trends.

Backcasting from Principles involves four general steps which in the interest of alignment should be accomplished in full cooperation with partner country:

A) A shared mental model of Success is defined as the target region (ODA recipient) within the biosphere, existing in compliance with the conditions for socio-ecological sustainability (i.e. the four Sustainability Principles – see item 4.3).

B) Current environmental, economic, and social situation is analyzed in relation to the conditions for socio-ecological sustainability.

C) Informed by the conditions for sustainability (i.e. the four Sustainability Principles – see item 4.3), possibilities for future development initiatives/projects/programs as solutions to the problems highlighted in 'B' are generated.

D) Appropriate strategies are identified to best move towards the envisioned desirable future by prioritizing the solutions generated in 'C'.

Guiding considerations for strategic prioritization of initiatives/projects/programs:

- Measures should bring recipient country closer to compliance with the sustainability principles.
- Measures should serve as flexible platforms for further advancing development to comply with the principles.
- Measures should bring capital (financial, social and political) to the recipient country to ensure the continuation of benefits from development intervention during and after assistance has been completed so that progress does not halt due to lack of resources. This ensures that development assistance is always used in a way that aims to reduce the need for development assistance.
- Measures should take into account the urgency of specific needs within the target region.

5.4. ACTIONS include but may not be limited to development initiatives, projects, and programs. They are oriented by the strategic guidelines (5.3) towards success (5.2).

5.5. TOOLS are selected to support efforts to achieve success (5.3), to monitor and evaluate strategic guidelines, to build capacity etc.

6. Further Benefits of SSD support in development assistance:

6.1. Sustainability as a superordinate goal provides a neutral basis to generate standards of aid conditionality and accountability.

6.2. Pursues socio-environmental sustainability as the only solid base from which to build lasting and sustainable economies.

6.3. Includes guidance (prioritization questions) in handling development trade-offs so that balances social and economic growth with constant progress towards sustainability.

6.4. Placing sustainability as the fundamental goal of development provides context for various proximate development goals (like the Millennium Development Goals) and the FSSD's decision-making support allows them to be aligned with each-other
Towards success.

6.5. Describes poverty as an outcome of unsustainability and barriers to people being able to meet their needs. This definition is related to the root causes of poverty and provides decision-making support in pursuing poverty reduction.

6.6. Provides an integrated approach to tackling global sustainability threats such as climate change while minimizing other unforeseen negative sustainability impacts.

7. Feedback Questions:

1. Do you agree that this model (described in section 5) could be applicable in development partnerships?

2. We believe that a principle-based definition of socio-ecological sustainability could serve as a superordinate goal that would help to orient the aims of development and result in greater ODA effectiveness. Do you agree? Why or why not?

3. We believe that the four sustainability principles (see section 4.3) could be used to guide development-related decisions and priorities, as they would provide a neutral, external set of criteria that are relevant to everyone. Do you agree? Why or why not?

4. We believe that understanding development from a systems perspective, which includes the four sustainability principles, is a holistic approach that could inform lasting results beyond the scope of individual projects or initiatives. Do you agree? Why or why not?

5. We believe that backcasting could be useful in allocation and planning for the effective use of ODA as it works back from a shared long-term vision and addresses the movement to get there in a way that can address root causes of poverty and unsustainability while aiming for a desirable future, rather than reacting to current issues and trends. Do you agree with this idea? Do you see any flaws in this argument?

6. We believe that sustainability (defined by the 4 Sustainability Principles) as the focus of shared mental models for success would effectively encourage partner country ownership and development goal alignment, as well as inter-donor harmonization. Do you agree? Why or why not?

7. We believe that a principle-based definition of success paired with strategic planning and a backcasting methodology can be helpful in managing for results and maintaining progress towards a concrete goal. Do you agree? Why or why not?

8. Where are the strong and weak points of this model?

9. What are your recommendations for improving these guidelines?
Appendix D: List of Experts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>POSITION</th>
<th>ORGANIZATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Artemy Izmestziev</td>
<td>Programme Specialist - Aid Effectiveness</td>
<td>UNDP Ghana/CDG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candice Stevens</td>
<td>Former OECD Sustainable Development Advisor</td>
<td>Independent Researcher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daniel Hanspach</td>
<td>Emerging Donors Policy Specialist</td>
<td>UNDP Regional Center Bratislava</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daniel McAvoy</td>
<td>Lecturer in Development Studies</td>
<td>University of East Anglia, UK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David Satterthwaite, Dr.</td>
<td>Senior Researcher, Human Settlements</td>
<td>International Institute for Environment and Development, London, UK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diana Mitlin, Dr.</td>
<td>Senior Researcher, Human Settlements</td>
<td>International Institute for Environment and Development, London, UK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frederik Haver Droeze</td>
<td>Deputy director of the Coherence Unit of Directorate-General for Development Cooperation</td>
<td>Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Netherlands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George Petropoulos</td>
<td>Country Director Uganda</td>
<td>Action Against Hunger USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hans Peter Melby</td>
<td>Senior Adviser, Evaluation Department</td>
<td>NORAD, Norway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joan Boer</td>
<td>Permanent Representative of the Netherlands</td>
<td>OECD, Development Co-operation Directorate, Paris, France</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Blewitt, Dr.</td>
<td>Director, Lifelong Learning Centre</td>
<td>Aston University, UK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenneth Hermele</td>
<td>Human Ecology Division, Lecturer</td>
<td>Lund University, Sweden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Klaus Niederländer</td>
<td>Programme Manager for Industrial and Finance Sectors</td>
<td>Centre for the Development of Enterprise, Brussels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mats Härsmar, Dr.</td>
<td>Special Advisor</td>
<td>Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matt Polsky</td>
<td>Research Fellow</td>
<td>Institute for Sustainable Enterprise, Fairleigh Dickinson University, USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pan. Navrozigidis</td>
<td>Country Director</td>
<td>Malteser International, Sudan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paolo de Renzio</td>
<td>Doctoral candidate / LSE Fellow</td>
<td>University of Oxford / London School of Economics, UK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raja Ali Saleem</td>
<td>Independent Consultant</td>
<td>CASA, Pakistan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard L. Ottinger, Prof.</td>
<td>Dean Emeritus</td>
<td>Pace Law School, USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shaju Thomas, Dr.</td>
<td>Reader, Postgraduate Dept.of Zoology</td>
<td>Nirmala College, India</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sidney Clouston</td>
<td>CEO</td>
<td>Clouston Energy Research, USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Position / Role</td>
<td>Organization / Location</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stefano Migliorisi</td>
<td>Consultant</td>
<td>Tech4Dev, UK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stephanie Dybsky</td>
<td>Student: Masters in International Development and a Certificate in Conflict Resolution</td>
<td>University of Denver, Josef Korbel School of International Studies, USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stewart Barr, Dr.</td>
<td>Co-Director, MSc Sustainable Development</td>
<td>University of Exeter, UK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamara Levine</td>
<td>Administrator, Development and Environment Network, (ENVIRONET)</td>
<td>OECD, Development Co-operation Division, Paris, France</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anonymous</td>
<td>Director of Department</td>
<td>University, Sweden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anonymous</td>
<td>Aid Officer</td>
<td>Public Authority, Palestine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anonymous</td>
<td>Climate Change Adaptation Specialist</td>
<td>NGO, Canada</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anonymous</td>
<td>Aid Officer</td>
<td>Public Authority, Palestine</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anonymous</td>
<td>Policy Officer</td>
<td>ODA Agency</td>
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Appendix E: Expert Feedback

The following responses reflect the attitudes and opinions of the respondents and do not necessarily reflect the attitudes of any organizations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>1. Do you agree that this model could be applicable in development partnerships?</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Petropoulos</strong>: Absolutely.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Navrozidis</strong>: It is impossible to apply all principles and tools at the same time. You can only break it down into smaller packages and introduce them where applicable. It is a good framework to guide to sustainable aid but hard to interpret into a full action plan unless as I mentioned above to focus on these smaller packages, easy to handle.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Anonymous</strong>: Yes and no. The approach is useful, but sounds very complex and demanding in application.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Izmestie</strong>v**: Yes. The model provides may provide a good response particularly amid the rising concerns over the climate change as well as increasing criticism of models underlying the current aid regime (as evidenced by the recent publications criticizing the role of aid). There is a general feeling that the development cooperation framework has to be redefined and the model provides a solid alternative.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Hårsmar</strong>: I must confess I get a bit nervous when reading, “scientifically based set of principles that define socio-ecological sustainability”. This is because the interface between absolute limits that the biosphere, with its limited resources, sets and societies utilizing such natural resources is always a contested area. The problem to my view is not so much providing the principles, but to get societies to live by them. And that is more of a political/social issue than a scientific one…</td>
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<td><strong>Melby</strong>: In spite of providing a lot of common sense, it could easily become another supply-side tool (encouraged by the donors and accepted by recipients realizing that they have to play by the rules of the aid game).</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Niederländer</strong>: Very difficult to judge at this stage as the model is very abstract, complex and very high-level. It is certainly necessary to define a sustainable development framework, which clearly highlights the constraining factors, i.e. in particular with regard to the environment (as the earth is finite and not infinite as some economists try to make us believe when propagating eternally ‘economic growth’) and at the same time emphasizes the focus in development on the ‘people’ or social factor. The concept of the seven forms of capital, in particular distinguishing between physical and social capital, could help to make things more concrete. I would definitely try to use a concrete example here, in order to make the case for the framework and use less jargon. Development still lacks sufficient pragmatism and concrete steps in the absence of a fully developed overall framework. Showing how those guiding principles could work in practice would make a stronger case.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Barr</strong>: Yes; it is a question of how it is applied and operationalised as the model is complex and also quite abstract.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Anonymous</strong>: Yes, in principle, however needs to be more specific and an outcome of negotiations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>McAvoy</strong>: Yes. In principle any tool or model, which encourages analysis of development goals against criterions of ecological sustainability is a useful step forward. One caution I would offer however concerns the potential for science-driven models to undermine local capacity by devaluing local beliefs/knowledge/expertise (c.f Contreras 1989).</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Thomas</strong>: Yes, I agree.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Saleem</strong>: I agree that this model can be applied to development partnerships.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Migliorisi</strong>: Difficult to say. It assumes that environment protection is an important goal for</td>
</tr>
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</table>
developing countries. This is often not the case. See China and India. Social cohesion is more of a concern.

**Mitlin**: The model assumes that development is a technical process. Only it is not - development partnerships are political negotiations. As one world bank official explained (actually some years ago in the context of Sri Lanka), suppose the government is not really following the PRSP but if the Bank pulled out there would be civil war. Do they stay or do they go? I think these are the kinds of problems that aid agencies face and I am not sure that this model really helps them address this kind of issue. There are lots of other problems but one is that the information base about the lives of the poor is very weak. Governments don’t know very much about the lives of the poor.

2. We believe that a principle based definition of socio-ecological sustainability, could serve as a superordinate goal that would help to orient the aims of development and result in greater ODA effectiveness. Do you agree? Why or why not?

**Petropoulos**: I don’t agree. I believe that in the under-developed countries where development aid is really in evidence, there is little to no proof that the ecological sustainability of projects is truly an issue. It’s too bad, but in front of the humanitarian indicators these countries are trying to tackle, it tends to take a back seat.

**Navrozidis**: I cannot answer the question unless you provide “non principle based definition” so that I can compare the two. All right to tell you the truth I know what you mean and the truth is that your approach creates a “Code of Conduct” for sustainable aid. I think that this is already the case since all Donors set specific conditions which derive through the respective principles.

**Anonymous**: While a principle based definition of socio-ecological sustainability is important, I think it is a mistake to assume that the views of science are unaffected by cultural belief, ideology or morality. While the specifics of the natural world, how it functions and the limits of it can be objectively assessed, their interpretation and the relative importance attached to them is affected by one’s on value system or world view. Culture and science are not separate worlds and if we try to view them that way we will fail to understand the challenges presented to moving sustainability forward.

**Izmestiev**: Yes, same as above. To give you an example, in the recent years, there was increasing interest in the Paris Declaration by such countries as Syria. Even thought, it is one of the less aid-dependent countries in the region, it started getting interested in development cooperation, primarily as the region is facing severe socio-ecological challenges. For example, some believe that increasing desertification and increasingly difficult access to water would lead to poverty and new conflicts in the Middle East. The solution should be multi-facet, including the scientific, financial, technical and political cooperation, which makes it more attractive for the countries like Syria to get engaged in the aid effectiveness discourse.

**Härsmar**: As I said above – I’m skeptical because there are so many other factors at play. However, to investigate the issue might still be worthwhile. So I remain to be convinced.

**Melby**: Actual development policy in the country is likely to respond to the domestic logics of power – hard to influence that by advice from abroad.

**Niederländer**: While I agree ‘in principle’ about principle based definitions and strategies to achieve more coherence and subscription to joint goals by all parties, I see here a credibility problem on the donor side. We are trying to bring in a framework, which quite frankly we have not managed yet to apply in the developed countries ourselves. How do you want to convince recipient countries to restrain the extraction of their natural resources, when they represent their major income source? If we don’t restrain ourselves, why should they, unless there is compensation or better alternatives? The principle-based definition of socio-ecological sustainability needs to be applied on a global scale and first of all implemented in the developed countries, in my opinion. If the West does not show leadership in this field, it will not work in ODA either.

**Barr**: It could be, but you need to think carefully about how this could be done and to whom you
wish to communicate your results. It will be important to come up with discrete measures to operationalise the model and to ensure that it can be communicated effectively.

**Anonymous:** Yes, if development cooperation partners agree.

**McAvoy:** Yes. This is an important contribution. It is good to challenge development agencies with the challenge of thinking within ecological paradigms and limits.

**Thomas:** I agree. We now live in a globalized world and the biosphere has no political boundary that is why we all are going to be affected by the outcomes of global warming.

**Saleem:** I believe socio-economic sustainability is a much better super ordinate goal than economic growth or development for which most of the poor countries are now striving. Socio-economic sustainability can help them make better decisions and not repeat the mistakes of the past.

**Migliorisi:** See previous answer.

**Mitlin:** Has this not been tried? I thought that many aid agencies have SD as a goal?

**Infocase:** There is much debate on the sustainability of development related decisions and priorities. How do we decide on the trade-offs that need to be made when some of our wants compete with the needs of others?

**Navrozidis:** See my answer above regarding a “Sustainable Aid” Code of Conduct. I say again that this is already the case but the reality on the ground is different. Money end up in big white Land Cruisers but often Governments’ Donors (USAID etc) and less Multi Donor Trust Funds close their eyes due to political implications (war against terrorism, access to oil etc) and thus themselves become part of the problem since not only they do not impose any sanctions (stop economic aid) but also provoke this phenomena with their tolerance. So these principles are already there but who cares when issues of “High Politics” arise?

**Anonymous:** They sound nice, but how does one define need – as opposed to want. And even this is somewhat culturally defined – what one culture might define as need another might define as a want that is not important. How do we decide on the trade-offs that need to be made when some of our wants compete with the needs of others?

I think these (I and II) are too vague to be useful – “extracted substances” and “substances produced by society” are accumulated in the biosphere as part of human society – what are, for example, buildings, roads, cities, railroads but “concentrations of substances”. These are not all “bads” and their accumulation need not be unsustainable.

What do you mean when you say that “nature is not subject to”? Perhaps this is outlined in more detail in the source you cite, but it is not in and of itself comprehensible or particularly well-nuanced and I don’t have access to the source at the moment.

In addition to this, the definition does not seem to take into account that the sustainability of human and natural systems is also a function of the system’s resilience to external and internal shocks to the system. Important elements to consider are the system’s vulnerability to shocks and its adaptive capacity – and these concepts apply in all dimensions of sustainability thinking (human/social/institutional, economic and ecological).

**Izmestiev:** Not entirely. As much as we perceive them as neutral, they are actually a subject of ongoing debate. Indeed, in the point 4.4 you acknowledge that “scientific fact is often used to support what are essentially political disagreements…”. I believe that there is a risk that sustainability principles may at times not be interpreted as neutral, particularly by the governments of developing countries, which may see it in conditionality designed to constrain them. I believe that it is potentially possible, but there is a need of political agreement. I believe that you would find more support for this idea among the representatives of civil society, than the governments.

**Hårsma:** This is an interesting principle, that could be relevant in relation to the discussion on
conditionality – if there is a framework given by objective criteria, it might be easier to get both country ownership, and donor buy-in. So as an alternative approach to conditionality it might be something (you notice that I soften up a bit here…)

Melby: Easier to get support in developed than developing countries for these. Quite likely, developing countries would accept environmental deterioration for still some time in order to develop economically.

Niederländer: In general, I fully agree. Its translation into concrete action is however far more complicated than four simple sentences might suggest.

Barr: Possibly; you need to think about the word 'neutral'; are these principles neutral? You may be challenged on that as these are good principles, but not entirely value-free. For example, what does 'damage' constitute in this context? One person's 'damage' is another person's 'slight impact' and another's 'destruction. Perhaps it would be better to avoid the word neutral and simply term them principles.

Anonymous: Yes, in principle, however needs to be more specific and an outcome of negotiations.

McAvoy: No. Clearly not everyone will support these principles. Culture, religious belief, denial, corporate and individual greed, narrowly conceived short-term political interest and personal agendas are like to sabotage application of these principles.

You might like to try a mental experiment by imagining or brainstorming around the question of who stands to lose from application of these principles.

Thomas: I agree. It is better to perform under a set of principles for achieving the goals.

Saleem: While I generally agree with the sustainability principles, I think the fourth principle is the most significant and should be given most importance. People in the developed world and donors give importance to the first three principles and leave the fourth one for the people and governments of the developing world to tackle themselves. There are two reasons for this. First, due to principle of sovereignty of the nation-state, donors don’t want to interfere in the internal affairs of the developing countries. Secondly, the fourth principle is ignored because the systematically undermining of people’s capacity to meet their needs is ultimately related to the unjust and dysfunctional international economic system, which favours the rich countries and undermines the rights of poor nations. I’m afraid there can be no sustainability unless the fourth principle is given due importance. It is also difficult for me to accept the all-inclusiveness nature of first two principles. I understand we should not be using fossil fuels but there are some metals which are abundant so why restrict their use? Similarly, unless it is proved that some chemical is dangerous, it should be used freely. I believe these principles should be applied after due research on case-to-case basis.

Migliorisi: They are way too broad. How would you apply them in education sector in Uganda?

Mitlin: I cannot see how they would be applied. Take, for example, low-income women in an African market making plastic bags for the sale of various vegetables. They use polythene sheeting and they seal the bags using paraffin burning in tin cans. The health consequences are not great, the use of resources is not great, but it is all they can do to survive. How would these principles help them? You could say that the government should have a programme to assist – but how and to what extent?

4. We believe that understanding development from a systems perspective, which includes the four sustainability principles, is a holistic approach that could inform lasting results beyond the scope of individual projects or initiatives. Do you agree? Why or why not?

Petropoulos: Agreed. But good luck with that…

Navroždis: Sure I do agree but as I said above it is difficult to translate this holistic theoretical model to a holistic implementation plan. That is you need to break down into smaller pieces and THEN interrelate it.

Anonymous: A systems approach is very valuable in understanding development, underdevelopment and the path to sustainability.
Izmestiev: Yes. To make it practical there is a need of the tools measuring the contribution to the principles.

Hårsmar: It is always more relevant to regard development from a broader perspective. To focus on individual initiatives/projects is dangerous.

Melby: I think the principles can enrich discussions… and that’s not bad.

Niederländer: The ultimate question here is which system do we talk about, as this sustainable system does not exist in practice. Awareness is constantly rising that we are living in an unsustainable system and that change is necessary. However, is it about simply adjusting certain elements of the current system to make the system sustainable or are we talking here about a complete redesign/systemic change? Still very much a philosophical question. We are still very much trapped-conditioned by our current economy focused system, making it difficult to imagine or design such a new system perspective. Yes, we do need a far more holistic approach, which addresses the environmental, social and economic challenges at the same time and in harmony.

Barr: This is certainly one way to approach the issue and I believe it is a valid approach.

Anonymous: Yes, in principle, however needs to be more specific and an outcome of negotiations. See Agenda 21 and WSSD, and Mill Ass.

McAvoy: Yes.

Thomas: I disagree, as we have to re define development first, and then go for system or holistic approach.

Saleem: I agree that a holistic approach like systems perspective would be more effective than piecemeal efforts. What is happening now is that there are some areas where there is too much focus while others are totally ignored. Moreover, sustainability, by its very nature, is all encompassing. We can be sustainable or unsustainable; something in between is not possible. Therefore, a holistic approach, like systems perspective, is the only way to deal with it.

Migliorisi: I agree. How would do it though? The analysis required is massive. Who would find it? Would it be shared?

Mitlin: Again, I think that aid agencies have been here. They don’t want to do isolated projects and programmes and they do think of aid more holistically. I think you should ask them why it is so difficult – before you get to the principles that could be used to help build effective programmes.

5. We believe that backcasting could be useful in allocation and planning for the effective use of ODA as it works back from a shared long-term vision and addresses the movement to get there in a way that can address root causes poverty and unsustainability while aiming for a desirable future, rather than reacting to current issues and trends. Do you agree with this idea? Do you see any flaws in this argument?

Petropoulos: I don’t understand the question. Sorry.

Navrozidis: No answer.

Anonymous: In principle it makes a lot of sense to have a clear vision for where one is going in order to be able to come to a common understanding of how one wants to get there. On the other hand, one cannot ignore current issues and trends while waiting to do this. People are hungry today, people are dying today. They cannot wait until we work through every last detail of this visioning and backcasting process. Rather, they need to work on a dual track – much as many humanitarian/development NGOs endeavour to do. They need to do their best to respond to urgent needs today in such a way as their response is also consistent with a longer term vision of sustainable, resilient development.

Izmestiev: I agree, but I also have some reservations on it. Backcasting as a method may occasionally be used in the current PRSP model. Backcasting could make the resource allocation more strategic. The question – what kind of output will such backcasting produce and how to align resources against its priority areas. In the current practice, alignment appears to be one of the most difficult issues in development cooperation.

Hårsmar: Back-casting looks a lot like planning. I am skeptical about too much planning, since...
development comes through processes, where you seldom can see the end point when you start. You need to learn as you go, and reorient yourself. However, this doesn’t mean that overall objective is meaningless. It all depends on how strictly they are applied. The best should not be the enemy of the good…

Melby: Hard to grasp the question.

Niederländer: I fully agree that we need to reverse our approach working our way backwards from the jointly set objectives, based on a shared long-term vision, to concrete activities and inputs, instead of the other way around. It’s really short-term vs. long-term approach. While you need short-term flexibility, it needs to be in line with the long-term vision.

Barr: This seems very sensible and a good scientific approach.

Anonymous: Yes, backcasting is a useful method and can be used to inform negotiations. Wouldn’t the objective be to reach targets in all dimensions, rather than “balancing”?

McAvoy: I am not familiar with ‘backcasting’ but if it relies on a ‘shared long term vision’ it sounds problematic. How do you propose vastly different visions of the future enjoyed by fundamentalists of any persuasion, might be reconciled.

Thomas: I agree. The flaw is in the absence of emphasis in transparency in the whole process.

Saleem: Backcasting can be useful but I don’t think it will change much because everyone agrees to the shared mental model of success and current conditions but when it comes to strategies, everybody thinks that his/her strategy is the best to achieve sustainability. Neo-liberals in the 1980s were really trying to achieve a sustainable society by applying structural adjustment plans on developing countries.

Migliorisi: This is already being done. The world is full of visions 2020 and strategies to get there. Your Backcasting is logical but the real gaps are: Your point D and the capacity to implement.

Mitlin: I haven’t seen it done. If you can get agreement on the shared vision it might be interesting in identifying points of different but it may be more difficult than you think. Take water in South Africa – everyone agrees that people need water but how much, on what terms and conditions? There is a big contentious debate about the price and amount of the subsidized water that each family receives (generally 6 cubic meters per family per month), before you even worry about whether or not there is sufficient water supply.

6. We believe that sustainability (defined by the 4 Sustainability Principles) as the focus of shared mental models for success would effectively encourage partner country ownership and development goal alignment, as well as inter-donor harmonization. Do you agree? Why or why not?

Petropoulos: Absolutely not. In principle, it should encourage it, but no, I don’t think that the developmental donors you have mentioned are ‘mature’ enough to ensure this harmonization. In my experience, donor harmonization is a pipe dream due to political influences on the distribution of developmental aid and the national identity as well as geopolitical strategy of donor countries.

Navrozidis: Yes but do not expect miracles. Inter- donor harmonization is possible once again when it comes to principles but not when it is about the implementation plan.

Anonymous: Sustainability would be helpful, but I think the 4 principles are inadequate for the task – but see above for comments on their limitations as defined so far in this document.

Izmestiev: Yes. However, partner country capacity is the pro-condition for ownership. In this context, it includes capacity to conduct scientific analysis, “make the case” and engage with partners in the debate on these issues.

Härsmar: This is, I believe, an empirical question that needs to be answered by observing what happens when such a model is applied. Would there be any chance for you to make such studies?

Melby: The latter more than the former, for reasons mentioned above. Donors could easily agree in theory. Although their practice may differ, with an increasing number of new aid mechanisms. And remember, there are other donor countries than the DAC members.

Niederländer: Ultimately, yes, but we are a long way off in achieving this, as there is not even sufficient awareness yet about the concept as well as not enough practical applications of the
concept. Currently it is often seen by recipient countries as yet another condition/constraint, which will hinder their development and catching up with the developed world.

**Barr:** Yes, this should be and I doubt if you will have any problems in convincing people of this.

**Anonymous:** No answer.

**McAvoy:** Yes. Although success to date is limited there are some examples where sustainability has promoted ownership and alignment – where perceived interests are aligned.

**Thomas:** I agree. But how are we going to create that mental model?

**Saleem:** I don’t think so. Most of the donors have their own priorities and while they will be acknowledging support to sustainability principles, they will always try to give their own solo performance and sustainability principles are so broad that everyone can legitimately claim to be following them.

**Migliorisi:** ODA is driven partly by self-interest and partly by philanthropy. The problem is not lack of strategies. It is ownership by developing countries and their ability of driving the process.

**Mitlin:** I work mainly on development and not the environment. But principle four is very far from being met and I don’t think that aid alone can bridge the gap. So what can aid negotiations offer? Moreover what do you propose if an elected government’s policy clashes with aid agency policy? Should the people’s choice be ignored?

**Mitlin:** I work mainly on development and not the environment. But principle four is very far from being met and I don’t think that aid alone can bridge the gap. So what can aid negotiations offer? Moreover what do you propose if an elected government’s policy clashes with aid agency policy? Should the people’s choice be ignored?

7. We believe that a principle-based definition of success paired with strategic planning and a backcasting methodology can be helpful in managing for results and maintaining progress towards a concrete goal. Do you agree? Why or why not?

**Petropoulos:** Yes, I agree but the question is loaded. Yes, it ‘can’ be helpful, but will it be used?

**Navrozidis:** Yes. Present the model through a case study.

**Anonymous:** It might be helpful, but see above for my concerns about its limitations.

**Izmestie:** Instead of giving my opinion, I will try to consult some colleagues working on strategic planning and MFDR.

**Hårsmar:** See answer to question 6.

**Melby:** I am not quite clear about the meaning of “backcasting” in this regard.

**Niederländer:** Yes, any undertaking, which is based on a clear vision with strong values, translated into a concrete strategy with precise objectives and desired results will be helpful in actually achieving the desired outcomes.

**Barr:** Yes.

**Anonymous:** No answer.

**McAvoy:** No answer.

**Thomas:** I agree. As all the points are very essential for the success of the whole process.

**Saleem:** I don’t think so. Paris Declaration on aid effectiveness was also very good but they hardly changed anything on the ground.

**Migliorisi:** They are potentially useful for setting the course and the objectives, but managing for results has not much to do with your framework.

**Mitlin:** Why do you think this? What evidence do you have?

8. Where are the strong and weak points of this model?

**Petropoulos:** I would venture to say that you should definitely try to ensure you capture the social context of the recipient country in the backcasting. I am at this point currently in a country where developmental aid is being used to leverage votes by being allocated to strategically important constituencies.

**Navrozidis:** Difficult to implement as a whole. Possible through sector specific packages.

**Anonymous:** See previous answer.

**Izmestie:** The strong point of the model is that it addresses the issues, which are commonly recognized as very relevant. There is a significant political momentum promoting these issues. The weak point is that the implementation will require significant capacity from both donor and recipient side. More work has to be done to prove the model’s neutrality.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hårsmar</th>
<th>No answer.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Melby</td>
<td>No answer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niederländer</td>
<td>The strong points of the model are to develop a more holistic approach, which puts far more emphasis on the preservation of the environment and social justice. The weak point is its current abstract nature, which makes it difficult to apply.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Barr</td>
<td>No answer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anonymous</td>
<td>Yes, in principle, however needs to be more specific and an outcome of negotiations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McAvoy</td>
<td>Strong: Introduces an issue of paramount importance to donor debates and dialogues. Provides a conceptual model for consideration of sustainability issues in relation to development. Weak: Inherent assumptions of your model seem likely to undermine its relevance. It is somewhat difficult to follow and poorly explained and therefore likely to be ignored by development practitioners.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas</td>
<td>The model is good in its overall approach. But it lacks strong implementing arguments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saleem</td>
<td>Strong: Introduces an issue of paramount importance to donor debates and dialogues. Provides a conceptual model for consideration of sustainability issues in relation to development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Migliorisi</td>
<td>See above. Take a look at Jim Wolfenson’s comprehensive development framework, which tried to do something similar, and what happened to it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mitlin</td>
<td>I would suggest that you build a model (if this is what you want to do) that is derived from practice.</td>
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**9. What are your recommendations for improving these guidelines?**

| Petropoulos | Streamline the questions’ numbering with the questionnaire. (Example, second question mentions section ‘II’ but no such section exists. |
| Navrozidis | No answer. |
| Anonymous | See previous answer. |
| Izmestiev | You may find it interesting to explore the work done in the preparations to the High Level Forum in Accra on the “cross-cutting issues”, such as human rights, gender equality and environmental sustainability. At the global level, the work has been championed by Mary Robinson, former President of Ireland. I am attaching one document from the Dublin workshop. See for example the SEA study. Beyond theoretical framework, it would be interesting to analyze practical relevance of the guidelines in the countries, which found themselves “on the edge” of sustainability challenges, for example those where the effects of climate change are felt the most or resource scarcity lead to conflicts. This may give some additional ideas. |
| Hårsmar | No answer. |
| Melby | Reality check, starting with a review of previous high level solutions and blueprints we have brought to the developing world. |
| Niederländer | Use concrete examples, on how to put the model into practice, step by step. |
| Barr | No answer. |
| Anonymous | No answer. |
| McAvoy | Explain what you mean by development, poverty, etc. |
| Thomas | You try to figure out how best these principles are going to be practiced in real life situation. |
| Saleem | I think I will like to read the whole thesis before making any recommendations because some of my concerns might have been answered in your thesis. However, one thing I can say at this point is lack of implementation details. How will you make donors/ developing countries agree to your recommendations? How will you prioritize between many aspects of sustainability? Etc... |
| Migliorisi | You need a case study in a specific sector / country to prove your point. It is way too abstract. |
| Mitlin | See previous answers. |
**General Feedbacks**

**Hanspach:** 1. I think that SSD principles can be used as a guiding principle of ODA but it will be always just one of the possible criteria.  
2. Methodology of your research is not very clear.  
3. Too often you use conditionality, e.g. "SSD approach to ODA should enable improvement in effectiveness..." plus it sounds more as a value statement.  
4. Neutrality of science? Again kind of a value statement. Natural laws applied to ODA? ODA is a cultural and economic phenomenon, isn't it? Apolitical and objective definition of sustainability? Impossible in my view, always subject to interests of different social groups, nations in concrete situations.  
5. You are going to facilitate to facilitate the steps in section 5.3 and then observe the results or what is the empirical basis?

**Droeze:** You claim as your main research objective to increase the effectiveness of development aid. The ineffectiveness of development aid has many causes, some of which are mentioned in paragraph 3 of your paper. As I understand it you have picked one of these problems, the lack of consideration of environmental effects, as the major bottleneck you want to solve. If this is the case it would help if you would present a sharper formulation of this problem you want to help solving.  
The lack of coherence between the goals of economic and social development on the one hand and preserving the natural environment on the other could be mitigated by superimposing the more holistic concept of sustainable development. Of course this has been said many times before but the problem has been that the concept of sustainable development has remained too vague to be operational. The strength of your proposal is that you want to contribute to a more concrete definition of sustainability. Better definition of the goals would certainly help to better prioritize actions and to agree on common strategies.  
However, in the next paragraphs I get the impression that your proposal makes too many claims and gets too ambitious. Scientifically based principles might help to define the ecological constraints of the development process, this method would not be very useful for the economic and social determinants of development. In the end, development is a very cultural and political process that cannot be planned on a purely scientific base. Your formulation that ecological threats represent the root causes of poverty certainly is an overstatement. There is a link between poverty and the environment but this is just one of many factors that determine whether a society is rich or poor. I therefore do not agree with your statement that science provides the only ground upon which to build a consensus on the goals of development. Better to state that science can make a contribution.  
This is not to say that your framework for strategic sustainable development cannot be of use for development assistance. I prefer your statement that SSD informs a holistic approach to development assistance. How this could be done is for you to demonstrate. The description in paragraph 5 is still rather vague and it would help if you could include an example how it would work in practice. For a practitioner many of the claims seem rather abstract, theoretical and ambitious.  
If you want your proposal to be practical for aid agencies you should realise that development planning in the way you describe it no longer exists. Understanding society in all its structures, institutions and relationships is not possible and certainly not for a modest aid agency working in a lot of very different environments. Even if megaplanning would be feasible, it would not guarantee agreement on a common strategy between donors and recipients. In reality, policymaking is done on a much more modest trial and error base in a constant policy dialogue between donors and recipients. I repeat, more clarity on the goals of these policies and even scientific evidence on the natural constraints could be very helpful, also for prioritization, monitoring, etc., but your claims should stop at that.

**Anonymous:** You and your colleagues have made a strong case for the SSD approach. The summary is well written and logically sequential. It does not seem to be very original however...but perhaps you are not looking for originality?
I don't specialise on sustainability issues, but I do know that sustainability is one of the guiding principles behind DFID project management (I think the same is true of the European Commission as well...see paragraph 105 of the European Consensus on Development).

In order to make your thesis stand out a bit more I think it would be good if you could look at whether there is a trade off between SSD and growth. In the context of the global financial crisis this is extremely important and could be a dynamic that could adversely effect the outcomes at the London Summit and at Copenhagen. In fact generally I think you would benefit from a deeper assessment of possible financial crisis impact on the implementation of a principles based FSSD.

Finally I would dispute (from a philosophical point of view) whether science is ever really neutral. Much science is funded by major energy, agricultural and pharmaceutical multinationals and these multinationals will have to be fully engaged if SSD is to be successfully adopted.

I hope I have given you some ideas for the expansion of your thesis.

**Stevens:** 1) You should compare the effectiveness of bilateral aid (on economic, social and environmental variables) for programmes, which take an SD approach and those, which do not. This information can be found in the DAC peer reviews done by the OECD and other sources.

2) The greatest difference will be found in whether bilateral aid programs support Poverty Reduction Strategies (PRS) or National Sustainable Development Strategies (NSDS) or some combination of the two in recipient countries.

Sustainable development depends on three (not two and not four) basic pillars or principles -- economic, environmental and social.

**Boer:** Over the dead line and I am afraid cryptical one:

No real obvious flaws in your summary, much of it will be or become available through the DAC Working Party on aid effectiveness. Not quite sure whether limiting to bilateral donors presents a fair picture, and not quite sure whether it is "aid" or inclusive globalisation that need to be the focus. Aid won't help the Africans inclusive globalisation might.

I see some challenges underlying sustainable development: segregation between and in societies not limited to developing countries, new scarcities/loss of biodiversity and the transitions in behaviour and resource and energy use that come with it including new economics where we change some of the rules of the game including some of the things we now still call externalities and moving beyond share holder value. Calling the complex entity underneath it sustainable development without specifying masks real events and opportunities.

**Levine:** In principle the research is interesting.

I have three quick points.

a) It may be valuable to recognize the growing use of sector and budget support as well as the growing emphasis on partner country ownership. This suggest an increasing need to mainstream SSD considerations in partner countries. This means building awareness of sustainable development and associated capacity in Ministries of Finance and Central Ministries. It also means that economic sectors and associated line Ministries in partner countries have a role to play. Donors have an important role in building capacity to ensure Ministries of Finance, Central Ministries and Sectoral Ministries have appropriate environmental capacity in this regard.

b) In terms of donor countries, it may be valuable to recognize the growing role of Environmental Ministries and Agencies in environment related aid.

c) The thesis could also be strengthened by looking at "whole of government approaches" in OECD countries.

**Anonymous:** 3. 1. The need to build partner country ownership. The issue becomes how well and realistic the development goals are. It is important to have ownership of realistic, implementable and achievable objectives.

2. Reducing fragmentation and improving harmonization. Even if there is a large number of donors, if they are willing to pool their funds or use basket funding or joint mechanisms then you can at least reduce the fragmentation from one side.

3. 3. The need for mutual accountability. Knowing where and how funds are spent is important. If the
government does not spend funds as agreed is one issue, if donors allocate 10 million USD and only spend 1 million USD locally and can account for 9 million USD spent on their own technical assistance, then this is another issue.

3.5 The risk of fostering aid dependence. This needs to be linked with humanitarian aid that sometimes is easier to get and does not abide by best aid practices and frequently aids in fostering dependency.

4.3 Sustainability Principles (SPs). These principles actually are contradictory to many foreign aid policies since most countries are supported that provide some form of natural resources for the donors and hence there is a level of exploitation. Similarly most trade with donor countries includes the importing of materials that are non-biodegradable, etc.

To be able to come up with a change in the aid scene by adapting these SPs will require a lot of work, advocacy.

Anonymous: Actually I have no particular comments so far. But I thought it was a very interesting framework and I have to admit that it was not easy to garb from the first glance, it is somehow new to me (I may need to read more about it). When speaking about the system I kind of imagined a diagram to be able to understand what you are talking about though I have a scientific background. However, there are some language mistakes or typos that I'm sure you'll fix as you proceed (my colleague sent me some comments on this that I can send to you if interested, but I thought that you were more interested in the content).

Nevertheless, as I read I had some questions. I thought it was useful for fragile situations; to understand the real causes of poverty and deal with them, but in cases as Palestine where the problem is known -military occupation- but the international community is not willing to apply any political pressure on Israel and is not ready to review procedures to be in line with the Paris principles, because they consider Palestine as a unique case of fragility. HQs interfere a lot in decision-making and dependence is inevitable because we have neither sovereignty nor control over borders or resources. So donors take the responsibility of Israel as an occupying power and they pay to mitigate a current situation. They are ready to reconstruct what Israel destroyed during bombing and incursions which donors already built previously. In the OPT aid is exceptionally highly politicized which affects ownership and sustainability. (If interested to know more, I can send you my thesis).

But generally speaking, when thinking about other 3rd world countries, I guess I'm ok with what is said.

Renzio: Although the idea is interesting, I don't think you have quite managed yet to define a clear research question. Your main aim is to link up debates on aid effectiveness with debates on sustainable development. The fact is, the two concepts are quite distant and difficult to relate to each other. Let me illustrate this through a simple possible contradiction. The aid effectiveness principles stress the need for country ownership of development policies. What should donors do if the recipient country does not see environmental sustainability as a development priority?

I think there are two possible ways for you to better specify and narrow your research question in ways that make it more interesting and manageable.

The first one is to adopt a different concept of sustainability, and think about the linkages between the aid effectiveness agenda and 'institutional' rather than 'environmental' sustainability. There's a mention of this in a short opinion piece I wrote some time back (http://www.odi.org.uk/events/g8_07/opinions/de%20renzio.pdf), but you should definitely look at the book by Gibson, Ostrom and others called 'The Samaritan's Dilemma' (http://www.us.oup.com/us/catalog/general/subject/Economics/Developmental/?ci=0199278857&view=usa). This, however, would take you quite far from your original idea.

The second one could look at some more specific instruments of the aid effectiveness agenda, such as Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) and General Budget Support (GBS), and examine to
what extent PRSPs and GBS operations incorporate aspects of your SSD framework. A lot of work
has been done on PRSPs and the environment (a simple google search for 'prsp+environment' finds
lots of useful materials), and some more limited one on aid modalities and the environment (see, for
of the general policy statements of 3-4 bilateral donor agencies, and 1-2 country material about
PRSPs and GBS operations, and see to what extent they seem to reflect an SSD approach, or what
would need to change for them to do so.
I hope this advice is useful. The main point, once again, is to think about ways to narrow your focus
and find concrete and researchable links between aid effectiveness and sustainable development.

Blewitt: I am afraid I can only give you a few brief comments on your proposal, which I think is
very good. The Natural Step framework is as good as any but I would suggest that you take a little
more skeptical view of science than you do as science in fact changes. It is is always “a work in
progress” and there is rarely if ever a permanent scientific consensus on such a fluid area as eco-
systems and there is a great deal of local knowledge that mainstream science does not always take
into account.
I would also suggest you consider addressing participation, democratic and community engagement
issues a little more and the idea that desire all its faults the term “sustainability” can serve to draw
people together. For this you might want to have a look at Appadurai, A. (2001) "Deep democracy:
urban governmentality and the horizon of politics" - Environment & Urbanization, Vol 13 No 2
Scoones, I. (2007) "Sustainability". Development in Practice. Vol.17, Nos 4&5. Of course, these are
my concerns but they may be worth considering.

Ottinger: 1. Objective – I would include private sector donors in your research as well as
development agencies.
2. Research Background – I would include the World Bank, GEF and IFC in your list of donor
agencies.
3. Need to identify the Paris and Accra forums, perhaps in a footnote.
3. In your sub-paragraphs re effectiveness challenges there needs to be included:
Education and Training -- Education and training of trainers, local decision-making, judicial and
administering officials. Trainers and educators must speak the local language.
Follow-up Responsibility – ODA contractors must be contractually responsible for maintenance of
equipment, provision of spare parts, and fixing failures
Public Participation -- Need to provide for participation of the affected public in decision-making and
implementation processes.
Customs and Culture – Need to take into account the appropriateness of ODA to the customs and
culture of the population affected.
Legal Structure – need adequate contract, sustainability and enforcement laws and a judicial system
that will enforce them.
In my opinion, these five considerations are essential to successful ODA projects. They are
frequently ignored or under-emphasized, a main factor in project failures. I could give many
examples from my Peace Corps experience in Latin America. Re customs and culture, I suggest you
read a book published in the 1960s titled “The Ugly American.” ODA too frequently funds
contractors who try to transplant developed country technology and practices to situations in which
officials are not adequately trained, the trainers have no knowledge of the local country and its
language, customs and culture; they supply equipment and then leave without follow-up provisions
so that if the equipment breaks down, it is abandoned; the public is not consulted and does not accept
the innovations promoted, no matter how advantageous, and the assistance provided is unacceptable
locally because of religious, economic realities or misunderstood needs – e.g. providing a marketable
product without provision for marketing or transportation.
5.3. Guidelines should include prevention of corruption in implementation of projects, including
adequate numbers, training and pay for inspectors, strict penalties, and provision for independent
audits. Corruption is rampant in developing countries, and even if good laws are passed, powerful
interests can and do prevent enforcement through bribery.

Re your feedback questions, sustainability certainly must be incorporated into ODA and contractor decisions and implementation. Your definitions seem sound, as do your four principles, with the suggested additions. Backcasting would be useful. My other comments are included above.

Polsky: I’m going to respond to your last question primarily; that is, provide some comments. Within this, I hope to answer some of your other specific questions.

I have a lot of experience trying to communicate and implement sustainability ideas, similar to these, in many sectors and situations. I have none in the ODA area, but have done some reading in it. I’d expect that my experience might be transferable, but would defer in many cases to a sustainability-informed practitioner in this field.

There is a very good understanding shown of sustainability and many good points made, but I’m going to focus on some areas that could be thought through more.

I’m often seen holism or integrated solutions put forth as really the only way to approach issues, particularly complex ones. This is mostly fine, but unfortunately, the systems proponent usually does not provide key guidance to the practitioner on just what level systems perspective is needed; a higher level or even a lower level—or even how to think about this.

By the latter, I mean what if a particular problem can legitimately be handled in a reductionist manner? You probably don’t need to go to a holistic health practitioner if you think you’ve broken your arm playing basketball. Just get an X-ray and a cast. Regarding the former, and this is ironic for a systems proponent; too often they leave out critical fields, such as mainstream politics, changing behavior, do’s and don’ts about making social or organizational change.

Further and relatedly, you rely on the frequent and commonly accepted claim that science is objective, neutral, or the only thing that “provides…ground upon which to build universal consensus.”

During the time I spent in the field of ecological economics years ago, including attendance at the conference that was the basis of your first footnote, I became aware that a sub-field within it, post-normal science, seriously questions these commonly held beliefs. It is not anti-science, but (again ironically) promotes a more systems-wide perspective on the role of science to include public participation, values, and particularly how to deal with the uncertainty that so often is a part of the mix.

I think you’ll find related ideas in the fields of sustainability science, environmental sociology, behavioral economics, and particularly the philosophy of science.

I’ve tried to keep a hand in this issue when it pops up in the mainstream. Ironically (again), I now think the Bush Administration position (although they rarely clarified it in this way) that science needs to be integrated with ethics (however much I might have disagreed with how they did it or the specifics outcomes of this convergence) is more consistent with a greater holism than the more conventional Obama position that decisions “should be based on science;” as if ethics and politics, and fundamentally even how issues are framed; could truly be ignored. (See “Energy Secretary Serves Under a Microscope” in today’s The New York Times for a taste of this.) While I’m likely to agree with the Obamas’ ultimate policy positions a great deal more, I try to be conscious that in their way these are not fully science-based decisions, however much they might be classified or spun.

The above perspectives inform many of my specific comments below.

Initial Quote: Good way to begin.

3. Challenges Facing Aid Effectiveness: Again, not my area, but from what I have observed there are a few issues missing here that are tricky from a sustainability perspective.

What if some “local development goals” or practices violate fundamental human rights? The Pope recently issued a statement, I believe was at least part right, that the Church should fight witchcraft and occult practices in Africa as these lead to people so fixated on who they think is possessed that they kill or blind children. (Of course, there’s a separate criticism that could be made too of his position.) Could you really ignore such things under the principle of “respecting local cultures?”

Other challenges are corruption in the recipient country; and the lack of interest and knowledge by
citizens in donor countries to the whole area of ODA.
The forums and literature you cite could be referenced and/or footnoted.

3. The Need for Mutual Accountability: It seems wise to put the onus on “both donors and recipient countries” but then, without explanation, it is shifted to the “partner country government (which I assume is the recipient), as well as civil society (which is the first time I’ve seen this and intriguing, but deserves an explanation as well).

3.4 Conditionality: This statement would benefit from a brief explanation of the apparent contradiction that aid should be “untied…from unfair conditions” and “establishing conditions upon which ODA is given.”

4. Effectiveness through Sustainability: I hope you’re right that “sustainability…is widely accepted by the international community.” I don’t see that from here.
I like the idea of sustainability “as the superordinate goal,” but we have a ways to go before we can claim much that is “concrete.” The SSD, based on TNS Principals, is a good start and framework, but I wouldn’t call it concrete.

4.1. Strategic Sustainable Development: It is a little confusing to have this as the name of the section, but the definition immediately afterwards is the classical definition of just sustainable development. My comments regarding “a clear, comprehensive, and scientifically based set of principles;” and “broad systems-level perspective” are the same as the above.
I do like “provides powerful decision-making support” (more on this later).

4.2. Principles of Sustainability
My comments on the root causes of poverty” and “neutral” are the same as above. While it is good (actually welcome) to emphasis exceeding the ecological underpinnings, there are other causes of poverty.
“Avoiding…negative unforeseen consequences…” is probably too much to claim.
While you’re focusing on the ODA area, and implicitly poor countries, it’s worth a mention of how these countries could still apply sustainability principles when they reach a further developmental stage.

4.3. Sustainability Principles (SPs): “Needs,” the final word in the last Principle, is not a clear area. What are needs and what are wants is always tricky.
I’ve never heard this, but I suspect most toxicologists, as well as those who promote the view that toxic waste sites should only be cleaned up to a relative level depending on the planned reuse of the site, would disagree with some of the Principles. They, also, though deem their perspectives “scientific.”

4.4. The Neutrality of Science: My comments on “existing beyond the bounds of cultural belief, ideology, morality (would you really want science to be divorced from morality?), non-biased, and apolitical” are the same as above.
Whereas, “aiming towards” some of these things, in my current thinking, are still acceptable.

4.5. Why Strategic Sustainable Development: It might be nice to think about not having to “address current problems in a reactive way,” but life has a tendency to intrude with unpredictable surprises (as well as opportunities).

5. Using a Framework for Strategic Sustainable Development in ODA: It is nice that factors like “historical, political, institutional…space” should be understood; but it is not clear how SSD, with its emphasis on science, enables these understandings to be utilized.
I am not optimistic about ever seeing “neutral shared mental models relevant to all sides.” We all see the world differently. I think we are wired or become wired that way.
Backcasting from Principles: The framework seems ideal, but is there a track record to reference where it worked?
Regarding “further advancing development,” see my comment above.
It is not clear if donor-provided capital should lessen while continuing to help after the initial allocation and hopefully initial success. The statement: “...is always used in a way that aims to reduce the need for development assistance” doesn’t address aid needed in emergency situations like
6. Further Benefits of SSD support in development assistance: I very much like: “guidance…in handling development trade-offs…with constant progress towards sustainability,” “…provides context…;” “decision-making support…” and “minimizing other unforeseen negative sustainability impacts.”

I am a fan of communicating modesty in what sustainability frameworks could provide and ultimately deliver. They could help, but difficult decisions and surprises will remain into the foreseeable future.

Anonymous: (Additional Comments) The topic is of course central to meaningful and effective development cooperation. This has also been long realised by the international community, see for example Agenda21 and the World Summit on Sustainable Development Report. See also the Millennium Assembly and the MDG discussions. The MDGs in part define socio-ecological sustainability. Most bilaterals as well as the UN system has SD starting points, with poverty alleviation at the centre. And don't forget that development cooperation is a two way street, as indicated in 3.1. The host country decides what they want and most agencies have a requirement that nothing will be supported unless initiated and "owned" by the host country. World Bank conditionality is widely frowned at.

Therefore, a general discussion as presented without linkages to what is already out there, and an analysis of how it has been applied in practice runs the risk of being disconnected from where these issues stand at the moment. Perhaps you have that in the research material, however, this is not indicated in the note you sent me.

The attachment could not be saved so here are some comments
3.4 Isn’t this already a dominating principle?
4.1 define: How? And how to arrive at it?
Two or three basic pillars?
4.3 Principles need to be discussed. Non-evident they cover the issues. I: What concentrations of oil and gas? GHG in the atmosphere and annual emission?
What about other substances? Methane?
4.4 Does neutrality exist? There are many issues left to interpretation and where the science is far from clear. And how large risks should the world accept and how should that be determined? UNFCCC “dangerous”?

Section 7
There are far too many “believes” here for this to be analytical.

Hermele: No I do not think you have proven anything by establishing the principles for SSD and back-casting UNTIL you try to apply them to one or two practical cases; this does not have to be live cases, i.e. real development programmes or projects, it would be enough if you discussed the guidelines or hand books of some of the aid agencies that you mention to see whether their methodologies for elaborating projects etc measure up to your principles? Similarly, you could - if you prefer a theoretical approach - analyze their evaluation methods to see whether they take into account the concerns that ought to be included according to your principles.

Strong and weak points: I do believe that the fourth principle stands out from the first three; the first three are based on natural sciences, and may possibly be described as you do in p 4.4. But the fourth is more of a social or perhaps political principle, which I have difficulty in concretizing: how can it be measured?

Perhaps you also have to give some thought to the possibility of trade offs between the four components of your definition: what if the fourth principle is measured by the Millennium Development Goals, or similar socio-economic indicators, and the other three by the relevant physical indicators; couldn't they enter into conflict with each other, the fourth being achieved at the expense of the other three?

My suggestion is therefore:
1) Recognize the possibility of trade offs and see what you can make of them! Are the first three...
principles always to have priority?
2) Be concrete when you discuss the relationship SSD, back-casting (yes I think it is a good idea!) and development cooperation: look into projects/programs, evaluations, and/or guidelines and manuals.

**Dybsky:** The following are my comments/suggestions for your thesis so far:
Part 3.2: "The proliferation...to developing country governments." You may want to mention lack of administrative training, resources, and/or education available in these countries as main factors hindering this process.
Part 3.4 "Establishing...own development plans." Whose development plans? The donor or recipient country?
Part 3.5 "Whether or not...the reduction of need." Reduction of need financially or in other aspects also? If other aspects, may want to include social/leadership dependence. Recipient countries lacking training and preparation for their own local leadership.
Part 3.7 "Development aid...plan and implement." Additionally, governments of both recipient and donor countries need to be more transparent in how they transfer and utilize donor assistance.
Part 5.1 The System: "Such an understanding...global levels." May want to include "cultural understanding" as well.
Part 5.3 (B) "Current environmental...sustainability." May want to include "cultural situation" analysis also.
Overall, I think the model could be applicable and is well put.

**Clouston:** I am thinking about your outline treatise on Strategic Sustainable Development. I believe that I will write a response even if simplified. Perhaps I will suggest something and/or elaborate on that or another factor.
I must say that I am doing a type of Strategic Sustainable Development project. I have just signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Energy Commission of Nigeria and the Applied Research Center of the Florida International University. We are in agreement to discuss collaboration with the International Global Village Energy Partnership regarding two other countries in Western Africa. An approach of the Type Two Partnership (T2P) which is a collaboration of government, non-profit and for profit business is the platform to implement the activities. The organization of T2P was promoted at the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) held in South Africa in 2002. Tools like Microfinance may be used but a Standard Offer and Contract Growing contracts are also a method with or without microfinance.
In general I agree with your research and I hope you might learn from our project for Western Africa. I see so many things that we are doing now and a few things that we ought to experience and might understand better because of your findings. Please continue your good work.
My only suggestion is that you join my group called Renewable Energy and Space Power and another called Rural Sociology both are at Research Gate. www.researchgate.net there is no cost to you.

**Migliorisi:** (Additional Comments) 3.1. The need to build partner country ownership: Problem is that very often local strategies are weak and broad and alignment by donor very easy but useless. Real challenge is at the sector level where very often there is no strategy or coordination
3.3. The need for mutual accountability: Developing countries reject the notion of being accountable to donors. They are accountable to their parliaments and people. Mutual responsibility is a better concept. It is often remarked that there is nothing “mutual” in this concept with very little asked from donors
3.4. Conditionality: Why should there be conditionalities? The issue is their elimination and transition to a performance based system where decisions are made locally and positive outputs rewarded ex post.
3.5. The risk of fostering aid dependence: I know what aid dependence is but do not understand what you mean.
3.6. Environmental threats: Motherhood and apple pie. The issue is who pays the cost of adaptation.
Mitigation is a commonly understood task. Green technologies are expensive and Asian countries for example are all regressing on MDG7

3.7. Commitment vs. Expenditure: Change title. Predictability of Aid or something similar. It is a real issue.

4. Effectiveness through Sustainability: Or ODA to increase.
4.4. The Neutrality of Science: In my opinion science is what humans understand about natural law, not something derived from it. There is also disagreement among scientists on future scenarios (e.g. global warming and its impact). Social sciences are not very scientific using your description in this paragraph.

Satterthwaite: I enjoyed your summary but you all have to get into real world issues. In some ways, it is too easy to retreat to the 'good principles' and then hammer agencies that do not follow these. But to engage in how their current structure, institution, political economy etc can move towards meeting your principles is far more challenging. Good luck.

3.1. The need to build partner country ownership. But this often impossible because of unaccountable, anti-poor governments. So big issue for official donors, what to do. In theory, makes sense to work direct with civil society in places where governments are anti poor but the official donors lack knowledge, capacity and structure to be able to do so.

3.3. The need for mutual accountability. Ultimately the people to whom aid should be accountable are those with limited or inadequate incomes or livelihoods and facing other deprivations. The whole aid business justifies its existence on the basis of these people’s needs. But almost none of the official multilateral or bilateral agencies ever think through accountability to these.

3.5. The risk of fostering aid dependence. But no agency is working to this, no agency really seeks to minimize the amount of its funding that is needed by seeking most efficient use of the funding and using the funding to leverage and support local resources.

4.1 Strategic Sustainable Development (SSD): NO the Brundtland commission took this definition from a 1972 book by Barbara Ward and Rene Dubos – “Only one Earth; Care and maintenance of a small planet”.

4.2. There are no science-based principles for social aspects of sustainable development. These are much more lodged in ethical principles. Principles of Sustainability
This is not true, most ecological threats come from high consumption high waste lifestyles not poverty; Rural poverty is rooted in inequitable access to land, water and forests. Most deforestation is done by commercial companies, not “poor people”. Same is true for most ecological damage.

4.5. Why Strategic Sustainable Development? This misses the many clever ways in which rich world high level consumption transfers ecological costs to other people and other ecosystems both now and in the future. EG we keep down our greenhouse gas emissions in Europe by importing from Asia most of the goods which had high energy, pollution and greenhouse gas emissions from their fabrication. Accounting for greenhouse gas emissions in terms of the best science would allocate them to the consumer whose consumption was the original cause of the emissions – politically this will never be accepted by west.

You have to consider why aid has been so stunningly incompetent at reducing or removing poverty. That is meant to be its primary goal. Of course it is important to bring to this an ecological perspective but if this does not address the stunning incompetence of aid to actually benefit those facing deprivation, it does not achieve much. You are working at abstraction that is not actually considering the institutional means by which aid is allocated and spent.