

NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT – WHAT ABOUT IT?¹

by

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In 2002, the Government set up a National Commission for Sustainable Development (NCSD), in terms of the Environment Protection Act (2001). The NCSD's main remit is to:

1. advocate national sustainable development across all sectors;
2. review progress in the achievement of such sustainable development; and
3. build consensus on action needed to achieve further progress.

The NCSD is also charged with identifying relevant processes or policies which may be undermining sustainable development, and to propose alternative processes or policies to the Government for adoption.

Sustainable development

But what does the term *sustainable development* really entail? The concept was first presented in the World Conservation Strategy in the 80's and published by the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources. At the time, sustainable development was defined as 'the integration of conservation and development to ensure that modification to the planet do indeed secure the survival and well-being of all people'. In 1983, the UN General Assembly set up the World Commission on the Environment and Development (WCED) with Gro Harlem Brundtland as the chairperson. The outcome of this effort was a publication in 1987 entitled *Our Common Future*. A new development path for the entire planet was set and termed 'sustainable development'. The term was defined as 'development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.'

This simple definition has been used, misused, misquoted and rewritten countless times since. The concept involves issues of intergenerational and intra generational equity, balance

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in the exploitation of resources, direction of investment and the orientation of technological developments which are consistent with future as well as present needs. It conveys a holistic view of progress, with various dimensions, including economic, social and environmental ones. The concept also suggests that the benefits of development for human welfare should be viewed on a long-term basis, rather than on short term gains.

*This is the first age that's
paid much attention to the
future, which is a little ironic
since we may not have one –
Arthur C. Clarke*

A direct consequence of the Brundtland Commission's work was the convening of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) often called the Earth Summit in 1992.

Malta's Commitment

In the aftermath of UNCED, the Maltese Government, together with the Governments of other nations, committed itself to adopt a National Sustainable Development Strategy, so as to 'build upon and harmonise the various sectoral, economic, social and environmental policies and plans that are operating in the country'.

The basic goals of this strategy were to

- ensure socially responsible economic development while protecting the resource base and the environment for the benefit of future generations
- be based on a thorough assessment of the current situation and initiatives
- be developed through the widest possible participation (Agenda 21, Chapter 8, para. 8.7)

Again, in September 2000, some 150 Heads of States, including Malta, signed the Millennium Declaration and reaffirmed their support for the principles of sustainable development and Agenda 21. They also agreed on the Millennium Development Goals, including the need to 'integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes and reverse the loss of environmental resources (see <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>)

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These commitments, amongst other, have imposed an obligation and a mandate for Malta to adopt a national sustainable development strategy.

A National Strategy for Sustainable Development

To this end, during the 5th meeting of Malta's National Commission for Sustainable Development (9th December 2002), the Commission appointed a task force to oversee the preparation of a Sustainable Development Strategy for Malta. This decision was taken in line with the functions of the Commission as listed in Article 8 (7) of the Environment Protection Act (Act XX 2001).

The criteria underpinning the strategy were that it should:

- seek to integrate economic, social and environmental considerations;
- be inter-sectoral and multi-layered;
- have a long run perspective and an ethical dimension with regard to future generations;
- be developed on the basis of broad participation and generate a feeling of ownership by stakeholders;
- be backed by strong political commitment;
- serve to develop capacity and itself general an enabling environment;
- promote the development of monitoring and assessment procedures;
- foster an educative process and a sustainable development culture;
- be coherent, in that there should be a balance between funding potential and strategy priorities, and anchored in sound technical and economic analysis.

A draft strategy, covering the period 2004-2009, has been completed and will be discussed during a conference launching a consultative and participatory process for the drawing up of a national strategy for Malta. The conference is being organised by the National Commission for Sustainable Development, in cooperation with the Ministry of Rural Affairs and Environment. More information and a registration form can be obtained by contacting the Commission at the Ministry for the Environment and Rural Affairs or email [NCSA Secretary at: emanuel.borg@gov.mt](mailto:emanuel.borg@gov.mt) .

