Memo

To:

Prof. Dr. Klaus Töpfer, Member of German Council on Sustainable Development
Dr. Volker Hauff, Chair, German Council on Sustainable Development
Bundeskanzleramt, G 32, Ref. 321
Auswärtiges Amt, 4 B 2, 4 B 3
BMU, Z G III, KI II 3, KI II 4
BMZ, UA 31
GTZ, Geschäftsführung
EEAC, Frans Evers, the Netherlands (Chair), Dr. Ingeborg Niestroy (Gen Sec)
EEAC Working Group on SD
OECD Berlin Centre, Heino von Meyer

Workshop on developing SD strategies in Asia / Pacific, organized by OECD / UN DESA / UN-ESCAP, Bangkok, March 8 and 9, 2007

The workshop was the second in a series of three workshops addressing the state-of-the-art of national SD Strategies, with the first held in Stockholm, September 2006, discussing the European experiences. The workshop reviewed national SD strategies in countries in Asia and the Pacific as well as their relationship to national development plans and poverty reduction strategies (PRS) with a view to better integration.

The workshop had four sessions addressing the issues of state-of-the-art of SD strategies, governance, stakeholder involvement, and development planning. On behalf of the European network of Environmental and Sustainable Development Advisory Councils, EEAC, I was asked to present an overview on stakeholder involvement in particular through SD Councils (see attached powerpoint). Ingeborg Niestroy represented the network and my presentation built on her expertise and introduced her as co-author.

The workshop agreed the following recommendations

- Promoting co-operation among partners active in national SD policies
- Build on planning mechanisms to develop national SD Strategies (inter alia: link reporting on NSDS plans and Poverty Reduction Plans and reports on the implementation of Millenium Development Goals; develop sustainability assessment methodologies)
- Extend the instrument of peer reviews and shared learning (also via monitoring efforts)
- Strengthen co-operation among international organisations.
- Develop networks of practitioners to share good practices on national SD Strategies
- Expand role of stakeholders, in particular through transparency and multi-stakeholder participation
- Follow – up Asia/Pacific workshop with OECD / UN workshop in Latin America.

Participants highlighted the importance of SD strategies and in particular mentioned the value comprehensive SD strategies may add to single point policies such as climate change abatement and poverty reduction. Also, an intensified and continued networking and sharing of experiences among Asian countries was highlighted as a mean to concrete and effective international cooperation. In this respect, the European network of SD Advisory Councils is seen as a role model together with other European networking activities.

Germany's efforts towards sustainability policies are highly acknowledged both in terms of politics and the business case. The names of Volker Hauff and Klaus Töpfer are well – known in the international SD community.

The workshop shed a realistic light on the practical constraints national SD strategies are facing in the countries present. It was reported about a lack of mechanisms to involve civil society, about SD strategies featuring too often only reactive policies rather than being proactive and introducing prevention policies.

The presentation of the Chinese case rehearsed the official Chinese perspective for economic restructuring, promoting technological advance, facilitating a resource-saving society. In 2003, the Government of China formulated *the Program of Action for Sustainable Development in China in the Early 21st Century.* Since then, a series of sectoral policies favorable to SD ware added. The presentation gave no new targets and timetables except for the already known energy objectives. The presentation made it surprisingly clear that China will not be able to meet SD goals out of China's own efforts. Thus, a growing need for support from the international community is seen, in particular in terms of finance and advanced technologies, but also regarding processes and policies. The Chinese calculation of a "Green GDP" is still a unique example in Asia and the Pacific (subtracting environmental costs from overall GDP; officially calculated with 3 %, in scientific contributions often calculated with 8 – 10%). In bilateral talks I got the impression that the Green GDP – concept is far from being accepted as a consensus within China, but that it is of great importance for communicating the issue of environmental damage and of the need to change the ways and means of development.

Although the representatives of China were not familiar with the recent RNE/GTZ project "BRICS+G Sustainability and Growth" they were very interested in this kind of low-key networking and exchange of ideas. The representative of Vietnam, an official involved in the Vietnamese SD Strategy, claimed that it would be almost impossible to implement the Vietnamese SD Strategy with an understaffed bureau, young and not enough skilled staff, and facing political constraints that still see poverty reduction strategies as prior or even opposed to SD strategies.

In the Philippines and Thailand, often regarded as Asian SD pioneers, the respective SD Commissions have not met for at least one year. Nevertheless, the representatives conceded that other policies are in place that followed the principles of sustainability, sometimes without even using the SD language. The often disconnect between national SD strategies and the budgeting scheme and other policy frameworks such as the poverty reductions plan was another feature repeatedly mentioned.

For a better integration of SD strategies into sectoral and other policies it was concluded that an international agreement similar to the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness appears necessary in order to streamline the language and performance of international organizations. In a number of contributions the threat of an upcoming UN fatigue was described. Too many institutions seem to force receiving countries into spending extra transaction costs that are

unproductive. A better cooperation of international institutions seems necessary and was promised (concept of one-stop-shop).

The role of EEAC in these discussions is it to make clear that organized stakeholder involvement via SD Councils or Commissions is a means and no end. Also, it is no panacea that automatically solves all problems of stalled and / or fragmented policies. Instead, Councils may work as a platform that helps to build the case for sustainability and to ensure continuity in SD thinking, overarching electoral cycles. It was also addressed that governments' willingness for dialogue with organized civil society varies, and most SD "Councils" in the region are so far government coordination mechanisms and some are government dominated. Presenting the function and work style of independent SD Councils in Europe was welcomed.

Our presentation displayed the TV commercial "sustainability in 50 seconds" as an example for creative communication tools.

Presentations will be available on the OECD website in due course.

Attachment: presentation