

Sweden Case Study

Analysis of National Strategies for Sustainable Development

This document is one of 19 country case studies that form the knowledge base for a synthesis report entitled “National Strategies for Sustainable Development: Challenges, Approaches, and Innovations Based on a 19-country Analysis.” The synthesis report and country case studies are available electronically at:

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Notice to Reader

Information in the country case studies was obtained primarily from publicly available sources (e.g., Internet and literature sources) and, where possible, was supplemented through interviews with government officials. The information was up-to-date as of May 2004. Every effort was made to ensure that official national sustainable development focal point contacts had the opportunity to provide feedback on the research, but such contacts were not successful in all cases. **This case study is in an unedited, working paper format.**

These case studies are made publicly available to add to the national sustainable development strategy knowledge base. The project’s research partners accept responsibility for any inaccuracies or omissions. The views expressed in this working paper do not necessarily represent the views of the funding partners.

The research partners welcome your comments on this country case study. Please e-mail comments to Darren Swanson at dswanson@iisd.ca.

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1 Introduction: Sweden Description

Sweden is located in Northern Europe between Finland and Norway, with a population of approximately 8.9 million people. Although Sweden is a country with low population density and moderate economic growth in the past few decades, environmental issues have long been at the “forefront of Sweden’s agenda” (OECD, p. 228). With its strong international interdependencies, such as entry into the European Union and other Nordic cooperative initiatives, Sweden’s environmental issues also have a strong international focus. One clear demonstration of Sweden’s pioneering environmental commitment was the initiative taken to host the first UN Conference on the Environment, held in Stockholm in 1972 (OECD, p. 228). Since then, through many national and international undertakings Sweden has continued to demonstrate its sustainable development commitment.

Economy

Sweden has a high standard of living with a mixed system of capitalism and extensive welfare benefits (CIA 2003). The GDP is estimated at US\$230.7 billion (purchasing power parity – 2002 est.) with a real growth rate of 1.9% (2002 est.) (CIA 2003). GDP per capita in 2002 was US\$26,000 (CIA 2003). The labour force by occupation is 74% services, 24% industry, and 2% agriculture (CIA 2003). Unemployment was estimated at 4% in 2002 (CIA 2003).

Society

The Sweden government is a constitutional monarchy. King Gustaf is the chief of state. There are three democratically elected levels of government: the Riksdag (Swedish parliament) at the national level, the county councils at the regional level, and the municipalities at the local level.

County councils handle matters such as medical and dental care, public transport, culture, tourism, nature conservation, protecting the natural environment, the promotion of business and industry, and regional growth and development. There are 18 county councils (Swedish Government 2003).

Sweden has 289 municipalities, which are responsible for specially regulated tasks such as: social services, care of the elderly, physical planning and building, certain environmental tasks and rescue services (Swedish Government 2003).

Sweden’s human development index ranked 3rd out of 175 countries in 2001 (UNDPa 2003, p. 237). Sweden was ranked 1st in the human poverty index of 2001 (UNDPb 2003, p. 248). The life expectancy at birth is 80 (UNDPa 2003, p. 237).

Environment

With a surface area of approximately 450,000 sq km, Sweden’s terrain is mostly flat or gently rolling lowlands, with mountains in the west. Sweden’s climate is temperate in the south, and sub-arctic in the north. The primary natural resources in Sweden include metals, timber, uranium, and hydropower. Sweden has an environmental sustainability

index of 72.6 (ranked 3rd out of 142) (Yale & Columbia 2002, p. 3). CO₂ emissions per capita were 5.5 tonnes in 2001 (World Bank 2001, p. 204).

Note to Readers

Research sources for this report are primarily Swedish government reports and a phone interview with the Ministry of Environment. Sweden's National Strategy for Sustainable Development 2002 is available only in Swedish. A summary of the strategy is available in English, and serves as the basis from which this report is written.

Some reference is also made to OECD reviews, and SD/WSSD Implementation Country Profiles prepared for Stratos Inc.

Sweden's Profile by Selected Indicators

Indicator	Value
Human Development Index (and ranking)	0.941 (3 rd out of 175)
Human Poverty Index (and ranking)	6.5% (1 st out of 17)
Environmental Sustainability Index	72.6 (3 rd out of 175)
GHG Emissions	5.5 tonnes per capita
GDP and GDP per capita	US\$230.7 billion and \$26,000 per capita

2 Content of the National Sustainable Development Strategy

The "Swedish Strategy for Sustainable Economic, Social and Environmental Development (Communication 2003/04:129)" is a revised version of the national strategy for sustainable development presented in 2002. The single, multi-dimensional strategy builds upon the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development, the EU strategy for sustainable development, and addresses the three dimensions of sustainable development: economic, social and environmental (Swedish Government 2004, p. 5).

Sweden's policies place a great deal of emphasis on sustainable development. Environmental concerns began in Sweden with nature protection in the first half of the twentieth century, and dealing with local effects of industrial emissions had already become important in the 1960s. Sweden hosted the first UN Environment and Development Conference in 1972 and has been active in promoting international agreements for addressing cross-border environmental problems (Roseveare 2001, p. 4).

This longstanding national history of commitment to the environment and to sustainable development precedes the many initiatives undertaken in the country, which are now packaged in the Swedish Strategy for Sustainable Economic, Social and Environmental Development. This strategy is just one more step in a long list of sustainability initiatives.

Strategy Content

Sweden's *vision* of sustainable development is based on seven fundamental principles which are outlined in the strategy. The achievement of this vision rests on three key premises around which the strategy has been created:

- Sustainable development in Sweden can only be achieved within the context of global and regional co-operation
- Sustainable development policies, measures and concerns must be mainstreamed, i.e. integrated into all existing policy areas
- Further action at national level will be needed to ensure long-term protection of the critical resources that constitute the basis for sustainable development (Swedish Government 2004, p. 4)

The strategy also specifies the policy instruments, tools, future strategic issues and processes that are necessary to implement the vision and values.

The 2004 Swedish then identifies four *future strategic issues* that the government has prioritized for the mandate period of the report (2004-2006). These issues, listed below, take one more step towards integrating the three pillars of sustainable development (Lofgren 2004):

- Environmentally driven growth and welfare
- Good health – our most important future resource
- Coherent policies for sustainable community planning
- Child and youth policies for an ageing society (Swedish Government 2004, p. 10).

The remainder of the strategy reports on the actions taken and those planned in the eight strategic core areas originally defined in the 2002 strategy as the most important elements of a sustainable society, including:

- The future environment
- Limitation of climate change
- Population and public health
- Social cohesion, welfare and security
- Employment and learning in a knowledge society
- Economic growth and competitiveness
- Regional development and cohesion
- Community development

For each of these core areas, the strategy includes concrete objectives and measures (Lofgren 2004).

Coordination and Linkages with Other Strategies or Planning Processes

The vision and the future strategic issues listed above were uniquely created for this 2004 strategy (Lofgren 2004). The remainder of the strategy builds on objectives, measures and strategies that have already been created and adopted through other Swedish governmental processes (Knutsson 2004). Rather than establishing new objectives and measures for sustainable development, the objectives and measures for each core area refer to related policies and other instruments. As such, the development and implementation of the objectives and measures found in the strategy is up to each organizational group responsible for their own objectives and measures, including the budgeting and monitoring mechanisms.

For instance, with regards to the economic dimension of sustainability, the strategy indicates that economic policy instruments should be applied to encourage more sustainable consumption and production patterns. The strategy also identifies examples of reforms designed to create a more stable and efficiency economy (such as tax and pension reforms, a stiffer competition act, and measures to boost employment, etc.).

Similarly, with regards to the social dimension of sustainability, the strategy refers to a new integration policy adopted by the Swedish Government in 2002, as well as the Ethnic Discrimination Act passed in 2003. Initiatives pertaining to gender equality, development and participation of children and young people, culture, and security from crime are all discussed in the strategy.

Box 1 also highlights an innovative development bill that lends itself to Sweden's sustainable development commitments. In developing and passing this bill, Sweden demonstrates its commitment to promoting and fulfilling the Millennium Goals adopted at WSSD.

Box 1: Development Bill

On May 23, 2003 the Swedish Government was the first government internationally to pass a development related bill in direct response to the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation. Tabled in Parliament, the bill *Our common responsibility – Sweden's policy for global development* "proposes new goals for all aspects of Government operations with the aim of contributing to fair and sustainable global development. Trade, agriculture, security, migration, environmental and economic policies are to promote global development. A poverty and human rights perspective shall permeate the entire policy. With this bill, the Government has reformulated its policy in order to contribute more forcefully to the fulfillment of the UN objectives. The overriding goal is to abolish world poverty. An intermediate goal is to halve world poverty by the year 2015" (Ministry for Foreign Affairs 2003).

The environmental pillar of sustainability largely has been addressed through Sweden's 15 national environmental quality objectives adopted by Parliament (see Box 2 for more details).

Not only is Sweden promoting sustainable development domestically, it recognizes that many sustainability issues know no political or geographic boundaries. As such, Sweden is deliberately promoting sustainable development at the international level, cooperating on strategies and measures that promote sustainable development (Swedish Government 2004, p. 6-7). For instance, the Swedish strategy is a complement to the EU strategy. As well, Sweden is active with the following organizations in regards to sustainable development activates: UN, OECD, WHO, the Nordic Council of Ministers and Baltic 21 (Swedish Government 2004, p. 7).

Finally, it should be noted that Sweden's post-WSSD efforts have been incorporated into the 2004 strategy (Lofgren 2004).

Integration of Sustainable Development Principles

The 2004 strategy integrates the principle of fulfilling our responsibility toward the future by extending its objectives to cover one generation (i.e. 25 years). For instance, the strategy includes a vision for the future, which should remain valid for a generation while at the same time acknowledging that the measures within the eight core areas may need to be reassessed at more frequent intervals (Lofgren 2004). Specifically, the “overall objective of environmental policy is to hand over a society to the next generation in which the major environmental problems have been solved” (Swedish Government 2004, p. 12).

With regards to integration of the three target dimensions of sustainable development, the strategy’s eight core areas clearly demonstrate the breadth of scope by addressing issues such as the environment, economic growth, regional development and social cohesion. Because new targets have not been created for this strategy, it is clear that Sweden’s approach is very integrated – using the strategy as a mechanism for pulling together existing targets related to sustainable development from across the spectrum of government responsibilities.

3 Institutional and Procedural Aspects of the National Sustainable Development Strategy

3.1 Development and Institutional Aspects

The Swedish Strategy for Sustainable Economic, Social and Environmental Development 2004 was tabled in Parliament in April 2004 as a written statement (not a formal bill). Currently, Parliament is reviewing the strategy and a decision on its acceptance is expected to be taken in the autumn of 2004 (Lofgren 2004). This strategy serves as a means for Sweden to meet the commitment made by all UN Member States at the World Summit in Johannesburg in September 2002, where all countries are expected to commence implementation of national sustainable development strategies in 2005 (Swedish Government 2004, p. 5).

The strategy was developed by the Swedish government, with cooperation from all ministries. The Ministry of the Environment had a coordinating function, but it was largely an internal, joint government process (Knutsson 2004).

According to government officials, no external assistance was given in the development of the strategy.

With regards to local sustainability issues the Swedish Government had appointed a National Committee on Agenda 21 and Habitat in 2000, consisting of eleven representatives of the political parties under the chairmanship of the Minister of Housing. The National Committee had the task of coordinating Swedish work on Agenda 21 and sustainable development as well as Swedish commitments under the Habitat Agenda (Association for Agenda 21 2002) (see Table 1 for more details on this Committee). The committee officially ended in April 2003, whereupon it presented the government with a

final report including recommended future actions. This report is currently being reviewed, and where appropriate, being implemented (Lofgren).

3.2 Participation Aspects

The Swedish Strategy for Sustainable Economic, Social and Environmental Development was developed with input of all government ministries. Input to this strategy, a revised version of the 2002 strategy, was solicited through questions on a website and a formal request for input made to approximately 2000 stakeholders (200-300 responses were received) (Knutsson 2004). The strategy updates the 2002 targets, and emphasizes the new four strategic issues related to environmentally driven growth and welfare; good health; policies for sustainable community planning; and child and youth policies (Knutsson 2004). A more in-depth revision is scheduled for 2006 (Knutsson 2004).

Government officials noted that in the development of the 2004 strategy, there was not a lot of conflict. However, because the strategy encompassed so many targets from such a variety of programs across the government, the conflict that did exist was in determining what should be included in the strategy, and how the items should be combined to enhance the sustainable development focus. Eventually agreement was reached, allowing the strategy to be presented to Parliament (Knutsson 2004).

3.3 Monitoring Aspects

“A first set of Swedish sustainable development indicators was adopted in 2001. These are described in the report entitled “Sustainable Development Indicators for Sweden: A First Set 2001”. This first set of indicators was revised and adapted to the 2002 National Strategy for Sustainable Development (Bernstein 2003, p. 50). A preliminary report using the indicators in 2001 shows that Sweden has improved performance in many areas, but that there remains much to do. “There is cautious optimism regarding efficiency, increased purchases of ecolabelled goods and services, strengthening of the preconditions for sustainable growth in research, education and energy but also, a shrinking inheritance for coming generations” (Statistics Sweden 2001, p.1).

It should be noted that the summary of the 2004 strategy identifies five “green indicators” – energy use, emissions of acidifying substances, carbon dioxide emissions, benzene levels in urban air, and nitrogen and phosphorus discharges into the sea – have been included in the Budget Statement every year since 1998. The strategy also identifies other areas for which indicators are being developed (Swedish Government 2004, p. 22). Government officials noted that Sweden’s sustainable development indicator work is closely linked with the work of the EU. As the EU develops its sustainability indicators, Sweden will be working closely to ensure alignment (Lofgren 2004).

One interesting indicator that is used by the OECD pertains to green taxes and environmental tax reform. This indicator shows that in 1998, approximately 3.1% of Sweden’s GDP was from green taxes. Table 1 discusses this initiative in more detail.

A progress report on the implementation of the 2002 strategy has been incorporated into the revised strategy. Again, it was the Ministry of Environment that was responsible for coordinating this report, but it was each ministry that was responsible for monitoring the progress towards the implementation of its own relevant targets and providing that information to the Ministry of Environment as it collated the data (Knutsson 2004). The revised strategy now also identifies new issues to sustainable development in Sweden, namely embodied in the future strategic issues (Knutsson 2004).

Government officials noted that there are not any formal implications for failing to meet objectives stated in the strategy, other than those that might be experienced within the respective government entity responsible for the given targets (Knutsson 2004).

It is interesting to note, however, that progress towards fulfilling the 15 environmental quality objectives is widely available. In the case of the environmental objectives, the Environmental Objectives Council (established in 2002) monitors the action taken to achieve the objectives and publishes a report in June each year (for example: A Progress Report from the Swedish Environmental Objectives Council – de Facto 2003). Every four years the Council carries out an in-depth evaluation, assessing progress towards the objectives and proposing further measures (Svergies miljomal 2003).

With respect to strategic environmental assessments (SEA), Sweden implements the European Directive on SEA. Currently, Sweden is working on creating a government bill for SEA and it is expected in early 2004 (Knutsson 2004 & Nordic Network 2004). Government officials indicated that the European Directive has a focus on plans and programs, but does not directly impact national government work (Knutsson 2004). While SEA may not be used nationally, it should be noted that between 600 and 700 EIAs/SEAs of municipal development plans are performed every year (Nordic Network 2004).

3.4 Implementation Aspects and Specific Initiatives

The summary of the strategy discusses in generic terms a variety of tools and instruments that can be used in the implementation of the strategy, such as legislation, spatial planning, broad strategies, economic instruments, and impact assessments. Details about the implementation approach, responsibilities and timeframes are only vaguely described in the text of the summary. And, according to government officials, there is “no systemic implementation strategy” (Knutsson 2004).

The summary of the strategy indicates that “the task of implementing Sweden’s strategy for sustainable development is the responsibility of the Government Offices as a whole. The government has set up a special body in the Prime Minister’s Office, Coordination Unit for Sustainable Development, to coordinate international and national efforts in this field and strengthen strategic initiatives (Swedish Government 2004, p. 5). This office will also be responsible for preparing the next revision to the strategy, in 2006. Details about the Secretariat’s role continue to be defined (Knutsson 2004).

The implementation of the strategy rests with each ministry that has targets incorporated within. Therefore, the financing for implementation rests with each individual ministry as they complete targets that, while in the strategy, embody components of their regular plans and programs.

The strategy is available in Swedish only; a summary is available in English. These documents, and others surrounding the issues of sustainability, are available on the internet.

Table 1 highlights some of Sweden's innovative initiatives undertaken to implement sustainable development.

Table 1: Selected Sustainable Development Initiatives

Initiative	Outline
Sustainable Development Indicators	The report entitled "Sustainable Development Indicators for Sweden: A First Set 2001" includes 30 sustainable development indicators which Sweden has created exist under four themes: Efficiency; Equality/participation; Adaptability; and Values and resources for coming generations (Refer to Appendix A for list of the 2001 indicators). Within the four themes, the indicators encompass economic, environmental and social dimensions of sustainability. The final indicators selected are common to those used in other SDI-reports.
Integrated Product Policy	The basic purpose of the Integrated Product Policy (IPP) is that the "production, handling, use and final disposal of products shall have as little adverse effect on the environment and human health as possible" (Swedish EPA 2003).
National Committee on Agenda 21 and Habitat	In 2000, the Swedish Government appointed a National Committee on Agenda 21 and Habitat, consisting of eleven representatives of the political parties under the chairmanship of the Minister of Housing. The National Committee had the task of initiating and coordinating Swedish work on local Agenda 21 initiatives and sustainable development as well as Swedish commitments under the Habitat Agenda. Co-operation with national and local authorities, non-governmental organizations and business was also emphasized. The Committee also took into account work carried out in the Local Investment Programs and the Regional Growth Agreements as well as work on Agenda 21 in the Baltic region – Baltic 21 – and work within the European Union on sustainable urban development (Association 2002). Although this committee is officially disbanded now, its final report is still being reviewed and where appropriate implemented.
Environmental Tax	Sweden's experiment with tax shifting began in 1991, when it raised taxes on carbon and sulfur emissions and reduced income taxes.

Reform	<p>Manufacturing industries received exemptions and rebates from many of the environmental taxes, putting their tax rates at half of those paid by households. In 2001, the government increased taxes on diesel fuel, heating oil, and electricity while lowering income taxes and social security contributions. Six percent of all government revenue in Sweden has now been shifted. This has helped Sweden reduce greenhouse gas emissions more quickly than anticipated. A political agreement between the government and the opposition required a 4-percent reduction below 1990 levels by 2012. Yet by 2000, emissions were already down 3.9 percent from 1990-in large measure due to energy taxes.</p>
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Box 2 highlights one of Sweden's innovative and successful components of its sustainable development initiatives, the Environmental Quality Objectives.

Box 2: Sweden's Environmental Quality Objectives

Environmental Quality Objectives

The Government's primary environmental objective is to hand over a society to the next generation in which the major environmental problems have been solved. The following 15 national environmental quality objectives, which have been adopted by Parliament, focus on the ecological dimension of sustainable development.

- Reduced Climate Impact
- Clean Air
- Natural Acidification Only
- A Non-Toxic Environment
- A Protective Ozone Layer
- A Safe Radiation Environment
- Zero Eutrophication
- Flourishing Lakes and Streams
- Good-Quality Groundwater
- A Balanced Marine Environment, Flourishing Coastal Areas and Archipelagos
- Thriving Wetlands
- Healthy Forests
- A Varied Agricultural Landscape
- A Magnificent Mountain Landscape
- A Good Built Environment

The Bill presenting these environmental quality objectives builds upon the preliminary framework of environmental objectives that was approved by Parliament in April 1999. The objectives represent a compass for environmental policy at all levels in Sweden, in the EU and international spheres. There are 65 sub-objectives and supporting action strategies.

3.5 Summary of National SD Strategy

The table below summarizes Sweden's sustainable development strategic initiatives.

Table 2: Summary of Sweden's National Sustainable Development Strategy

Criteria/Aspects	Outline
Content of SDS	
- Typology	- National Sustainable Development Strategy, multi-dimensional, cross-sectoral
- Content	- Introduces four future strategic issues; Reports on progress and plans on 8 core areas, objectives and measures
- Linkages with other strategies and planning processes	- Synthesis of existing targets and policies; Environmental quality objectives; Sweden's Policy for Global Development
Development Aspects	
- Legal basis, state of process	- Policy created by government with input from government and non-government stakeholders
- Institutions, responsible agencies	- Ministry of the Environment – coordinating role
- Decisions and negotiation	- Internal joint government process
- External Support	- External support – none
Participation	
- Coordination	- Coordination – Ministry of Environment
- Inter-governmental actors	- Input from all government ministries
- Civil society, NGOs actors	- Invited feedback through website and formal requests from wide range of stakeholders
Monitoring, Reporting and Adaptation Aspects	
- Responsibilities & Mechanisms	- First set of Sustainable Development Indicators 2001
- Compliance mechanisms	- Compliance mechanisms – none
- Learning and Adaptation	- Strategy incorporated feedback from review of 2002 strategy. Strategy to be reviewed again (in 2006)
- Application of Strategic Environmental Assessment	- Not legally required for policies and national programs. Compulsory for municipal comprehensive plans
Implementation of SDS	
- Responsibility and Coordination	- Responsibility outlined in vague terms within objectives and measures; coordination of SDS implementation – no systematic implementation plan
- Financing and capacity	- Financing – within existing structure
- Communication	- Communication – available on the internet
Specific SD Initiatives	
	- Sustainable development indicators
	- Integrated Product Policy
	- National Committee on Agenda 21 and Habitat
	- Environmental Tax Reform

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Appendix A – Sustainable Development Indicators for Sweden – A First Set 2001**List of indicators:****Toward sustainability: Efficiency**

1. Total energy supply by GDP
2. GDP per hour worked
3. Waste
4. State of health; Expenditure on health
5. Proportion of pupils not qualifying for upper secondary schools

Toward sustainability: Contribution and Equality

6. Population by age group
7. Gross regional product
8. Passenger and freight transport
9. Disposable income per consumption unit
10. Women's salaries as percentage of men's salaries
11. Electoral participation
12. Ratio of the population exposed to violent crime or threat of violence
13. Enterprises with EMAS or ISO 14001 certification, certified eco-schools; area with certified forestry
14. Purchases of ecolabelled products and services

Toward sustainability: Adaptability

15. Primary energy supply mix
16. Investments in share of GDP
17. Newly started enterprises and bankruptcies
18. Level of education
19. Research and development expenditure in relation to GDP
20. Employment: Women and men by activity status
21. Organic farming, grazed pastures and hay meadows

Toward sustainability: Values and resources for coming generations

22. General Government and Central Government Net Debt in per cent of GDP
23. Share of GDP spent on health, education, welfare and social security
24. Direct Material Consumption
25. Quantities of chemicals hazardous to health and/or the environment
26. Prevalence of allergic asthma among school children
27. Protected area
28. Exploitation of Baltic herring
29. Extinct and endangered species
30. Emissions of carbon dioxide