

**ESDN Workshop on  
“Experiences with Participatory Tools and Mechanisms”**

**Workshop Outline**

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Hosted by the [ESDN](#) in cooperation with the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety & the German Federal Environment Agenda (UBA)

**Berlin, 9-10 April 2008**

### Organisational issues

- **Time:**
  - 9 April 2008, 13:30 – 18:30 (followed by dinner)
  - 10 April 2008, 09:00 – 13:00
- **Venue:**  
 German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety, Alexanderstrasse 3, 10178 Berlin  
 Room 3135

### Thematic outline and purpose

Whenever the governance of sustainable development (SD) is under discussion, the quest for **involving different stakeholder groups** (e.g. civil society organisations, business representatives, academia, sub-national levels, etc) in policy-making is imminent. According to Agenda 21 (UNCED 1992), SD strategies should build on trustful partnerships and “the widest possible participation”. The rationale behind this quest is diverse, and so are the types and degrees of participation. One can distinguish between several **types of participation**: ad-hoc forms like internet consultations, workshops, round tables and dialogues, and institutionalised forms like committees, advisory groups and National Councils of Sustainable Development (NCSDs). Most of these types differ in terms of **breadth of participation** (involvement of all stakeholder groups or a selected few) and **degrees of participation** (informative, consultative and decisional). The main purpose of the workshop is to exchange information and experiences in applying different participatory processes and mechanisms.

### Topics

The Workshop consists of **three topics**: Topic I, as an introductory session, will deal with participation in the context of NSDS processes and will be introduced with a short keynote by the ESDN Office and Ecologic. Topic II and III will discuss participatory mechanisms in the preparation/revision and implementation/review of NSDS respectively. Each topic will be introduced by two case studies: The case studies will be presented in an interview format, i.e. each case study representative will be asked five questions on the participatory process, stakeholder selection and involvement, use of results and overall experiences. The workshop will be moderated by Ursula Kopp (ESDN Office).

### Working group discussions

Several forms of interactive exchange between the workshop participants will take place:

On the one hand, Topic I will make use of the **interactive “Crea”-method** to collect experiences, ideas and questions on four topics. The results should stimulate the general discussion and will be further used in the working groups.

On the other hand, the **working groups** in Topic II and Topic III will be asked to produce five statements (not necessarily representing consensus) that should aim to answer three guiding questions. Each working group will have a moderator who leads the discussion and collects the statements. A summary of all working group statements will be presented by the moderators in the final workshop discussion. The moderators are: Ursula Kopp, Gerald Berger (both ESDN Office) and Anneke von Raggamby (Ecologic).

The results of the workshop will be documented in a Workshop Report that will be published on the ESDN website and should foster further discussions on participatory mechanisms in the context of NSDS.

In the first part of this Workshop Outline, we present an overview of important issues which cross-cut all topics of the workshop. In the second part, we provide specific background information for each of the three workshop topics.

## **PART 1**

### **Participation in NSDS processes – An introduction**

Agenda 21, the Action Programme adopted at the UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio 1992, points out that “one of the fundamental prerequisites for the achievement of sustainable development is broad public participation in decision-making” (UNCED, 1992, para 23.2). Generally, there is a high degree of consensus on the **need of participation in SD** – some would claim that SD without participation does not qualify as a true SD process.

Generally, it is difficult to present a useful and generally accepted **definition of “participation”** in the context of SD. Many approaches exist at various levels with the involvement of different stakeholder groups (Dalal-Clayton & Bass, 2002). Therefore, we offer a broad definition which should open up discussions and provide a basis for the workshop: *Participation refers to the inclusion of public stakeholders, i.e. all or a selection of those institutions and actors (e.g. civil society organisations/NGOs, business representatives, social partners, sub-national authorities, etc) that are affected by the results of policy- and decision-making processes.*

Participation is also a **key element of SD strategy processes** and has been addressed at various levels: First, Agenda 21 outlines that National Sustainable Development Strategies (NSDSs) “should be developed through the widest possible participation” (UNCED, 1992, para 8.7). Therefore, public participation is included as an important element in UN and OECD guidance documents for preparing NSDS (UN, 2002; OECD, 2001). Second, participation is addressed by several of the policy guiding principles in the renewed EU SDS (i.e. open and democratic society<sup>1</sup>, involvement of citizens<sup>2</sup>, policy coherence and governance<sup>3</sup>) (European Council, 2006). Third, and most important, participatory tools and mechanisms can be found in the preparation and implementation of NSDSs in most EU Member States. Generally, participation must be considered of fundamental importance for SD strategy processes with regard to legitimacy, mobilisation, engagement, gathering of skills, information and knowledge, capacity-building, effective implementation and as a value in its own right in democratic political systems (UN, 2002, 19-20).

For this workshop, we have selected several case studies of participatory mechanisms that are or were applied in NSDS preparation and implementation. They will be presented and discussed in Topic II and Topic III of the workshop and will provide an insight into practical application, success factors and challenges of participatory mechanisms.

In the following, we provide an overview of different aspects of participation that are all related to NSDS processes and that will cross-cut all topics and discussions of the workshop:

- Participatory mechanisms

<sup>1</sup> *Open and democratic society*: “Guarantee citizens’ rights of access to information and ensure access to justice. Develop adequate consultation and participatory channels for all interested parties and associations” (European Council, 2006, 4).

<sup>2</sup> *Involvement of citizens*: “Enhance the participation of citizens in decision-making. Promote their education and public awareness of sustainable development. Inform citizens about their impact on the environment and their options for making more sustainable choices” (European Council, 2006, 5).

<sup>3</sup> *Policy coherence and governance*: “Promote the coherence between all European Union policies and coherence between local, regional, national and global actions in order to enhance their contribution to sustainable development” (European Council, 2006, 5).

- Participation in different policy processes and stages of policy-making
- Stakeholder involvement and participation at different political levels
- Degree and breadth of participation
- Conditions for successful participatory mechanisms in SD strategies

### Participatory mechanisms

Depending on the scope and objective of the participation, there are different **participatory mechanisms**. One can distinguish between, on the one hand, *ad-hoc forms* that are organised once for a specific purpose like, e.g. internet consultations, web-based debates, workshops, public hearings, conferences, presentations, round tables and dialogues, etc. On the other hand, participation can be organised in *institutionalised forms* like, e.g. partnerships, committees, advisory groups and National Councils of Sustainable Development (NCSDs), etc. One can also find examples where ad-hoc forms have been institutionalised, like round tables and dialogue forums (e.g. Round Table “Sustainable Austria”).

The case studies presented in the workshop are examples of both, ad-hoc and institutionalised forms of participation. The workshop participants are invited to reflect on the differences, major advantages and challenges between both forms.

### Participation in different policy processes and stages of policy-making

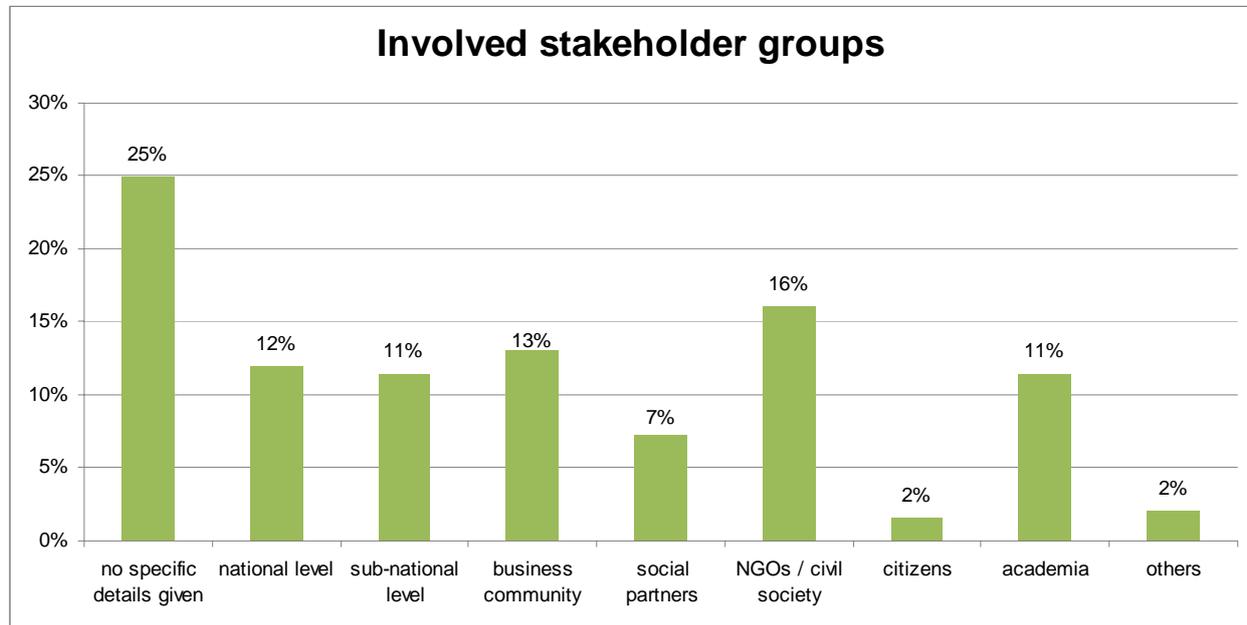
Participatory arrangements can be applied for **different policy processes**: First, on the highest political level in the development and/or implementation of policies, strategies, overall concepts, etc. which mostly outline general objectives. Second, participation can take place in the development/implementation of plans and programmes that define objectives and targets in specific policy fields. And third, participation in projects that have a clearly defined scope and a specific running time.

Moreover, participation can take place at **different stages of policy-making**: Participatory mechanisms can be applied in the *preparation* of policies, strategies, etc, in the *implementation* stage and for *review* mechanisms. One can assume that the participation processes in the preparation phase will explore broader issues and objectives of SD strategies. Participatory arrangements in the implementation and review stages may be more focused on specific strategy objectives as well as outcomes and outputs of strategy processes. A general reflection on the distinction between participatory mechanisms used at the different stages of policy-making will be made in Topic II and Topic III of the workshop.

### Stakeholder involvement and participation at different political levels

**Stakeholder involvement** refers to the interactions between representatives from political levels, policy sectors, interest groups and civil society. Depending on the scope and objective of participation, different stakeholder groups are involved. A research project, commissioned by the German Federal Environment Agency, that is currently conducted by the ESDN Office at RIMAS and Ecologic, provides an overview of different participatory mechanisms used in the context of

NSDS in 12 countries<sup>4</sup>. The results, based on a document analysis (e.g. NSDS and follow-up documents, national progress reports on implementing EU SDS, secondary literature), show that the following stakeholder groups were involved in different participation mechanisms of NSDS processes (preparation, implementation, review):



Graph 1: Involvement of stakeholder groups in participatory mechanisms of NSDS processes

Graph 1 shows that from 94 participatory mechanisms described, 25 % provide no specific information on the involved stakeholder groups. In these cases, the information given was either too generic (“... a broad range of stakeholders was involved.”) or not available. An aggregated look at the involvement of the various stakeholder groups provides the following overview: 16 % NGOs (environmental and social NGOs) and civil society organisation (e.g. youth groups, indigenous communities), 13 % representatives from the business community, 12 % representatives from the national level (excluding those institutions that organised the participatory process) and 11 % representatives from the sub-national levels (regional and local authorities) and academia (universities). Social partners (trade unions, business associates and chamber of commerce) were involved in 7 % of the cases and individual citizens were only marginally involved (2 %).

Participation takes place at **different political levels**. Although NSDS processes mainly refer to the national level, there are several participatory arrangements in related process on the sub-national levels, e.g. regional round tables, LA 21 initiatives, etc. The number of stakeholders involved, the objectives and scope of participation may vary according to the specific policy process and level of application. Dalal-Clayton & Bass (2002) argue that in participatory processes at the nation level, participation is often restricted to traditional stakeholder groups and “classic” participatory mechanisms. In contrast to the national level, participation on the sub-national levels is often more interactive and innovative. Moreover, the motivation for stakeholder participation at the sub-national level is fostered by direct regional/local concern and experiences. The link between top-down and bottom-up dynamics in participation and the fostering of decentralised mechanisms will be discussed in Topic I of the workshop.

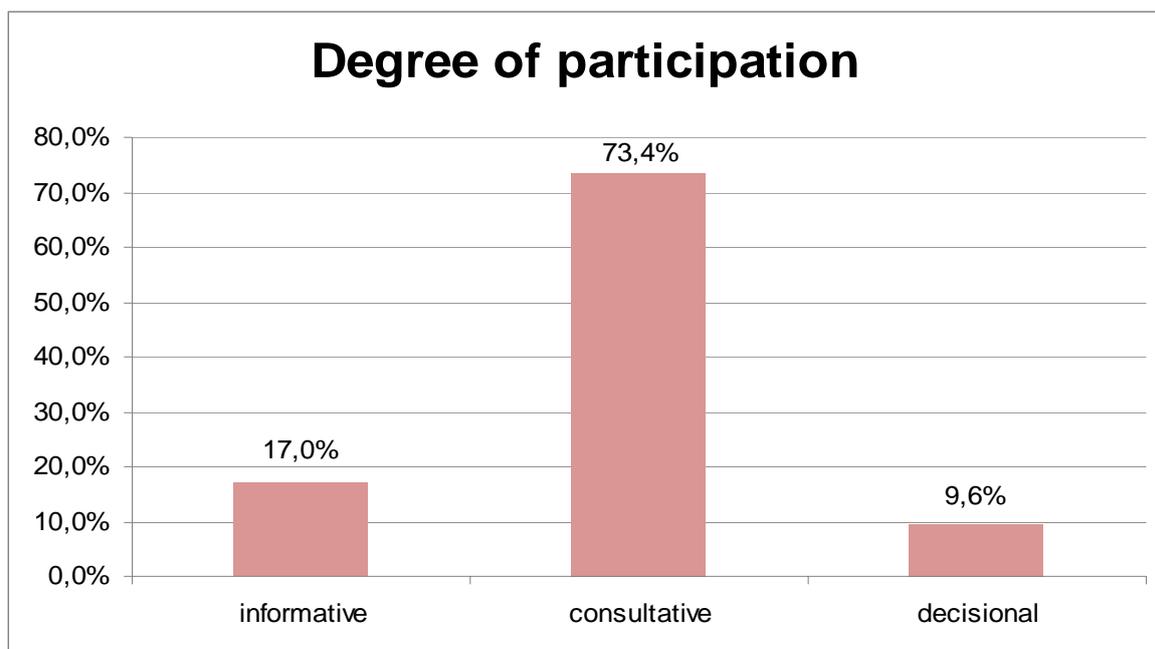
<sup>4</sup> The 12 countries are: Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Ireland, Netherlands, Slovakia, Sweden, Switzerland and UK.

## Degree and breadth of participation

In terms of **degree of participation**, one can distinguish between informative, consultative and decisional forms. In the description below, we use the typology by Green & Hunton-Clarke (2003), originally developed for corporate participatory efforts. This typology is a more simplified version than the one developed by Bass et al. (1995) and can also be applied to SD strategy processes:

- *Informative participation* describes processes that involve information being passed from one body to another. On the one hand, this includes the distribution of information from the central NSDS institution(s) to the stakeholders (e.g. websites, online reports, brochures etc) in a one-way communication. On the other hand, it also includes processes with a two-way information exchange between the central NSDS institution(s) and the stakeholders (e.g. during information events, campaigns, etc).
- *Consultative participation* refers to a higher-level of exchange between the central NSDS institution(s) and the stakeholders. At this level, the stakeholders are asked to contribute their views, knowledge and experiences at various stages of the NSDS process. Examples are consultation processes, round tables, dialogue forums, workshops, national SD councils, partnerships, etc. This form of participation not only involves a stronger involvement of stakeholders, but also refers to issues like commitment in the process, resources applied, capacity-building, etc.
- *Decisional participation* describes mechanisms in which stakeholders participate in the decision-making process. This includes participation in actual political decision-making or in the preparation of political decisions. Examples are some national SD councils, sectoral policy dialogues, decisions on indicator sets, etc.

In the current research project commissioned by the German Environment Agency, the ESDN Office at RIMAS and Ecologic analysed how the 94 participatory mechanisms differ in the degree of participation:



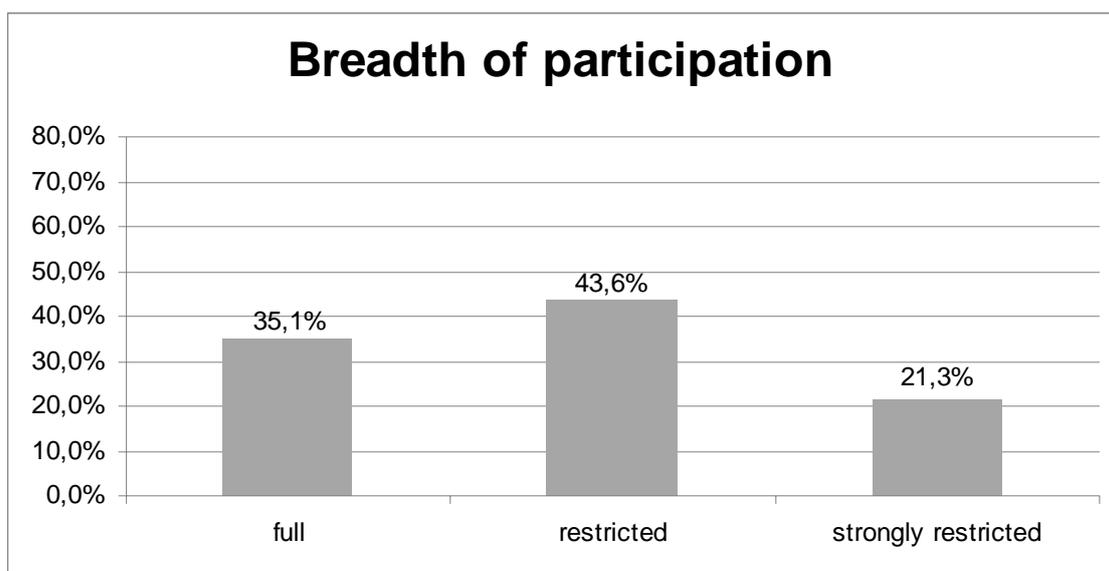
Graph 2: Degree of participation in participatory mechanism of NSDS processes

As graph 2 shows, consultative forms of participation are applied in a majority of the mechanisms (73.4 %). Informative participation is used in 17 % and decisional participation in 9.6 % of the cases.

**Breadth of participation** refers to the number of stakeholder groups involved in a participatory mechanism. Based on Dalal-Clayton & Bass (2002), one can distinguish between:

- *Full participation*: All major sectors of society are involved, including individual citizens. Moreover, representatives of at least two political levels take part in the participation. There should be no administrative or technical restrictions in place (e.g. access to information, need of special technical equipment, etc).
- *Restricted participation*: Only some sectors of society are involved; individual citizens are not involved in participation. In most cases, not more than two political levels are involved. Administrative or technical restrictions can be in place. The central NSDS institution(s) define general terms for participation, including selection criteria.
- *Strongly restricted participation*: Only a selected few sectors of society are involved; individual citizens are not involved in participation. Not more than two political levels are involved. Administrative or technical restrictions are in place. The central NSDS institution(s) define clear terms for participation, including strong selection criteria.

The analysis of the 94 participatory mechanisms in terms of breadth of participation brought the following result:



Graph 3: Breadth of participation in participatory mechanism of NSDS processes

Graph 3 shows that 43.6 % of the participatory mechanisms are characterised by restricted participation, 35.1 % by full participation and 21.3 % by strongly restricted participation.

### Conditions for successful participatory mechanisms in SD strategies

The OECD guidelines (OECD, 2001, 29) and Dalal-Clayton & Bass (2002, 193) define several conditions for successful participation in SD strategies. These conditions provide a good starting point for discussion and a reflection on requirements for participatory mechanisms. The conditions are:

- *Agreed principles of participation:* The principles need to be subject to early discussions, based on previous experiences and existing strategies. These principles usually comprise issues like diversity, representation, transparency, learning, equity, inclusiveness and time schedule.
- *Proper understanding of all strategy stakeholders* – all those with a legitimate interest in the strategy and its results. In this context, it is important to clarify the number of stakeholders that should be involved in the participatory process and their concrete roles (see “breadth of participation” above).
- *Catalysts for participation:* NGOs, business associations, sub-national authorities, etc. in order to start the participation and to link the decisions to be taken centrally with those at the appropriate levels.
- *Phased approach:* It is important to design the participatory process in various phases, like: (i) Initiation phase – design of concept and framework conditions for participation, (ii) preparation phase – definition of objectives and process, organisational aspects (budget, time schedule, technical equipment, venue, etc), and (iii) implementation phase – responsibility of participants, rules of the process, presentation and implementation of results.
- *Specific activities or events:* This refers to the different types of participation or participatory mechanisms, e.g. internet consultation, workshops, round tables, committees, advisory groups, etc.
- *Adequate resources, skills and time:* Effective participation involves a number of crucial aspects like, e.g. access to information, capacities, budget for process and participants, time schedule, etc.
- *Learning environment:* Institutions and mechanisms that encourage, support, manage and reward participation in the development and implementation stage.
- *Implementation of results:* Stakeholders who participate need to know how their contributions, time and resources will impact on decisions, policy processes and strategies.

## PART 2

### Topic I: Participatory mechanisms in the context of NSDS processes

First, a **keynote presentation** will present various aspects of participation in the context of NSDS processes. Second, the workshop participants are invited to collect experiences, ideas and questions regarding four topics in the “**Crea**”-format. The “Crea”-method has the objective to create opportunities for exchange amongst larger groups of people within a relatively short time. A selected number of questions is used for brainstorming in different corners of a room with a facilitator writing down topics, ideas and questions of the participants. The participants move from one corner to the next to brainstorm on the different topics and to mix with other participants. This brainstorming session should stimulate discussions and the results will be further used in the workshop. The four topics are:

- *Linking top-down and bottom-up dynamics by participatory mechanisms:*
  - How best to link top-down (national) and bottom-up (stakeholders, sub-national) dynamics by participatory mechanisms?

- *Fostering decentralised mechanisms:*
  - How can sectoral, regional and local participatory mechanisms contribute to NSDS processes?
- *Achieving broad effects in society by using participatory mechanisms:*
  - How can participatory mechanisms achieve better understanding and commitment in society for NSDS objectives?
- *Applying results of participatory mechanisms in further development/implementation of NSDS:*
  - What are the major challenges to use the results of participatory mechanisms in the further development/implementation of NSDS?

## Topic II: Participatory mechanisms used in the preparation/revision of NSDS

We have selected **two case studies** for Topic II which will provide insights into the participatory mechanisms, stakeholder selection and involvement, use of results and overall experiences. Below please find a short description of the case studies.

### Finland: “Sustainable Development Strategy Group”

Finland's renewed NSDS was adopted in June 2006. For the consultation process, a broad multi-stakeholder “Sustainable Development Strategy Group” was established in 2005 by the National Commission on SD (NCSD). The group was chaired by the Under-Secretary from the Ministry of Finance and wise-chaired by senior officials from the Ministry of the Environment and Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. More than 20 stakeholder groups took part in the Sustainable Development Strategy Group. The members represented administration at national, regional and local levels, businesses, producers and entrepreneurs, labour unions, and environmental, development and youth organisations. For about 6 months, the stakeholders developed, together with the NSCD, an interim report published in January 2006 which was then discussed with the various government ministries and with the public via internet.

### UK: Participatory mechanisms for the preparation of the renewed NSDS 2005

For the development of the renewed NSDS 2005, a system of various participation mechanisms was developed in the UK, involving large stakeholder groups and the different political levels: At the national level, a large number of voluntary, private and public sector organisations were invited to take part in an online consultation process. In addition, a series of thematic seminars and workshops were held across the country. At the regional level, stakeholders discussed in “regional dialogues” issues which require action at both the national and regional levels. At least one dialogue was organised in each of the nine English regions. Other activities, varying between regions, included internet- and paper-based surveys, working breakfasts with key stakeholders, and workshops with key regional groups. At the local level, consultation packs were designed for and distributed to community groups, local authorities and Local Strategic Partnerships. These consultation packs were used by the local stakeholders for their responses in the consultation process. Additionally, training events were held across England for representatives of local authorities and community groups, offering individuals training as ‘facilitators’, while also seeking their responses to the consultation document.

### Questions for the working groups

The three working groups in Topic II should have a **general discussion** on the participatory mechanisms applied in the preparation of NSDSs. The case studies should provide an important input of practical examples. However, all working group participants should bring in their own experiences. The working group questions listed below aim to guide the discussions.

Each of the three working groups is asked to come up with **five statements** as a result of discussing the following questions:

1. What are the major objectives and benefits of applying a participatory process in NSDS preparation? Which participatory mechanisms best fit the requirements of preparing an NSDS?
2. How best to guarantee meaningful stakeholder involvement (i.e. selection, capacities, resources, time, etc)?
3. How can the results of the participatory mechanisms best be included in the preparation of an NSDS?

### Topic III: Participatory mechanisms used in the implementation and review of NSDS

Again, **two case studies** were selected for Topic III. Each will provide insights into the participatory mechanisms, stakeholder selection and involvement, use of results and overall experiences. Below please find a short description of the case studies.

#### Austria: Participatory Development of Indicator Set

The development process of topics and an indicator set for the “Monitoring SD in Austria – Indicators for SD” report was designed as a two-sphere-model participation process. The process started with a workshop that involved 45 participants to develop the main topics in the two areas “man/society” and “environment”. The further development took place in parallel processes. The indicator development process for the field “man/society” was participatory. Important contributions were collected through a written survey of about 500 stakeholders and interviews with about 50 scientists. The Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Water Management and Environment first selected suitable indicators and discussed them in two workshops with around 40 (of the 500) stakeholders. The result was a list of indicators and a reflection of main challenges of SD indicators. A folder with 10 headline indicators was being distributed to the wider stakeholder community.

#### Switzerland: Forum for Sustainable Development

The “Forum for SD” was established in 2001 with the aim of becoming the main platform for the implementation of SD policies. It was initiated by the Federal Office for Spatial Development, the

Conference of Construction, Planning and Environmental Directors, and the Association of Swiss Cities. Generally, the Forum supports the exchange of information and development of consolidated implementation projects between the national, regional and local levels. Moreover, the Forum fosters the further development of activities in relation to the NSDS on the level of regions and municipalities. It also supports partnerships between various actors. The forum organises meetings twice per year with representatives of the national, regional and local levels as well as different stakeholder groups. The last meeting was held in November 2007 on climate policy issues.

### Questions for the working groups

The three working groups in Topic III should have a **general discussion** on the participatory mechanisms applied in the implementation/review of NSDS.

Each of the three working groups is asked to come up with **five statements** as a result of discussing the following questions:

1. What are the different requirements for participatory processes in NSDS implementation compared to NSDS preparation?
2. What are the major differences, advantages and challenges between ad-hoc and institutionalised forms of participation? Which form fits best for what stage of the policy process?
3. How can the results of the participatory mechanisms best be included in NSDS implementation and how does this differ from NSDS preparation?

### References

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