

BRITISH VIRGIN ISLANDS COUNTRY REPORT ON NATIONAL SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

DEVELOPMENT PLANNING

Policy Framework:

The planning / policy framework in the British Virgin Islands is one that is built on the concept of integrated development planning. Integrated planning upholds the principle of sustainability since it necessitates that both the natural and human resources of the territory be considered and managed properly in the short and long-term. The planning framework is based on strategic analysis and positioning that requires that the territory be conscious of the future and all the issues and the associated pitfalls, as well as to deal with interrelated concerns simultaneously rather than sequentially.

It will require that situations be evaluated, options assessed, risks analyzed, and informed choices made. The thrust of this effort is embodied within our sustainable development strategy i.e. National Integrated Development Strategy (NIDS) which covers the long term, a medium term development strategy plan contained in the Speech from the Throne 2003 and short term plans are covered by Ministries' Strategic Plans.

Objectives:

The overarching goal of the development strategy is to improve the quality of life for British Virgin Islanders and this is expected to be achieved through interventions aimed at improving the standard of living and living conditions of society i.e. the development of a sound economy, ensuring an ecologically sustainable environment, achieving social integration, development of supportive social services, community development and good governance.

The promotion of a balanced, resilient and internationally competitive economy remains paramount so as to provide a stronger foundation or the attainment of sustainable development. The framework serves as a long term approach / guide to the development of medium and short

term strategies and plans; and ensures that there is balance between the various objectives thereby ensuring vulnerability.

With regards to the integration of priorities into the policy framework, this is being done mainly through the linking of strategies and policies found in current planning documents with the NIDS core objectives. The core objectives are:

- To reduce overall vulnerability
- To ensure balanced development
- To enhance human capital
- To ensure environmental sustainability
- To improve the physical infrastructure
- To maintain social cohesion
- To attain global competitiveness
- To promote global connectiveness
- To promote good governance
- To preserve cultural heritage
- To ensure meaningful participation of BVI Islanders in the affairs of the territory.

One example whereby strategy is linked to the overall objectives is via the short-term legislative agenda (2003 – 2007): The agenda is predicated on the following:

- The building a stronger economy through diversification into new areas such as mega yachting, electronic commerce, small business development.
- Improving social services and health care via the better management practices, prevention strategies, new facilities and the enactment of relevant legislation;
- Promoting good governance through greater transparency in financial management, public tendering, pensions management, integrity in public life, improved auditing and value for money, better relations with the UK and providing consumer protection.
- Developing a world class education system, investing in youth development, strengthening the legal framework, improving the curriculum, building of new and improved facilities, introducing programmes to integrate young persons into society and establishing a department of Youth and Sports Affairs.

- Sustaining the natural resources through strategic planning, prudent national parks management, promoting sustainable fisheries, improved livestock management and improved labour relations including the legal framework.
- Improving communications links and infrastructure including liberalisation of telecommunications, upgrading civil aviation management, enhancing port of entry security and safety and expansion of physical facilities, enhanced shipping regulations, marine services management, improve marine pollution management and improving road transport safety.

Institutional Arrangements:

BVI development planning involves extensive collaboration between the political administration and the central planning agencies. It is a function of both the Executive and Legislative divisions of government with the more technical responsibilities lying with the central planning agencies and the line ministries of the Government. Executive and Legislative Councils approve the public sector expenditure while the ministries are supposed to develop and coordinate strategies as well as prepare the corresponding programmes and measures. In the case of the NIDS framework which is concerned with the implementation of sustainable developing activities, ministries are responsible for developing priority areas (as they relate to their respective areas) and ensuring that programmes and initiatives fall within established national objectives.

While there is no active national council dedicated specifically to sustainable development, the Development Planning Unit (DPU), plays a coordinating role on matters and issues pertaining to NIDS. In addition to its function of assessing and providing information on the macro-economic status of the territory, the Unit also assists with the monitoring and review of the implementation of development strategies. Additionally, the Project Cycle Management Unit (PCMU) of the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development has been established specifically for the purposes of assisting with the review of projects i.e. implementation of the Public Sector Investment Programme, this includes the monitoring of the physical progress. PCMU also provides technical assistance to ministries on the preparation of project documentation as well as assisting said ministries and departments with meeting the requirements of loans and grants of financial institutions. Finally, public consultation is also an

important component in the planning approach; and over the years several methods have been employed to facilitate this. The more common being the use of print media, radio, “call-in” shows and town-meetings.

Participatory Decision-making

The process leading up to the development of the NIDS is a good example of decision-making using consultation in implementing sustainable development. With technical assistance from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) the process required an integrated and collaborative effort, involving consensus between Government, the private sector and civil society at several levels. First an overall coordinating group i.e. management team comprised of ministers and senior technical persons (Heads of Development Planning, Town and Country Planning and Social Development units / departments) was established to provide policy guidance and direction. A technical working group i.e. the Integrated Planning Committee was established and this group was comprised not only of representatives of government agencies but also of the private sector and non-governmental organisations. Their function was to develop the framework and methodology through which the strategy would emerge. Additionally other committees and other working groups were established to inform the development of the strategy. The following describes the sequence of the key components of the overall process:

- Development of the conceptual framework and methodology
- Data Review
- Data Analysis
- Compilation of existing policies and proposals
- Public Consultation
- Preparation of the plan and strategy

Public consultation played a pivotal role in the development of the strategy as this where the viewpoints of the public at large was incorporated into the process. Consultation was mainly carried out through the media both print and visual. Town meetings were also conducted in major districts. A more recent example of the implementation of consultation and participatory processes in national decision-making comes via one of the BVI Governments undertaking of the creation of a new National Physical Development Plan. The purpose of the Plan is to establish

the priorities with regards to the physical makeup and development of the territory particularly with respect to the use of land. Since the integrated approach is being utilised, economic, social and environmental issues will also be considered and incorporated into the overall development of the plan. The Town and Country Planning Department is the lead agency in this effort and is supported by other planning agencies namely the Development Planning Unit, Social Development Department and the Conservation and Fisheries Department. Although Government is a major stakeholder in this initiative the planning process involves the use of public consultation with civil society as well as the general public so as to garner input on issues that affect BVI Islanders i.e. issues that relate to physical planning as well as other areas of development.

The consultative or participatory process is one that is being utilised on an increasing basis; and is regarded as a key component in informing the creation of the national strategy and plan and as such ensures that the needs and aspirations of BVI Islanders are kept in the forefront of the development process.

Further Requirements / Actions needed:

In order to facilitate the further integration of environmental, social and economic issues, first a central coordinating mechanism needs to be put in place so as to improve cross-sectoral cooperation and collaboration. Secondly, there needs to be a culture of decision-making that is based on evidence (quantitative and qualitative). This will require political and even a philosophical commitment to utilising research and analysis of issues and also to the strengthening participatory processes i.e. public consultation in planning and decision-making. The implementation of these actions will inform decision-making and will result in policy and measures that are pro-active or relevant to the situation or groups they will affect.

Future Plans

The strategic vision emanating from the NIDS consultative process and as such the thrust of development in the territory is that the BVI will develop into a society that is globally competitive and socially cohesive and able to equitably satisfy the basic needs of its people within an environment that upholds the principles of human rights, good governance while seeking to manage its natural and human resources in a sustainable manner, one that

generates self-confidence among its people while simultaneously maintaining its unique cultural identity. The over-riding theme in the development strategy is the reduction of vulnerability i.e. economic, social and physical. Given the changing global context particularly in view of the events of September 11, 2001 and the ensuing war on terrorism, more emphasis needs to be placed on safety and security issues. Particularly in view of the fact that the territory is aspiring towards high-end tourism. Safety and security issues which in the past have tended to be only limited to disaster management, will need to be fully incorporated into the planning framework and as such become a priority issue in the sustainable development strategy. It is hoped that the planning system with its various components will be established, and that the Sustainable Development Council, the Project and Planning Advisory Committee (PPRAC), the Business Forum and other consultative mechanisms will be re-activated.

DEVELOPMENT INDICATORS

Programmes and Initiatives

BVI Government has established parallel systems of indicators to monitor sustainable development in the territory. Indicators on social development, environmental, spatial and economic planning are regularly collected and used to inform policy development. In the case of the economic indicators the DPU disseminated internally via the preparation of quarterly reports to Executive Council as well as external dissemination via publication of monthly statistical bulletins and posting of information on world-wide web.

Institutional Arrangements

At the national levels there are some institutional arrangements that promote the use of indicators. The Physical Development Plan which is currently being developed incorporates several indicators which refer to both current and future aspects of spatial planning and development. In 2003 the introduction and use of strategic planning utilises specific indicators to point out key areas of performance and achievement at the ministerial level. There are also arrangements within the decision-making that facilitate a more informed process such as the requirement that papers, particularly subject papers being submitted to Executive Council receive input / comment from relevant Ministry personnel. With respect to obstacles to success, the

disjointed approach towards decision-making i.e. isolated planning is still very much present and policy making in the absence of supporting data continues to be the norm. Ministries policies, national budgets and strategies are being developed without the benefit of hard data. There is a need to create and promote a culture of planning and decision-making that incorporates coordination and cooperation across ministry and department in an integrated way rather than one that shows limited interest in indicators on the part of decision-makers because of their potential to reveal bad policies and results.

Development Indicators – Status

While indicators for sustainable development have not been developed per se, NIDS indicators have been developed for monitoring of the performance of productive and service sectors in the economy, business and enterprise development, disaster management, environmental management and social development.

The benchmarks for NIDS have been set and currently monthly indicators are being collected and used to inform policy and decision-making in several areas. For example, collection of information tourist arrivals and expenditure to inform the development of a tourism policy or collection of information on International Business Company registrations to inform the development of financial services policy. Other areas include but are not limited to education particularly as it relates to the construction of schools and health policy, and environmental policy as per the current undertaking of the formation of a National Environmental Action Plan.

Further Requirements / Actions needed:

In order for national programmes on sustainable development to be successful or in the case of the BVI the full implementation of NIDS will require on the part of the Government more financial resources this includes greater investment in the training and recruitment of staff and other personnel. There also needs to be more work done in the area of developing supporting legislation particularly in the case of collection of raw data for the development of indicators i.e. a Statistical Act needs to be in place. Finally as stated earlier more emphasis developing coordinating mechanisms, particularly as it relates to planning and implementation of the NIDS or the implementation of the Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP).

Conclusion:

There are a number of factors that have contributed to the success of the approach taken towards sustainable development in the BVI. First, the use of public participation and the willingness of the populace to cooperate in the planning process as well as their desire for better (more informed) long-term planning has been a significant factor. Secondly, Government commitment to the concept of integrated development planning as well as sustainable development on the whole remains steadfast, and this is further evidenced by the resources (both human and financial) that have been made available for the pursuit of this end. Finally the BVI has also been adept in researching and adopting proven and appropriate policies used by other countries and international community.

The overarching concern and critical factor to the entire process of sustainable development planning is the current attitude or culture of planning. Although the NIDS approach represents a step in the direction, it is still at best remains an aspiration. Greater emphasis needs to be placed on approaching decision-making and policy planning in an integrated manner. There is an overall lack of coordination and cooperation between ministries and departments, civil society and the public. Also decision-making needs to be based on facts and / or evidence as such the implementation and even appreciation of indicators in planning process remains very much a critical issue.