

Capacity-Building Courses for Integrating Sustainable Development into Policy Planning and Implementation

László Pintér, Ph.D.

Gabriel A. Huppé

1.0 Introduction

Turning sustainable development from concept into practice has always presented organizations with capacity challenges, and continues to do so. The reasons are not difficult to see. Even though sustainable development was introduced more than two decades ago as a central aspiration for societies, the easy way for many governmental and other organizations to function is according to time-tested models that are unable to cope with the consequences of unsustainability. Often, they directly drive it.

Good intentions are not enough to change this situation. Organizations have to be enabled to act according to the logic of sustainability as the correct and feasible thing to do. The goal of capacity building is to create the conditions for this to happen. In addition to the all-important political will and mindset change of the voting public, the necessary knowledge, expertise and skills, technical capability, organizational acumen, and not the least, resources, must be at the disposal of those best positioned to act.

Creating capacity for sustainable development planning and strategic management requires real effort and investment. It requires a nuanced understanding of needs and often tailor-made solutions that build on capacity that already exists while identifying and adding what is missing, and helping to reorganize according to the unique context of any given organization. Capacity gaps and needs can span the entire management cycle, from diagnosing sustainability problems to envisioning alternative future outcomes, creating and implementing transition pathways, monitoring progress and adapting based on what has been learned.

Countries will need to translate the new Post-2015 Development Agenda and related sustainable development goals to their own context and start implementing them to enhance the relevance of capacity building and training programs. Increasingly, science argues that staying on the current development path is unsustainable and exceedingly costly (e.g., the

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's *Fifth Assessment Report*).¹ However, alternatives are available in the forms of technologies, policy options and knowledge tools that can help bring about the transition to a new model of development that is not only feasible, but desirable.

The **objectives of this review** are to assess the current status of capacity-building efforts by international organizations on sustainable development planning and implementation. In particular, it covers the types of courses that are being provided, the distribution of these courses, and notable trends and gaps.

2.0 The Approach

A total of 24 organizations were included in this review, representing the following categories: United Nations agencies, development banks, development agencies, regional commissions and institutes (see a full list of attending organizations in Box 1). Courses and trainings were collected based on the websites of reviewed organizations. In a first screening, courses were independently assessed according to whether they addressed common issues or themes in sustainable development. These courses were then organized under two categories:

- **Category 1: Courses focusing directly on sustainable development planning** are explicitly based on a broad policy framework (e.g., sustainable development, resilience, green economy) and linked to the policy planning cycle. These also include courses providing a high-level theme-based integrative lens.
- **Category 2: Courses focusing on themes, tools and methodologies** cover narrower themes, tools or methodologies focused on the integration of sustainable development issues into specialized policy areas.

Courses that did not belong to these two categories were screened out. These courses either covered a specific tool without an integrated environmental or social development perspective, or were too narrow in thematic or methodological scope. These include courses, for example, on conflict, peace building, capital markets, financial governance and natural disasters.

Only courses scheduled during the years 2013–2014 (as of April 1, 2014) were included in this review. It is important to note that more courses were likely to have been offered by these organizations that were not identified by our review, which was limited to organizational websites.

¹ IPCC, 2014: Summary for policymakers. In O. Edenhofer, R. Pichs-Madruga, Y. Sokona, E. Farahani, S. Kadner, K. Seyboth et al. (Eds.), *Climate change 2014: Mitigation of climate change. Contribution of Working Group III to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press.

BOX 1: ORGANIZATIONS SELECTED FOR THIS REVIEW

United Nations

- UN Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR)
- UN Development Programme (UNDP)
- UN Environment Programme (UNEP)
- UN Office for Sustainable Development (UNOSD)

Development Banks

- African Development Bank (AfDB)
- Asian Development Bank (ADB)
- European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD)

Development Agencies

- U.S. Agency for International Development (US AID)
- Danish International Development Agency (Danida)
- Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA)
- Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad)
- Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ)

Regional Commissions

- UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UN ESCWA)
- UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN ESCAP)
- Economic Community Of West African States (ECOWAS)

Institutes

- World Bank Institute (WBI)
- World Resources Institute (WRI)
- International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED)
- Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI)
- Institut du développement durable et des relations internationales (IDDRI)
- The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI)
- Institute for Global Environmental Strategies (IGES)
- Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF)

3.0 Current Status

In total, over 1,500 courses were reviewed. To illustrate the distribution of courses, consider Figure 1, which represents Category 1 and Category 2 courses being offered in 2014 (as of April 1, 2014). Fifty-three courses were classified under Category 1 while 137 courses were classified under Category 2. Category 1 courses were composed of two types of courses: those on broad policy frameworks and those on theme-based integrated frameworks. Category 2 courses were composed of two additional types of courses: those on narrower sustainable development themes and those on tools and methodologies.

Category 1: Courses focusing directly on sustainable development planning

Of the 53 courses classified under Category 1, about half were based on broad policy frameworks and half on theme-based policy frameworks. UNITAR, Danida, GIZ, ASEF and UNOSD were among the top five international organizations providing courses based on broad policy frameworks, while organizations like TERI and WBI tended to offer courses on theme-based integrated frameworks.

Category 2: Courses focusing on themes, tools and methodologies

Of the 137 courses classified under Category 2, about four fifths were based on narrow themes, and the rest were based on tools and methodologies. WBI, Danida, SIDA, GIZ and UNEP were among the top five international organizations providing theme courses, while organizations like UNDP, WBI and Danida offered the most tools and methodologies courses.

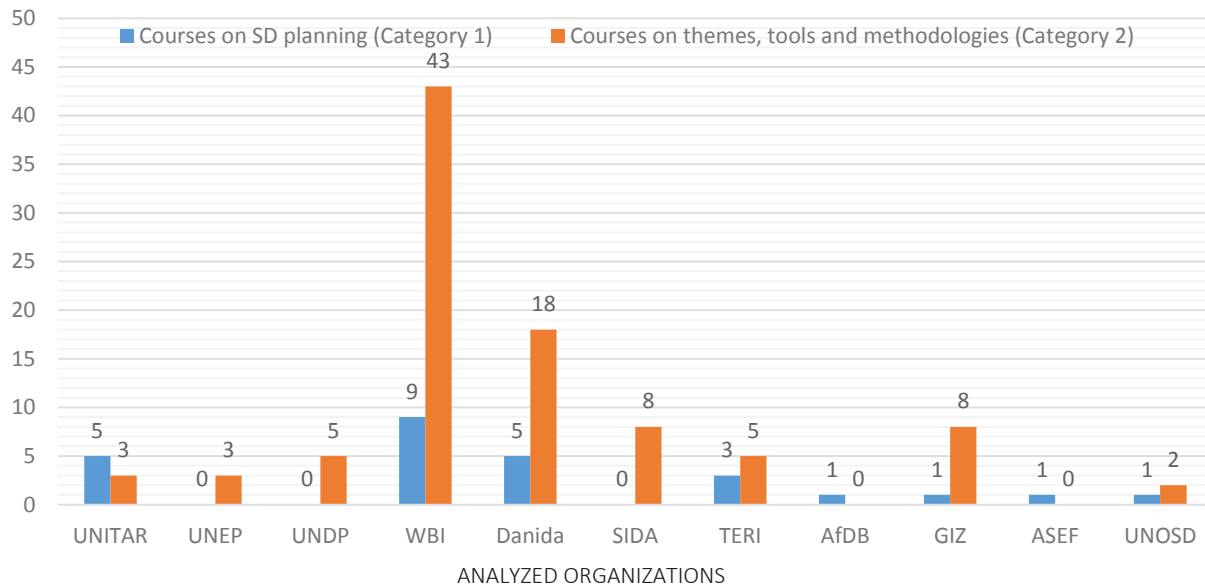


FIGURE 1. OVERVIEW OF COURSES OFFERED IN 2014 BY THE SELECTED CATEGORIES IN THE ANALYZED ORGANIZATIONS.

BOX 2: SAMPLE COURSES

Category 1: Courses focusing directly on sustainable development planning

Broad policy framework course examples:

- Sustainable Development: Idea, Process and Goal (UNITAR)
- Policy Instruments for Low Emissions Development: From Design to Implementation (WBI)
- Meeting the Millennium Development Goals: Results-Based Management for Sustainable Development (Danida)
- Integrated Sustainable Coastal Development (SIDA)
- Inclusive Growth Policies (AfDB)
- Greening the Growth (WBI)
- Green Growth and Sustainable Development Goals - A Development Agenda for Post-2015 (ASEF)

Theme-based integrated framework course examples:

- Training Course on Designing and Implementing Solar Energy based Livelihood Projects for Rural Communities (TERI)
- Trade, Energy and Climate Change (UNITAR)
- Advocacy Training Workshop for LDCs in Achieving MDGs as Part of the Implementation of the Istanbul Programme of Action (UN ESCAP)
- Energy Sector Strategies to Support Green Growth (WBI)
- The Climate Change and Rural Development Nexus (GIZ)
- International Symposium on Sustainable Cities: Empowering Local Governments through Capacity Building and Knowledge Sharing (UNOSD)

Category 2: Courses focusing on theme, tools and methodologies

Themes course examples:

- Governance of Extractive Industries (UNITAR)
- Sustainable Communities Course (UNEP)
- Economics of Climate-Resilient Development (WBI)
- Green Energy and Carbon Markets (Danida)
- Organic Agriculture and Products in Development Countries (Danida)
- Efficient Energy Use and Planning (SIDA)
- Regional Workshop on Eco-Industrial Clusters (ADB)

Tools and methodologies course examples:

- TRACE: How to Use the Tool for Rapid Assessment of City Energy (WBI)
- Designing and Implementing Successful Water Supply and Sanitation Utility Reform (WBI)
- Environmental Mainstreaming (Danida)
- Procurement Strategy Development (UNDP)
- Low Carbon Development: Planning & Modelling (WBI)
- NAMA-Training (GIZ)

4.0 Trends, Gaps and the Way Forward

Besides the work on monitoring frameworks and indicators carried out by the United Nations Statistical Commission and the United Nations Statistical Division, several other initiatives are under way that already produced or aim to produce guidance and concrete proposals for monitoring, measurement and reporting progress towards the future sustainable development goals (SDGs). As an illustrative list, Table 1 shows some of the key initiatives.

TABLE 1: TOTAL NUMBER OF COURSES BY ORGANIZATION TYPE (2013-2014)

	CATEGORY 1	CATEGORY 2
United Nations Agencies	15	14
Development Banks	1	1
Development Agencies	20	73
Regional Commissions	1	0
Institutes	16	49

This review has found a significant number of courses in which sustainable development is integrated into current issues and topics like green economy, climate change and climate-resilient development. However, on the whole, relatively few courses (less than 4 per cent of courses reviewed) focused directly on sustainable development policy and planning. This is a remarkable gap, especially because international organizations selected for this review are

among the world leaders in sustainable development education. It should also be noted that a large number of courses dealing with budgeting, procurement, financial issues and parliamentary processes were identified, and that these could be relevant for sustainable development planning and implementation but lacked a sustainable development perspective or focus. This dimension could be added to those existing courses. In addition, some courses were relevant to sustainable development and potentially interesting topics for policy-makers, but targeted to private sector actors (e.g., WRI, EBRD), and thus not directly linked to policy planning and other qualifying criteria.

The relative lack of courses where the sustainable development perspective is accompanied by specific planning and management tools represents a significant gap. Considering that sustainable development goals will cover a wider range of issues and new targets, implementing them will require the involvement of more actors whose active participation will be needed, but who do not necessarily have prior experience with sustainable development. Likewise, organizations normally responsible for sustainable development policies would face a more complex landscape of issues and policy needs than before. Capacity-building courses that bring together the broader strategic framework of sustainable development and integrated planning with mainstream policy tools will be needed. The elements of these courses already exist, but they are in bits and pieces that should be brought together around the themes of the Post-2015 Development Agenda and the eventual SDGs.

5.0 Recommendations

To conclude, capacity building will be crucial for ensuring that necessary means are available to implement global and country-specific provisions of SDGs. Capacity building will need to retain the broad systemic perspective of sustainable development, but will also need to help people turn it into the practice of integrated planning, budgeting, monitoring and valuation and all the other methods and tools of governance and management. The balance between comprehensiveness and specificity needs to be achieved.

Effective capacity building does not easily happen—it needs a careful assessment and joint agreements on needs between those who require and who support and deliver capacity building. It will require adjusting existing and developing new tools and methods, and building on the results that will emerge from SDG processes at the global and national levels. Capacity building will require a learning approach and learning together that is one of the fundamental promises of networks like SDplanNet.

We offer the following recommendations on ways forward, recognizing that implementing them will benefit from developing a multi-year work program in collaboration with network members and partners to secure resources for a robust capacity-building effort:

- Monitor the results of the global process to define sustainable development goals and discuss their relevance with network members to understand implementation challenges and related capacity needs.
- Design new targeted courses for government policy-makers and other key stakeholders for implementing and monitoring sustainable development strategies in direct response to the articulated needs.
- Mainstream sustainable development into sectoral courses, working to the extent possible with current course offerings.
- Monitor SDG implementation efforts and provide a platform for sharing experiences and best practices and to facilitate learning (e.g., through peer reviews).

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Contact:

INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (IISD)

75 Albert Street, Suite 903, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada K1P 5E7

INSTITUTE FOR GLOBAL ENVIRONMENTAL STRATEGIES (IGES)

IGES Regional Centre, 604 SG Tower, 6th Floor, 161/1 Soi Mahadlek Luang 3, Rajdamri Road, Patumwan, Bangkok 10330, Thailand

Email

info@SDplanNet.org

About SDplanNet

SDplanNet is a sustainable development planning network created to help government professionals at the national and sub-national levels share good practices and build capacity in the preparation and implementation of strategies for sustainable development or development plans that incorporate sustainable development principles.

SDplanNet is administered by the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD), the Institute for Global Environmental Strategies (IGES), the Africa Technology Policy Studies Network and is sponsored in its current phase by Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH on behalf of German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ).

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