

**THE EUROPEAN UNION AND THE EXTERNAL DIMENSION OF
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: AMBITIOUS PROMISES BUT
UNCERTAIN OUTCOMES?**

by

Camilla Opoku and Andrew Jordan

Centre for Social and Economic Research on the Global Environment (CSERGE), School of
Environmental Sciences, University of East Anglia, Norwich NR4 7TJ, UK.

Contact: c.opoku@uea.ac.uk.

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ABSTRACT

Sustainable development is now a fundamental goal of the European Union (EU). In its 2001 Sustainable Development Strategy, the EU itself recognises that sustainable development includes both the simultaneous pursuit of social, environmental and economic objectives within the Union, but also takes into account the effect of EU policies (e.g. the Common Agricultural Policy) on the ability of other countries to develop sustainably, especially those in the developing world. After all, if sustainable development within the EU involves ‘exporting’ problems to other areas then, by definition, it is not genuinely sustainable in an intra- or inter-generational sense. This link between the so called ‘external’ and ‘internal’ dimensions of sustainability represents an ambitious policy objective and sets the EU apart from other broadly comparable political entities such as the US. However, until recently, it has received little political or scholarly attention. This paper examines how the EU has interpreted and operationalised its commitment to sustainable development focusing on the development of the ‘external dimension’. It traces the historical evolution of the EU’s thinking in this area and identifies a number of underlying drivers behind the emergence of the ‘external’ dimension. The importance of the EU’s relationship, both explicit and implicit, with developing countries is then discussed by examining key policy statements and strategies, as well as the main implementing mechanisms such as the Cardiff process, the Sustainable Development Strategy and new Impact Assessment regime. This analysis reveals that the EU’s interpretation of sustainable development has, until recently, mostly focused on its environmental and internal dimensions. Thus far, progress towards addressing the external dimension, which (in the case of the poorest nations) often has more to do with the social and economic pillars of sustainability than the environmental ones, has been slow and partial and somewhat disparate from the Union’s development agenda.

1. INTRODUCTION

Sustainable development is now a fundamental goal of the European Union (EU) (Jordan, 2005). However, while the famously ambiguous nature of the concept of sustainable development (Rist 1997; Riordan and Voisey 1997) allows it to be used as a “metafix” uniting

everyone (Lele 1991, 613), its interpretation at the level of specific policies is highly contested (Jacobs 1999). What exactly should be involved in the pursuit of the ambitious goal of sustainable development is necessarily based on normative assumptions and value judgments which are rarely examined (Faucheux *et al* 1996). Thus, “the notion of sustainability often appears as a ‘black-box’ which may have different significance and practical implications from one person or group to another” (Faucheux *et al* 1996, 2). Crucially, developing countries have been portrayed as interpreting sustainable development with an emphasis on intra-generational equity (i.e. the needs of the present, often social and economic) where as industrialized countries treat it as simply an environmental concept (Jacobs 1999; Carter 2001; Sachs 1999; Bhaskar and Glyn 1995) placing the emphasis on intergenerational equity (i.e. the needs of future generations).

The EU has a positive track record of attempting to address internal environmental issues (if not in actually achieving satisfactory outcomes) such as pollution and biodiversity loss, as well as problems such as climate change and ozone depletion that have truly global consequences (Coffey and Baldock, 2003; Jordan, 2005). However, there is a third facet of sustainable policy making (in this paper referred to as the external dimension), where internal EU policies (e.g. the Common Agricultural policy or the Common Fisheries Policy) have impacts on countries outside the EU (Oxfam, 2002; Borrel and Hubbard, 2000; Sporrang *et al.* 2002; Kaczynski and Fluharty, 2002; WWF, 2003) that, until recently, has received much less political and scholarly attention. It is clear, however, that the two are closely linked: if sustainable development within the EU involves ‘exporting’ problems to other areas then, by definition, can it be genuinely sustainable in an intra- or inter-generational sense? This line of thinking was certainly evident in comments made by the former EU Environment Commissioner, Margot Wallstrom (2003), when she warned that “our credibility will suffer if unsustainable trends [in the EU] persist, or if our policies have detrimental impacts outside the EU, in particular on the development opportunities of the poorest countries.”

Any such ‘detrimental impacts’ could, one might imagine, easily conflict with the EU’s development policy and with various ambitious promises (e.g. to integrate developing countries into the world economy and halve extreme poverty in the world by 2015), that the

EU has recently made under the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation and in its own Sustainable Development Strategy (COM (2002) 264) and related documents (e.g. COM (2003) 82). In fact, these ‘detrimental impacts’ of its internal policies threaten to undermine the EU’s claim that it is “well placed to assume a leading role in the pursuit of global sustainable development” (COM (2001) 264, 6). The EU Sustainable Development Strategy recognises the obligation of the EU to broaden its pursuit of sustainable development and demands that all EU policies “must actively support efforts by other countries – particularly those in the developing world – to achieve development that is more sustainable” (COM (2001) 264, 9). This link between the external and the internal dimensions of sustainability is a hugely ambitious policy objective, which sets the EU apart from other broadly comparable political entities such as the US (Vogel, 2005) as well as many member states.

There is an emerging literature on what the EU has done to address the sustainability challenge within its own borders (Baker *et al.* 1997a; Jordan and O’Riordan, 2004; Lafferty, 2004), or through linked initiatives such as those concerning environmental policy integration (Lenschow, 2002a; Jordan and Schout, 2006; Jordan *et al.* 2006). Other scholars have also begun to document the EU’s input to sustainability policy making at the international level (Burchill and Lightfoot, 2004; Oberthur, 1999; Sbragia, 2002). However, the literature on the outside or ‘external’ dimensions of sustainability remains rather sparse (but see, Coffey and Baldock (2003), and Amalric and Stocchetti (2001)). This paper attempts to examine how the EU has addressed this third ‘external dimension’ in its pursuit of sustainable development, particularly in its coordination of internal policies. This aspect of the EU’s pursuit of sustainable development is crucial because without it the EU risks not only exporting its own sustainability issues to countries outside its borders but also undermining its own leadership role in the pursuit of sustainable development at the international level.

The next section of this paper examines how the EU has in general interpreted and operationalised its commitment to sustainable development revealing a primarily environmental outlook with little consideration of the external dimension. Section three sets out why this omission in the EU’s interpretation is so important by briefly outlining the strong and historic relationship between many developing countries and the EU. This

section particularly focuses on the significant influence that the EU has on the sustainable development of many developing countries through some of its internal policies, such as the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), and also on some of the EU's commitments to the sustainable development of developing countries through its international agreements its development policy. Section four goes on to examine the EU's main sustainable development implementation mechanisms to see the extent of its consideration of the external dimension in practice. Section five gauges the progress so far and arrives at an overall conclusion as to whether the EU is likely at present to be able to achieve positive outcomes to its ambitious promises on global sustainable development.

2. THE EU'S INTERPRETATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The EU has adopted the Brundtland definition of sustainable development¹ either in full e.g. in its Sustainable Development Strategy (but outside of the main text) (e.g. (COM (2001) 264)), or more usually implicitly (e.g. (COM (2002) 82)). Within this understanding of sustainable development, the EU's conception of sustainable development focuses on inter-generational equity (i.e. the environment), mainly operationalised through the integration of the environment into other policies spheres, a process known as environmental policy integration (EPI).

EPI was one of the operational principles of sustainable development advocated by the Brundtland report:

“Those responsible for managing natural resources and protecting the environment are institutionally separate from those responsible for managing the economy. The real world of interlocked economic and ecological systems will not change; the policies and institutions concerned must” (WCED 1987, 310).

Although EPI does not itself constitute sustainable development, as it only addresses the environmental pillar (as opposed to the economic and social pillars), it is an “indispensable part of the concept of sustainable development” (Lafferty and Hovenden

¹ The Brundtland Report defines sustainable development as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to their own needs” (WCED 1987, 43).

2003, 2). The Directorate General (DG) of Environment in the EU Commission was increasingly realising that environmental regulation on its own was not enough to ensure good environmental quality. Therefore, as the concept of sustainable development gained acceptance in the late 1980s and 1990s, DG Environment was able to use it to propel its environmental message beyond its own departmental boundaries through this concept of EPI (Jordan and Schout 2006). This pushed EPI from merely a principle being championed by DG Environment in successive Environmental Actions Plans to a concept which entailed action from all sectors within the EU. In this way, EPI became the primary operating principle of sustainable development in the EU and both concepts received an increasingly central role in the EU's *acquis* (Lenschow 2002b, 21) and in practice through mechanisms such as the Cardiff process. (This process started in 1998 and called for nine councils of the EU prepare a strategy to integrate the environment into their sectors.)

The emphasis on the environmental pillar was “justified on the basis that environmental concerns have persistently been underplayed in other policies, despite the fact that long-term social and economic development depends on a functioning environment” (EEA 2004). However, by the late 1990s and early 2000s recognition that the implementation of sustainable development requires broader consideration than just environmental factors was beginning to take root. This can especially be seen in recent sustainable development coordinating mechanisms such as the Sustainable Development Strategy (COM (2001) 264) adopted in 2001 in time for the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002 and also the new Impact Assessment regime which was introduced in 2003 as a policy appraisal mechanisms to identify the likely positive and negative impacts of all major Commission policy proposals.

Although the EPI debate and practices continued, the EU's use of the concept of sustainable development began to merge with the trends in the common understanding of the concept post-Brundtland. In particular it calls for the ‘balancing’ or integration of the three pillars of sustainable development. For example a related document to the Sustainable Development Strategy states that:

“sustainable development must strike a balance between the economic, social and environmental objectives of society, in order to maximise well-being in the present, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs” (COM(2002)82, 3).

Although the integration of these three pillars was implicit in the Brundtland definition of sustainable development this interpretation mainly became popular in the mid 1990 after first being formally formulated in the UN conference in Rio in 1992 (COWI, 2004). By emphasising the three pillars the EU is trying to offer a vision that “sustainable development more than a purely environmental concept” poses a fundamental challenge to the economy and society (SEC (2001) 517). When this broader image of sustainable development was merged with EPI, in some instances, it was not always clear if the purpose of an integration exercise was to integrate the environment into policies as a contribution to sustainable development or to integrate this broader remit of integrating the three pillars of sustainable development considerations into policies (Fergusson *et al* 2001).

The adoption of both the Brundtland definition and the emphasis on the three pillars of sustainable development has policy significance. Baker *et al* (1997, 28-29) suggests that the adoption of the Brundtland definition allows:

“The EU as a whole to commit itself to the reconciliation of economic and environmental interests, while at the same time allowing member-states as well as individual DGs within the Commission a great deal of latitude with respect to their choice of policy options to put this commitment into practice” (Baker et al 1997, 28-29).

At the same time the three pillar interpretation of sustainable development also leaves significant scope for flexibility in interpretations of what counts as sustainable development. While many documents speak of “difficult trade-offs” between the three pillars (COM(2001) 264, 4) and that the three pillars should be “balanced”, there are no instructions on how this should be done (COWI, 2004). Therefore, how this balance is handled where the three pillars are conflicting is a political act dependent on the

preferences of the actors (*ibid*). It is not surprising then that it has been found that when ‘balancing’ the three pillars, DG Environment tended to focus mostly on environmental issues where as DG Agriculture tended to focus more on issues related to the other two pillars, as this reflects the natural sectoral focus of the two DGs (*ibid*). In general, the same report found that economic concerns were the most prominent issue in these balancing acts (*ibid*). Environmental concerns were often found to be integrated as a constraint or a harm to be minimised (*ibid*).

Despite this emphasis on integrating the three pillars of sustainable development, in practice it is still seen as mostly an environmental concept in the EU championed by DG Environment. Within the Commission there is “a widespread belief that the promotion of sustainable development is the business of those who deal with the environment” (CEC 1994a in Baker 2000). Sustainable development has even been seen by some officials in the Commission as a “Trojan horse” for the environment as a way of getting other sectors to take on the environmental agenda (Dalal-Clayton 2004, 6). This lack of understanding in practice of the broad nature of the concept of sustainable development is graphically illustrated in the Goteborg European Council Conclusions in June 2001: “The European Council agrees a strategy for sustainable development which completes the Union’s political commitment to economic and social renewal, adds a third, environmental dimension to the Lisbon strategy and establishes a new approach to policy making” (EC 2001). In this phrasing it appears that the Sustainable Development Strategy is an environmental add-on to another (economic) strategy rather than a broad three pillared approach.

While the EU’s interpretation of sustainable development within its own borders maybe narrow, it does extend its interest in the environment and sustainable development to a geographically wide area. Since the early 1990s, has identified international environmental leadership as important and so has sought to “carry the sustainable development flag in the international scene” (Baldock 2003, 7). This followed a European Council stipulation in 1990 that the Community should “exploit to the full its moral, economic and political authority” in order to accelerate international efforts to

solve global problems, to promote sustainable development and respect for the global commons (EC 1990). By doing this the EU would “strengthen its normative international base and shape the concept of sustainability in a manner reflecting its own aims and objectives” (Lightfoot and Burchill 2004, 338). The fifth Environmental Action Plan produced by DG Environment particularly called for the strengthening of the international role of the Community and the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio gave the Community the opportunity to put this leadership into action, particularly since the US gave the environment a low priority (Baker 2000,308). The Community saw that it had a particular role in environmental diplomacy acting as ‘broker’ in the formulation of international environmental agreements and also as a bridge between the developed countries and the developing world so favouring “the emergence of new alliances between industrialized and developing countries” (CEC 1996d:110). This leadership role continued in the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002 where the EU saw that it had “a responsibility to show leadership throughout the preparations for the 2002 Summit and at the conference itself “ (COM(2001)53, 2). However, the agenda in Johannesburg raised many problems for the EU because it reflected (much more than Rio) the broader, multi-sectoral demands of sustainable development, which raised challenges encompassing issues beyond the usual parameters of environmental policy (Lightfoot and Burchill 2004).

It is this broader perspective of sustainable development that raises important questions regarding the ability of the EU to effectively champion sustainable development (Lightfoot and Burchell 2004). Significantly, although the EU has adopted a Brundtland understanding of sustainable development, it has not fully embraced Brundtland’s intra-generational equity message of the needs of the present. This is especially true when the needs of the present may refer to the needs of people in countries outside the EU, i.e the external dimension. While the EU struggles between DG Environment pushing for EPI and other sectors defend them selves from this perceived threat of encroaching environmentalism the crucial external dimension of sustainable development has been largely neglected in the sustainable development debate. Instead international development, until very recently, has remained somewhat separate from the EU’s

understanding of sustainable development which has, in general, been championed by DG Environment rather than DG Development. Only in the new millennium has the global agenda been given any prominence and much of this has appears to be the response to a global development agenda, in particular the changing development emphasis of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD).

However, this separation between sustainable development agenda and that of international development is less defined than the EU's interpretation of sustainable development would imply. Since countries and sectors are inter-dependent on other parts of the earth for resources or markets sustainable development should to be viewed in a global context (Coffey and Baldock 2003). The next section briefly sets out how the strong influence that the EU has on the sustainable development of developing countries makes this neglected external dimension so important.

3. THE EU'S RELATIONSHIP WITH DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

The EU's Traditional Relationship with Developing Countries

The EU has many profound and historic influence on sustainable development beyond its borders, and in particular in developing countries. EU is a major global actor both economically and politically. It is the largest trading block in the world taking up 38% of world exports, producing 36% of the world's GDP and financing 51% of the World's Foreign Direct Investment (Amalric and Stocchetti 2001, 13). The EU is also extremely influential in global governance institutions such as the WTO where it holds 27% of the votes on the board and is the main financier of key policies and programmes and the UN where it is also the main financial contributor (Amalric and Stocchetti 2001, 13).

The relationship between the EU and developing countries in particular is also an extremely significant one based on historical ties and continued today through external policies such as trade and development assistance. In fact, The European Community's development policy is one of its first common policies (Lister 1997). Its origins date back to the creation of the European Economic Community in 1957 (Koutrakou 2004) when France wanted to protect its special relationship with its colonial territories

(Holland 2002,26). Today, the EU, together with its member states, is the largest aid donor in the world, providing 55 % of global Official Development Assistance to patch work of countries (COM(2000)212). The most significant aid relationship exists with the former colonial African Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) states, originally through the Lome Conventions and now the Cotonou Agreement. However, in addition, EU relations also incorporate Latin America, China, India, most of Asia and North Africa in a number of regional cooperation agreements. Perhaps as a consequence of these historical ties, the strength of the relationship between the EU and developing countries sets the EU apart from other developed regions and countries.

The EU is the main trading partner to many developing countries with 47% of its total imports and around 66% of its agricultural imports coming from the developing world (more than 48bn euros) in 2003 (CEC 2004a,41). Since many of the exports from developing countries are of primary products, these significant trade figures mean that the EU has a tremendously important influence on the pattern of natural resource use in developing countries. A report published by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) in 2005 revealed that the EU is using more than twice its fair share of natural resources: “With merely 7% of the world population the EU is using 17% of the biosphere’s regenerative capacity. As a resultit increasingly exports its insatiable demands for natural resources to poorer countries” (WWF 2005, 3).

While the main political and scholarly attention has been on the EU’s impact on developing countries through these traditional external policies of trade and aid, some of the EU’s internal policies can also have a significant impact which is often overlooked in the EU’s pursuit of sustainable development (i.e. the external dimension). Perhaps the prime example of such an internal policy with detrimental impacts outside the EU is the Common Agricultural policy. The EU spends around €13 billion (nearly half of the total EU budget) every year on agricultural subsidies (Oxfam 2002) in comparison to €4.6 billion on development aid. These subsidies insulate and protect EU farmers and agricultural processors from global competition through three main instruments: import tariffs, export subsidies and direct subsidies to inputs and outputs (Borrell and Hubbard

2000). This results, not only in developing countries being denied the EU market for their exports, but in the ‘dumping’ of EU agricultural products which depresses the world market price preventing many exporters from developing countries competing on the world market (Oxfam 2002). In addition, the depressed world market price undermines the domestic market forcing small hold farmers in developing countries out of business.

The EU's Commitments to Global Sustainable Development

These negative impacts on the sustainable development of countries outside the EU often conflict with many commitments of the EU on global sustainable development made both in international agreements and also in internal documents, policies and treaties within the EU. These commitments related to the global environment but also to the social and economic issue of poverty reduction, which has recently been emphasised in global sustainable development agenda. In contrast to the EU's traditional interpretation of sustainable development, this emphasis on global poverty reduction is beginning to be incorporated into the EU's debate on sustainable development. The EU now regards the four large global development agreements: the Millennium Development Goals, the WSSD, the Doha Development Agenda of the WTO negotiations, and the Monterrey Consensus as “mutually supportive processes and essential building blocks of a worldwide partnership for sustainable development” (CEC 2004a, 4). The dominant agenda for all these partnerships, to which the EU is a party and in many instances has played a leading role, is poverty reduction. In particular, the first Millennium Development Goal and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (the outcome of the WSSD) is to eradicate extreme poverty with a target to halve between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people whose income is less than \$1 a day (UN 2000; WSSD 2002).

These international commitments to global sustainable development are mirrored in its internal documents such as the Development Policy and the Sustainable Development Strategy (and related documents). For instance a priority objective of the ‘global’ sustainable development Strategy is to “attain the International Development Targets and the Millennium Development Goals, in particular the target of halving extreme poverty in

the world by 2015” (COM(2002)82, 9) while the overall objective of the EU development policy is the reduction and eventual eradication of poverty (COM(2000)212).

The EU has certainly made many ambitious promises regarding global sustainable development but when its own policies are incoherent with these it risks being part of the problem rather than part of the solution (FOEE 2002). However, pressure to include the external dimension, most notably the European Office of WWF and the Institute of European Environmental Policy (IEEP) (see section below on the Sustainable Development Strategy) has forced the EU to begin to acknowledge that its pursuit of sustainable development must consider this external dimension to sustainable development alongside its traditional internal considerations (Dalal-Clayton 2004). For example the Sustainable Development Strategy states that:

“Sustainable Development should become the central objective of all sectors and policies. This means that policy makers must identify likely spillovers –good and bad- onto other policy areas and take them into account. Careful assessment of the full effects of a policy proposal must include estimates of its economic, environmental and social impacts inside and outside the EU.” (COM(2001)264, 6).

If this external dimension of sustainable development is not considered, the EU’s ambitious promises regarding global sustainable development are unlikely to lead to positive outcomes. This article has already briefly shown that in general the EU’s interpretation and implementation of sustainable development has been mostly environmental and internal. However, the next section examines the EU’s main sustainable development implementing mechanisms in more detail in light of the statement from the Commission above. How far has the EU actually begun to consider its policy impacts on countries outside the EU?

4. CONSIDERATION OF THE EXTERNAL DIMENSION TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Treaties

The main articles in the Amsterdam Treaty referring to sustainable development, Articles 2 and 6,², do not specifically mention the external dimension but perhaps it could be assumed to be implicit in the support for sustainable development in general. It is interesting however, that while a little progress has been made in translating the commitments made to sustainable development and specifically EPI in Articles 2 and 6 into practice (in particular see the Cardiff process and Impact Assessment below), very little action has ever resulted from article 178 of the Maastricht Treaty which states that all community policies that are likely to affect developing countries should “take account of” the objectives of the development policy. This article is not generally connected to the sustainable development debate and no formal mechanisms have ever set up to implement this commitment, such as occurred for articles 2 and 6.

Environmental Action Plans

The Commission has used the recent Environmental Action Plans (EAPs) as a platform to advocate for the strengthening of the EU’s leadership role in pushing for global (environmental) sustainable development. Both the 5th and the 6th EAP (published in 1993 and 2001 respectively) have large sections on the EU’s role in the international context. The fifth EAP notes the “special responsibility of the Community and its constituent Members States to encourage and participate in international action to combat global environmental problems” (OJ of the EC, No.C 138/93) and covers the major global environmental threats such as climate change, ozone layer depletion and biodiversity loss etc. Its also sets out the EU’s positive attitude to global partnership and regional cooperation in seeking to address these issues. The sixth EAP naturally shows a much more developed understanding and position on global environmental leadership

² Article 6 of the Amsterdam Treaty states that: “Environmental protection requirements must be integrated into the definition and implementation of the Communities policies [] in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development”. The concept of sustainable development is also enshrined in the preamble and in the objectives of the Amsterdam Treaty as well as featuring in Article 2 of the Treaty, which lays down the tasks of the Community.

and concentrates much less on laying out the issues and more on linking (coordinating) the EU's role in global environmental agenda with its external relations and taking an active position in international environmental governance where it sees itself as a "leading proponent of international environmental action and cooperation" (COM (2001) 31, 59). However, beyond this recognition of the potential leadership role in international environmental diplomacy, neither the fifth or the sixth EAP draw out the links between the external and internal dimension of environmental protection and/or sustainability. There is however, a little evidence for this occurring in the Thematic Strategies, the main implementing mechanisms of the sixth EAP, which are discussed below.

Cardiff Process

The Cardiff process is a so called 'Partnership for Integration' (COM (98) 333) in which the Council of Ministers were requested to develop their own strategies to give effect to "environmental integration and sustainable development" in their sector (EC 1998,13). Reviews of the nine strategies produced in this process found that the strategies barely considered the external dimension (Fergusson *et al* 2001; Opoku 2003). Fergusson *et al* (2001) described the strategies as "weak in relation to the external dimension, even in areas where this is clearly a major issue". For example the Fisheries strategy dedicates considerable space to international fisheries management fora but does not discuss the impacts of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) on the environment outside Europe which Fergusson *et al* (2001, annex 2, 11) judge to be a "serious omission". Similarly, a more focused review of the Cardiff process evaluating its consideration of the external impacts (Opoku 2003) found that although the Agriculture Strategy mentions "the legitimate concerns of the rural world" in WTO negotiations, it does not elaborate any further on the considerable negative impacts of the policy area on developing countries. Beyond just ignoring the whole dimension, the strategy of the Economic and Finance Council sees the global dimension to sustainable development as a constraint for the EU's own internal policies because of concerns over EU competitiveness. It further notes that external trade (apart from that with Accession States and the European Economic Area) is a small percentage of the total EU trade, and thus of relatively minor importance – but from the internal economic perspective rather than in relation to the global environmental impact

(Opoku 2003) In addition the review of the Cardiff Strategies by the European Environmental Bureau (EEB) also claims that the councils failed to address adequately the need for major policy reform to bring Europe within its environmental space (EEB 1999).

Sustainable Development Strategy

In 1997 the EU, and other signatories of the Rio Declaration, committed itself to producing a Sustainable Development Strategy in time for the Johannesburg Summit. The resulting European Union's Sustainable Development Strategy, '*A Sustainable Europe for a Better World: A European Union Strategy for Sustainable Development*' (COM (2001) 264) was adopted in June 2001. One of the most significant criticisms of the Sustainable Development Strategy was that it neglected the global dimension of the EU's role in sustainable development. In fact the Sustainable Development Strategy only contains one paragraph on the external dimension. It is unclear whether the Task Force constructing the Sustainable Development Strategy had been fully aware from the outset that the strategy would need to address the external dimension and took an early decision to leave it aside or whether the Task Force had overlooked this need until others drew attention to it and then made the pragmatic decision to leave the external-dimension aside (Dalal-Clayton 2004). In either case the main pressure to include the external dimension came from the NGO community, most notably the European Office of WWF, and IEEP. WWF in particular set out a concerted campaign for the external dimension: in a consultation paper on the Sustainable Development Strategy in 2001 and a follow up response in April 2001. It also wrote to the Heads of State and to the EC Commissioners to reinforce their concerns. Subsequently, WWF prepared a critique on the published 'global' Sustainable Development Strategy setting out what it saw as the key shortcomings (Dalal-Clayton 2004).

The Goteburg Council meeting adopted the Sustainable Development Strategy and also called for the Commission to develop a communication on the external dimension of the EU's sustainable development agenda. This was carried out by an Inter-service group involving officials from DG Development, Environment and Trade as well as the

Secretariat General. The short time frame this group had to develop the document between September 2001 and early 2002 made consultation minimal. The first draft by DG Development made poverty the main focus and as prominent as possible in the interpretation of sustainable development. However, this draft was unacceptable to both DG Trade and DG Environment and it became apparent that the three different DGs had “different objectives, agendas and territories to defend” (Dalal-Clayton 2004, 16). To help smooth the tensions DG External Relations (DG RELEX) joined the inter service group and assisted in the production in a new draft.

The final document “*Towards a global partnership for sustainable development*” was released by the commission on February 13 2002 (COM (2002) 82). It contained six sets of priority objectives and actions concerning: trade for sustainable development; fighting poverty; natural resources; policy coherence; governance; financing sustainable development. However, this document has also been criticised for not really evaluating the problems and causes preventing global sustainable development, including the role of some of the EU’s policies such as the CAP in these, and also inadequately addressing the EU’s enormous use of the world’s natural resources (IIED and RING 2004). The document has also been accused as being semi-detached while the main Sustainable Development Strategy remains internally focused (Coffey and Baldock 2002). It is also obvious that the annual review process for the Sustainable Development Strategy in the Spring reviews of the Lisbon process (a strategy for employment and economic growth) is inadequate for the EU’s internal environment let alone its impact on the external environment (Coffey and Baldock 2002). The hope from many interested parties now is that the 2005 review process will be taken as an opportunity to review the Sustainable Development Strategy together as a single process so that the revised strategy is fully integrated (Dalal-Clayton 2004, RING 2004). This expectation is supported by the Presidency conclusions of the Spring council 2005 which calls for the new Sustainable Development Strategy after the review process to be presented at the end of 2005 to “fully integrate the internal and external dimensions” (EC 2005a).

Impact Assessment

In 2003 all major policy proposals from the Commission have gone through a new Impact Assessment regime. This replaced all other previous policy appraisal mechanisms and aimed to identify the likely positive and negative impacts of all major Commission policy proposals (including potential economic, social and environmental consequences). Early evaluations of the Impact Assessments found that little consideration of the external impacts (Wilkinson *et al* 2004; Opoku *et al* in press). This is in contrast to specific instructions of the procedural Guidelines issued by the Commission in 2002 and updated in 2005 which calls for the consideration of impacts outside the EU (CEC nd., 24; SEC (2005) 791, 28). Even more prominently the title page of the original Guidelines displays the following quote from the EU Sustainable Development Strategy: “Careful assessment of the full effects of a policy proposal must include estimates of its economic, environmental and social impacts inside *and outside the EU*” (COM(2001)264) (emphasis added). However, the updated Guidelines have replaced this quote on the title page with others referring to the need for the EU policies to support competitiveness and proportionality. Nevertheless, it is still clear from the text of the Guidelines that the Impact Assessment procedure is not just intended to assess EU impacts and issues but also on external impacts beyond the borders of the EU. Opoku *et al* (in press) found that of those Impact Assessments on policy proposals with some or significant external impacts only the Impact Assessments carried out for external policy proposals adequately including this dimension in its analysis. Of the other policy proposals with some or significant external impacts not adequately considered the external dimension (e.g. Impact Assessments on the Reform of the Sugar Regime, Reform of the Tobacco Regime, REACH) and in general the external dimension was mainly tackled in the impacts section of the Impact Assessments and isolated from the rest of the text (*ibid*). Without linking these impacts with other sections of the Impact Assessments, as occurs for the internal impacts, it is difficult to assess the significance of these impacts. It was also found that consultation with developing countries and development Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) had been lacking (*ibid*).

Thematic Strategies

The sixth EAP called for strategies to tackle seven key cross-cutting environmental issues, such as air pollution, the marine environment, which they viewed as requiring a holistic approach due to their complexity and diversity of actors concerned. There is some evidence that the networks developing around these themes are grappling with the external dimension (ENDS, 2004), but the whole initiative has not yet born fruit. Certainly the areas covered by some of the Thematic Strategies would indicate a connection to external sustainable development and would merit consideration in this area, for example the Sustainable use of natural resources has obvious implications for global environmental space since so many of the EU's natural resources used come from developing countries. However, we await the publication of the strategies to see what consideration to the external dimension they will bring.

Informal Organisation Structures

There are a number of informal organizational structures within the EU that aim to promote policy coordination for sustainable development, however, few deal with the external dimension. There are Sustainable Development units embedded in various sectors. However, these will have a limited impact on external sustainable development considerations as they are primarily environmental units and not focused on often social implications of EU policies on developing countries. Likewise the Green Diplomacy network, an informal network of environmental experts within foreign ministries established in 2003 which aims to promote the use of the EU's extensive diplomatic resources in support of environmental objectives, is an extension of the EU's role in global environmental leadership (i.e. encouraging other nations to be environmental) and will not aid the consideration of the external impact of EU own internal policies on the sustainable development of developing countries.

The role of the RELEX family in policy coherence and the Interservice Quality Group may have more bearing on addressing the external dimension. The RELEX (external relations) 'family' was set up in 1995 to assist in coordinating external relations. It operates as a inter-service consultation mechanism with civil servants from the different RELEX members (DG Development; DG Trade; DG External relations; Enlargement;

Humanitarian Aid Office; EuropeAid Co-operation Office) producing briefings on the policy issues of interest to more than one member. However, the RELEX family has been criticised because it focuses only on external Community policies so it misses some key incoherence issues arising from internal community policies. Also its mandate is limited to examining new policies not existing policies, so it tries to ensure the new policies are coherent with old policies that may need reform (OECD 2002b, 70). The Inter-service Quality Support Group was established in 2001 to monitor all Country Strategy Papers for European Community aid recipient countries. Its members are drawn from all the services that are involved in the management of the European Community's relations with developing countries (DGs Development, DG External Relations, DG Trade, DG Enlargement, Humanitarian Aid Office Europe Aid). It has its own secretariat in DG Development. Commission guidelines specify that Country Strategy Papers should contain a section on coherence which identifies incoherencies and outlines the chosen policy mix. However, there are indications that the Interservice Quality Group has also failed to lead to significant coordination of the impacts of EU policies on developing countries. Actionaid Alliance, a network of international development NGOs state that Inter-Service Quality Support Groups have "certainly raised the profile of policy coherence within the Commission but its impacts on Country Strategy Papers has yet to be felt" (Bond 2004, 1). A staff working paper published in November 2002 states that although the "policy mix" was mentioned in the vast majority of documents, the analysis was rarely taken very far (SEC (2002) 1279, 17).

Policy Developments

A number of adhoc policy reforms and measures are relevant to the EU's consideration of the external dimension to sustainable development including reforms of the CAP, the CFP and the EU trade policies. Within the reform of the CAP, the Commission sees the greater decoupling of subsidies from production and a reduction of guaranteed prices as positive sign of efforts to increase the market orientation of the CAP which is likely to in turn reduce its negative impact on developing countries. However, the reforms have been received critically by many NGOs, for example, Actionaid Alliance perceives these changes as "piece-meal reforms [which] offer little, if any benefit to the world's poor.

Particularly since they allow the provision of public aid to agriculture in ways which are designed not to reduce overall levels of EU production” (Actionaid Alliance 2003, 7). Actionaid emphasis that reductions in intervention prices are accompanied by increased direct aid payments enabling prices to be charged for agricultural products which do not reflect the underlying costs of production (Actionaid Alliance 2003). (It should be noted that these policy reforms could be seen as driven by pressure from other countries through the World Trade Organisation (WTO) rather than the EU’s concern with the external dimension to their sustainable development.)

As part of the reform of the CFP the Commission presented a Communication on an Integrated Framework for Fisheries Partnership Agreements in December 2002 which will replace the old Access Agreements. This new approach recognises the need for better knowledge on the financial, economic, institutional, environmental and social impact of a fisheries agreement on the partner country prior to the opening of negotiations. In addition from 2003 Sustainability Impact Assessments have been carried out for new Partnership Agreements. While the EU has not considered withdrawing from these access agreements altogether, claiming that the EU would be replaced by something less responsible, “many of the ambitions set out in the Communication should lead to a substantial improvement of the current situation (IEEP 2003, 3). However, there are some reservations about whether the EU will attempt to conclude more agreements with developing countries in the future and expand its presence further. “The Commission’s rather candid statement about wanting to maintain a European presence in distant waters should perhaps be a warning to those expecting fundamental change to follow from any agreement on the Communication (IEEP 2003, 4).

Three developments in EU trade policy have had significant impact on the sustainable development of developing countries. First, in the Doha Development round of WTO trade discussions the EU has given itself a mandate to push for an outcome that is supportive of sustainable development with a “ broad agenda focused on development” (EC 2005b). Specifically the EU sees its objectives to include the “integration of developing countries in the world trade system....and finding workable solutions to

developing countries concerns” EC 2005). However, many developmental NGOs criticise the trade liberalisation logic of the EU’s trade position as well as its reserve in liberalising its own agricultural market (Oxfam 2003). A second important contribution to external sustainable development which has come out of EU trade policy changes is the Everything But Arms (EBA) initiative which started in March 2001, and grants duty-free access to the EU market for the world’s 49 least developed countries. The initiative covers all goods except arms and ammunition and three ‘sensitive’ agricultural products such as bananas rice and sugar (which will be phased in 2006, and 2009). This initiative for widely welcomed as giving the 49 least developed countries a fairer trade deal and representing “an important political gesture indicating the EU’s commitment to promote a more equitable distribution of the benefits of international trade” (Bryer 2001). Finally, the EU has development a mechanism to aid coordination between external sustainable development and EU trade policy: Sustainability Impact Assessment on all new trade agreements. This is a process carried out before and during a trade negotiation which seeks to identify economic, social and environmental impacts of a trade agreement. The purpose of a Sustainability Impact Assessment is “to integrate sustainability into trade policy by informing negotiators of the possible social, environmental and economic consequences of the trade agreement” (CEC 2004b). So far Sustainability Impact Assessments have been carried out on many regional agreements such as the ACP trade relation and also WTO negotiations.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The brief look in this paper at the EU’s progress so far in considering the implications of its own internal policies on the sustainable development of developing countries reveals a gap between the EU’s ambitious commitments to global sustainable development and implementation through its main sustainable development mechanisms, despite its acknowledgement that it must address the external dimension to its own quest for sustainable development. In fact, the EU has a history of ambitious mission statements (especially in the environmental field) but its ability to implement and coordinate is less proven (Jordan and Schout 2006). It was found that sustainable development has mainly been interpreted by the EU as an environmental concept and until recently operated

through the principle of EPI. The often social and economic (as well as environmental), impacts of EU policies on developing countries are not generally being picked up by the current EU sustainable development mechanisms.

It is worrying that newer mechanisms such as the Impact Assessment (which explicitly state that external impacts are of interest) are not performing significantly better than older mechanisms which started before the EU fully recognized its responsibility to the external dimension to sustainable development. The lack of initial consideration of the external dimension in the EU's own Sustainable Development Strategy in 2001 is also problematic. It is perhaps surprising that, in the absence of any obvious specific implementing mechanisms for taking into account the EU's development policy objectives in the Community's policies (as promised in the Maastricht treaty), no link has been emphasized between this laudable constitutional promise and some of these sustainable development mechanisms. The Sustainable Development Strategy and the Impact Assessment, in particular, could have a great potential for implementing this ambitious promise of the EU. From the literature reviewed here, the EU development agenda does not appear to be fully integrated with the EU sustainable development agenda. The one language of sustainable development is in this case perhaps only thinly veiling two still separate cultures. The extent of this fragmentation and the possible reasons behind it can not be ascertained from this review of the literature but would perhaps make the grounds for future research.

Tackling this external dimension to its sustainable development is crucial because "on many key issues, the EU is part of the problem rather than the solution" (FOEE 2002). At a time when many actors around the world are increasingly looking towards the EU to exercise leadership (FOEE 2002), it is apparent that the EU is still grappling with issues of internal policy coordination which prevents it from fully being able to implement its own commitments to external sustainable development (Lightfoot and Burchill 2004). Without doing so, it undermines its pursuit of sustainable development because, as the Brundtland Report originally suggested in 1987, "even the narrow notion of physical sustainability implies a concern for social equity between generations, a concern that

must logically be extended to equity within each generation” (WCED 1987, 43). However, it is this aspect that is most often de-emphasized in many interpretations of sustainable development and sometimes ignored altogether (Jacobs 1999). In fact, authors from the social justice field of interpretation place “social justice *at the core* of sustainable development” (Langhelle 2000, 299). Taking their cue from Brundtland’s definition of sustainable development and also the first of the two key concepts, authors of this school see the issue of intra-generational equity (i.e. the needs of the world’s poor, mostly in developing countries) as the point of sustainable development which must be obtained within the *proviso* of sustainability (Langhelle 2000; Jacobs 1999; Agyeman *et al* 2003; Neefjes 2000). Environmental sustainability on its own is a necessary, but insufficient, condition of sustainable development.

Whether such a radical view of sustainable development is taken or not, without tackling this issue of the external dimension to its sustainable development, it is hard to see that the EU will be able to deliver on its numerous commitments and ambitious promises about global sustainable development. “If the EU is unable to operationalise its commitment to sustainable development and not move beyond rhetoric, then allegations of greenwash can be made” (Lightfoot and Burchill 2004, 338). At a time when the concept of sustainable development itself is in danger of being over shadowed by the competitiveness agenda of the Lisbon agenda, this important but much neglected dimension of sustainable development is in danger of slipping off the political and scholarly before it has received the airing it deserves.

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