



Sustainable Development Research Network Annual Report: 2003 – 2004

Introduction

The Sustainable Development Research Network (SDRN) is a UK wide initiative, coordinated by the Policy Studies Institute (PSI) in London. The SDRN was established in April 2001 with funding from the DETR and subsequently from Defra. In October 2003, PSI's contract to coordinate the Network was renewed for a further three years. This report describes the SDRN's activities over the year to October 2004, and the contribution that the Network has made to the government's *Taking it on Consultation* and review of the UK Sustainable Development Strategy.

Aims and Objectives

The SDRN aims to facilitate and strengthen the links between providers of research and policymakers across government, in order to improve evidence-based policymaking to deliver the UK government's objectives for sustainable development. Its specific objectives are to:

- Facilitate the provision of research and evidence to policymakers;
- Engage government policymakers, scientists and members of the research community;
- Promote sustainable development in the research and academic communities;
- Work with funding bodies to encourage relevant research; and
- Advise the Defra Sustainable Development Unit on sustainable development research issues.

Network Activities

Research and Evidence Reviews

The Network organises a rolling series of short projects (two per year) based around rapid research and evidence reviews. These projects are intended to function as a clearly structured, rapid, and cost-effective way of improving the transfer of evidence, and facilitating links between researchers and policymakers.

The projects are chosen, in consultation with the Network's Advisory Committee, using the following criteria:

- **Relevance:** is the policy area relevant to the Governments' headline SD indicators and Defra PSA objectives?

- Research sensitivity: is the development of policy in the area sensitive to new research and evidence or is there already a well-founded and well-understood evidence base?
- Additionality: will the Network project make a significant contribution in addition to other existing or planned activities?
- Timeliness: can the Network make a timely contribution to informing the development of policy?
- Buy-in: are key policymakers in the project area willing to actively engage with the Network?

The first two projects undertaken by the SDRN focussed on the issues of: i) Motivating Sustainable Consumption; and, ii) Environment and Social Justice. As a result the Network was able to make a significant contribution to the government's *Taking it on Consultation* (<http://www.sustainable-development.gov.uk/taking-it-on/index.htm>) and review of the UK Sustainable Development Strategy.

Motivating Sustainable Consumption

The SDRN's Motivating Sustainable Consumption review was undertaken by Professor Tim Jackson, of the Centre for Environmental Strategy at the University of Surrey. The work drew extensively on Professor Jackson's research fellowship on the 'social psychology of sustainable consumption', funded by the ESRC's Sustainable Technologies Programme.

The review was overseen by an *ad hoc* steering group of policy customers from Defra, DTI, the Sustainable Development Commission and National Consumers Council. Its broad aims were firstly, to provide a bibliographic resource providing access to the extensive academic literature on consumer behaviour, pro-environmental consumer behaviour and behavioural change, and secondly, to draw out from this literature some of the possible policy avenues for influencing consumer behaviour towards sustainable consumption.

The terms of reference for the review were negotiated with the 'policy customers' for this work and were based around three linked research questions:

- What does research tell us about the factors that motivate, shape and constrain the behaviour of 'mainstream' household consumers?
- What does research tell us about the factors that motivate, shape or constrain pro-environmental household consumer behaviours?
- What does research tell us about achieving pro-environmental change in mainstream household consumer behaviours?

Draft outputs from the review were discussed at a small expert workshop, with 12-15 leading researchers [font is in the wrong size here] and key policymakers, on the 6 May 2004, prior to being presented at a dissemination seminar and *Taking it on* consultation event organized by the SDRN at the British Academy on the 8 July 2004.

The seminar attracted an audience of over a hundred policymakers, researchers and SD practitioners. Speakers included: Professor Jackson; Andrew Darnton; Dr Frans

Berkhout, Director of the ESRC Sustainable Technologies Programme; and, Robert Lowson, Director of Defra's Environmental Protection Strategy.

As such the SDRN's sustainable consumption review contributed directly to the 'sustainable consumption, production, and use of natural resources', and 'changing behavior' themes of the *Taking it on* consultation, as well as helping to underpin the work of the newly established SDC/NCC Roundtable on Sustainable Consumption.

Copies of the review are available at:

<http://www.sd-research.org.uk/researchreviews/sustainableconsumption.php>

A guide listing research and policy experts working on sustainable consumption in the UK was also compiled as part of this project. See

http://www.sd-research.org.uk/researchreviews/documents/SC_expertslist_000.doc

A policy briefing summarizing key points and lessons from the review is available at:

<http://www.sd-research.org.uk/researchreviews/documents/SDRNbriefing1MotivatingSustainableConsumption.pdf>

Environment and Social Justice

The second project undertaken by the Network in 2004 was a rapid review of research and evidence on environment and social justice, commissioned as part of the background work to underpin the development of the new UK Framework and Strategy for Sustainable Development.

The Review summarises the evidence for environmental inequalities and injustice in the UK in relation to 21 topic areas identified as relevant by Defra. For each topic, evidence was summarised on patterns of social distribution, impacts on social or economic outcomes, externalised costs, the causation of inequalities and policy interventions to address these. The 21 topics were divided into four groups:

- Immediate locality front door issues
- Wider service issues
- Planning infrastructure and development issues
- Multiple environmental deprivation

The review was undertaken by small team led by the SDRN Coordinator Dr Malcolm Eames together with Professor Gordon Walker of the IESR at Staffordshire University and Dr Karen Lucas of CfSD at the University of Westminster. The review was completed between June and September 2004 with additional support provided by an expert working group established by the Network to assist with this task. The review fed directly into the work of the interdepartmental working group responsible for the environment and social justice theme of the *Taking it on* consultation and strategy review.

In addition, on the 8 November 2004 the Network convened a workshop on Environment and Social Justice: Research Priorities for approximately twenty key stakeholders and representatives from the research community. The output from this workshop will feed into longer-term discussions with a range of research funders regarding research needs, opportunities and priorities in this area.

Copies of the review are available at:

http://www.sd-research.org.uk/researchreviews/documents/ESJ_final_report.pdf

A guide listing research and policy experts working on environment and social justice in the UK was also compiled as part of this project. See

<http://www.sd-research.org.uk/researchreviews/documents/ESJExpertsList.doc>

A policy briefing will be available shortly.

2004 Annual Conference

The SDRN's Annual Sustainable Development Research Conference was held at the Institute of Electrical Engineers, in London, on the 14 September 2004. The conference was well attended with over one hundred and thirty delegates principally from government and the research community. The conference sought to:

- **Provide a shop window for research relevant to a number of the key themes identified in the Government's *taking it on* consultation on the development of the UK sustainable development strategy**
- **Identify key messages for policy-makers and research funders**
- **Update the research community on the development of the new UK sustainable development strategy**
- **Review current developments in the funding of UK research relevant to sustainable development**
- **Provide a networking opportunity for delegates**

Details of the conference programme are briefly outlined below. Further details and copies of the conference presentations are available at: <http://www.sd-research.org.uk/events/>

Additional funding for the 2004 Annual Conference was kindly provided by the DTI and C4S consultants.

Plenary Sessions

Developing the UK Sustainable Development Strategy

Jill Rutter, Director of Strategy and Sustainable Development at Defra, outlined progress in developing the new UK sustainable development strategy in light of feedback from the *Taking it on* consultation.

Evidence-Based Policymaking

The evidence-based policy agenda has been one of the key organising concepts underpinning the modernisation and reform of government under the Blair administration. Engaging with and promoting evidence-based policy is one of the central objectives of the SDRN's work. At the same time the discourse of evidence-based policy is not well understood by many in the research community. Louise Shaxson outlined emerging thinking from of the Defra Science Strategy Team's

project on Evidence-based Policy Making, and explored the question of what constitutes robust evidence.

UK SD Research Policy - Current Developments and Future Challenges

Professor Jim Skea, Director designate of the UK Energy Research Centre (UKERC), Professor Philip Lowe Director of the Rural Economy and Land Use Programme (RELU), and Professor Andrew Watkins of the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research, each reviewed current developments in their areas and commented on how research can more effectively underpin and support sustainable development. This session was followed by a panel discussion.

Parallel Sessions

Sustainable Consumption and Production in the Food Chain

The 2002 World Summit for Sustainable Development (WSSD) committed the international community to developing a ten-year framework of programmes to “*accelerate a shift towards sustainable consumption and production*” (SCP). The UK Government is addressing this challenge through publication of its *Changing Patterns* framework, the establishment of the SDC/NCC Roundtable and through promoting SCP as a central element of its revised strategy for sustainable development.

This session explored issues of sustainable consumption and production through a particular sectoral lens, that of the food chain. Issues addressed included: How can the sustainability of agricultural production systems be improved? What are the sustainability implications of innovations in food production and processing, and what would be the implications of a nutrition driven food policy for land use and the rural environment?

Speakers: Dr Andrew Flynn, BRASS, University of Cardiff, Professor Keith Goulding, Rothamsted Research and Professor Bruce Traill, University of Reading

Policy respondent: Dr Mike Segal, Food Chain Analysis & Farming Regulation Directorate, Defra

Changing Behaviour

Changing behaviour is recognised a key element within the Government’s *Taking it on* consultation on the development of the UK Sustainable Development Strategy. Information and education, economic incentives and regulation are all promoted as tools for encouraging people to adopt more sustainable behaviours and tackling climate change. But what does research into how behaviour actually changes tell us and what lessons does this imply? What role can ‘bottom-up’ community initiatives play in supporting behaviour change, and what can insights can be drawn from other areas of research and public policy, such as transport policy, and what combination of measures is likely to be most effective in creating behaviour change?

Speakers: Dr Laurie Michaelis, ECI, Oxford, Dr Jillian Anable, Robert Gordon University Aberdeen and Paul Miller, DEMOS.

Policy respondent: Tim Ash-Vie, Sustainable Development Unit, Defra

Environment and Social Justice

Environment and social justice is also a key theme of the Government's *taking it on* consultation. Key questions to address include: what is the current state of the evidence base with respect to the links between the environment, social equity and health; what types of policy interventions could reduce environmental and health inequalities; what lessons can be learnt from the emergence of the environmental justice movement in the USA; and, how can communities be empowered to improve their environments and protect their health?

Speakers: Professor Gordon Walker, University of Staffordshire, Professor David Briggs, Imperial College and Professor Andrew Dobson, Open University.

Policy respondent: Neil Witney, Sustainable Development Unit, Defra

Devolution and Governance for Sustainable Development

It is widely recognised that sustainable development requires action at all levels from the local to the global. What does this mean in terms of the UK's changing governance and constitutional structures. How can national government, the devolved administrations, regional and local government all best play their part in promoting sustainable development? How can policies best be tailored to local needs and what works most effectively for sustainable development under different local circumstances.

Speakers: Dr Kevin Bishop, Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA), Professor Richard Munton, UCL and Dr Karen Lucas, CfSD, University of Westminster.

Policy respondent: Tom Davy, Sustainable Development Directorate, Scottish Executive

Sustainable Development and Quality of Life Lecture Series

The Network is currently planning a high profile lecture series, with the intention introducing innovative and challenging thinking from current research to a wider policy audience. The lectures will be open to the public but principally aimed at reaching senior policy makers across government together with leading figures from the academic, business and NGO community concerned with sustainable development.

The Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) have agreed to co-sponsor the lectures, which will be held quarterly beginning in February 2005, at their Great George Street venue in London.

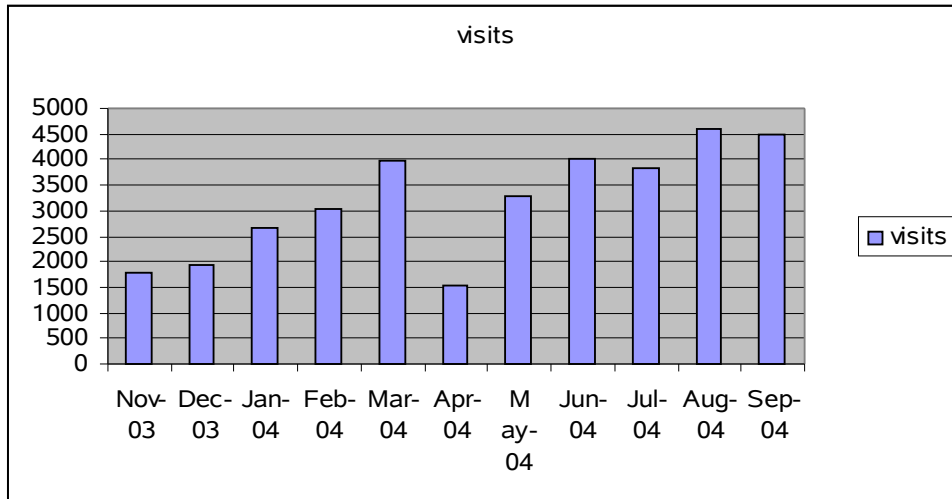
Membership and Information Services

Membership of the Network is free and open to all those with a professional interest in sustainable development research. Members receive a free fortnightly email newsletter, the *SDR-Network Mailing*, which provides a current awareness and information service on SD research and policy developments.

The number of subscribers to the list continues to grow steadily. By October 2004 there were 1208 members, compared with 844 in October 2003.

Website

The SDRN's website (www.sd-research.org.uk) was redesigned and re-launched in February 2004. Visits to the site have substantially increased over the last year, from just over 1500 in November 2003 to around 4000 - 4500 by the summer of 2004.



Guide to UK Sustainable Development Research Centres and Evidence Providers

In October 2004, the Network published its online *Guide to UK Sustainable Development Research Centres and Evidence Providers* (<http://www.sd-research.org.uk/sdrguide/>). This is intended to assist policymakers identify key 'knowledge hubs' outside of government upon which they can draw to assist them in the development of an integrated approach to sustainable development in the UK.

It identifies the main UK academic departments, institutes and research groups undertaking cross-cutting sustainable development research and their relevant areas of expertise. Details of key organisations from outside of the academic sector (such as voluntary sector organisations and consultancies) are also included where appropriate.

The Guide is organised under fifteen themes.

1. [Corporate Sustainability, Environmental Regulation and Management](#)
2. [Environmental Costs and Benefits](#)
3. [Environmental Justice, Citizenship and Participation](#)
4. [Environmental Risks, Values and Ethics](#)
5. [Globalisation, Trade and Environment](#)
6. [Measuring and Monitoring Sustainable Development/Quality of Life](#)
7. [Policies and Strategies for Sustainable Development \(Inc' La21 & Environmental Policy Integration\)](#)
8. [Sustainability Appraisal and Assessment](#)
9. [Sustainable Agriculture & Rural Economy](#)
10. [Sustainable Cities, the Urban Environment and Regeneration](#)
11. [Sustainable Energy](#)
12. [Sustainable Production and Consumption](#)

13. [Sustainable Spatial Planning](#)
14. [Sustainable Transport](#)
15. [Sustainable Waste Management](#)

And can also be searched by institution.

SDRN Advisory Committee

The SDRN coordinating team at PSI is supported by a broadly-based Advisory Committee comprising leading academics, research funders, government policymakers and other stakeholders. The SDRN Advisory Committee meets twice a year and is chaired by Professor Richard Munton of UCL. Details of the Committee's terms of reference and membership are available via the SDRN website, together with the agendas and papers for its meetings (see: <http://www.sd-research.org.uk/about/advisorycommittee.php>).

SDRN Coordinating Team

The SDRN is coordinated by Dr Malcolm Eames, with support provided by Kristina Dahlström and the administrative and communications staff at PSI. Over the period October 2003-04 Professor Jim Skea acted as Senior Policy Advisor to the Network.

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