SUSTAINABILITY AND HEALTH APPRAISAL OF POLICY

The Spectrum Approach

Purpose

The aim of this technique is to enable decision-makers to take a quick but holistic overview of policy from the sustainability and human health standpoint. It acts as a summary of the strengths and weaknesses of a policy, and is useful in public and political as well as professional/technical context.

Defining Sustainable Development

“The National Assembly for Wales will promote development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. By this we mean the needs of all human life, within the carrying capacity of supporting ecosystems, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own social, economic, environmental and cultural needs.

Starting to live differently, 2006, The Sustainable Development Scheme of the National Assembly for Wales

Defining Health

The World Health Organisation's objective is the attainment of the highest possible level of health by all the peoples of the world.

“Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.”

Objectives

The Spectrum Approach attempts to be:

- simple to understand and manage
- useful to decision-makers
- comprehensive with respect to major sustainability and health issues
- value-explicit, but without weighting values/criteria
- clearly discriminating between different issues and levels of impacts.
- amenable to qualitative and/or quantities measurement
- transparent, motivating and educational
Using the technique

First of all, a list of criteria need to be developed and agreed between the stakeholders with advice from the consultants. The policy then assessed against each of the criteria. The Spectrum Approach distinguishes five different levels of success or failure, each associated with a colour: blue, green, yellow, orange, red.

The assessment provides a spur to action. Where the scores are yellow or orange there is a need for further work, attempting to overcome the problems. Yellow suggests that problems could be satisfactorily mitigated through work or negotiation. Orange suggests the problems are deeper and may require fundamental reappraisal if they are to be overcome.

One or more red scores indicate more serious problems. Note that it is not primarily a question of how many criteria are compromised, or which are considered most important, but how severely. At this extreme any criteria may be critical.

Testing the policy against criteria

| EXCELLENT | The criterion is fully satisfied. A very well-designed policy is backed with realistic action plan and partner backing as appropriate. Delivery is secure and exemplary. |
| GOOD | The criterion is generally satisfied. Well thought out policy with an action plan. Delivery is secure. |
| NEGOTIABLE | The criterion is addressed and there is an acknowledgement of a delivery mechanism/action plan but success depends on further work and negotiation |
| PROBLEMATIC | The criterion is addressed but remains largely aspirational. It is not likely to be satisfactorily fulfilled without major reassessment |
| UNACCEPTABLE | The criterion is not being addressed at all in the policy |

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