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Deadline 7 February

Alliance response

8. What are key methodologies, processes and principles that should underpin an effective decision-making process in Government?

The UN 2030 agenda and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) should underpin all decision-making in Government. This means not only that decision-makers and officials understand the targets under each SDG and how they link to Scotland's National Outcomes but, crucially, how each goal interacts, supports or potentially undermines any other goal.

This principle is enshrined into the SDGs as 'policy coherence for sustainable development' (PCSD) (Target 17.14). PCSD is defined as "an approach to integrate the dimensions of sustainable development throughout domestic and international policy-making". ([OECD Recommendation on Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development - OECD](#)) Given the complex interconnections between economic, social and environmental challenges that the SDGs aim to address – as well as their multiple global-domestic linkages related to the environment, biodiversity and climate – this is no easy task, and one that requires complete institutional and political commitment.

In this sense, PCSD is about consistency of public policy in pursuit of sustainable development, whereby no policy undermines any other policy. Where policy conflicts occur, the root cause of the conflict should be identified and efforts made to resolve it in a manner which minimises trade offs and maximises synergies.

It is crucial that the principle of sustainable development is understood by all decision-makers for a PCSD approach to be successful.

A full definition of PCSD is available in this Alliance report:

[WSD Bill Report May2022 final WEB.pdf \(intdevalliance.scot\)](#) (p21).

Key to this definition is that development (social, economic or otherwise) must support ecological integrity and social equity within Scotland and elsewhere in the world, and support the self-defined sustainable development of other countries.

The Alliance and many of its members have consistently called for a PCSD approach to drive Government decision-making. In essence, this approach would mean that processes are put in place to ensure actions taken by one part of government do not undermine the positive actions taken by others and, preferably, support and reinforce one another.

An effective approach to PCSD requires mechanisms for cross-government planning, coordination, transparency, stakeholder engagement and participation in decision-making and leadership from the highest level. The OECD proposes 8 principles to drive PCSD, and articulates mechanisms and measures required for each one.

The Scottish Government has explicitly stated its commitment to a PCSD approach and acknowledged the need for it to be central to domestic, as well as international, decision making ([17 Partnerships for the Goals - Scotland and the sustainable development goals: a national review to drive action - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#))

However, it remains unclear how this approach is embedded in decision-making in practice. For example, the Scottish Government has convened a Ministerial Group on PCSD but there is a lack of transparency in how this group operates, what its role is and what it focuses on. It is not clear whether the group is being used in such a way as to enhance PCSD across government.

The Ministerial group must help to foster cross-party recognition and commitment to the importance of action on PCSD as well as act as an internal government mechanism for enhancing coherence.

Building on the OECD principles for PCSD, this group should also:

1. Encourage reference and attention to PCSD by all Government Ministers in all policy documents going forward, and indicate how policy focus areas can interact with others using the SDGs as the framework for comparison.
2. Identify and work on specific thematic areas that overlap ministerial portfolios to minimise unintended consequences and enhance impact on SDGs/National outcomes, e.g. the business pledge (international development and trade portfolios), climate proofing (climate and international development), etc.
3. Ensure regular and systematic communication with and involvement of stakeholders from different interest groups including local government, the private sector, public sector and local and international NGOs. Promote and facilitate regular parliamentary scrutiny of the work undertaken by the Group and ensure that there is a lead Committee in the Scottish Parliament to do this.
4. Promote a common approach to Sustainable Development Impact Assessment for policy teams across government that goes beyond standard impact assessments (tick box exercises) like [this one](#) developed by the Scottish Parliament.

9. What are the capabilities and skills necessary for civil servants to support effective decision making, and in what ways could these be developed further?

Effective decision-making is highly dependent on the extent to which civil servants are capable of connecting their specific area of focus to wider social, economic and environmental considerations, locally, nationally and internationally. In this sense, a critical part of their role is to act as 'global citizens'.

At its most basic, 'global citizenship' is about individuals self-identifying as connected to the world around them and acting in a way that is cognisant of social, political, environmental, and economic interconnections between the local and the global. It also means engaging positively with other identities, perspectives and cultures and being able to recognise and challenge stereotypes. It is also about actively considering how we use and share the earth's resources fairly and uphold the human rights of all.

Therefore, as a skill, Global Citizenship is about critical thinking, and in the context of decision-making, it is about thinking through what is equitable and just for people, and what will minimise harm to our planet. It is a type of transformative education that aims to shift individual perspectives and influence collective action and behaviours. With a focus on values, it enables people to think critically and to make informed decisions which are coherent with sustainable development.

The Alliance co-created a toolkit to support Scottish policy making to be more joined up and coherent, across policy areas both within Scotland and internationally which addresses the issues outlined above: https://nationalperformance.gov.scot/sites/default/files/documents/Outcomes-focused_Policymaking_SDG_NPF_FINAL.pdf

10. What are the behaviours and culture that promote effective decision-making?

The Outcomes focused policy-making toolkit:

https://nationalperformance.gov.scot/sites/default/files/documents/Outcomes-focused_Policymaking_SDG_NPF_FINAL.pdf includes some useful tips on approach to decisionmaking that could be implemented to ensure improved policy coherence and promote effective decision making. For example, the concept of "Glocalise" - think globally, act locally. The toolkit supports thinking that connects local problems to global issues and global problems to local issues.

This approach highlights interrelationships and power differentials – not just doing activity 'out there', while inequality and injustice is ignored closer to home, nor just acting locally, while ignoring how it might be, directly or indirectly, related to systems of inequality and injustice elsewhere in the world.

11. What is best practice in relation to what information is recorded, by whom and how should it be used to support effective decision-making?

No response

12. What does effective decision-making by the Scottish Government ‘look like’ and how should it learn from what has worked well and not so well? Please share any best practice examples.

A Ministerial group on PCSD would support effective decision making. The Alliance has developed the following principles to guide the Ministerial group:

- Encourage reference and attention to PCSD by all Government Ministers in all policy documents going forward, and indicate how policy focus areas can interact with others using the SDGs as the framework for comparison.
- Identify and work on specific thematic areas that overlap ministerial portfolios to minimise unintended consequences and enhance impact on SDGs/NPF outcomes, e.g. the business pledge (international development and trade portfolios), climate proofing (climate and international development), etc.
- Ensure regular and systematic communication with and involvement of stakeholders from different interest groups including local government, the private sector, public sector and local and international NGOs. Promote and facilitate regular parliamentary scrutiny of the work undertaken by the Group and ensure that there is a lead Committee in the Scottish Parliament to do this.
- Promote a common approach to Sustainable Development Impact Assessment for policy teams across government that goes beyond standard impact assessments (tick box exercises).

Other priority aims for the group should include:

- Raising awareness and generating support for action on SDGs both domestically and internationally.
- Considering how the group can outlive electoral cycles and changes in government/cabinet compositions. Long-term and sustained promotion of PCSD requires this.
- Laying the groundwork for formalised institutional mechanisms for cross government and cross-party parliamentary planning and policy review through a PCSD lens.

13. To what extent should there be similarities or differences in the process for decision-making across the Scottish Government?

Whilst in practice there will always be some differences across departments, for effective, joined up, coherent government, it is important that clear principles are implemented across the whole. Once a definition of sustainable development is agreed as an overarching goal key principles as outlined here

https://www.intdevalliance.scot/application/files/3216/5876/3334/Summary_of_Recommendations_for_Policymakers.pdf could be implemented across government. These might include:

- The principle of respect for planetary boundaries, including through preventative, precautionary, and regenerative approaches.
- The principle of intra- and inter-generational equality and equity – to meet the needs of present generations without compromising

- The principle of doing no harm internationally and good global citizenship.
- The principle of evidence-based policy-making.
- The principle of openness and transparency - availability of information on efforts to achieve sustainable development is vital to engagement and accountability.
- The principle of participation – to recognise that all of society has a role to play in working together to achieve sustainable development.

A common set of principles such as these should apply at all times, that encourage collaboration, participation as per the outcomes focused policy making tool:

https://nationalperformance.gov.scot/sites/default/files/documents/Outcomes-focused_Policymaking_SDG_NPF_FINAL.pdf .

14. What role should ‘critical challenge’ have in Government decision-making, when should it be used in the process and who should provide it?

Critical challenge is essential in Government decision-making, and should be embedded throughout the policy process. This includes wide-ranging stakeholder engagement and participation which organisations such as Carnegie UK can advise on.

The Scottish Government’s activities should also be subject to systematic and regular parliamentary scrutiny using a PCSD approach, with all relevant committees using the Scottish Parliament’s sustainable development impact assessment (SDIA) tool: <https://www.parliament.scot/chamber-and-committees/research-prepared-for-parliament/sustainable-development-scrutiny>.

A PCSD approach could involve building more time into the current parliamentary processes to allow existing Committees to scrutinise legislation for policy coherence and reform of parliamentary processes.

Furthermore, all new legislation and policy should be systematically ‘proofed’ against thematic priorities, such as climate justice, gender equality, and fair trade principles. New legislation should be open to public scrutiny, publicly reported on and debated in Parliament.

15. What is considered to be the most appropriate way of taking account of risk as part of effective Government decision-making?

An approach to decision making based on policy coherence for sustainable development (PCSD) involves a system of balancing different risks against each other. The trade-offs involved in the decision making process should be documented and open to scrutiny. Transparency will enhance public understanding of risk.

16. How can transparency of the decision-making process be improved?

Details of key meetings, including those of the Inter-ministerial PCSD group, should be published. As it currently stands, content and outcomes of these discussions are unclear and fail to guide cross-government decision making. The composition, TORs and selection of advisory bodies, eg the Global South Panel, should also be consistently published. Publishing Ministerial discussions based on a PCSD approach should help public understanding of risk in government decision making.

17. How can decisions by the Scottish Government be more effectively communicated with stakeholders?

Ensure regular and systematic communication with and involvement of stakeholders from different interest groups including local government, the private sector, public sector and local and international NGOs. Promote and facilitate regular parliamentary scrutiny of the work undertaken by the Group and ensure that there is a lead Committee in the Scottish Parliament to do this.