

## **Local Administrative Reforms in Turkey and the Philippines with regard to Agenda21: Profiling Contexts, Parallelisms, and Contrasts**

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### **Abstract**

*This paper analyzes the contribution of Agenda 21 processes to local administrative reforms in Turkey and the Philippines. Since 1992, many local authorities around the world have initiated Agenda21 programme to achieve sustainable development and good governance. Drawing on the Philippine, and Turkish experiences, this paper concludes that long-term commitment at national level is crucial to get pleasing results at local level.*

**Keywords:** Local Agenda 21, Sustainable development, institutions, community, PA21

### **Introduction**

The notion of sustainable development was defined in detail by World Commission on Environment and Development (1987) as "meeting the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." According to the commission's report, which is also known as Brundtland Report, strategies for sustainable development should aim to promote harmony among human beings and between humanity and nature. The report also maintains that appropriate administrative environment for a sustainable development entails a political system that secures effective citizen participation in decision making, and an administrative system that is flexible and has the capacity for self-correction (see fig.1).

A few years later, in the 1992 Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit, national governments and members of key sectors of society from all around the world reached for a consensus to implement an action agenda for sustainable development, now popularly known as Agenda 21 (CADI, 1999). Some national governments have legislated to locally implement it. Such programmes are often known as Local Agenda 21 (LA21 hereafter). Up until today, thousands of local authorities all over the world have been engaged in LA21 processes. LA21, in general, aims to enable young people, women and elderly people to act as partners in decision-making processes at local level (EUROMED, 2010). On the other hand, today, LA21 is criticized as it prioritizes the communitarian system which is allegedly conflicted with the individual freedoms. These on-going debates make LA21 an interesting issue for predicting the future direction of similar programmes.

With the globalization, public administration has become more sensitive to the demands and pressures of transnational interaction. The new global order and its emerging ethos have also served to veer perspectives away from the narrowed epistemological debates of disciplinary boundaries and scope (Reyes, 2001). Hence, Agenda21, which calls for a global awareness and change, offers a fitting context for evaluating local administrative reforms since it gives opportunity to test the reaction of administrative systems in different countries. The paper is a comparative-historical work. It reviews the current challenges of LA21, and separately evaluates local administrative reforms in both countries with a brief synopsis of debates. Important academic writings on the issue as well as unpublished academic works about LA21 were reviewed and used in the study.

### **Concepts and Debates**

The community and institutions are two key concepts of the study. The community as a notion has both political and social aspects. It is defined as the center of human socialization, where social participation is on the basis of allegiance to communitarian values.

The political facet of community was essentially shaped by the thoughts of Aristotales, who described the man as a political being since he saw the man as a sociable animal, living with his equals in a *polis* (community) (Sosmena, 1991, p.120). In our day, numerous political scholars such as Tsalik (1999) maintain that local democracy has an educational potential for citizens' development. By serving on local bodies, citizens are expected to act for public interests, as well as to think and to speak on local problems. Therefore, participation platforms promote accountability and responsiveness of local governments. They also develop citizens' capacity for implementing "checks and balances".

Stillman (2000; 2003) identifies *the Reinventors* and *the Communitarians* as two significant clusters of thought in public administration. Whereas the first group advocates the entrepreneurial spirit in government and free-market methods, the latter struggles for larger issues of rebuilding the community and of citizenship. Whereas communitarian ideas became significant during the 1990s with the writings of academic sociologists, reinventing government initiative formulated by Ted Gaebler and David Osborne attracted huge interest due to its emphasis on entrepreneurial spirit to make the government work better and cost efficient. However, the latter was also harshly criticized because of its result oriented nature and legitimacy problems. Among critical academics, Moe (1994) argues that the reinventing undermines the rule of law as it points at culpable laws and regulations for the waste instead of reinvigorating them with new processes. In addition, for him, replacement of the term "citizen" with "customer" is another problematic issue as it is injurious for the equity in public services. Thus, he concludes that change, almost literally for change's sake, has acquired a theological characteristic discouraging discussion within the public administration.

Likewise, the main debate regarding LA21 is its communitarian nature (To better evaluate the conflict between personal interests and communal purposes see Funder, 2010). In the communitarian perspective, individual freedom is meaningful only with respect to the collective welfare of the community (Bautista, 2009: 33). Therefore, it is a way of escaping from modern alienation for the people by involving more in the community. The difficulty here is to convince the people that the only system they trust to offer material comfort and a measure of liberty is somehow defective (Box&King, 2000: 761-762).

Fox and Miller (1995) suggest that any given social construction of the reality may happen within what are now considered as institutions. Institutions are habits, not things and understanding institutions is the most important part of structuration. Similarly, Wamsley and Dudley (1998) argue that institutions are the aggregate of structure and processes in dynamic interaction and at the core of this dynamic interaction, there are values. They also maintain that it is more important to understand process than to figure out structure; that's why, they call for a different rationality in administrative reforms in favour of processes. Finally, Frederickson and Smith (2003) maintain that institutionalism is crucial especially in the disarticulated states of today as its assumptions do not lean to sovereignty and authority.

### **LA 21 and Turkey**

In Turkey, reform efforts regarding the local administrative system date back to the Ottoman period. *Islahat Fermanı* (Royal Edict of Reform) in 1856, *Teşkil-i Vilâyet Nizamnamesi* (Provincial Organization Ordinance) in 1864 to arrange the transition from federal to the provincial based administrative structure, *İdare-i Umumiye-i Vilâyet Nizamnamesi* (General Provincial Ordinance) in 1871 to broaden and rearrange the political issues to be discussed in general provincial assemblies, *Kanun-i Esasi* (Principal Law) in 1876 to restrict the Sultan's authority and bring some constitutional regulations to the provincial administrations, were among those efforts. The latest arrangement before the end of the Ottoman era entitled, *İdare-i Umumiye-i Vilayet Kanunu Muvakkati* (Interim law on General Provincial Administration), was issued in 1913, but paradoxically remained in effect in Turkish local administration system with more than thirty amendments until 1987 (Guler, 2005).

In Turkey, the participatory decision-making issue came to the political agenda later than the Philippines. Some municipalities began to organize meetings with interested citizens in the early 1990s. In 1997, participatory platforms of LA21 were established at municipal level (Onez, 2006). The issuance of article 76 of Municipality Law Order 5393 in 2005 providing a strong legal basis for city councils, is the utmost outcome of LA21 processes in Turkey. Main phases of LA21 are as follows:

**Phase 1: “Advancement and Development of LA 21s in Turkey”**

In this phase, two principal goals were first to campaign for LA21 at the national level, and later to steer the actions by establishing participatory programs at local level. By the end of this phase, in December 1999, the quantity of partner cities increased to 23. When the initial stage was introduced, the central and local authorities did not have enough acquaintance about sustainable development, Agenda21 and LA21. Municipalities and local stakeholders were not ready for the LA21 programme, and they did not know how to carry out such activity at their local units. In the beginning, central authorities hesitated to give a positive feedback for the integration of local authorities to their issues due to over-centralized political-administrative system.

**Phase 2: “Implementing Local Agenda 21s in Turkey”**

The project had five key objectives: bolstering local governance in 50 cities by safeguarding civil society contribution in decision making, upgrading Local Agenda 21 action plans, informing the community, upholding a long term support and spreading out LA21 throughout the country. The second phase was launched in January 2000. As the initial phase enhanced the awareness about LA21 activities, local authorities were invited to take part in LA21 projects. The second phase Plan Document was announced in the Official Newspaper on 22 January 2001. Within this process, the involved municipalities increased from 23 to 47. The principal objective of this phase was building up the good governance by the engagement of various participants (public institutions, local authorities and civil society organizations) in the decision making process.

**Phase 3: “Localizing the Millennium Development Goals and WSSD”**

The third phase was dedicated to the institutionalization of LA21 procedures and instruments at local and national level with promotions and capacity building initiatives. There was a consensus in the global community for starting the advancement towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) from local level. A Plan of Implementation was issued at the end of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg. This action plan emphasized the importance of participatory procedures and cooperation for decision-making. A project entitled “Local Agenda 21 Small Grants Program” was also unveiled for the achievement of Millennium Development Goals (Emrealp, 2005: 30).

Aftermath of these three core phases, main problems regarding City councils in Turkey were underlined in a report prepared by European Commission in 2008 as following below:

“City councils, which are the principal participation platforms for the citizens at local level, are fully functional and effective only in a limited number of cities. There should be an effort to strengthen all city councils as well as the accountability and transparency.” (Emrealp, 2010:57).

Upon these critics, the last phase of LA21 in Turkey for strengthening of City Councils and providing the capacity building support was implemented between 2009 and 2011.

*Classification of LA21 Applications in Turkey*

LA21 applications in Turkey may be classified in three main groups:

- 1- The cities, where all stakeholders are strongly committed to LA21 process, participation mechanisms are well established, and important developments in local action planning and application have been achieved.
- 2- The cities, where LA21 programme proceeds slowly because of the difficulties in providing the support of municipalities and governmental institutions even though LA21 process is generally owned by the people.
- 3- The cities, where the progress is very limited owing to local conditions, lack of the satisfactory institutional and personal participation (Emrealp, 2005:50).

However, based on local similarities, there are mainly two LA21 models. These are the model led by the municipality and the model led by the city council. For the first model, the city of Izmir can be given as an example. The key role in the coordination of LA21 process in the city belongs to the Execution Board. This board is assigned by the municipality but its role is limited to keep contact among the municipality and other stakeholders.

In this model, the success mainly depends on the simplifying and supporting role of the municipality rather than an executive role. For the latter, the city of Antalya is one of the best examples. In Antalya, LA21 process started just after the Habitat Summit in Istanbul. In this model, city council constitutes the participatory platform of the city. The city council includes both assemblies for main groups and Working Committees, and it is the primary institution to establish cooperation and common understanding among municipality, governorship and civil society (Emrealp, 2005:52-54). Umutevi and Umutkoy projects aimed at answering the problems of street children are among the successful applications of LA21 programme in Antalya (Beyazit, 2006).

Women are seen as one of the disadvantaged groups in the society, That's why; LA21 aims at enforcing the status of the women in the society. City Volunteers Houses are among the main institutions founded within the framework of LA21 to achieve this goal. The vocational courses offered for the women in these centres dramatically help to eliminate their financial hardships. Hence, they strengthen the active participation of the women to the political and social life. As a remarkable point of their success, a survey about the success of these courses in Bursa and Istanbul indicates that ninety-six percent of the participants have positive opinion for the spread of similar vocational courses in other districts. Intriguingly, the negative viewpoint of the remaining four percent was not as a result of their dissatisfaction, but due to their concern for the prospect quality decline (Kiriker, 2010).

#### *Common Problems in LA21 Applications in Turkey*

*LA21 is a process, which is applied voluntarily by the LGUs being aware of its importance for their city; therefore, the precondition for the success of this process is the LGUs' approach. So, LA21 may give different results in different cities as well as different countries. (e.g., a survey conducted in Bursa city revealed that people were not well informed about the Local Agenda 21 and activities related to the project. This situation decreases the success of the project and shows the importance of the LGUs' active promotion and presentation of LA21. See Erbey, 2003).* Another key element for the success of LA21 applications is the participation of the young people and women. The representation of the women in political life is another problematic issue in the country. Even in Local Governmental Units, which are the first step for the participation to the political life, the representation of women is quite limited.

#### The Role of Agenda 21 in Local Administrative Reforms in the Philippines

##### *Philippine Agenda 21 and Related Applications at Local Level*

Many of the national problems have their roots in local activities. That's why, the participation and the cooperation of local authorities are critical to find the solution for the problems. Local authorities construct, operate and maintain economic, social and environmental infrastructure; oversee planning processes; establish local environmental policies and regulations; assist in implementing national and sub-national environmental policies.

The Philippine administrative system can be said as having shaped and developed under the tutelage of colonial rulers. Certainly, over three hundred years of Spanish colonialism, approximately four decades of American rule and about three years of the Japanese occupation have deeply influenced the Philippine administrative system. For example, the civil service system observing meritocracy was introduced in the Philippines under the American tutelage with the promulgation of Act no.5 of 1900. The Act was a reflection of Pendleton Act of 1883, which reorganized the American civil service based on the merit and fitness principle (Reyes, 2011: 31). On the other hand, *Imperial Manila* expression being used for the capital city during centuries has been a marker to prove the high level of centralization in the country. Therefore, decentralization and devolution have been at the top of the political agenda in the Philippines for a long time due to country's over-centralized political system. After many unsuccessful and unfruitful regulations, in 1991, the Philippine Congress enacted the Local Government Code to transform the nature of power relations among central government and local governments. The code, which is also known as Republic Act 7160, was by far the most radical and successful initiative. Thanks to Local Government Code, substantial political and administrative authorities were successfully devolved to local government units (LGUs). The Code devolved the responsibility for the delivery of some basic services including environmental issues like community based forestry projects to local government units.

It also provided institutional infrastructure for the broader participation of civil society in local governance by allocating specific seats in local special bodies to nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and people's organizations (POs) (Brillantes, 2005: 278-79). Besides, Philippine Agenda 21 (PA21) has been a part of the country's answer to accomplish its commitments in the Earth Summit in 1992, where government and key sectors of society agreed to enforce an action agenda for sustainable development, known as the Agenda 21. It was also planned as the country's primary framework for sustainable development.

PA21 seeks to answer four questions: Where are we now? What is sustainable development? Where do we want to go? How do we get there? To answer these questions, the major stakeholders involved in the formulation of the PA21 found it essential to search for a common ground (PSDN, 2011). Memorandum Order 399, dated 26 September 1996, directs all government agencies to analyse their policies, plans and programs and to line up these with PA21. PA21 was produced under the counselling and supervision of the Philippine Council for Sustainable Development (PCSD) and Office of the President. The PCSD was set up by President Fidel V. Ramos to ensure that all government tasks are coherent with the global Agenda 21 commitments the Philippine government promised at the Earth Summit in Rio.

The primary issues vary from one country to another. For example, whereas female advantage over the male can be generally observed at all levels of education in the Philippines (NEDA, 2010), the gender disparity in primary and secondary education is still a challenging issue for many countries. Nonetheless, abject poverty is still in the agenda of the Philippines.

The Philippines launched the Social Reform Agenda (SRA) on June 4, 1995 to enable people to have access to opportunities for undertaking sustainable livelihoods espoused under the agenda for change. The SRA is composed of social reform packages providing programs and services for marginalized sectors of society in the country's 20 poorest provinces. As of June 1996, the majority of the 20 priority provinces had localized the SRA at the municipal and *barangay* (village) levels. By 1997, efforts were geared towards pushing the Agenda in municipalities and convergence areas, where the SRA is expected to impact the lives of ordinary people. After the Ramos period, the Estrada Administration reaffirmed PA21 as the country's framework for sustainable development and issued Memorandum Order 47, which directs all local government units to localize PA21 through Sustainable Integrated Area Development (SIAD). SIAD is now also recognized as a potent framework for poverty alleviation. The PA 21 adopts the principle that the LGUs, the National Government, and economic sectors should be further developed to achieve the optimal conditions for the application of the financial resources strategy (UN PA, 1998). The said memorandum envisages the establishment of Local Sustainable Development councils to implement the localization of PA21 objectives. It is also assumed that the spread of Sustainable Development councils in each region, province, city, and municipality will ensure the good governance at local level. Nevertheless, after a civil uprising called EDSA II revolution in 2001, PA21 was largely neglected during successive Gloria Macapagal Arroyo presidency. In addition, weakly institutionalized party systems are regarded as an hindrance for a long term commitment to any transformational process. Political parties are the pillar of democracy and of a well-established checks and balances system, but the nature of Political Parties in the Philippines is oligarchy as accountability of elected representative is to the party leader, and not to the electorate (Carlos *et al*, 2010).

#### *Is There a Need for a Robust Local Action Agenda for Sustainable Development in the Philippines?*

Despite the similarity between the objectives of the Local Government Act and Local Agenda 21, LA21 was not institutionalized in the Philippines. The Philippines has the largest number of NGOs per capita in Asia. According to data of the Securities and Exchange Commission in Manila, there are nearly 60,000 non-stock, non-profit organizations in the Philippines—even though many such groups have never registered with any government agency. This is a good sign for the strength of the civil society but the contribution of the civil society to the democracy is limited due to the lack of institutionalization (Wurfel, 2004). For that reason, a comprehensive LA21 could be a strong catalyst for the success of the Local Government Act. Because, LA21 attributes importance to the environmental issues and the civil participation to the decision making processes, which are also main issues of the Local Government Code, as mentioned above.

A participatory approach regarding different multi-stakeholders at the national and local levels was adopted in the conceptualisation of the PA21.

Consultations were held at the regional level to identify issues and develop strategies and action agenda towards sustainable development. These consultations, which involved government, civil society and other major groups, strengthened the foundation for the operationalization of the national action agenda for sustainable development. While the consultation process in the region focused chiefly on the national action agenda, participants also embarked on the formulation of their respective regional action agenda. This was to ensure that sustainable development takes root in their neighbourhoods. The regional action agenda restrained in the arrays that will follow articulates the emerging issues and concerns in the various regions and can serve as a first step in translating further the national action agenda into local action agenda for each region, province, city, and municipality. These are by no means a complete and comprehensive action agenda for each region. It is, however, a first attempt towards localizing PA 21 and can serve as a basis in firming up a more thorough and comprehensive "Local Agenda 21" in the near future (PSDN, 2011). Nevertheless, as PCSD allegedly became nothing more than a paper agency, and its activities became significantly low, there are currently calls for incumbent Benigno (Noynoy) Aquino III administration to review the option of re-activating the PCSD, and for local government units to establish the local Sustainability Councils.

According to Brillantes and Fernandez (2011, p.56), the Filipino people counted on President Aquino for bringing in reforms to restore the dysfunctional institutions and systems of the Philippine politico-administrative sphere. The President also pledged for the adoption of a "straight path toward change". His campaign slogan says "*Kung walang corrupt, walang mahirap.*" (If there is no corruption, there is no poverty). The emphasis of Filipino scholars on leadership is understandable as some recent studies (e.g., DiRienzo, 2010: pp 841) suggest that emerging countries with moderately low levels of economic freedom receive a larger boost in the capabilities of their political leaders to direct transformative change with a decrease in corruption compared to other countries with more economic freedom and fewer rigidities. Furthermore, the use of central funding to a local authority should be left to its electors' and councillors' discretion, but national government should prevent the usage of funds in a discriminatory way for the good of the advantaged at local level (Chandler, 2010: 16-17). Figure 2 illustrates the role of the leadership and processes such as LA21 in establishment of sustainable administrative environment.

Finally, this study demonstrates that The Philippines has hitherto suffered some structural problems within last decades. For example, sustainable development may not be separated from other issues such as graft, corruption or patronage systems, which are principal hindrances to be addressed in the country. The key to solve said problems is to implement robust institutions through successful processes (e.g., LA21) along with the long term commitment at national level as seen in figure 2.

### ***Concluding Observations***

LA21 is one of the local level strategies for sustainable development. It may address many weaknesses in local development planning and environmental planning. Nevertheless, there are two major restrictions of LA21s: - Their success depends on accountable, transparent and effective local government, even if they are a process for promoting these qualities. – They are weak in ensuring sufficient attention to less obvious environmental issues such as the transfer of environmental costs generated in a given area to other people and other ecosystems (OECD, 2001: p.32).

The importance and weaknesses mentioned above regarding LA21 may be justified by the writings of public administration scholars. For example, Fox and Miller (1995) maintain that the citizenry is not given enough mechanisms to engage in direct participation since the structure of bureaucracy and government usually makes it so. They also argue that participation is a steady theme in many attempts to reform the policy process and public meetings and open hearings are required by many recent legislative enactments at all levels of governments. That's why, processes such as LA21 are crucial for the achievement of sustainable development as they aim at enhancing people engagement. However, Lindseth (2001: 24) maintains that it should also be underscored the limits of municipal apparatus' possibilities to control the social development towards a sustainable direction. There is a limit to what a municipality can and will do when there is no governmental politics at national level characterised by sustainability. It is clear that a stronger commitment to sustainable development at national level makes it possible to change the direction at local level.

LA21 processes in Turkey primarily focus on social issues such as participation of women to the political life, solution of the young and elderly people's problems at local level. Especially the transformation of city councils into permanent political structures at local level is one of the biggest successes of the LA21 programme in Turkey. For the Philippines, PA21 processes at local level are primarily for reducing the poverty. Nevertheless, PA21 did not turn into a comprehensive LA21 programme in the country. The Philippine and Turkish experiences confirm the necessity of long term planning for successful implementation of programmes. Although necessary legal amendments constitute a strong basis for the localization of PA21, political interruptions at national level negatively affected establishing of the programme in the Philippines.

To sum up, there is less focus on Local Agenda 21 today than in the 90s. In addition, many local stakeholders have moved onto new concepts and trends. What is important, however, is that nations, local authorities, organisations and people of the world have learned something from UNCED (United Nations Conference on Environment and Development) process and from their own Local Agenda 21 efforts (Sager 2008: 133-34). Different outcomes in Turkey and the Philippines underscore the importance of long term commitment at national level in establishing the good governance at local level.

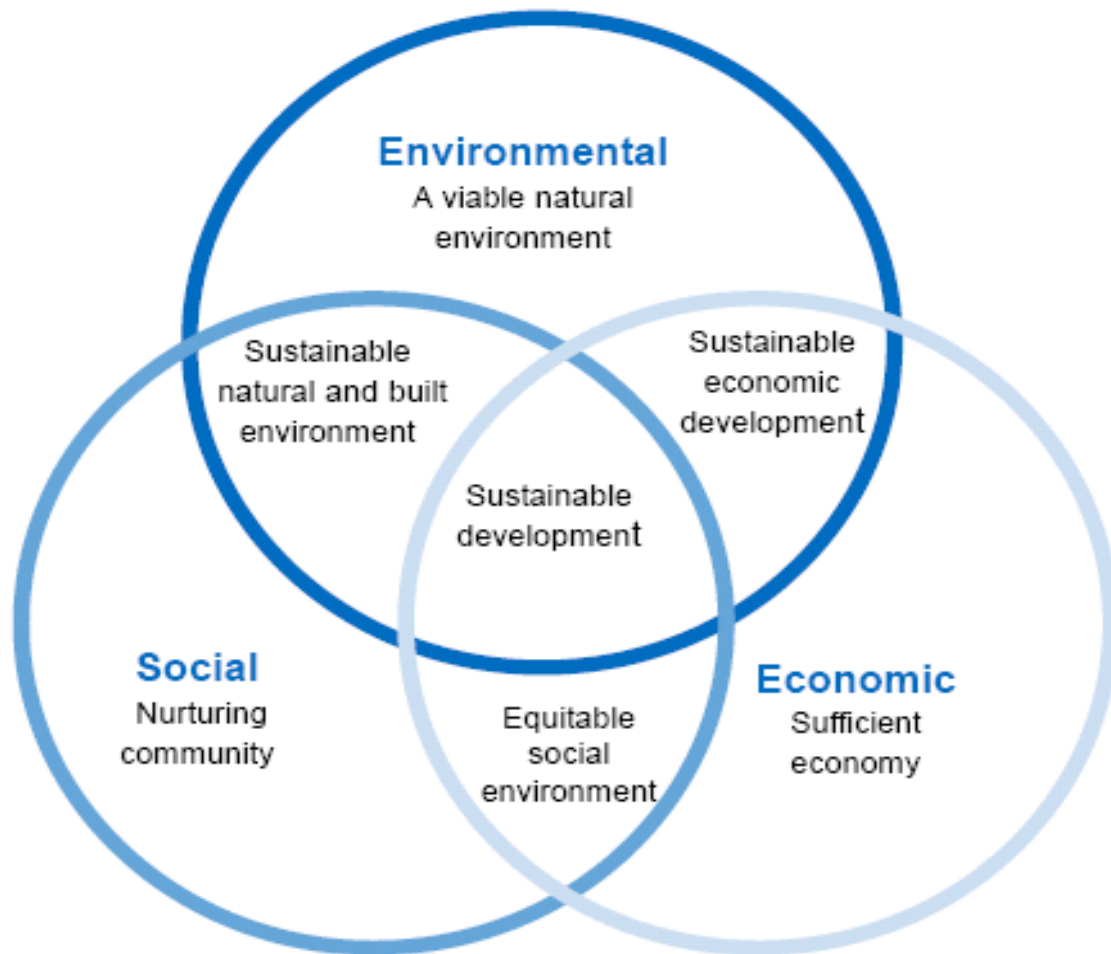
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Figure 1. Constituents of Sustainable Development



Source: Strategies for Sustainable Development, OECD (2001).

Figure 2. Social and Economic Recycling for Appropriate Administrative Environment

