

# **GEARing-up sustainable development assessment**

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# The problem

- We want to report on the environment in such a way that it provides **useful information** for understanding and responding to sustainability issues...
- ....but we have great difficulty identifying the **relevant assessments** needed to deliver this knowledge ..... let alone constructing suitable indicators!

So....





# Trying to define sustainability

*“There is no point in trying to secure ‘universal agreement’ on an unitary meaning for the term [sustainable development]”.... Sustainable development is a normative political concept. Up to a large extent its value precisely has to be sought in the fact that it is contestable. On the one hand it refers to something which is broadly accepted as important, and for which no other terms are available. **As such it falls in the same category as the concept democracy, liberty or social justice.***

Beckers et al, in SCOPE-ASI background paper, 2004





# Teasing out the “SD meaning”

GEAR-SD: some key features that we think need understanding and analysis for progress towards SD to be evaluated:

Distributional equity

Governance

Sector integration

Avoiding irreversible damage

Decoupling

Global responsibility

Inter-generational equity

Adaptive capacity





# An EEA Guideline for Environmental Assessment and Reporting in the context of SD (GEAR-SD)

1. We want to provide future generations the same environmental potential as the current one (**'inter-generational equity'**)
2. We want our economic growth to be less natural resource intensive and less polluting (**'decoupling'**)
3. We want a better integration of sectoral and environmental policies (**'sector integration'**)
4. We want to maintain and enhance the adaptive capacity of the environmental system (**'adaptability'**)
5. We want to avoid irreversible and long term environmental damage to ecosystems and human health (**'avoid irreversible damage'**)
6. We want to avoid imposing unfair or high environmental disbenefits on vulnerable population categories (**'distributional equity'**)
7. We want the EU to assume responsibility for the environmental effects it has outside the EU geographic area (**'global responsibility'**)
8. We want rules, processes and practices to ensure the uptake of sustainable development goals and implementation of cost-effective policies at all levels of governance (**'SD governance'**)





# This is GEAR-SD....

- **GEAR-SD** is simply:
  - ....a checklist ...
  - ... a guideline
  - ... a tool

✓ Towards an improved reporting framework useful for different actors at different levels.....





## Steps to be taken

- Define better the questions!
- Tease out experiences (good & bad)
- Learn lessons (towards policy as an experiment?)
- Design actions

*“There is no problem with money – what is lacking are good ideas” George Soros*





# References

- *Beckers et al. Shaping the concept of sustainable development. In: Assessing Sustainability Indicators, SCOPE, (in press).*
- *Stanners et al. Frameworks for environmental assessment and indicators at the EEA. In: Assessing Sustainability Indicators, SCOPE, (in press).*
- *Stanners et al. Frameworks for policy integration indicators, sustainable development and for evaluating complex scientific evidence. In: Assessing Sustainability Indicators, SCOPE (in press).*

