

Statement of Intent

Strategic Alliance for a Sustainable Information Society

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We the undersigned commit ourselves to taking practical actions towards achieving a sustainable world by becoming a signatory to the ASIS Statement of Intent. In doing so, we pledge voluntary but active participation in the process of developing a sustainable Information Society, pursuing the goal of worldwide sustainability by applying the information and communications technologies inherent in the Information Society to help solve the economic, social and environmental challenges before us in order to build a fair, fulfilling, prosperous and sustainable future for all.

We recognise that the new technologies driving today's Information Society offer many specific and attainable routes to sustainable development through their contributions to achieving greater economic well-being, reducing material consumption, supporting increased eco-efficiency, promoting more sustainable lifestyles, and improving democratic governance in modern society. And while the sustainable Information Society will allow far more opportunities than ever before to reduce the burdens on the environment, contribute to higher ecological efficiency, tap personal creativity, and empower citizens to enhance their dignity and feel a greater sense of purpose in their daily lives, we recognise that the transition to a fully sustainable Information Society will require collective positive action to shape it so that it properly contributes to the larger goal of achieving a sustainable world.

We also recognise that one of the most serious threats to the sustainability of human activities is the "rebound effect", which counteracts the reduction of natural resources, material and energy used in one area of activity by increasing their usage in others. While the globalisation of markets certainly increases this threat, it also offers the possibility for creating new frameworks to deal with it. We pledge to promote the development of such frameworks within the emerging Information Society, along with the means for monitoring, analysis and prediction to support them.

We further recognise that no one country, nor any single organisation acting alone, can possibly hope to achieve the goals of sustainability effectively, which is why an alliance of influential member organisations - working together voluntarily while sharing their expertise and experience across a broad range of social and technological issues - is the only way in which requisite critical mass can be attained, and concerted actions undertaken, to create changes in the climate of public opinion so that we may better set and achieve meaningful, quantifiable results.

We therefore commit to working together voluntarily to build a strategic consensus for action among key decision makers in all aspects of society - using our influence to spread the word, change opinions, and get others to act as well - in order to move society from sustainable development theory towards truly sustainable development practise. We pledge to play an active part in the work of the Alliance by participating in one or more of its Action Groups, which will specify targets through which we cement our commitment to the Alliance, and will establish benchmarks to gauge the effectiveness of our actions while providing us with the means to identify and take corrective actions and follow-up measures.

By becoming a signatory Member to the Statement of Intent, we recognise that we are not making a commitment to any new organisation or institution. Rather, we are making a commitment to ourselves and to each other to work together to produce the required outcomes for a sustainable world by achieving consensus on the ways and means to bring collective action to bear on the important issues at hand. As Members of the Strategic Alliance we will endeavour, through our actions and our influence, to create the broadscale awareness, interest, momentum and support necessary to ensure that the world of the 21st Century will be a better, more sustainable world for the future of our planet.

Addendum to the Statement of Intent

Economic Challenges

Long-term economic challenges, technical innovations, and coping with the "Rebound Effect"

The key economic challenge facing the world today is how to maintain economic growth rates which are strong enough to ensure high employment levels without exhausting material resources or further damaging the environment. While everyone agrees that material consumption must be dramatically reduced long-term, the overall increase in material consumption seems inexorable: reducing consumption in one area all too often results in increasing such levels elsewhere. If technical innovations produce environmentally sound products - thereby creating a self-satisfied atmosphere that encourages the consumption of yet more products - or if reducing the materials content of manufactured goods results in lowering their cost in the market place - thereby encouraging more frequent use - what can result is a self-defeating cycle of consumption called the "rebound effect".

Awareness of this tendency to "rebound" is not an excuse for global inaction, however. What is required is to shape consumer actions in such a way as to minimise the rebound effect, leading and encouraging consumers as a whole into more sustainable behaviour.

Information technologies can impact on the problems of material use....

The tools of the Information Society can be applied to these issues in a variety of useful ways. Quantified knowledge about material flows, product/waste cycles and eco-audit assessments can be widely disseminated through information and communication technologies. In the wider context of overall eco-efficiency - beyond the basic process of dematerialisation - automated monitoring (of toxicity, for instance) may also contribute significantly to sustainability and the actions required to support it.

...and of planning future actions

Another important contribution that the sustainable Information Society can make right now is in the use of advanced scenario-building and modelling tools which enable us to foresee the impact of today's actions on tomorrow's world. In addition to accurately knowing where we are today, we also need to know how the complex inter-relationships of actions taken today will effect the world of the future. Impact analyses, complex modelling and scenario-building exercises will enhance the techno-economic efficiency of actions we take today while raising the level of their credibility to society as a whole.

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Social Challenges

The Information Society has great implications for society

The sustainable Information Society, by virtue of its global handling of information within the realms of production, commerce, government, education and entertainment, can contribute significantly to the enhancement of cohesion, identity and fairness around the world.

These include issues of culture, age, gender, and geographical location

The social dimension of sustainability extends not only to organisations and regions but to individuals as well: all organisations and citizens - regardless of size, rurality or peripherality of region; or culture, gender and age - may be included in the new, wider opportunities for employment, education and quality of life. Small businesses and micro-businesses (less than ten people) that were once disadvantaged by small size can employ networking and cooperative working arrangements. The problems inherent in having a rural or peripheral location can be greatly overcome through high-quality interactive communications systems. In addition, new information technologies allow people to implement much broader and independent scenarios for working and living. Places of residence are no longer bound to the location of employment; virtual work sites are no longer restricted to specific geographic locations; and the highest quality of education is no longer restricted to cities, making learning - as well as life-long learning - possible for everyone.

These also include issues of freedom of choice, lifestyle and identity

This freedom of choice which the new information structures provide can support a multi-valued and multi-varied culture. Individuals, families and the broader communities in which they live may choose to adopt satisfactory and sustainable lifestyles with reduced levels of material consumption. Plus, such a new style of living in an Information Society may also include the increased participation of citizens in political decision-making by giving them immediate access to relevant information, raising their awareness about political processes, and providing the means for closer dialogue with the public sector.

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Environmental Challenges)

Environment and growth

Those who seek world sustainability accept the fact that the world's population will continue to grow. However, the sustainable impact we can impose upon our global and local environments is finite, and its limits are already being reached. Thus, quantitative growth cannot continue indefinitely without being transformed into *qualitative* growth in order to secure a long-term sustainability of development.

Eco-efficiency

Increasing the eco-efficiency of products, activities and lifestyles is a key component of both qualitative growth and sustainable development. Eco-efficiency measures the beneficial effect of products, processes or activities in relation to their environmental detriment, such as consumption of natural resources, use of material and energy, and generation of waste and emission of harmful gases and substances. Increasing eco-efficiency by a factor of 4 to 10, as compared to present values today, is going to be necessary if we are to reach adequate levels of qualitative growth in production, lifestyles and public services in the years ahead.

Dematerialisation

One of the most promising solutions for reaching the goal of qualitative growth is dematerialisation. Dematerialisation is essentially the achievement of better results with reduced material consumption, which can be accomplished either through product-to-service-conversion, through supporting environmental-friendly rationalisation of production processes, by influencing suitable structural changes in production, or by redefining consumer needs.

Product-to-service conversion

Many of today's leading companies are for the most part information and service providers, and a huge market is developing in on-line and other Information Society technology-based services. Many currently "physical" products have high potential for conversion to these types of services, such as the conversion of printed newspapers to on-line news services.

Environmental management

Eco-efficiency can also be increased by modified management techniques focusing on environmental impact issues. For example, by waste-management companies employing reuse and recycling strategies, or by implementing environmental life-cycle product assessments. The specific role of Information Society technologies would be in systems which monitor, analyse and document processes both within and outside these organisations.

Redefinition of needs

Yet beyond the issues of dematerialisation and rationalisation, it will ultimately be society's responsibility to redefine its needs with regard to material products and processes. The earlier the necessity for innovation and change is recognised and accepted, the smoother the transition to a sustainable Information Society will be.