

Building Capacity for Local Sustainability

Action

Making alliances with people and organisations

- Regularly assess stakeholder organisations' and citizens' experiences of participation and their perceptions of how their involvement has impacted on policy development and implementation.
- Build on existing effective partnerships and further develop informal relations with leaders within civil society. Combine formal and informal partnerships and links between local officers and stakeholder organisations.
- Critically assess the effectiveness of both formal and informal partnerships and monitor the evolution from informal to formal partnerships (and vice-versa).
- Evaluate partnership outcomes – which have resulted in action, learning and change.

Communicating to make a difference

- Use multi-media and traditional communication channels as a mix of uni-lateral and bi-lateral ways of providing information and ensuring real dialogue.
- Provide attractive, easy to understand but scientifically sound information.
- Distinguish between information that aims to attract, to explain effects or causes, or to present success and failure of an activity.
- Articulate messages targeted to hearts (values), minds (rational), and eyes (aesthetics).
- Periodically monitor citizens' and stakeholders' perceptions of the communication tools used.
- Recognise that a linear 'information in, action out' approach to change does not work. Use more innovative models in behavioural change that attempt to define how the complexities of values, motivations, relationships etc impact on societal change. Develop understanding and apply these models.

Sharing experience with peers

- Develop projects in partnerships with other local authorities and promote your good practices to other European towns and cities in order to learn from each other, and to create innovative next steps for local sustainability management.
- Take part in regional, national and international conferences, meetings, pilot projects, and city-to-city exchange schemes.
- Make your city the host of national and international events in order to gain recognition linked to the theme of sustainability, and to attract national and international decision-makers to become aware of your activities.

Learning as an organisation

- Provide dedicated training on stakeholder and community participation techniques and approaches (ranging from information and consultation to partnerships with stakeholder organisations), and on new public management tools and project management approaches, in order to enhance staff skills and stimulate a 'culture of integrated thinking' on problems and solutions.
- Develop techniques and working practices within local authorities to enhance and upgrade officers' abilities in project design, active listening, negotiation, and other result-orientated approaches.
- Highlight, market and disseminate results, promote "active" actors and the benefits of fruitful co-operation. Reward commitment in terms of public visibility, salary incentives, or increased competencies.

Facilitating the process and developing credible leadership

- Provide up-to-date training to local government officers on new and relevant participation tools targeted at specific actors and organisations.
- Be clear about which level of involvement or participation to adopt: Distinguish between information dissemination, consultation on plans, and stakeholders' and citizens' contribution to implementing projects.
- Co-ordinate and optimise the inter-relationship between different existing bodies and forums for participation managed by different departments, in order to avoid overlaps in participation offers, inefficiency in the use of time and money, and poor quality of outcomes.
- Practice what you preach: Establish sustainability management instruments within your local government, and apply sustainability criteria for daily practices such as procurement, land-use planning, building and construction, energy management and transport.

Catalysing action through raising environmental awareness

- Incorporate environmental issues in the local economic and social development agenda by integrating environmental criteria and indicators in single sector budgets, policies and local initiatives.
- Maintain coherence of local policies with the UN Agenda 21 objectives, the Millennium Development Goals and the Aalborg Commitments.
- Publish and promote local practices which have been successful in a 'triple-bottom line' (win-win-win: environmentally, socially and economically successful) sense, showing the synergies and added value of integrated activities for single actors as well as for the local community.
- Publish a periodical assessment of your local efforts and action towards global as well as local goals.

Influencing all levels of government

- Explicitly link improvements in local sustainability to policies and strategies at other government levels (European, national, regional, district, neighbourhood).
- Highlight local achievements in relation to formal commitments to international or European declarations and their practical implementation.
- Maintain and stimulate sustainability mainstreaming in local policies by referring to relevant international frameworks such as UN Agenda 21, the Aalborg Charter and Commitments, Millennium Development Goals, and other relevant frameworks.
- Find a critical voice - demonstrating 'buy in' across the organisation, between neighbouring local governments and from local communities can go some way to reducing the likelihood of central government ignoring the views of local government.

Moving away from 'policy silos' within local government

- Appoint senior leaders and motivated officers within departments as "ambassadors" for sustainability integration and create an administrative network of these ambassadors in order to provide appropriate technical input at the right time and place to any relevant plan or strategy.
- Establish cross-departmental integration by addressing environmental, social and economic criteria in all policies. If possible include targets, indicators, defined responsibilities, and monitoring procedures to evaluate performance.
- Establish cross-departmental working groups on projects thus bringing expertise and learning from different disciplines.

Encouraging creativity and innovation in policy-making

- Enhance the competition among local officers, planners, artists and other local individuals and groups for innovative solutions to local problems. Reward new ideas rather than focusing on why they might not work.
- Test new technologies and methods in pilot projects and transfer the positive outcomes of these to everyday practices.
- Adopt a learning approach incorporating action research models where the emphasis is on a cycle of action, critical reflection, improvement and monitoring.
- Provide training to officers and external partners to create awareness of and skills in project life cycle and decision-making processes (problem assessment, idea generation, project definition/design, project implementation, project resources and responsibilities, project monitoring).

Maintaining commitment to achieving the long-term vision

- Periodically celebrate your city or town's vision in order to maintain interest in and commitment to its implementation.
- Establish routines, such as a 'sustainability check', that link single council decisions and projects to your city or town's long-term vision.
- Frequently inform citizens and stakeholder organisations on active local groups and individuals, success stories and examples of innovative thinking, and link this explicitly to highlighting opportunities for participation.
- Promote or 'brand' your city or town as sustainable in order to help create a high level of identification of local citizens with the aims of sustainability, and attract the best human resources for improving local social and institutional capacity.

The DISCUS Project

Developing Institutional and Social Capacities for Urban Sustainability

What preconditions need to be fulfilled before a local sustainability process can produce tangible results? In order to examine and understand the factors and conditions which had been identified as required for sustainable development policy achievements, the DISCUS fieldworkers undertook research in 40 cities and towns all over Europe.

Based on the findings of the DISCUS project, the Fano Guidelines outline the factors and conditions which had been identified as crucial for building up the capacity within local government needed for the successful implementation of local sustainability policies. They have been presented to European local governments during the 'Governing Sustainable Cities' Conference hosted by the City of Fano/Italy, on 4-5 November 2004.

The full results of the DISCUS project are presented in the book 'Governing Sustainable Cities' by B.Evans, M.Joas, S.Sundback and K.Theobald (Earthscan/UK).

More information: www.governingsustainablecities.org

The DISCUS project is a co-operation between the following partners: ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability, European Secretariat, Freiburg/Germany (co-ordinator); Sustainable Cities Research Institute, Northumbria University, Newcastle/UK; Åbo Akademi University, Turku/Finland; WWF-UK, Godalming/UK; Universidade Nova de Lisboa, Lisbon/Portugal; FocusLab, Modena/Italy.

With financial support from:

