

## ANPED WORKING GROUP BRIEFING PAPER

### LOCAL ACTION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Local Action for Sustainable Development (LASD) has been a key issue for ANPED for eight years. Local action by NGOs and communities is crucial if we are to see lasting change. It can help turn international agreements from paper in to programmes that change peoples' lives and provide real protection for our environment. It can also help ensure that local concerns are brought to the attention of policymakers and are considered when national and international agreements are developed.

#### **Why Local Action and what do we mean by local action for sustainable development?**

Local action for sustainable development is one way to improve our quality of life in the long-term and leads to economic and social benefits which do not harm the environment. Getting local people involved in work to protect and improve their environment is often an important first step to their involvement in other issues.

Local action that takes many different forms, within each there may in turn be hundreds of similar types of activities and projects. Although these issues overlap, there are six main areas within local action where ANPED members are active:

- **Raising awareness.** Building awareness of environmental and sustainability issues is the first step to getting people involved and active. This is an issue everywhere: even the most 'environmentally-aware' nations still need more involvement from local people if they are to meet ambitious targets on climate change and other sustainable development issues.
- **Meeting local needs and building capacity.** Sustainable Development is about meeting environmental, social and economic needs now and in the future. There are still many places in the European UNECE region where those basic needs are not being met. NGOs are helping people meet their needs in innovative ways, and are successfully integrating this work with environmental improvements.
- **Local planning and co-operative action.** Many NGOs now combine advocacy and campaigning with co-operation with local government to develop local plans. This approach has been supported by the Local Agenda 21 / Local Action 21 (LA21) movement. There are over 6000 LA21 processes world-wide. In many cases successful LA21 initiatives have come about after NGOs took the first steps.
- **Tackling local problems.** Helping local people organise to tackle the problems they face is perhaps the most 'traditional' form of local activity. Environmental and sustainable development problems vary enormously across Europe and governments are often slow to act. Local action is often a vital first step.

- **Project development.** Practical work on the ground turns plans and talk into clear improvements in quality of life. Project focused work is also essential for many NGOs who cannot depend for their income on public support: ANPED helps NGOs develop joint programmes.
- **Working for stronger local governance.** Local and national government support for sustainable development is essential. NGOs have an important role to play in encouraging commitment and transparency within governments.

Local action can help deliver short and medium term benefits for local people as part of an overall longer term oriented strategy. This in turn helps build long-term involvement.

### **Our activities and achievements**

ANPED is one of the few international sustainability networks to focus on support for local action. We have run two international skill-share workshops on Local Agenda 21 and many other events at our international conferences. We have also organised workshops and side events at events such as the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), the Ministerial Conferences on Health and Environment, and Environment for Europe and the 2<sup>nd</sup> World Urban Forum in 2004.

We are engaged with the leading local government agency, ICLEI, who are responsible for the LA21 initiative. We have also lobbied to ensure that international agreements such as the Aarhus Convention are 'localised'; that they have clear ways in which their overall aims can be applied locally.

In the run up to the 2002 WSSD we produced a report on the barriers to local sustainability, based on the experiences of groups in seven nations. This was launched at the 2001 meeting of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development prior to the WSSD. We are currently developing new projects to link local sustainability programmes in different countries and in early 2005 we will publish a new report on the value of local action.

### **The mission and aims of the Working Group**

The working group mission is to support NGOs and other community organisations to achieve real environmental, social and economic sustainability at a local as well as global level through promotion of local actions and involvement of civil society in sustainable development processes.

The LASD Working Group offers a way for groups in different countries to work towards common goals and to share experiences, ideas, good practice and to identify common problems and the ways these might be overcome. The aim is to ensure that any interested NGO or community-based organisation can get advice and inspiration on how to make their work more effective.

We also seek to ensure that national and international programmes are run in ways that support and empower local action and that enable the cooperation between local governments and NGOs. The group works closely with the other ANPED working groups, and provides ways to link their local activities to global and national work on sustainable development.

### **Our goals: Towards an international local policy agenda**

Effective local action makes important contributions to meeting local needs and can help meet national targets. To do this well local action needs to be better supported. That support needs to come from local and national government and international agencies.

ANPED does some of this work. As an Alliance we help members to develop their skills to work locally and to engage with local government and also to work nationally to put pressure on national governments. We also work with members to engage with international agencies and processes and we act as a voice for the needs and concerns that are expressed at the local level.

There are important issues that will help create an environment within which local action can flourish. Some nations in the region are working on all these matters: others are less advanced but we see these issues as essential for everyone in the longer term. These issues include:

**1. A national strategy for sustainable development that supports local action**

Each nation should have a national strategy for sustainable development. It was agreed at the 2002 WSSD that these should be developed now and that implementation should start by 2005. There should be a section within this document which specifically sets out the need for local action both by local government and by NGOs (and for cooperation between the two), and that outlines how national government will support this. The national strategy should also support local action for sustainable development based around the LA21 programme. The goals in the strategy should be measurable through use of sustainable development indicators at national and local levels.

**2. Spatial planning systems that recognise and value sustainable development perspectives**

Each nation needs a clear and democratic planning system. The framework for this system should recognise sustainable development as an over-arching framework and should also make clear the need to protect and enhance the environment (both natural and built) as part of the strategy for sustainable development.

**3. National and local procurement strategies**

National and local government are major purchasers of goods and services. They should ensure that procurement contributes to sustainable development by including clear environmental standards and seeking to buy local goods and services wherever possible and appropriate.

**4. Recognition of the value of activity by non-governmental groups and support for such action**

National and local government should seek to engage with organisations active at a local level, recognise the value of their work, and provide support frameworks to ensure that such work is as effective as possible.

**Priorities for the activity of the Working Group.**

Member organisations have agreed some key actions for the Group. These include:

- Exchange of information on local activity and global processes for sustainable development;
- Creation of tool-kits which include approaches and solutions that address the problems faced by NGOs and community groups in their day-to-day work;
- Exchange of expertise and experiences;
- Training and capacity building;
- Development of methodologies for evaluation of local projects ;
- Linking local activity and local concerns with international processes that promote sustainable development and public participation;
- Working with other international organisations on the promotion of local action and cooperation between local governments and civil society;
- Support for local and national level activities of member organizations;
- Organising joint actions and campaigns.

In 2005 we are working with members to organize a series of 'Local Sustainability Weeks' in towns and cities across the region. An electronic list-server links all those ANPED members active on these issues.

If you are working on local sustainable development, we would welcome your involvement in the network.

## **ANPED – the Northern Alliance for Sustainability**

ANPED is a unique alliance of NGOs working together for sustainable development in the northern hemisphere.

The alliance was set up in 1991 before the UN Earth Summit in recognition of the fact that northern NGOs have special responsibilities with regard to the impact of the richer northern nations on the poorer south. This relates especially to issues of sustainable consumption and production, which has always been a major issue for ANPED.

Since 1992 ANPED has developed a second major role: it offers a way for NGOs in the east and west parts of the northern hemisphere to work together. A majority of our members are from nations in eastern Europe and from nations that were formerly part of the USSR. As well as linking Europe and North America we also have strong links with southern NGO networks.

ANPED is both a network and an alliance. Networking takes place in many ways, while the Alliance members meet annually to agree priorities and policy goals. Our mission statement is:

*ANPED, the Northern Alliance for Sustainability, works to empower Northern civil society in creating and protecting sustainable communities and societies world-wide. We do this by:*

- *Building capacity among Northern civil society organisations through sharing of information, knowledge, and skills; and*
- *Enabling informed and effective democratic participation by civil society in local, national, regional and international decision-making on sustainable development policy and processes.*

ANPED receives funding from the EU and other organisations and has a permanent secretariat based in Amsterdam. ANPED currently works on these issues:

- Agriculture and Biodiversity
- Health and Environment
- Human Rights and Sustainable Development
- Local Action for Sustainable Development
- Nuclear Issues
- Sustainable Production and Consumption
- Water, Pollution and Health

ANPED welcomes new members from any nation within the regions in which we work.

For more information visit the website: [www.anped.org](http://www.anped.org)