



SPM International

Written for “the Carpathian Opportunity”

“Some thoughts to walk the talk”

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Introduction

The guiding principles for sustainable development were first evoked at the international level in the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) report titled “Our common future.” Also known as the Brundtland Report¹, this 1987 document makes the first link between development and the environment, and gives a definition of sustainable development: “Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”.

Clearly, this is something we can all agree to. This vision for sustainable development has been repeatedly reinforced by a series of important conferences, including the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio. To prepare for Rio, the Business Council for Sustainable Development (BCSD) was created in Geneva in 1990 to provide a business perspective on sustainable development. Under the Executive Directorship of the Hon. J. Hugh Faulkner, P.C., and bringing together over 50 senior executives from major corporations worldwide, the BCSD played a critical role in defining the concept of “eco-efficiency” – or efficiency at both the economic and ecological level.

Eco-efficiency was an attempt to create a vocabulary that could be compelling to the private sector, and indeed was an attempt to bridge the gap between environmental and economic interests. It also took a holistic approach to the environment, as being inclusive of the social aspects of human development, including job creation. In order to implement eco-efficiency, the public-private partnership model was devised as a mechanism for stakeholder involvement. Mr. Faulkner founded Sustainable Project Management (SPM) in 1994 to support viable business development in the waste, water and energy sectors for developing communities through creating locally owned public-private partnerships.

Almost twenty years have gone by since the Brundtland report. The 1980s also produced Lovelock’s Gaia theory that publicised the concept of a global biosphere and raised the red flag about the disruptive force of human activity. Current climate issues show that much is at stake and that we could be reaching what Al Gore calls the tipping point. And yet -- why is more not being done? Indeed, as noted in the WWF Living Planet Report 2004, “the news is not good. The LPI declined by about 40 percent from 1970 to 2000, which represents a critical blow to the vitality and resilience of the world’s natural systems.” Evidence suggests that the main obstacles lie in financing and political implementation, and certainly a gap between vision and execution. Although sheer population growth has been a factor, sustainable development is also seems to be over-shadowed by the market economy model driven by the principles of maximum production and careless waste. Clearly we must be more prudent with resources and minimize waste, but how?

¹ To download the Brundtland report:

http://www.are.admin.ch/are/en/nachhaltig/international_uno/unterseite02330/



Three Lessons Learned

Link local needs and capacity to objectives and vision.

From Brundtland to the Apollo ten points, we have principles that can all be agreed on. The Framework Convention on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians, dated May 2003 and ratified by some of the member countries, is also an excellent starting place that evokes all of the key elements for a long-term, multi-lateral strategy. What is more difficult is the short-term implementation of programs, as to do this we have to match local needs and capacity with the overall objectives. What is the most feasible option for programmatic execution, given current political and financial climates in the Carpathian region? Where is the real capacity to deliver? Where is the most immediate need? Who are the existing players? These are the questions that we hope to understand in the course of the Vienna meeting. We have found that international agendas don't always match local needs, and that adjustments might need to be made along the way to truly meet the needs of the local populations. Without real demand for a project, it is very difficult to gain the local participation necessary for success. We have also found that it is important to build on existing resources, rather than starting from scratch, and to put in place a local team that is directly responsible for coordinating projects.

Involving and motivating all partners.

This may seem obvious, but can often be very hard to execute over the long-term. Through the public-partnership model, we have found that it is easier to work at the local level than the national or multi-national level. A bottom-up approach seems to be more successful, as long as we remain aware of the macro-political, social and economic climate. In the process of joining together public and private interests, we have found that it is critical to not disenfranchise the public sector. There are various reasons why the public sector needs particular care and attention: among them, the short terms of political office, as well as the lack of capacity and resources. A successful partnership means partners engaging in projects at the same level, and SPM often works closely with Local Government Units (LGUs) to assure their equal footing in projects. Without LGU participation, projects cannot be sustainable long-term. We also firmly believe in a mixed capital approach, whereby all partners some level of financial or in-kind contribution. Finally, this model also means being in constant communication as well as actual contact with the local community – the final stakeholders in any people-driven project.

Doing the groundwork: the pre-feasibility study.

Donors tend to like tangible programs and want to see quick results, but it's critical to do the groundwork once a specific need has been identified. A pre-feasibility study is a way to build sustainable development objectives into the execution of a project, by identifying upfront the social, political, economic and technological factors that might come into play. Such a study can help identify the main stakeholders, and the type of technical solutions that might be necessary – for a waste-to-energy conversion project, for example. Depending on which issue is being evaluated, SPM recommends partnering with a technical expert when necessary. This type of groundwork can be done relatively quickly – between 4-6 months depending on the size of the project – and certainly saves time and money in the long-term. Although a project must always stay flexible to allow changes down the road, this pre-execution work allows us to truly understand the local conditions and, in the evaluation process, gain buy-in for the sustainable development objectives.