A summary of Durban's Local Agenda 21 programme: the sustainable development challenge

by
Debra Roberts and Nicci Diederichs

Renewed interest in local environmental initiatives has developed due to the Rio+10 conference to be held in Johannesburg in 2002. This working paper series on **Local Agenda 21s and Urban Environmental Action Plans** aims to contribute to the knowledge and debate in this area.

Over a period of time the Human Settlements Programme at IIED has published several Local Agenda 21 studies in its journal *Environment and Urbanization*, mostly in Latin America. These are being brought together here and combined with newly commissioned case studies in Africa and Asia. The entire series now provides a broad range of information on Local Agenda 21 and Local Agenda 21–type activity across several continents.

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No 7. ***The sustainable Penang initiative: creating state-society partnerships for sustainable development*** by Khoo Salma Nasution

No 8. ***A Summary of Durban's Local Agenda 21 programme: The sustainable development challenge*** by Debra Roberts and Nicci Diederichs (December 2001)

No 9. ***The Principles of Local Agenda 21 in Windhoek: collective action and the urban poor*** by Jane Gold, Anna Muller with Diana Mitlin, (December 2001)

Future studies pending

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This paper is a summary of a comprehensive book documenting Durban's Local Agenda 21 programme entitled: "Durban's Local Agenda 21 Programme: Tackling Sustainable Development". The book details the programme components from the start (1994) to the present (2001). It also describes the problems and successes of the programme in more detail. Should you wish to obtain a copy of the book, please write / fax Dr Debra Roberts as per contact details above.

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Summary

List of Abbreviations

APELL Awareness and Preparedness for Emergencies at the Local Level
CEROI Cities Environmental Reports on the Internet
DMA Durban Metropolitan Area
DMEPI The Durban Metropolitan Environmental Policy Initiative
D'MOSS Design of a Durban Metropolitan Open Space System
EMS Environmental Management System
SDCEA South Durban Community Environmental Alliance
SOE&DR State of the Environment and Development Report
SEA Strategic Environmental Assessment
UESMP Unicity Environmental Services Management Plan
UNEP United Nations Environmental Programme

Exchange Rates

On 10 December 2001, the interbank exchange rate for one South African Rand was approximately:
  0.093 US$, or
  0.065 UK£, or
  0.104 European€

Summary

Durban's Local Agenda 21 programme has been at the forefront of the Local Agenda 21 movement in Southern Africa since the mid-1990s. This paper describes the first four phases of the programme, 1994-2001. The paper also describes the difficulties faced in localizing the sustainable development concept in Durban. Key amongst these was the initiation and development of the programme during a period of local government transformation and restructuring. The perception that Local Agenda 21 has a "green" focus and is "anti-development" (due to its location within an environmental department) has also resulted in a lack of proactive and sustained political support. These problems have been exacerbated by limited human and financial resources which have restricted the programme's capacity to build support and consensus among stakeholders. Durban's Local Agenda 21 programme has, however, helped keep sustainable development on the city's agenda and has provided a mechanism through which local stakeholders can interact with local government around environmental management issues. The paper concludes with a section on the lessons learned and factors required to ensure future progress.

1. Introduction

In 1994 Durban became the first city in South Africa to accept the Local Agenda 21 mandate[1] as a corporate responsibility. Since then Durban has been at the forefront of the Local Agenda 21 experience in the country. This documentation offers the opportunity to record and review the lessons learned over the last seven years. The overriding message to emerge is that Local Agenda 21's implicit promise of a more sustainable future for all often obscures the difficulties encountered in realizing this goal. Frankness about these difficulties is essential if the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002 is to become a forum for realistic and focused debate aimed at producing meaningful change in the 21st century.

2. The Driving Forces for Change

In order to fully understand the Durban Local Agenda 21 experience, it is necessary to understand the context within which it has taken place. Durban's commitment to 'Local Agenda 21' is the result of three important factors. At the global level Agenda 21 and the 1992 Earth Summit prioritised sustainable development and acknowledged the importance of local action in achieving this goal. At the national level post-apartheid democratisation in South Africa created a 'window of opportunity' for new concepts to be embraced by previously conservative local government structures. At a local level (i.e. Durban) these national and international trends were accompanied by the establishment of an Environmental Management Branch within the municipality which subsequently became the Local Agenda 21 champion within the city. This latter point is significant, as local government in South Africa has been in a continuous state of transformation since 1994. This restructuring of local government has impacted significantly on the development of Durban's Local Agenda 21 programme and necessitated a phased approach to implementation. To date, three phases have been completed and a fourth 'Unicity'[2] phase is in progress (due for completion in 2002) greatly increasing the metropolitan area with the inclusion of areas excluded under the previous apartheid system.

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[1] The global action plan for economically, environmentally and socially sustainable development endorsed at the 1992 United Nations Earth Summit.
[2] Unicity refers to the new structure of the Durban Metropolitan Council. In the past it comprised a metropolitan council with 6 local councils. Through restructuring, Durban has become a Unicity - which is a metropolitan council with metropolitan substructures. The transformation to Unicity brought with it an extensive expansion in the size of 'Durban'. This expansion of boundaries is obviously a noteworthy impact on the LA21 programme.
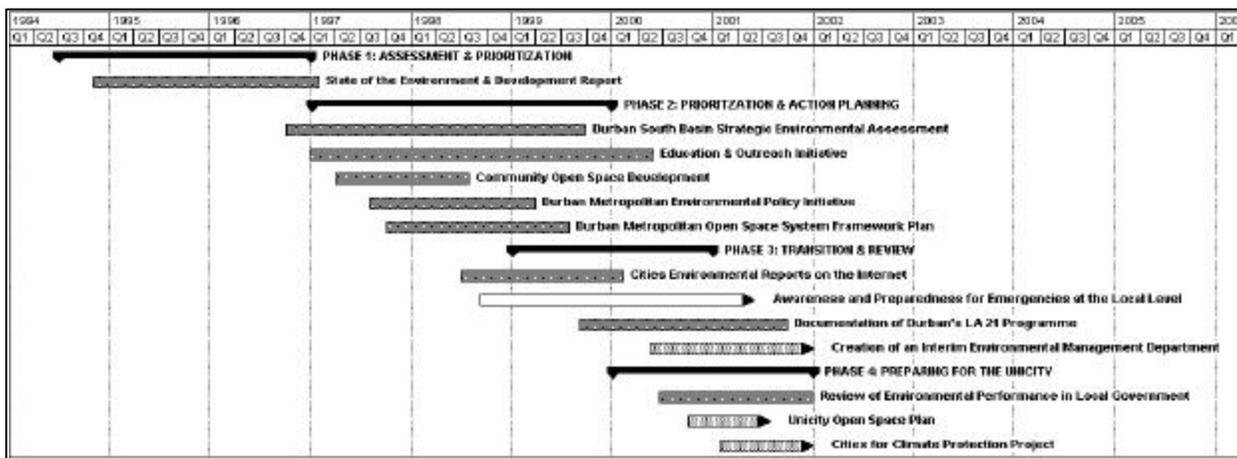
Figure A: Durban's Local Agenda 21 Programme

3. Phase 1: Assessment and prioritisation (1994-1996)

The aim of Durban's Local Agenda 21 programme is to develop an environmental management system (EMS) that will ensure that social, economic and ecological concerns are integrated into all planning and development processes within the city. From the outset it was clear that the lack of knowledge regarding the city's environmental status was an obstacle to realizing this goal. The preparation of Durban's first State of the Environment and Development Report (SOE&DR) was therefore identified as the first step in EMS development.

3.1. Project Process

Three institutions were involved in the SOE&DR project: Durban City Council, the CSIR (a statutory research organization) and the university-based Institute for Social and Economic Research. Stakeholders were involved in the planning and execution of the project through three consultative forums: an interim advisory committee to advise on project brief development, a project advisory committee and a forum for local government officials. Case study research was also undertaken in three local communities in order to better understand environment and development priorities at the grassroots level. The study focused on reviewing the state of environment and development in 17 key sectors: terrestrial resources, atmospheric resources, fresh water resources, marine resources, urban form, housing, transport, water supply and sanitation, waste, energy, economy, education, health, violence and peace, governance, city finances and the legal framework.

The final report was completed in June 1996 and highlighted numerous areas and issues requiring action. A community-based prioritisation process resulted in the selection of the following five issues:
- promoting peace, safety and security in the metropolitan region;
- improving water and sanitation management;
- developing an integrated housing policy;
- establishing a structure to coordinate land use, transportation and environmental planning in the Durban Metropolitan Area (DMA);
- institutionalising the Integrated Environmental Management procedure of the national Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism.

The Environmental Management Branch identified a package of projects to address these priority areas as well as other environmental and developmental pressures as part of Phase 2.

3.2. Summary of Lessons Learned during Phase 1

Durban's Local Agenda 21 programme has been marginalized because of the Environmental Management Branch's limited human and financial resources and the perception that its association with an environmental function means a focus on 'green issues'. The shortage of resources has also meant that Local Agenda 21 work has often had to be put on hold or sacrificed entirely because of more immediate development pressures and crises. As a result, there has never been adequate time, money or skills to build anything other than nominal capacity around sustainable development and environmental management amongst other local government stakeholders. The Environmental Management Branch therefore remains the sole custodian of the programme. It is clear that future success requires that adequate time and resources are allocated to building support and mainstreaming the Local Agenda 21 concept.

Timing has also proved to be critical. Durban's Local Agenda 21 programme was initiated at a time when previously conflicting elements of society were being drawn together to debate the country's future. This meant that the SOE&DR process became embroiled in the broader national debate, making it difficult to manage and focus stakeholder consultations. Tensions also emerged between the Environmental Management Branch and some key line functions regarding the manner in which the state of Durban's environment should be reported. This highlighted the need to establish constructive dialogue between all stakeholders

4. Phase 2: Policy formulation and planning (1997-1999)

Several strategic projects were initiated during Phase 2 to address the priorities identified during Phase 1. These focused primarily on policy formulation and

planning, and aimed to develop a framework within which stakeholders could act or contribute towards improved sustainability. The selected projects included:
The Durban Metropolitan Environmental Policy Initiative (DMEPI)
The Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) of the Durban South Basin
The Design of a Durban Metropolitan Open Space System (D'MOSS) Framework Plan
Community Open Space Development

4.1. The Durban Metropolitan Environmental Policy Initiative (DMEPI)

The promulgation of legislation creating metropolitan level environmental management responsibilities highlighted the need for the institutional restructuring of local government structures in Durban. The Durban Metropolitan Council subsequently approved the development of the first environmental management policy and related institutional framework for the city.

4.1.1. Project Process

The project was managed by a project team with representatives from the Durban Metropolitan Council, the Development Bank of Southern Africa (co-funders of the project) and an independent consultant group (Common Ground Consulting). A Review Panel was established to represent the interests of all major stakeholders in the process i.e. councillors, council officials, non-governmental organizations, community-based organizations, business and industry, trade unions, organizations representing women, disabled and youth, and the KwaZulu-Natal provincial government.

A Public Visioning Workshop was held at which stakeholders participated in the development of a vision for Durban's environment. A Policy Brainstorming session followed at which policy options on a range of environmental management issues were generated. These policy options were reviewed by the Review Panel before being finalized. A similar participative process was followed in the development of the Institutional and Procedural Framework. The Framework provided guidance on policy implementation and the establishment of an Environmental Management System for Durban. It motivated for the creation of a small, dedicated environmental management capacity at the metropolitan level to ensure coordination and cooperation between line functions and council structures as part of the city's final restructuring. It also identified the need to increase the interim capacity of the Environmental Management Branch. This interim restructuring was strongly opposed by some line functions within local government who feared the emergence of a new power base with overlapping and/or controlling functions.

4.1.2. Summary of Lessons Learned

The DMEPI project highlighted the importance of effective stakeholder participation to Local Agenda 21 programmes. Of particular importance was the role played by the independent consultant group who provided a neutral focus point for conflict resolution between stakeholders. The multi-stakeholder Review Panel was also important in facilitating constant and representative stakeholder interaction with the project and in motivating for capacity building to empower previously marginalized groups to participate effectively in the process.

Despite the success of the public participation process, divergent views existed within the project management team regarding the desired outcomes of the project. This highlighted the need for the priorities of all parties to be clarified at the outset of a project and for there to be a level of flexibility in project management. Without clarity on what is to be achieved and flexibility to address unexpected requirements, resources will be spent on resolving project management conflicts rather than on delivering sustainability and meeting stakeholder needs. Similarly, the opposition to the interim restructuring of the environmental management function by some local government sectors demonstrated how line functions can become so entrenched in their 'silos' that the primary concern becomes one of maintaining the *status quo,* rather than improving urban sustainability. This shortsighted approach can be very destructive for sustainable development processes which require partnerships and cooperation between stakeholders.

4.2. Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) of the Durban South Basin

The Durban South Basin is an environmental 'hotspot' with a mix of heavy industry and residential land uses located in close proximity to one another in a topographically contained area. It is also the economic 'heartland' of the city and South Africa's second most important manufacturing centre. It has become a focal point for community mobilization around environmental quality and justice issues over a period of many decades. The aim of the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) project was to develop sustainable development guidelines to address existing problems in the area and to guide future development.

4.2.1. Project Process

The SEA project brief was developed in conjunction with key stakeholder groups and the project was managed by a multi-disciplinary team consisting of representatives from the CSIR and the Durban Metropolitan Council. As a first step, a baseline environmental assessment of the area was undertaken and major issues of environmental concern (i.e. 'strategic development criteria') were

identified. Different development scenarios for the Durban South Basin were then tested against these criteria. A multi-stakeholder 'study team' was also established, which included members of the SEA project management team, technical specialists and representatives from the three stakeholder groups (local government, industry and community) involved in the project. The study team provided a forum for the review and evaluation of the proposed development options.

The findings of the evaluation process suggested that the Durban South Basin was likely to retain an industrial character well into the foreseeable future and that the resources (i.e. financial and technological) required to address environmental quality issues appeared to be linked to the need to attract new industrial investment into the area. This would put pressure on the non-commercial and non-industrial (i.e. residential) land uses in the Basin. On the basis of these findings, a policy planning framework and action plan for the Durban South Basin was prepared to assist government in dealing with the existing and anticipated development and environmental challenges in the area. An extensive public participation process was also undertaken which included an environmental education and capacity building component. Although much time and effort was spent on this element of the study, it had a limited impact due to the heightened tensions that existed between local government and local communities as a result of the study's finding that certain future development options would result in the loss of existing residential areas.

4.2.2. Summary of Lessons Learned

The SEA highlighted the need for the institutionalisation of public participation and conflict resolution processes in order to address the haphazard and piecemeal approach to public participation that is prevalent in Durban. The level of conflict in the Basin suggested the need for area-based participation structures as a vehicle for building trust and a common vision at a scale that is meaningful to local communities.

Difficulties were also encountered in the manner in which political structures interacted with the project. Although report-backs and presentations were given to Council committees, councillors seldom raised any argument or discussion. This had significant repercussions towards the end of the project when councillors were called on (during an election year) to take difficult and contentious decisions in support of the recommendations of the SEA study. This resulted in delays while they debated how to approach the decision-making task. To date no formal position has yet been taken on the SEA recommendations. This underscored the need for effective engagement with political power bases during Local Agenda 21 projects.

The SEA also helped dispel the myth that a 'win-win scenario' is the logical end to all Local Agenda 21 processes. The SEA project suggested that in reality there will be instances when 'win-lose' might be the only option left to achieving improved sustainability. Tough and sometimes unpopular decisions may therefore be required to break unsustainable development patterns, particularly in countries of the developing world where poverty and economic growth remain the two key priorities. Tough decisions taken without the acceptance of those affected will, however, leave a legacy of anger, bitterness and mistrust that will perpetuate conflict rather than resolve it. To avoid this, discussion, understanding, compromise and agreement are required.

4.3. Durban Metropolitan Open Space System (D'MOSS) Framework Plan

The third project undertaken during Phase 2 focused on the long-term protection and management of the rich natural resource base of the city. Although Durban has had an approved open space plan since 1989, there was a need to update and expand the plan following the demarcation of an enlarged metropolitan area in 1996.

4.3.1. Project Process

The preparation of the Durban Metropolitan Open Space System (D'MOSS) Framework Plan involved a multi-disciplinary team consisting of representatives from a consortium of independent consultants (lead by Markewicz English cc) and the Durban Metropolitan Council. 'Urban open space' was defined as all vegetated areas or open hard-surfaced areas within the urban environment. These spaces were seen as an asset to be protected, conserved and managed. Experts from around the city contributed their knowledge to the identification, mapping and classification of the open spaces considered to contribute to the creation an ecologically functional open space system for the metropolitan region. On completion of the data capture exercise, maps showing the open space asset were displayed at a central venue in each local council area for public comment and were displayed at all the stakeholder workshops held throughout the process. This allowed members of the public and various environmental organizations to further refine the mapped asset.

A review of the relevance of an open space system to the needs of a growing African city demonstrated that open spaces provide services (e.g. water supply, pollution control) that are vital to meeting the basic needs of urban residents, particularly poor and conventionally unserviced communities. In Durban the total replacement value of the services delivered by the metropolitan open space asset was estimated -using international research in the field of resource

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economics - at R2.24 billion per annum[3] (excluding the value of Durban's tourism sector, which is worth approximately R3.5 million per annum). The Framework Plan also suggested that the entire open space asset did not need to be owned and / or directly managed by local government, but that business, industry and all other land owners should be encouraged to manage the resource on a catchment basis in accordance with the principles of the plan.

4.3.2. Summary of Lessons Learned

Resource economics provided a useful tool for bridging the gulf between the conservation concerns of environmental planners and the development concerns of politicians. This approach allowed the D'MOSS concept to be re-invented a way that transformed it from a 'green' concern of the advantaged minority, to a 'lifeline' for the disadvantaged majority. It also highlighted the role of 'windows of opportunity' (in this case political transition) in changing the fortunes of sustainable development initiatives.

The D'MOSS Framework Plan has not, however, gone unchallenged by line functions and political decision-makers within the city, many of whom see it as a threat to future development. Thus, while tools such as resource economics provide a useful first step in aligning biodiversity concerns and societal priorities, it is clear that this alignment process must be supported by education programmes that help develop a deeper understanding amongst stakeholders of broader, long-term sustainability issues.

Caution must also be expressed regarding the use of resource economics as a decision-support tool. Many of the services provided by open spaces are intangible, difficult to quantify, irreplaceable or priceless. Resource economics, however, implies that the non-human world is only of value when it provides goods and services to the human world. In the instances where the value of open areas cannot be clearly identified or where the economic value is not viewed as sufficiently substantial, there is the real danger that areas will be treated as valueless i.e. 'If they don't pay they cannot stay!' It is clear that there is a need to review and improve the tools used to promote sustainable development, for while some may offer short-term relief, they could well be counter-productive and undermine the move towards longer-term sustainability.

Forward planning of the D'MOSS project and the other large Phase 2 projects (DMEPI and SEA) was severely hampered during this period by the fact that approval or consideration of the recommendations emerging from the these projects occurred, on average, a year after the date of submission to Council. Local Agenda 21 programmes must make provision to deal with the reality of bureaucratic inertia.

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[3] This is a conservative estimate as the values for some services are not yet available.

4.4. Community Open Space Development

The majority of projects undertaken during Phase 2 addressed planning and policy development rather than focusing on tangible deliverables. A once-off allocation of capital monies to the Environmental Management Branch for 'greening' programmes, however, provided the opportunity to demonstrate the practical advantages of improved environmental management to local communities. The project focused on the creation of usable open spaces in high density residential areas that would contribute to D'MOSS and help address community priorities such as poverty alleviation, improved quality of life, equal access to resources and job creation.

4.4.1. Project Process

The Environmental Management Branch worked in partnership with Parks Department officials (the implementing agent for the project) and local councilors in selecting project sites in five previously disadvantaged community areas. In all the projects it was stipulated that part of the budget should be used for the production and erection of educational signage. A further requirement was that local labour should be used in the development of the sites wherever possible. The key problems encountered were that operational funds were not budgeted for by the Parks Department (they had assumed these would be forthcoming from the Environmental Management Branch); vandalism; poor project management; and the discontent of local communities at being involved in the development but not the maintenance of the project areas.

4.4.2. Summary of Lessons Learned

The problems encountered in the five project areas highlighted a number of issues that have relevance for sustainability planning generally i.e.:
- The need for linked capital and operating budgets.
- The need for effective and well coordinated project management from cradle-to-grave.
- The need for effective communication between line functions and formal definitions of project responsibilities.
- The need to maximize stakeholder ownership through involvement in all stages of the project cycle: planning, implementation and management.
- The realization that the cheapest solution is not always the most sustainable one.

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4.5. Education and Outreach Initiative

A problem encountered during Phases 1 and 2 of Durban's Local Agenda 21 programme was that environmental management and sustainable development concepts are difficult for people to understand. Furthermore, stakeholders did not understand how the many projects associated with the Local Agenda 21 programme in Durban related to one another and contributed to the larger goal of sustainable development. In response to this, a Local Agenda 21 Environmental Education and Outreach Initiative was launched to:

complement Phase 2 projects through the production of a range of media products (i.e. booklets, pamphlets and brochures) which highlighted and discussed environment and sustainable development issues;

promote educational and capacity-building opportunities within Phase 2 projects; undertake sustainable development and environmental management training;

explore the use of more innovative educational mechanisms, such as street theatre, for communicating sustainable development concepts.

4.5.1. Lessons Learned

This project highlighted the importance of education and capacity building to the success of Local Agenda 21 programmes. This contrasts with the low priority usually assigned to environmental education in many development projects. It also underscored the fact that sporadic educational projects and interventions do not provide the flow of information and level of interaction required for effective capacity building, and that there is a need to explore innovative educational tools to ensure that all stakeholders have an opportunity to participate in the information sharing process.

5. Phase 3: Transition and review (1999-2000)

Following the completion of Phase 2 it became apparent that there was going to be a significant transition period as preparations began for the establishment of the Durban Unicity. It was determined that the most strategic use of this time would be to consolidate work already done and to lay foundations for programme development within the future Durban Unicity. The outcome was the initiation of the following five projects:

- Participation in Cities Environmental Reports on the Internet (CEROI) project.
- Documentation of Durban's Local Agenda 21 Programme as an International Case Study.
- Awareness and Preparedness for Emergencies at the Local Level (APELL) project.
- Education and Outreach Initiative – Promotional Event.
- Creation of an Interim Environmental Management Structure.

5.1. Cities Environmental Reports on the Internet (CEROI) Project

The aim of the CEROI project was to facilitate comparative global reporting through the development of a simple and easily understood State of the Environment Report template for the Internet. This was seen as an opportunity for Durban to increase the accessibility of the information collected within Phases 1 and 2 of its Local Agenda 21 programme to a broader range of local, national and international stakeholders.

5.1.1. Project Process

As Durban had already completed its first State of the Environment and Development Report in 1996, the primary aim was to test the suitability of the proposed software and template for future State of the Environment reporting in the city. Key sectors from the 1996 State of the Environment and Development Report were updated for the Internet report, and supplemented with information on selected additional issues of environmental importance.

5.1.2. Summary of Lessons Learned

The preparation of the Internet-based SOE&DR required that the Environmental Management Branch collect information from a variety of local government departments. Once complete, it would have been desirable for these departments to take responsibility for updating the relevant sections of the Internet-based SOE&DR. This has not been possible due to the lack of resources and skills in these line functions. The result is that a single staff member within the Environmental Management Branch is solely responsible for the Internet-based SOE&DR. This means that updating of the site cannot occur on a regular basis. Furthermore, this individual has not been able to transfer her skills, as there is simply no one to transfer them to. The risk to local government is that these valuable skills will be lost before they can be transferred. Thus while donor funding may be useful in building skills, government institutions often do not have the capacity to sustain or further develop these skills.

During the preparation of the Internet-based SOE&DR, each local government line function was responsible for compiling the information entered into the CEROI template. This addressed the problems encountered during the preparation of the initial SOE&DR i.e. some line functions felt that the externally prepared reports incorrectly reflected the state of their sector. Although this new approach helped smooth previous tensions, it generated a new concern that line functions are unlikely to be critical of their own activities. Any future state of the environment reporting must therefore involve outside technical peer review to ensure transparency and accountability in the reporting process.

The technological challenges that face many sustainability initiatives were also highlighted by this project. Controls on local government's computer network meant that Durban's Internet SOE&DR had to be published from outside of the Council system. This was not only time consuming and inconvenient, but will make updating of the web-site difficult. This highlights the need for the technical capabilities of local government to match the tools that it will be expected to use in contributing to improved global sustainability.

5.2. Awareness and Preparedness for Emergencies at the Local Level (APELL) Project

One of the recommendations of the Durban South Basin SEA was that the United Nation's Environmental Programme's (UNEP) Awareness and Preparedness for Emergencies at Local Level (APELL) programme should be initiated in order to better prepare the city for possible technological and industrial accidents in the South Basin.

5.2.1. Project Process

Although the Durban APELL project was initiated by the Environmental Management Branch, it soon became clear that the Branch was not a suitable lead agent for the project. Following discussions with key stakeholders in the city administration, the Disaster Management Branch agreed to take primary responsibility for the project provided that the Environmental Management Branch continued to provide them with interim assistance in organizing the regional workshop to launch APELL in Durban and sub-Saharan Africa.

Recognizing the existing stakeholder conflict in the Durban South Basin, an independent facilitator was appointed to assist with the planning and running of the workshop. Despite this, the South Durban Community Environmental Alliance (SDCEA) indicated their intention to withdraw from further involvement in the APELL process until the Council decision regarding the Durban South Basin SEA recommendations was known. Despite this notice of withdrawal, all other stakeholders at the workshop reconfirmed their support for the initiation of APELL in Durban and proposed the creation of an 'Interim Committee' with representatives from government and industry. The mandate of the Interim Committee was to secure community support and participation in the APELL programme and to establish a fully representative Steering Committee.

Initial attempts by the Interim Committee to fulfil this mandate were not successful. As a result, the international funding agency offering potential funding to the APELL process in Durban considered withdrawing its support. A personal approach by the Environmental Manager to an environmental activist and community leader in the Durban South Basin resulted in further discussions with

SDCEA regarding APELL. This resulted in permission being obtained from SDCEA for a mission by an independent conflict resolution to assess the likely success of an APELL programme in Durban. The subsequent mission report recommended a number of conditions that were to be met by all three stakeholder groups before funding could be released for the Durban APELL project. All three stakeholder groups expressed their qualified commitment to meeting these preconditions, but the international funding agency has nevertheless declined to support the programme due to its likely cost and focus.

5.2.2. Summary of Lessons Learned

The *de facto* association of APELL with the SEA report made the project unacceptable to local communities, despite the fact that improved disaster management in the Durban South Basin is in everyone's best interests. In retrospect, it would have been wiser to unbundle the SEA and APELL processes regardless of the synergies that existed between them. This highlights the need for careful strategizing as part of sustainable development planning.

A further difficulty encountered was the inability to effectively transfer the lead agent responsibility from the Environmental Management Branch to the Disaster Management Branch. This was largely due to the lack of importance placed on the forward planning function of the Disaster Management Branch by city management and the resulting shortage of financial and human resources available to the project. It is clear that without adequate resources and high-level administrative or political support, the move to greater sustainability can be an arduous process.

Finally, the role played by SDCEA indicated the power of gatekeeper organizations and their ability to effectively *veto* processes under conditions where other elements of society are not effectively mobilized or organized. This highlighted the need to build capacity amongst all stakeholder groups to ensure that sustainable development processes are not dominated by the agenda of any particular group.

5.3. Education and Outreach Initiative

The resignation of the staff member responsible for the Education and Outreach Initiative led to the indefinite suspension of the project. In order to ensure that the impact of the Initiative was not entirely lost, a promotional event was held to focus attention on the achievements of the first six years of the programme. A range of key local government officials and politicians were invited to the event at which a video and series of posters profiled the work undertaken during the first three phases of Durban's Local Agenda 21 programme. This was a highly successful event, both from an exposure perspective and in terms of building a

better understanding of Local Agenda 21 and the importance of sustainable development.

5.3.1. Summary of Lessons Learned

Education and capacity building initiatives are often amongst the first elements of a programme to be sacrificed when resources are scarce and technical workloads are high. This is a short-sighted approach, given that education provides the best long-term hope of changing mindsets and achieving real sustainability.

5.4. Creation of an Interim Environmental Management Department

Following approval for the interim restructuring of the Environmental Management Branch received during Phase 2, approval was received in 2001 for the filling of seven of 19 new posts. A review of critical posts throughout the Council, however, led to this decision being revisited and only two of the new posts being approved. This effectively leaves the Branch in its current under-resourced form for the foreseeable future.

5.4.1. Summary of Lessons Learned

Surviving a process of constant restructuring is the single largest challenge that Durban's Local Agenda 21 programme has faced during its first seven years. Inappropriate institutional structures, insufficient resources and influence, constant turn-over and loss of staff and changing responsibilities have made advancement and development of the programme a continuous challenge. Institutional stability is thus seen an important element in achieving improved sustainability.

5.5. Documentation of Durban's LA21 Programme as an International Case Study

The offer of European Commission funding from the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) to assist with the documentation and publication of Durban's Local Agenda 21 programme created the opportunity to formally record and evaluate all of the work undertaken during the last seven years. This documentation process was seen as critical to developing an institutional memory in a situation where staff turnover levels are high and where institutional restructuring is ongoing.

6. Phase 4: Preparing for the Unicity (2000-2002)

The projects initiated during Phase 4 were primarily a response to the transition from a metropolitan to Unicity administration and looked to build on work undertaken in previous phases.

6.1. Review of Environmental Performance in Local Government

From the outset, the objective of Durban's Local Agenda 21 programme has been the development of an environmental management system (EMS) for local government aimed at achieving sustainable development. During Phase 4, the need to review local government's sustainable development performance was identified as the next step in advancing the process of EMS development. Council approval was thus obtained for a project to:
review existing Council policies, actions and decision-making in terms of environmental performance standards and guidelines specified within the Durban Metropolitan Environmental Management Policy and other external systems such as ISO 14001;
identify strategic projects which will improve this performance;
prepare business plans for implementation of these projects;
establish private/public partnerships and/or identify funders to ensure implementation of these business plans.
This project is due for completion in January 2002. Although six strategic projects have been identified it is likely that the resource limitations of the Environmental Management Branch will greatly restrict the extent to which it can further

6.2. Preparation of a Unicity Environmental Services Management Plan (UESMP)

This project focused on the extension of the Phase 2 metropolitan open space plan to the new Unicity boundaries. Key activities included:

Identifying, mapping and classifying all open space areas in the Unicity.
Revision of the previous typology used for classifying open space areas.
The design of an Unicity open space system. This differs from the previous metropolitan system in that it includes only those areas considered to be critical to the sustainable provision of open space services. By way of comparison, the metropolitan plan had included all areas considered to contribute to the ecological viability of the system.
A detailed case study was undertaken in the Umgeni River Catchment which refined and updated the open space plan in this area and more clearly identified development pressures and corresponding sources of environmental services
Available financial and legal tools were also investigated with a view to ensuring that important open space resources in private ownership are not lost because of

the owner's financial inability to maintain them, or through the implementation of existing, inappropriate development rights.

Although the project was completed in June 2001, the Environmental Management Branch is continuing to refine the UESMP during the remainder of Phase 4 and is hoping to lay the foundation for the hand over of the open space planning function to the Unicity Parks Departments, so that planning and implementation in the natural resource base are undertaken by a single line function.

6.3. Cities for Climate Protection Project

The final project planned for Phase 4 also has its roots in work undertaken during Phase 2. Concerns related to open space planning and air quality management suggested that there was a need for a broader focus on the global aspects of these issues. The question of climate change provided an umbrella under which the global impacts of many of these local problems could be addressed. This was given further impetus by a Bilateral Grant Agreement signed between the national Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism (DEAT) and USAID (US Agency for International Development) to implement a South African program to address global climate change. One component of this programme is a 'Unicity Climate Change Initiative' that aims to engage South African cities in actions that will address both their own urban service priorities and those of the global climate change agenda. The programme intends providing technical assistance to the cities in preparing climate protection plans as well as providing technical and grant assistance for implementation. Durban has been selected as one of the eight local authorities that will participate in the project.

7. Durban's sustainability roadmap

In reviewing Durban's experiences, UNESCO's 'wise practice' framework provides a useful framework for highlighting lessons of general applicability to other local authorities considering embarking on a Local Agenda 21 programme.

1. Ensure Long-term Benefit
Benefits of the activity will be evident years from now and will improve environmental quality.

- *Need For Change*

Durban has shown that Local Agenda 21 is not a pseudonym for 'business as usual'. It is a call for long-term change in all sectors. For government this could mean changing its structures to ensure a critical mass of people and resources to work towards sustainability, or facilitating the involvement of local stakeholders in decision-making processes. For business and industry it could mean changing

modes of production to become responsible contributors to local and global sustainability rather than just vehicles for economic gain. For communities it could mean replacing activism with a willingness to sit at the bargaining table to discuss new and difficult issues. Because Local Agenda 21 programmes will have to mediate these processes, they must be flexible enough to meet the expectations of the different stakeholder groups and responsive enough to react to the new priorities and needs that will emerge through time.

- *Ripple Effects*

Local Agenda 21 processes are slow to unfold and require time to become well rooted in local administrations and political structures. Changes in attitudes do not occur instantaneously. Because of the evolving nature of these processes it is possible that decisions made at one point will have consequences later on in the process. This 'ripple effect' needs to be managed and the possible long-term consequences of all decision-making critically evaluated.

2. Capacity Building and Institutional Strengthening

The activity should provide improved management capabilities and education for the stakeholder groups as well as knowledge and efforts to protect the local environment.

- *Need for Capacity Building*

Because the concept of sustainable development is so complex and the term 'Local Agenda 21' foreign to many, capacity building and education are critical elements of any Local Agenda 21 programme. This capacity building must be an ongoing process rather than a once-off exercise. Capacity building must also be a priority task rather than the first element to be sacrificed when resources and skills are scarce. In order to be successful, Local Agenda 21 programmes must also acknowledge the capacity mismatch that exists between stakeholder groups. This is an important consideration as these programmes seek to create partnerships for local action under conditions where each partner will usually have different skills and capacity building needs. One size does not fit all! Capacity building is also important in ensuring that processes are not dominated by the agendas of gatekeeper groups.

- *Need for a Critical Institutional Mass*

There is a need to establish a critical institutional mass to sustain momentum and ensure delivery. This is necessary as Local Agenda 21 programmes require widespread networking and partnership development, a process that cannot be undertaken successfully by one or even a few people. Where this critical institutional mass is not achieved there is a danger that there will be too strong a reliance on the role played by champions. Under these circumstances, programme sustainability becomes strongly aligned with the commitment and energy of individuals. This is highly unsustainable.

3. _Sustainability_

The activity adheres to the principles of sustainability (the extent to which the results will last and development will continue once the project/programme has ended).

- *Need for Mainstreaming*

Working towards greater sustainability in the urban environment is a complex task involving the coordination of stakeholders, resources and priorities. Because it will never occur spontaneously it must be planned for. For this reason it is imperative that Local Agenda 21 programmes are mainstreamed (i.e. prioritized within the strategic planning processes of local government) in order to ensure broad scale commitment and involvement. Local Agenda 21 programmes in the developing world particularly need to have a strong developmental focus, and must demonstrate how sustainability can help meet people's basic needs and improve quality of life. Location within an environmental department therefore brings with it the danger that these processes will be seen as 'green' or anti-development.

- *Need for Adequate Resourcing*

Human and financial resource limitations will have severe impacts on Local Agenda 21 programmes. This ranges from the inability to undertake work to the need to curtail or stop successful initiatives. Preventing the wastage of human and financial resources will require that Local Agenda 21 programmes are adequately resourced from the beginning. This is important as stakeholder expectations are raised through involvement, and the inability to complete the project or implement the resulting recommendations creates mistrust and reduces commitment to future projects.

- *Grab Opportunities*

Local Agenda 21 programmes should be make use of 'windows of opportunity'. This does not mean that programmes should be deliberately opportunistic in nature, but rather that they should be able to use changing circumstances (e.g. political transformation) to their advantage. The drawback is that the change and uncertainty that often characterize these 'windows of opportunity' can have equally negative consequences for the Local Agenda 21 process, making it difficult to plan proactively and impacting on the motivation and commitment of staff.

- *Catalysts and Implementers*

There is a division between role players that act as 'catalysts' and those that act as 'implementers' in any Local Agenda 21 programme. Typically 'catalysts' initiate new projects, promote new ideas and seek out new problem solving techniques. Every 'catalyst' must, however, be partnered by an accompanying implementing agent to give effect to these new ideas. Unless both capacities are present in local government, many sustainable development initiatives are unlikely to move from the drawing board.

4. Transferability
Aspects of the activity can be applied to other sites, in or outside the country.

- *No Carbon Copies*

Local Agenda 21 processes are not standardized and the individual needs and priorities of each city should be used to craft a city-specific programme. Although key principles and methodologies may be transferable between cities, in each case these have to be applied or used by people and institutions with a deep knowledge of the local context.

5. Consensus Building
The activity should benefit a majority of the stakeholder groups, whilst bearing in mind that in some cases certain under-privileged groups may need to be treated as special cases.

- *Need for Compromise*

All too often the notion of sustainable development is taken to imply a 'win-win' scenario. This is misleading as there are likely to be instances where the move to greater sustainability produces situations that are regarded by some stakeholder as 'win-lose' scenarios. This implies that Local Agenda 21 programmes will be arenas for difficult decision-making and that they will have to rely on strong and visionary leadership to ensure that the best long-term decisions prevail. Particular care must be taken where potential losers belong to vulnerable or disadvantaged groups to ensure that improved sustainability for the many does not further peripheralise the few. These groups must also be fully engaged in determining and overseeing the change process.

- *Conflict Management*

Where competition exists between well-established and entrenched power bases, new integrative initiatives such as Local Agenda 21 may be seen as threatening, signalling the emergence of a new competing power base or as an attempt to control existing ones. Local Agenda 21 practitioners should not think that because they advocate a better, more sustainable future that this idea will be readily accepted or embraced by other stakeholder groups. Some stakeholders could have vested interests in perpetuating unsustainability for short-term gain. Local Agenda 21 programmes can therefore be highly conflictual in nature and this must be planned for through the establishment of conflict management processes and structures that regularly bring together different stakeholder groups and power bases for debate, dialogue and capacity building in order to build trust and new partnerships.

6. Participatory Process
Participation of all stakeholder groups – where the intentions of all groups are known - and the involvement of individuals, is intrinsic to the process.

- *Champions*

The scale and complexity of the global environmental crisis often serves to trivialize the role of the individual. In Local Agenda 21 processes a single person or small groups of people can and do make a difference. Local Agenda 21 programmes must therefore make space for more than just stakeholder groups they must facilitate action by highly motivated individuals, particularly those that will act as champions. Champions are important as they provide continuity when interest wanes amongst other stakeholders, help brand processes, provide a rallying point for people with similar interests and are often instrumental in unblocking stalled or difficult processes. Without hard working and committed champions, no Local Agenda 21 programme can hope to succeed or survive in the long-term. At the same time there are potential pitfalls associated with too strong a reliance on champions. There is the danger that when a champion moves on (either geographically or in terms of interest) the programme will lose momentum or collapse entirely. This does not mean that champions are irreplaceable, but rather that each project should have more than one champion. Local Agenda 21 programmes should therefore work towards the identification of a range of champions amongst all stakeholder groups (e.g. amongst city administrators in different line functions, politicians, community groups and NGO's) and help build their capacity to ensure the continuity and sustainability of the programme.

7. Effective and Efficient Communication Process
A multidirectional communication process involving dialogue, consultation and discussion is needed to attain awareness.

- *Consultation*

The success of the consultation and participation processes within any Local Agenda 21 programme is often the best barometer of overall sustainability. Effective participation and consultation requires the creation of small, committed and accountable stakeholder groups that can play an integral role in the planning and implementation of projects. A structured approach to participation (i.e. clear objectives and rules for interactions and defined roles and responsibilities) also provides a mechanism for addressing the distrust that can exist between stakeholders. By working together in an agreed on format, new understandings and friendships are developed.

8. Culturally Respectful
The process values local traditional and cultural frameworks while also challenging their environmental validity.

- *The Challenge of Cultural Diversity*

In a culturally and politically diverse society, Local Agenda 21 programmes must employ different tools and approaches to communicate ideas to stakeholders in terms that are meaningful to them.

9. Gender and/or other Sensitivity Issues

The process accounts for the many aspects of gender and/or other sensitive issues.

- *The Silent Constituency*

To date, Durban's Local Agenda 21 programme has not focused specifically on gender linked issues or problems. This is not a result of a lack or awareness but rather the result of focusing limited resources on issues that are perceived to have greater developmental and political significance. This demonstrates how easily this aspect of sustainable development can be overlooked. Mechanisms will have to be found to mainstream gender concerns, particularly in the cities of the developing world. This will require a diversity of interventions e.g. training of local government officials, the establishment of specific institutional structures to deal with gender and related issues, and for these issues to be incorporated into performance management systems.

10. Strengthening Local Identities

The activity provides a sense of belonging and self-reliance at various levels.

- *A Cocktail of Action*

Local Agenda 21 projects that focus on policy development or planning are unlikely to change the attitudes of local communities. For any Local Agenda 21 programme to survive it must appeal to grass-roots stakeholders as well as policy makers. It is difficult for most stakeholders to sustain interest and involvement in high-level processes that appear to have no direct benefits. This suggests that Local Agenda 21 programmes must link planning and policy generation with local development projects in order to ensure sustained buy-in from the broader community.

11. National Legal Policy

The activity adheres to current government environmental, economic, legal and social policies.

12. Regional Dimension

The activity should embody the regional, economic, social and environmental perspective.

- *From the Bottom - Up*

Compliance with national and regional policy and law is a critical element in ensuring long-term sustainability. There will, however, be instances where local processes highlight the unsustainability or unsuitability of these higher order requirements. Under these circumstances local needs should be used to inform and motivate changes in these broader frameworks.

13. Human Rights
The activity should provide freedom to exercise fundamental rights.

- *Providing a Platform*

Local Agenda 21 programmes must provide a platform for all stakeholder groups to exercise their fundamental rights and to lobby for change where these rights are compromised through unsustainable development.

14. Documentation
The activity and the lessons learnt have been well documented.

- *Creating Institutional Memory*

The complexity and dynamism of many Local Agenda 21 programmes mean that many important processes, experiences and decisions are not be adequately documented due to a lack of time and resources. The net result is that no permanent institutional memory is created and that valuable lessons are lost. Time and resources must be found in all Local Agenda 21 programmes to document sustainability experiences.

15. Evaluation
The activity has been tested to determine the extent to which wise practice characteristics have been utilized.

- *Measuring Progress*

It has been internationally recognized that a system for measuring achievements and monitoring the implementation of Local Agenda 21 programmes is important. This need is, however, often overlooked due to the lack of appropriate human and financial resources and the fact no measurable objectives were set at the beginning of the process. This means that those involved directly in the programme are not be able to realistically assess the level of success and that the progress made will often be obscured by the difficulties associated with the process. The need for monitoring also underlines the urgent need for accurate and comprehensive databases to be developed in all key sustainable development sectors to establish the baseline state and to evaluate future progress.