

LOCAL DIALOGUE 21



A working relationship

Moving a windmill from Pretoria in South Africa to Namsos in Norway has demonstrated the benefits of working together.

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From Sweden to Lake Victoria

Cultural exchange and exchange of environmental knowledge is central in the co-operation between students and teachers from Sweden and the Lake Victoria region.

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Common challenges

Lahti in Finland and Bojanala Platinum in South Africa exchange ideas and experiences on how to tackle social and environmental challenges.

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New bearings for the Nordic countries

The Nordic strategy for sustainable development points at the importance of international co-operation to promote sustainable development in different parts of the world. In line with this, Local Dialogue 21 highlights innovative action in the Nordic countries that can give inspiration and new ideas on how to strengthen the global perspective in Local Agenda 21 activities.

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Photo: la Brix Jensen

Local action with national impact

Environmental activists from Denmark and South Africa have worked together for two years to strengthen their role as change agents in the local community. The co-operation has successfully made an impact on national environmental policies in South-Africa, participants point out.

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Local Dialogue 21 is a collaboration between the Nordic countries and the Nordic Council of Ministers



Editorial

Building bridges

- In a pioneering school project, teachers and students in Denmark and Africa use e-mail and the Internet to develop a cross-cultural learning environment with a global curriculum.
- In Finland, local authorities have linked up with colleagues in African countries to exchange ideas and experiences on environmental issues and local democracy.
- In Grästorps, Sweden, partnership with Marrupa in Mozambique gives local people new perspectives on their own society.
- In North West Russia and Northern Norway, school children have collaborated to create a message to the world's leaders at the UN Summit on Sustainable Development.

These are just a few examples of local efforts to build bridges between people in the Nordic countries and people in other parts of the world. Since the Rio conference in 1992, numerous local initiatives have sprung up in the Nordic countries to follow up Agenda 21 and its call for joint action towards a sustainable development. Some of the examples are presented in this newspaper – with a hope that they can give ideas and inspiration to others.

Local Agenda 21 is considered to be one of the most successful elements in the implementation of Agenda 21. A large number of communities in the Nordic countries have engaged in Local Agenda 21 activities, involving local politicians and local authorities, non-governmental organisations, businesses and ordinary citizens.

Sometimes, local environmental issues have dominated the work rather than global perspectives. But the examples on the following pages show that there are many ways to integrate the local and global perspectives of sustainable development, ways that open up for broader participation in Local Agenda 21 work.

A major goal for Local Agenda 21 is to contribute to solving global environmental problems. But the broad involvement that characterizes a successful Local Agenda 21 process can also promote mutual understanding across borders and strengthen local democracy in different parts of the world.

Modern technology opens up for new ways of global co-operating. This newspaper is a good example: Writers come from both the North and the South, the lay-out work has been done in the North by people from both the North and the South, and it is printed in the South – in Johannesburg. ■

Øivind Fjeldstad
Editor

New Bearings for the Nordic Countries

The Nordic strategy for sustainable development constitutes a Nordic contribution to the 10th anniversary of the Rio Conference. With the strategy, the Nordic countries want to promote intensified and binding international co-operation on sustainable development.

The Nordic welfare states have relatively long traditions for including social considerations in economic development. However, inclusion of the environmental dimension of sustainable development in sectors and other policy areas remain major challenges in the Nordic region.

Including the sectors

The Nordic strategy focuses on efforts to include environmental considerations and sustainable development in six important sectors – energy, transport, agriculture, business and industry, fisheries, and forestry. Additionally, the strategy defines initiatives to strengthen public participation in activities promoting sustainable development and local Agenda 21 activities.

"Broad public participation in the decision-making processes is one of the fundamental preconditions for sustainable development, and this presupposes access to information on the environment and developments," the strategy points out.

The Aarhus Convention

The Nordic strategy states that "openness and participation are two faces of the same coin," and points at the importance of the Aarhus convention.

The Aarhus Convention, which was signed in 1998, entails a right to access to documents and files and provides for a duty on the part of the authorities actively to keep the public

informed. The authorities must make sure that citizens are provided with the necessary environmental information, and they must encourage private enterprises to disclose how their activities impact on the environment.

To strengthen the possibility of the public to exert influence, the Convention

requires public involvement in decisions taken by the authorities regarding the environment, in public planning, and in preparing legislation.

Local Agenda 21

The principles in the Aarhus Convention are important to motivate and enable citizens to participate in local work for sustainable development. Such participation, through Local Agenda 21, is seen by the Nordic countries as important for two main reasons: It helps the authorities design the best and most appropriate strategy for sustainable development in local communities, and at the same time, participation in Local Agenda 21 will give citizens a better understanding of the implications for them of transition to sustainability.

The Nordic strategy also points at the importance of international co-operation between different actors to promote sustainable development in different parts of the world. It refers to the recommendation in Agenda 21 that an international exchange of experience should be launched between local authorities, NGOs and local groups of citizens and their associations.

Local Dialogue 21 displays examples of how this recommendation has been followed up locally in the Nordic countries, and is itself a contribution to promote international exchange of experience from work on sustainable development. ■



About Local Dialogue 21

Local Dialogue 21 is a collaboration between Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden and the Nordic Council of Ministers. Its goal is to show how local initiatives can contribute to a sustainable development by building bridges between East and West, North and South.

Local Dialogue 21 highlights innovative action in the Nordic countries that can give inspiration and new ideas on how to strengthen the global perspective in Local Agenda 21 activities.

Local Dialogue 21 is a Nordic priority because:

- Local Agenda 21 has been a cornerstone in implementing Agenda 21.
- Participation and co-operation are hallmarks of the Nordic model for democracy.
- Local community involvement in global projects gives citizens global perspectives.

More information
and more good examples
are found on
the Local Dialogue 21 website –
www.ld21.net

Fun with a global perspective

It should be cheap, simple and fun. These are key words for work on Local Agenda 21 in Grästorp in Sweden. Environmental action has given the community four mentions in the Guinness Book of Records.

By Øivind Fjeldstad



A group of strange creatures are smoothly moving back and forth in the big sports hall in Grästorp, a small community with 6 000 inhabitants in central Sweden. Voices speak about the conditions of life around the world and about the importance of water. The creatures are sea animals representing different continents.

Behind the colourful masks are children, and they are preparing for a public performance on the occasion of the World Environment Day. The performance is a shortened version of the play "Thoughts of water", which dramatizes global environmental issues.

"By using music, dance and theatrical expression we try to promote environmental understanding among children in an entertaining way," says Lena Johansson, who has visited several schools with "Thoughts of water". Now she works on a new project – "Building Bridges" – which aims at raising the awareness among school children on global issues.

Global perspective

Working with children is important, says Grästorp's municipal Agenda 21 co-ordinator Gunnel Lundmark. "The children are the future, and through the children we also reach their parents."

Lundmark emphasizes that local environmental work should always have a global perspective. And she believes that one of the best ways to bring in this perspective

is through direct contacts with a local community in another part of the world. For Grästorp, this means co-operating with Marrupa in northern Mozambique.

At Grästorp's municipal camping site a group from the Agenda 21 Association North/South discusses the summer's work. Every evening for ten weeks, the association operates the camping site. Payment for the job is 25 000 Swedish kroner (US\$ 2500), which will go directly to support rural development in Marrupa.

The initiative to establish contacts between Marrupa and Grästorp was taken in 1996. Since then, various forms of material support have been given from Grästorp to Marrupa. But Gunnel Lundmark, who has been involved in the co-operation from the beginning, stresses that both sides benefit from the contact.

As part of the co-operation, people from the two communities have visited each other. This has opened the visitors' eyes for both good and bad aspects of the life in the other society.

"Why are there so many people here without children?"

asked the chief administrator in Marrupa when he visited a home for the elderly in Grästorp. He was convinced that they had no children, as he couldn't imagine that people would send their old parents away instead of taking care of them at home, as people in Marrupa do. And during a visit to the waste recycling site in the Swedish community, he was somewhat shocked when he saw all the fully useful things that ended up as waste.

"Such reactions give us a new perspective on our own lifestyle," says Gunnel Lundmark. "We have learned very much from our contacts with Marrupa. It has made us understand that we cannot solve our problems if we cannot manage with less resource use."

Serious fun

The Agenda 21 co-ordinator works hard to increase public awareness of global environmental challenges. Her strategy is straightforward: The activities must be fun and the message



"The children are the future, and through the children we also reach their parents," says Grästorp's municipal Agenda 21 co-ordinator Gunnel Lundmark.

All photos: Øivind Fjeldstad

easy to understand, although dealing with serious issues.

Among the entertaining environmental actions in Grästorp, have been the numerous attempts to set new Guinness world records. Such attempts have included collecting used light bulbs, crown corks and hard plastic objects, as well as constructing the world's biggest milk carton castle. The record attempts have been successful four times and have found their way into the Guinness Book of Records.

The attempts form part of the annual environmental and culture week, during which a number of activities take place, including children's theatre performances, competitions in green shopping and sorting waste into the right categories.

"For a small community, successful environmental work depends on finding ways of doing things which are cheap, simple and fun. It is the Grästorp model," says Gunnel Lundmark. ■

During a visit to the waste recycling site in the Swedish community, he was somewhat shocked when he saw all the fully useful things that ended up as waste



A working relationship



Students and teachers at Namsos upper secondary school in Norway and Pretoria Technical High School in South Africa are in tune with each other. Moving a South African windmill to Norway has demonstrated the benefits of working together.

By Eivind Kvam

"Through practical work and co-operation between people in Namsos and Pretoria, despite a quite different starting point, we want to increase international understanding. And so far, we are highly satisfied with the results," says headmaster Joar Grande at Namsos upper secondary school.

It was the headmaster's interest in veteran cars which literally speaking paved the way for a project that has given some of his students experiences which many will envy them.

"The whole thing started by chance," Grande says. "Through my hobby, I came in touch with a Norwegian working on an aid project in South Africa. It turned out that we shared views on several issues, such as globalisation and global energy challenges. We became eager to find concrete projects. And then we got started."

Through the Norwegian Agency for Development Co-operation, contact was quickly established between Namsos and Pretoria Technical High School. First between the headmasters, and then between teachers and students.

"At our school, we were then in the middle of planning a significant rebuilding and expansion, and plans for an energy park were launched. A windmill, which had pumped water in the countryside in Africa, would fit well into such an environment," says Joar Grande.

Effective students

The idea was quickly followed up in practice. In May last year, four students and the teacher Oddbjørn Guldvik went to South Africa. Together with fellow students and teachers from Pretoria, they were to dismantle a 40 year old windmill.

Teachers and students from Namsos upper secondary school and Pretoria Technical High School see the windmill as a symbol of friendship between the North and the South.

Photo: Lars Øvereng

"We had planned to spend two or three working days on the job. But the Norwegian and African students co-operated so well, so the task was solved in six hours," Guldvik says.

In addition to the work on the windmill, the ten days in South Africa were filled with a number of social activities, as the students from Namsos lived with their fellow students in Pretoria.

"We became familiar with the way of living and the social life in a foreign country, and we are left with strong impressions which we will hardly ever forget," says Otto Bremset, one of the students who participated in the trip.

Last autumn, the windmill finally reached Namsos, and time had come for a return visit and mounting of the windmill. "The work was done just as smoothly as the dismantling in South Africa," Guldvik says.

Different work ethics

The teacher admits that there were differences between the Norwegian and African students.

"Everybody had the same attitude towards the concrete tasks. They were all prepared

to co-operate to solve the challenges facing them. But there is no denying that the African students showed a commitment that our students might envy them. They showed a respect for the work which was somewhat different from that of the Norwegian students," Oddbjørn Guldvik says.

This spring, a new delegation of students and teachers from Namsos visited Pretoria Technical High School. The main purpose of the trip was cultural exchange and getting to know a foreign country, but the headmasters from the two schools also have plans for new, concrete co-operation projects.

"Working together on concrete projects of a technical character forces students and teachers to co-operate on a practical level. Our philosophy is that this promotes mutual understanding better than bringing the students together on a theoretical basis only," Grande says.

Norwegian guesthouse

After the visits in Pretoria, the people in Namsos have found out that they can help their African friends by building a guesthouse on the premises of the school in Pretoria.

"We have just started the planning of a project which aims at making the students co-operate to build a traditional Norwegian log house in Pretoria. Later we may start other projects linked to nature and culture. But first we want to carry through the guesthouse project," says Joar Grande.

In a couple of years, an African windmill may pump water in Namsos, while guests at Pretoria Technical High School may sleep in a house made from Norwegian timber. Is it possible to imagine a more concrete result of co-operation between students from two continents? ■

There is no denying that the African students showed a commitment that our students might envy them



It took only six hours to dismantle the 40 year old windmill.

Unforgettable moments



Meeting students in Norway has changed our outlook towards people in other countries, the four students from Pretoria say.

Photo: Neo Ntsuma

in Norway

Four students from Pretoria Technical High School toured Norway and many parts of Europe in October 2001, in what they say was the best experience of their lives.

By Hope Huma

The four, Ntombi Banda, Harry Sebapo, Daniel Smith and Vincent Gimesi were chosen to represent their school in an international exchange programme between Pretoria Technical High School and Namsos upper secondary school in Norway.

As part of the co-operation between the two schools, the four students participated in the dismantling of an old windmill from Zeerust, in the North-Western province of South Africa, and re-built it on the Namsos school premises. This was done mainly to teach the Norwegians about traditional energy technology in South Africa, and to symbolize the relationship between the two schools.

In an interview with the four students, they run out of words when describing their excitement about the visit to Norway.

"Being there was an experience of a lifetime, and one I will cherish for the rest of my life", says one of the students. They all agree that while Norway may be much more technologically-advanced than South Africa, the students in Namsos still have a lot to learn from them as far as school subjects are concerned.

The students were fascinated by the technological gadgets they were

introduced to, such as the 67 meter high wind turbine, the high technology hydro-electric power station, as well as the green vegetation and clean environment in Norway.

Valuable lessons

The South African students emphasize that they learnt a handful of invaluable lessons from their Norwegian counterparts. "Firstly, our approach and expectations from school are worlds apart. Also, the fact that the Norwegian students do not wear uniform and can leave classes at any time is very strange to us," they point out.

"Their teachers and their parents are much more liberal than here in South Africa," the students add. "We realized and appreciated

the fact that it is their nature of doing things and we were excited to experience the Vikings' hospitality at first-hand. Crime is almost non-existent, the people are very friendly, and they even pay high taxes to earn respect in the community."

Close interaction

The students say that their encounter with the students in Norway has made a world of difference in their general outlook towards people in other countries. In terms of culture, they were impressed about the seriousness with which the Norwegians treated music and art.

"The fact that we went to their school, lived in their homes, interacted with their parents and ate their food brought us closer together at a personal level. We exchanged

many life experiences and taught one another our histories, which was very stimulating," one of the South Africans says. ■

The fact that we went to their school, lived in their homes, interacted with their parents and ate their food brought us closer together at a personal level

From Sweden to Lake Victoria

Schools in Sweden and in the Lake Victoria region in Kenya and Uganda work together to strengthen young people's participation in the development of a sustainable society.

In February 2002, seven students and three teachers from the Gullmargymnasiet school in Lysekil, Sweden, visited the Victoria Lake region for three weeks. The Swedes visited schools in Kenya and Uganda and participated in tree planting and community activities in villages, and they engaged in an exchange of knowledge on culture and environmentally sound technologies.

The trip was part of the Lake Victoria and Scandinavian Regions School Link Project, which has so far involved two schools in Sweden and eight schools in Kenya and Uganda. The idea behind the project is to promote cultural exchange

and exchange of environmental knowledge, and to collaborate in community-based sustainable development awareness activities.

The initiative to start the school project was taken by teachers from Sweden and the Lake Victoria region, who worked together on a Swedish financed development project in Kenya towards the end of the 1990ies. Working together, they realized that schools were neglected and under-utilized as a means to promote sustainable development.

The project is based on the underlying recognition that ideas and principles for sustainable development often suffer from lack of support from the grassroots – partly because of poor communication strategies. Using the schools, which are a powerful channel for bringing new ideas and concepts down to the local level, can change this. ■



Co-operation between schools can be an effective means to promote sustainable development.

New tricks for old



The exchange of ideas between Danish and South African environmentalists gave the participants from both countries new perspectives on their community work.

Photo: la Brix Jensen

Transcultural engagement is not always easy, but the struggle for common ground makes for valuable individual learning. This is what a group of Danish and South African community activists have experienced after two years training in leadership and Local Agenda 21.

By Merete Lindstad

Why should a Danish well-paid teacher bother to grow his own potatoes and tomatoes when he can afford to buy them in the supermarket? And how come South African environmentalists don't see burning of waste as an acceptable way of handling a waste problem?

These were among the questions that came up when ten Danes and ten South Africans met over a two year training course on Local Agenda 21, leadership and the role as a "change agent" in the local community. The course was organized by the Danish Society for the Conservation of Nature (DN) in collaboration with Group for Environmental Monitoring (GEM) and lasted up to February this year.

"A huge success"

Co-operation between environmentalists from South Africa and Denmark has successfully made an impact on national environmental policies in South Africa. This is the view of participants in the LA 21 programme run by Danmarks Naturfredningsforening (DN) and Group for Environmental Monitoring (GEM).

By Hope Huma

For two years, ten South African environmental activists have co-operated with Danish partners in a joint Local Agenda 21 leadership programme. And the South Africans experienced that the partnership brought new perspectives into their work.

"This interaction has promoted friendship and trust in the interest of the environment, and has promoted a more meaningful dialogue which is extremely useful in understanding the richness of perspectives held by other people across the world. This richness has enhanced our work both at national and local levels," says one of the participants.

During the programme period, the South Africans carried

out extensive work, including researching the status of Local Agenda 21 and generating media coverage of the project. In November 2001, a Local Agenda 21 guide for both Denmark and South Africa was produced. Large quantities of the guide have already been distributed to major non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

National impact

According to the South African participants, the programme has had a major influence on their innovation and their work as "change agents" in their communities. They believe that it has had a national impact as well.

During the implementation of the programme, South African partner NGOs participated in several workshops with the South African National Department of Environmental Affairs to discuss amendments to the National Environmental Management Act, and the National Strategy for Sustainable Development.

The discussion that took place between GEM and the South African Department of Environmental Affairs, and



One of the objectives of the collaboration between DN and GEM has been to improve the North-South dialogue between Denmark and South Africa, says Project Manager Mensah Frimpong. Photo: Neo Ntsuma.

the policy amendments that were made soon after the participants boarded the LA21 project, is seen as a proof that the DN-GEM partnership has successfully made an impact on national environmental policies in South Africa.

dogs

Through practical and theoretical information the participants were to strengthen their capacity in Local Agenda 21 and leadership in a way where each of them could improve his or her own community work. With South Africans representing the "South" and Danes representing the "North", there was also a third dimension to the training; a North-South dialogue.

Grassroots activists

"I am one of those people who will always be doing something in my local area," says Susanne Balslev Nielsen, one of the Danish participants.

Beside her work as a civil engineer teaching at the University in Copenhagen, Balslev Nielsen has been a member of DN for many years. Like all the other participants, she is a grassroots community activist. And when everybody were asked to formulate a LA 21 project in their community which they could work on while attending the course, it was easy for Susanne Balslev Nielsen.

"I was already working on forming and using a broad citizens' forum to establish a recycling centre in my community, Gundso," she says. In connection with this, the training course was very useful.

Even on clearly defined, limited issues like technology, we Danes couldn't take it for granted that we alone knew the one and only truth

"The training has improved my ability to act in the local community. Especially the modules on project management and on solving conflicts were very instructive, inspiring and motivating."

New perspectives

Still more significant were the new perspectives that evolved as a consequence of the close communication with the South African activists.

"I understood that there is more than one truth," says Balslev Nielsen. "Even on clearly defined, limited issues like technology, we Danes couldn't take it for granted that we alone knew the one and only truth."

The cross-cultural learning process was demanding and sometimes quite tough, she admits. At the same time it broadened the perspectives on her community work.

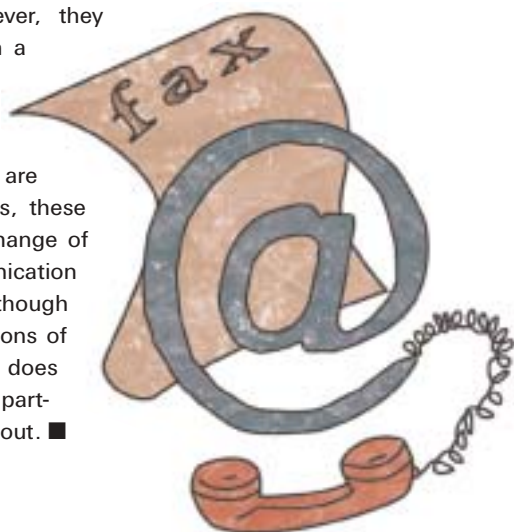
"I definitely got a stronger global consciousness. Meeting the South African reality helped me place my thoughts and ideas into a broader context," says Susanne Balslev Nielsen. ■

Imbalance

The participants in the programme experienced that the idea of an equal partnership between the Danes and the South Africans was not easily achieved. The South Africans point out that DN is technologically more advanced and therefore has a more reliable e-mail system and access to telephones, while some GEM participants did not have access to the Internet or telephone. This meant that there was a clear imbalance in the pattern of communication between participants.

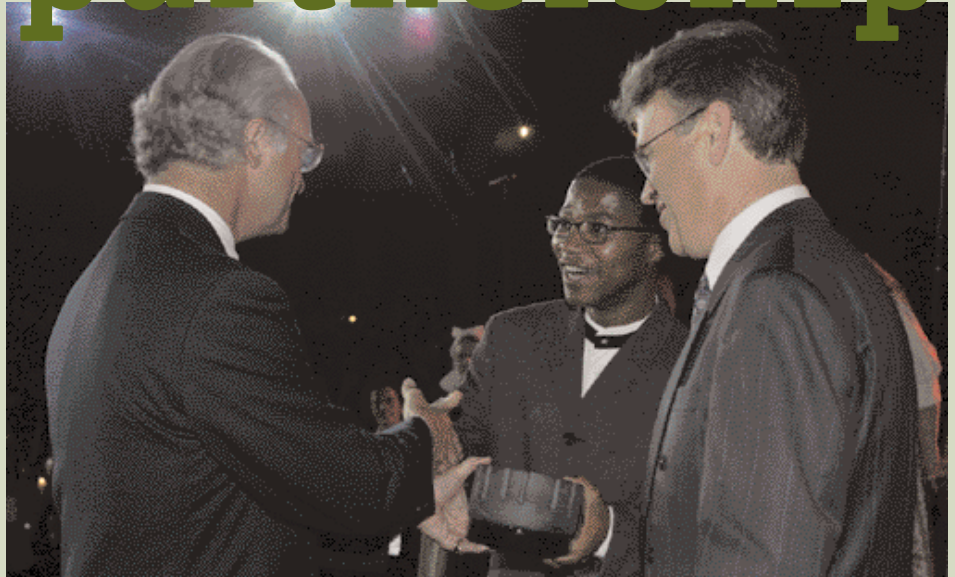
Nevertheless, the South Africans believe that the co-operation programme was a huge success, and the development of the Local Agenda 21 guide a major breakthrough. However, they maintain that meeting face-to-face on a regular basis is the key to effective communication.

While e-mails, telephones and faxes are useful for planning and sharing ideas, these are insufficient to develop a rich exchange of ideas and experiences. Such communication could easily be misinterpreted, and though every GEM participant has had intentions of participating in a "cyber-dialogue", this does not happen that easily, South African partners in the DN-GEM programme point out. ■



While e-mails, telephones and faxes are useful for planning and sharing ideas, these are insufficient to develop a rich exchange of ideas and experiences

Award-winning partnership



As a recognition of its successful co-operation with Emthanjeni, Karlstad received the "The Stockholm Partnerships Award" from the Swedish king Carl Gustav.

Photo: Thomas Engström

Awareness of environmental issues has grown significantly, and new ideas on how to tackle environmental challenges have been adopted. Friendship has developed between people in the two municipalities. These are some of the results of the partnership between Karlstad in Sweden and Emthanjeni in South Africa.

By Øivind Fjeldstad

On the World Environment Day this year, the Swedish municipality Karlstad received "The Stockholm Partnerships Award" for its successful co-operation with Emthanjeni in South Africa to promote local sustainable development. The award was presented to Mikael Schultz from Karlstad by the Swedish king Carl Gustav. A representative from Emthanjeni was also present at the ceremony.

The partnership between Karlstad and Emthanjeni (formerly de Aar) dates back to 1999. From the outset it was decided that the co-operation should fall within the Agenda 21 framework and lead to transfer of knowledge and competence between the parties. It was decided that the co-operation should focus on the following areas: public awareness and training, water and sanitation improvements, solid waste management and pilot environment projects at educational institutions.

Active schools

The partnership has resulted in a number of concrete projects. Among the activities started in Emthanjeni are public education efforts on environmental issues and Agenda 21, pilot projects on waste management and recycling, measures to improve the quality of drinking water and efforts to encourage households to grow vegetables.

Work in schools has been an important part of the co-operation. Participation in practical activities such as gardening and recycling of waste has increased awareness for environmental issues among pupils.

A sign that the work in schools has been successful is the fact that some schools have won prizes at the national competition "Eco-plant" for their work with urban agriculture. Several schools have started up environmental committees, and there are also monthly meetings on environmental issues between representatives from different schools in Emthanjeni.

Impressive impact

Working in schools also has a positive effect on the rest of the local community, according to representatives from Karlstad:

"By working with awareness raising activities in the schools, we have also certainly reached many of the adult population through the most excellent ambassadors, namely school kids."

As part of the co-operation between Karlstad and Emthanjeni, representatives from the communities have visited each other more than once. This has resulted in strong ties of friendship and new ideas for future co-operation. A number of school-children in the two communities have become pen pals and are regularly exchanging letters.

The impact has been impressive, says a report on the co-operation between Karlstad and Emthanjeni. It concludes that by far the most important achievement of the project is the widespread new awareness of environmental issues related to Agenda 21. ■



Lahti and Bojanala Platinum District have many environmental challenges in common, says Sami Keto from Lahti. Here he conducts a workshop on environmental issues at Mfidikwe Primary School.

Photo: BK

Capacity building

Through co-operation with Norwegian municipalities, a number of municipalities in Africa are given assistance to strengthen administrative capacity and local democracy.

During the general election in Norway in 2001, a delegation from the Mukono municipality in Uganda visited its Norwegian partner municipality Gran. The timing of the visit gave the Ugandans a chance to see how Norwegian democracy functions in practice at election time, and at the same time they were given an insight into the daily work in a Norwegian municipality.

The visit from Uganda was part of a co-operation programme between municipalities in Norway and in Africa, which for the moment includes five Norwegian municipalities and their partners in South Africa, Namibia, Uganda and Zambia. The programme is co-ordinated by the Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities and it is financed by the Norwegian Agency for Development Co-operation.

The main purpose of the programme is to strengthen the capacity of local governments in co-operating countries, as well as to strengthen international awareness within Norwegian local government, through mutual exchange of experience.

"The municipal administration in Mukono has lots of ideas and a competent staff. We have a sort of advisory role. We pass on our experiences and ask questions which can trigger their own creativity," says Kirsten Jåvold Hagen in Gran. She believes that the co-operation stimulates popular participation in Mukono, in accordance with the ideas behind Local Agenda 21.

"Efforts have been made to mobilize and make citizens more responsible, for instance by taking part in cleaning up the streets. There is also a wish to strengthen people's participation in the municipal planning process," Jåvold Hagen says. ■

Local authority co-operation

Exchange of information about local governance systems, participatory methods and social and environmental issues are issues on the local authorities' agenda in Finnish and African municipalities.

By Merete Lindstad

Countries in both the North and the South face great challenges in promoting good local governance and creating sustainable environmental, social, cultural and economic development. These challenges can often be the same in different parts of the world. So why not get together as colleagues and exchange experiences and ideas on an equal basis?

This is the basis for the Finnish initiated North-South Local Authority Co-operation Programme, which started up in January 2002. Eight Finnish and six African municipalities have been involved in the programme, which will last for three years.

The programme is organized by the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities and is financed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Finland. It promotes equality, mutual learning and interaction between municipalities in Finland and in African countries.

Learning from each other

"In traditional foreign aid we in the North sometimes 'help' the South, thinking that we know better. But in this programme, we try to learn from each other by focussing on issues that concern both Finnish and African local authorities and municipalities," says programme co-ordinator Heli Liikkanen.

These issues range from environmental

problems like waste management and air quality to local democracy and popular participation. And in this connection, the North cannot claim always to have an upper hand.

"When you look at our over-consumption and extensive use of energy and natural resources, the North is not a very good model for sustainable development," says Liikkanen.

Close relations

Some of the participants are already familiar with each other after many years of contact. Amongst them are the City of Lahti in Finland and Bojanala Platinum District Municipality in South Africa. Since 1996 they have co-operated on environmental and social issues.

Despite differences, the two communities have many environmental challenges in common, according to the project co-ordinator in Lahti, Sami Keto.

"Water and air quality are very significant issues in both Bojanala Platinum and Lahti," says Keto. Finding methods to create and control good water and air quality is therefore one of the concrete objectives in the co-operation.

Different strengths

Keto points out that capacity building in the environmental administration in

Bojanala Platinum will be a priority. Here the Finns will be able to contribute with many years of experience.

However, on issues like participatory municipal planning and public awareness, many challenges are similar in the two municipalities.

"In Finland we lack the widespread grassroots involvement you find in many African communities. Such involvement is a prerequisite for promoting local democracy and raising public awareness on environmental issues," says Keto.

Sami Keto and Heli Liikkanen emphasize that both the Finns and the Africans will benefit from the programme.

"When we now meet on a colleague-to-colleague basis, Finns will experience that Africans have knowledge and in some cases have the same – or even better – models on how to promote local democracy and sustainable development," says Heli Liikkanen. "At the same time, experiences from Finland can also be useful in the South." ■



It may look beautiful in the winter, but when the snow melts the truth about environmental neglect comes out. To promote the development of more sustainable tourism, four communities have participated in the project "Environment and Tourism in the Arctic".

Photo: Kåre Hendriksen

Tourism in the Arctic

Four Arctic tourist destinations are working to develop sustainable tourism in a vulnerable environment.

In the isolated Arctic areas, with a limited population, the local economy is mainly based on natural resources, through fishing and hunting, and sheep farming in the southern part. Trends over the last few decades indicate that this activity, especially hunting and fishing, is no longer profitable. In this situation tourism can be seen as the best opportunity to ensure survival of the local culture.

But tourism is not always a blessing for the local community and for the environment. The benefits for the local community are often small because the tour operators

own the hotel, and bring their own guides and their own food. At the same time, tourism may increase the pressure on a vulnerable environment.

To promote the development of more sustainable tourism, four destinations have participated in the project "Environment and Tourism in the Arctic". The participants are

Ammassalik Kommunia and Ilulissat Kommuneat in Greenland, Snæfellsnes in Iceland, and Svalbard, Norway. The project was initiated by the Danish consultancy company Rambøll and is supported by the Norwegian Industrial Fund.

The project started in 2000 and has stimulated co-operation between different

actors in the local community, such as local authorities, tour operators, fishermen and hunters, schools, voluntary organizations and local businesses. Experiences from each destination are to be collected in a common "toolbox" on the Internet that will give guidance on how to develop tourism, which is both economically and environmentally sustainable.

The project also aims at creating an Arctic sustainable tourism network between the participating destinations. ■

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Indigenous youth get together

In July this year, youth from indigenous peoples in eight Arctic countries met at a summer camp in Northern Norway, hosted by the Sámi sports club Deanu Searat. The main purpose of the camp was to establish an Arctic youth network for sustainable development.

The Sámediggi plenary, an elected assembly working to give the Sámi people in Norway influence over their own situation and future, has adopted a Sámi Local Agenda 21. The document, which outlines priorities in Sámi work for sustainable development, underlines the importance of a global commitment and of increasing the awareness of the Sámi community's links to the rest of the world.

Children and young people are among the target groups for Sámi Local Agenda 21 work. Through its Local Agenda 21 co-ordinator, the Sámediggi plenary has co-operated with the Deanu Searat, a sports club concentrating on traditional Sámi sports. The sports club has worked to build up knowledge about traditional Sámi games and activities and to promote the use of these among children and young people. As part of this work, the sports club has arranged camps in the sum-

mer, and these have developed into a youth exchange including among others Italy, Germany and the Czech Republic.

The summer camps have attracted the attention of the Arctic Council, an intergovernmental forum for co-operation between the Arctic countries. Seeing that

Deanu Searat's work is in line with the Arctic Council's own efforts to increase knowledge and understanding of sustainable development among Arctic youth and children, the Arctic Council has worked together with the sports club and the Sámediggi plenary to take the summer camps one step further.

As a result, Geassesiida 2002, an activity camp for youth from indigenous peoples in the Arctic region, was arranged in the first half of July. The participants came from Alaska, Canada, Greenland, Finland, Norway, Iceland, Russia and Sweden. The camp gave the participants an insight into Sámi culture and traditions and the current challenges linked to sustainable use of natural resources. The camp was also seen as a step towards establishing a network among youth from indigenous peoples in the Arctic area. ■

Barents regional network

A group of municipalities in Finland, Norway, Russia and Sweden have established a Local Agenda 21 network for the Barents region. The purpose is to strengthen co-operation between the municipalities to promote sustainable development.

For several years, municipalities in the Barents region have worked together across borders. Direct co-operation has included cultural exchange, contacts between schools and co-operation between local politicians and municipal employees. Co-operation projects have also included environmental issues, such as conservation of natural resources, improvement of drinking water supply and waste management.

To encourage such direct co-operation, a network of local communities was established during a meeting in Saariselkä, Lapland in Finland, in late 1999. The network is for municipalities in the Barents Region that want to work together in the spirit of Local Agenda 21.

While the municipalities work two or three together on concrete projects, the network provides a wider forum for the exchange of ideas and experiences. The primary objective is to strengthen co-operation across borders, but the network has also promoted co-operation between municipalities within the participating countries. ■

Friends and partners



Strong ties have been established between Stord in Norway and Comalapa in Guatemala through 13 years of co-operation. Starting with a focus on cultural and social exchange, the co-operation has increasingly been linked to Local Agenda 21 and concern for the environment.

By Øivind Fjeldstad

Mayor Flavio Velásquez and headmaster Cécar Icu from San Juan Comalapa were guests of honour when people at Stord, an island community in Western Norway, celebrated the Norwegian national day on May 17 this year. Representing Stord's twin town in Guatemala, Mayor Velásquez gave a speech on the national day, which was very well received.

An event of greater importance for the relations between Stord and Comalapa took place almost two weeks later. On May 30, Flavio Velásquez and Stord's Mayor Magne Rommetveit signed a partnership agreement that will strengthen the long term relationship between the two municipalities. The agreement stipulates that each municipality will send two young people to live and work in the other municipality every year.

"The agreement is a natural development of the friendship ties between Stord and Comalapa. We look forward to receiving the visitors and know that we have much to learn from them," Mayor Magne Rommetveit said when he signed the agreement.

"We will take great care when selecting our representatives, and we expect them to take an active part in the development

of our own community when they return home," said Mayor Flavio Velásquez.

The Norwegian Fredskorpset (Volunteer Service), which gives financial support to organizations, business partners and municipalities that arrange exchange programmes for young people between 22 and 35 years of age, will finance the exchange programme.

Mutual benefit

Environmental co-ordinator Oscar Ingebrigtsen at Stord is convinced that both sides will benefit from the exchange programme.

"The two participants going from Stord to Guatemala will work with health, education and the environment. One of those coming from Guatemala to Stord will work with environmental issues in the schools, whilst the other will be based at the town hall and work with municipal administration and local democracy. This will be useful, as new laws have been passed in Guatemala to strengthen local government," Ingebrigtsen says.

The first contacts between Comalapa and Stord were established back in 1989. From the beginning, co-operation between schools in the two communities was an

important element, and today pupils from six schools in Stord have contacts with pupils from six schools in Guatemala. Local organizations and the local church on both sides have also been active in the partnership between Comalapa and Stord.

Photo: Torleiv Agdestein

One of the major results from the partnership has been the establishment of contacts between musicians and music teachers in the two communities. Through mutual visits they have worked together and learned about each other's musical traditions.

Biological diversity

In recent years, the co-operation between Comalapa and Stord has been directly linked to Local Agenda 21. In order to give the work a global perspective, the two communities have chosen to focus on biological diversity.

"The convention on biological diversity which was adopted in Rio, advised all countries to make a survey of their biological resources, and in Norway it has been decided that all municipalities should carry out work in this field before the end of 2003," says environmental co-ordinator Oscar Ingebrigtsen.

"We have given the schools a major role in this work," Ingebrigtsen adds. "The pupils go out in their local environ-

ment and observe and document biological diversity. In Comalapa, the main interest has been connected to deforestation problems, which also leads to great losses of biological diversity. At Stord, there is a broader focus, ranging from water environment to land based ecosystems. In this way, the pupils gain knowledge about the environment, while at the same time collecting information which is useful for the municipal administration."

The environmental co-ordinator believes that the partnership with the community in Guatemala has positive effects for Stord as a whole.

"The personal contacts give us an insight into another society which we could not achieve in another way. We learn about culture, traditions, history and living conditions. As the co-operation has developed, people have become more and more engaged. It contributes positively to the development of both societies," Ingebrigtsen says. ■

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Youth meeting Youth

Youth meeting Youth will enhance not only the students' learning about central topics of the curriculum chosen for the collaboration, but also their intercultural, linguistic and communicative skills.

Photo: Poul Tang

This year 22 schools in Denmark, Kenya and Zambia have joined forces and started using the Internet to create a digital bridge between youth on two continents. The long-term goal is to establish a truly global school project.

By Øivind Fjeldstad

Imagine students and teachers at a school in Zambia communicating by e-mail and the Internet with students and teachers at a school in Denmark. Together the teachers develop education material and the students exchange thoughts and ideas and study together. When they need background material or want to communicate with other schools, they enter a "virtual house" on the Internet.

After two years of planning, such a learning environment has now been established through the project "Youth meeting Youth" – which is a pioneering venture to put ideas about global education into practice. In the first phase, 22 schools in Denmark, Kenya and Zambia participate in the project, working in pairs but also keeping contact with all the other schools. The central

meeting point is the project's website – www.youthmeetingyouth.org.

Support from IBM

"The idea behind the project is to utilize the potential in having an exchange between students from different societies and with different backgrounds. It will be a challenge to develop cross-cultural teaching material which can fit into the curriculum both in Denmark and in the African countries," says Ellen Farr from the Danish Association for International Co-operation (MS), one of the organisations behind the project. Other partners in the project include Ecoschools in Kenya and The Danish Outdoor Council (DOC).

"All schools have access to e-mail, and with support from IBM, we will send com-

puters to participants in Kenya and Zambia," Farr says.

Youth meeting Youth is a project for lower and upper secondary schools. In the pilot phase lasting from January 2002 to July 2004, it will be limited to 22 schools in Denmark, Kenya and Zambia, but from August 2004 the project is to be open for schools worldwide.

With economic support from Danish International Development Assistance (Danida), an organisation has been established to co-ordinate the project. The Youth meeting Youth organisation assists in establishing partnerships directly between the participating schools and classes and provides the digital environment, which facilitates the learning process.

Electronic conferences

To start the process, teachers from two or more partner schools choose together a central topic of the curriculum around which students execute local research activities. Results are discussed and exchanged by means of electronic mail.

In addition the project has created a teachers' electronic conference and a similar conference for the students on the Internet. The conferences can be used for communication of ideas, facts and results regarding the project, discussion of pedagogical and content issues and for informal chat and discussion.

As a co-operative distance-learning project, Youth meeting Youth will enhance not only the students' learning about central topics of the curriculum chosen for the collaboration, but also their intercultural, linguistic and communicative skills.

A practical result of the project will be a direct and personal contact between individual students in the South and in the North through the school partnerships, which are expected to leave the students with an increased knowledge of each other and each other's economic, social, and cultural reality. ■

Saving energy

Through co-operation with Bräcke municipality in Sweden, Tuv Aimak in Mongolia has learned to use energy in a more efficient way.

When representatives from Bräcke community went to Tuv Aimak in April 2002, they were satisfied to see that more efficient energy use had been implemented in two local schools. The schools had been pilot objects in an 18 month co-operation project between the two communities, aiming at increasing the competence in Tuv Aimak on energy and building techniques.

As part of the project, seven trainees from Mongolia have gone through an educational programme in Bräcke, in

order to learn about techniques for improving energy efficiency. Bräcke has successfully managed to reduce energy use and cut costs through a series of measures, and has passed on the

experiences from this work to their Mongolian partners. Representatives from Bräcke have also travelled to Tuv Aimak to assist the Mongolian trainees in putting into practice what they have learned in Sweden.

The project in Bräcke and Tuv Aimak has been financed by the European Union and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA). Bräcke is now seeking economic support to continue the valuable co-operation between the two communities. ■

When they need
background material
or want to communicate
with other schools,
they enter a "virtual house"

Action 21

The establishment of the Youth meeting Youth school project draws on experiences from previous exchange between schools in the North and the South. One example of such exchange is the Action 21 project, which involved 100 school classes in Denmark and in Zimbabwe.

Action 21 was an attempt to combine environmental education with cross-cultural communication. Through the project, which was carried out in 1998, pupils in Danish and Zimbabwean schools were given the opportunity to learn about the situation of youth in another country.



The participants engaged themselves in local environmental issues and exchanged information on this with their partner classes. In that way, the project gave an increased insight into both local and global environmental problems.

Although it was inspired by the action plan from the Rio Conference, Agenda 21, the Action 21 project was not limited to issues concerning sustainable development. As it developed, the pupils exchanged information and ideas on many aspects of the life in the two countries. ■

From Umba to Johannesburg

In Northern Norway and North West Russia, children and young people have established friendship across borders and exchanged ideas on how to solve environmental problems. Together they have created a message to the world at the Johannesburg summit.

By Øivind Fjeldstad

"We know that sometimes a sheet of paper, written by childish hand can make change adult's mind." The sentence, written at a school in Murmansk, Russia, is found in the book "From Umba to Johannesburg", which was made by pupils in Russia and Norway. After a long journey through Russia and Norway, the book has found its way to the Johannesburg summit.

In "From Umba to Johannesburg", school-children express their concern for the environment and their thoughts and hopes for the future of the planet Earth. The first page of the book was written in Umba - a small settlement at the coast of the White Sea in December 2001. From there, new pages were filled with text, drawings and pictures as the book travelled from school to school in the Murmansk region.

On April 12, 2002, the book crossed the border and was handed over to Norwegian youth from Seida School in Tana municipality. It then continued its journey through Northern Norway. When the last page was written in the coastal municipality of Vega, pupils from more than 40 Russian and

Norwegian schools had made their contributions.

Stimulate interest

"The main purpose of the project has been to stimulate interest in and knowledge about global environmental and development issues among pupils and teachers," says Lise Flø at Svanhovd Environmental Centre. The centre, which is located in Finnmark county in Norway, has co-ordinated the project. "The aim has also been to spread information about the World Summit in Johannesburg," Flø adds.

To assist the teachers participating in the project, Svanhovd has prepared information material in Russian and Norwegian, focussing on sustainable development and international environmental co-operation. Information has also been available on Svanhovd's website.

While making their contributions to the book, participating schools have also involved themselves in other activities.

"The schools have been encouraged to

work on environmental projects with an international perspective," says Lise Flø.

Impressive creativity

Their creativity has been impressive. Among the activities are exhibitions and meetings on environmental issues, excursions and practical work to clean up the local environment, games and drawing competitions. Pupils have also written stories, staged plays and made videos focussing on the environment in a global perspective. In many places, local media has covered the activities.

"Originally the target group was young people between 12 and 15 years, but the project has also attracted the interest of younger children. Even nursery schools have made their contributions to the book," says Lise Flø. ■



Local Dialogue 21 - Nordic experiences with North/South and East/West collaboration for sustainable development - is a collaboration between the Nordic countries and the Nordic Council of Ministers.

The project includes an exhibition at the UN Summit for Sustainable Development, a website and a newspaper.

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