

Project/Program #: Z-020258-001

Project/Program Name: Local Agenda 21 Romania

Second year-end narrative report April 2002 – March 2003

The second year of work has been focused on four main activities:

Activity 1: Completion and dissemination of LA21 strategies and action plans.

Activity 2: Dissemination of LA21 capacity building project experiences nationwide and internationally.

Activity 3: Capacity building training for civil society and local governments to implement LA21 Action Plans and manage LA21 projects.

Activity 4: Preparations for the selection of the demonstration micro-pilot projects.

Activity 1

Completion and dissemination of LA21 strategies and action plans

All three cities finalized their LA21 strategies, distributed them to stakeholders and initiated city-wide discussions on the Implementation Plan. As part of the discussion series, David Runnalls, President of the International Institute for Sustainable Development, who spent 10 days in Romania in May 2003, met with all three local Steering Committees and representatives of the Working Groups. Mr. Runnalls, together with the Canadian Project Manager and representatives of the National Centre for Sustainable Development (NCSO) (including its Executive Director), visited several sites and projects that might be eligible for micro-project funding. The delegation was particularly impressed by the efforts of a participating NGO in Oradea that built shelters for homeless and unemployed people, created employment opportunities, and expanded its program to address the needs of runaway children and abused women. It is a good example of how to include pressing social issues on the LA21 agenda.

Mr. Runnalls promoted the importance of the LA21 process to the highest levels of government. Meetings with high-ranking government officials, including the Minister of Environment, took place in Bucharest, emphasizing the value of a multi-stakeholder approach.

During his visit, Mr. Runnalls met with business leaders. The goal was to encourage local business to play an active role and to be prepared to partially fund (in Phase 3) some of the identified micro-projects. The visit highlighted the need to support LA21 officers in their development of local schemes and campaigns that may engage local business and industry, drawing them into the wider sustainable development view of the specific region. We also need to encourage LA21 officers to develop good working relationships with larger operations run by investors and with some of the accounting and banking firms willing to provide corporate sponsorship. The NCSO has already started this

practice, and the results are promising. However, the organization warns that offers made by banks may prove volatile if financial strains plague the banking sector.

Below expectation:

Integrated environmental assessment capacity has remained a crucial factor in monitoring progress at the local level. A key task is to complement the LA21 implementation strategy with performance measurement tools. The LA21 officers need further assistance in understanding the objectives, mechanisms and constraints of measurement, foreseeing some of the key issues used in identification, diagnosis and responses to trends most important for the people and environments of the affected locations. These critical issues will help guide the selection of indicators themselves, therefore it is an important step in the feedback process of measurement and reporting.

Activity 2

Dissemination of LA21 capacity building project experiences nationwide and internationally

We have encouraged the pilot municipalities to share their experiences with each other and with the UNDP/NCSO program. The NCSO entered into partnership with the Romanian Federation of Local Authorities (RFLA), working together to support sustainable development in Romania through the dissemination of the LA 21 principles and implementation of local strategies based on the experiences of the pilot cities. The NCSO, RFLA and the Association of Municipalities of Romania (AMR) organized the first National Forum for Sustainable Development in Miercurea Ciuc, April 10–12, 2002. There were over 250 participants representing all Romanian county municipalities. The LA21 project pilot cities provided demonstrations to the forum, shared their experiences and discussed relevant topics with the other municipalities. Ion Iliescu, President of Romania, several ministers, ambassadors and representatives of donor agencies (including UNDP's regional director for Europe and CIS countries and Mr. Denis Provost of CIDA) participated. (See the attached report of NCSO and the Joint Declaration of NCSO and RFLA.)

NCSO's partnership with RFLA is a significant factor in promoting the LA21 project experience in Romania. The forum was a smashing success in the national visibility it had through the high profile of the participants and invited guests, and in the impact it had on the other municipalities. The NCSO was overwhelmed by requests from other municipalities wanting to be included in the LA21 process. The forum demonstrated great interest on behalf of other municipalities in promoting local sustainability.

The forum was also a great success for the NCSO itself, proving its strength in building coalitions and reaching out to the highest levels of government decision-makers. It was also a successful test of the centre's organizational skills. NCSO reached out to the private sector to fund the event and several banks and financial institutions indeed contributed. At the same time, one of the key sponsors did not fulfill its promise for

funding, due to unexpected liquidity problems, leaving the center's leadership in an extremely difficult situation.

Nationally, the further impacts of the Miercurea Ciuc meeting have led to an agreement between the NCSD and the national government to expand the LA21 project to other municipalities. Three ministries of the government—Public Administration; Water and Environmental Protection; and Transportation—agreed to create a detailed workplan with the NCSD and the Federation of Romanian Local Municipalities.

In July 2002, the Ministry of Water and Environmental Protection signed a Memorandum of Understanding with NCSD to cooperate in the short term to elaborate Romania's presentation file at the World Summit for Sustainable Development and, in the medium term, to elaborate on a plan to extend the Local Agenda 21 projects from the nine pilot municipalities to 40 new localities by 2007. The MoU has been very successful and represents the first time that the national government has committed itself to promoting local autonomy based on LA21 capacity building.

Dissemination:

The cities continued to work on communicating and disseminating their results nationally and internationally. One of the cities, Ramnicu Valcea, achieved great international success with their project "Integrated Municipal Waste in Ramnicu Valcea" and was recognized by UN-HABITAT as one of the six best practices from Central and Eastern Europe in 2002. It was selected for inclusion in the *Best Practices – Newsletter 11* published in Johannesburg at the World Summit on Sustainable Development.

Activity 3

Capacity building training for civil society and local governments to implement LA21 action plans and manage LA21 projects

A comprehensive needs assessment is a key to a successful training. The local secretariats in all three pilot cities supported by CIDA are conducting a training needs assessment, involving the local Steering Committee and Working Group members and municipal officials. A separate needs assessment was prepared by NCSD staff to cover the coordination and communication tasks as well.

The needs assessments (see attached) covers a wide variety of issues, but did miss a few important elements (in particular gender and equality issues). The Canadian partners evaluated the results and made a careful decision about what to include in the proposed training. We also included topics that we deemed important based on our international experience. We circulated the draft training outline among the Canadian partners and the Romanian cities. After several iterations, we arrived at a final version (see attached) to the satisfaction of all participants.

Evaluation:

The training consisted of four modules:

1. Project Design Development and Implementation;
2. Communications and Engagement Strategies;
3. Assessment and Reporting; and
4. Local Business Involvement and Promotion.

A detailed description of each module was attached in the third quarter narrative report 2002–03. Each module was designed as a mixture of plenary presentations, discussions and small group exercises.

The training started with an explanation of the purpose of the training and an overview of the two days, followed by a short introduction of the trainers and the participants. Each module ended with an evaluation of the module. At the end of the second day of training, the two-day program was evaluated by participants as well as trainers.

To evaluate the training sessions, Project Manager Peter Hardi prepared a questionnaire that was distributed to all participants in each city. The following detailed evaluation is based on the returned questionnaires; oral and written (including e-mailed) comments; and the trainers' own observations.

The number of participants per session ranged between 40 and over 50. There was some fluctuation, and the composition of the groups usually changed between the first and the second day. There was a good balance among civil society, NGO and local authority representatives. Business was generally under-represented. The most uniform group participated in Ramnicu Valcea where the majority of the participants came from different departments of city hall. In Ramnicu Valcea and Oradea, delegates from other pilot city Secretariats (Giurgiu, Baia Mare and Targu Mures) also attended.

The evaluation sheet distributed to each participant included questions concerning the content and the format of the training. The unanimous opinion of the trainees was that the best aspects of the training were:

- small group exercises and working in small groups, which made interaction among the trainees possible and provided them with an opportunity to bring their own ideas into the discussion;
- the interactive character of the training;
- objective, clear and coherent presentations;
- the specific applications and the examples given by the trainers; and
- the good environmental and managerial background of the trainers that made the transfer of knowledge and applicable methods possible.

The trainees liked that various institutions were represented by the trainers. They also liked the teamwork and the flexibility of the presenters. We received very few comments on what should be included in the next training. Some of these suggestions were:

- a discussion on how to work in teams effectively;
- more specific presentations on how to improve communication;
- the legislative barriers in Romania; and
- information about different financing organizations for Romania.

It was also suggested that local trainers be used. We have not received any comments on what to remove from the existing training materials. Actually we got several explicit “non” responses, suggesting that nothing should be left out. In general, the feedback received from the participants was very positive. They emphasized how useful the training was concerning their future activities. The training encouraged participants to discuss more of the relevant issues among their own contacts, and it improved communication within the group itself. They would like to see similar kinds of training on the county/regional level. The most encouraging comment was the following: “come again.”

The comments on logistics and local organizations were forwarded to the Secretariats and the coordinators of the training.

Lessons Learned for Future Trainings:

What needs to be improved? It became obvious that we need to redesign Module 4 on business involvement. We need to involve many more representatives of the private sector in the training module even if they do not participate for the entire training. We also have to carefully select the examples—positive and negative—of business cases we present and we have to carefully explain why we believe some Western or Canadian experiences can be applied in Romania or in transitional countries in general. Some of the other lessons learned from the observations of the participants are:

- we should include more examples of best practices referring to the implementation of LA21 in the training materials;
- we need to provide more detailed descriptions of the projects and practical examples we mention;
- we received several comments on the length of the training, in general emphasizing that a longer training period (at least five days, according to some) is needed (this point will need careful consideration, because from other experiences we know how difficult it is to get consistently high attendance beyond two days);
- we need to further select the information we provide and perhaps fewer topics should be discussed in the available time; and
- there should be more representatives of the media at the training.

The Project Manager asked each participating trainer to give his or her comments on the training. We jointly agreed on the matrix of the comments that included remarks on the content of the training; the coherence of topics; team performance; the format of the training; the group exercises; the interaction with the audience; gender balance; time management; responsiveness to feedback; organization by Secretariats; logistical support;

the support by NCSD staff; and questions on what would you do differently in the preparation and implementation, and the most remarkable experience. A summary of the most important comments follows.

Content of the Training:

This was based as much as possible on the needs assessment. The actual presentation materials seemed quite appropriate and useful to the participants. The training seemed to provide something for most people. Given the diversity of the participants, some of them were already familiar with some of the content while everybody could learn something interesting and new. This is normal for training of this kind and even offers the advantage that the participants can reinforce their knowledge and can even communicate what they already know to the others.

The trainer from ICLEI Europe thought that there was a certain imbalance between what the audience expected and what we could offer them. For her own part, she would design the module differently. If there hadn't been a communication gap between ICLEI Europe Secretariat and the trainer herself, she would have had more time to contact the Romanian city Secretariats in advance to develop the training material in consultation with the Secretariat members. Her suggestion is to include more specific examples from the respective cities when we discuss implementation barriers in the training module.

Coherence of the Topics:

LA21 processes require a wide variety of capacities and skills, and the training matched these needs. The trainers became better in making links among the various sections and topics, so the coherence of the program increased as the week progressed. Sufficient coherence was proven through the fact that we could often make reference to other modules or sessions. The suggestion is that, next time, a brief overview lecture at the beginning of day one of the training could provide participants with a "coherence roadmap" on LA21, such as the roles and responsibilities of government, business and civil society.

Team Performance:

This got the highest marks, such as "excellent," "top notch," "very enjoyable," "good chemistry," "respect for others," "compatible knowledge and skills" and "flexibility and creativity throughout the program." The mix of lectures and exercises seemed to work well in terms of keeping the energy level consistent. Some of the longer lecture segments could have been built up with short discussion questions. One of the trainers suggested that, in future training, an intake process be created for participants to provide the training designers with information such as who the participants are, why they are taking the training and what their connection is to the LA21 process.

Group Exercises:

This was another strength of the program. The group sessions went well and produced the results one would expect. The exercises became better each time as instructions for group exercises—as well as the style and timing of feedback—were continuously improved. Again, because we had little knowledge of the participants' backgrounds, our efforts were very much experimental. In Iasi, the groups needed more coaching than the groups in Ramnicu Valcea, for example. The small group system allowed maximum networking and defused any personality challenges that might have presented themselves in larger plenary settings. The added advantage of the group work was the opportunity for participants to network and learn from each other. Group exercises are always needed since it is extremely difficult to only listen to lectures for two days. While the number of participants was actually too high in all three cities, the sessions produced plenty of local materials and examples that examined the points at a practical level.

Interaction with the Audience:

In general it was excellent, although breaking the ice in plenary was not always easy. The audiences varied a great deal: Iasi was keen but quietly polite; Ramnicu Valcea was keen and verbal; and Oradea was more scattered. Participants had a lot of space to bring in their own opinions, yet some people were more outspoken than others while others preferred not to speak in public—a perfectly-natural and expected scenario.

Gender Balance:

We did well in this regard. In fact, we may have had more women than men in some cases. We also felt that, on balance, women made more interesting interventions. The coverage of the gender topics significantly improved after the first session in Iasi, taking into consideration the immediate feedback we received.

Responsiveness to Feedback:

Responsiveness is an important part of the program. We adjusted the program as we went along. The responsiveness was very good; the changes we made after the first session were definitely for the better. Getting feedback from, and providing feedback to, other team members was invaluable. Participants also approached us on an individual basis to discuss their particular interests. For example, we were able to provide additional information to women wanting to start women's business networks or open women's shelters. We gave also feedback to someone interested in youth shelters for tourists and so on. We expect the e-mails will keep coming and are looking forward to providing any support we can.

Organization by Secretariats was generally excellent, including the response to last-minute changes such as translation of new program outlines and the organization of group exercises.

The support we received from NCSD staff was excellent and offered with good humour! They were very flexible and very reliable. Radu Vadineanu and George Romanca accompanied the trainers to each city and they added a lot with their helpful attitudes. They have done much to cultivate good working relationships with the local Secretariats.

Lessons Learned by the Trainers:

What would you do differently in preparations?

The Secretariats could have been tasked to administer an intake interview process for the participants: who they are, why are they taking the course and how are they involved in LA21. Try to engage a few of the local participants to get their detailed feedback on the program. Put more time and effort into previewing the presentations to see how they fit together. This would be even more important if the presentation was only going to occur just once with no opportunity for adjustment. Hold briefing sessions with Secretariats the evening before the training to get a sense of particular challenge of the community. Focus better on more defined target groups and clarify, when the training is announced, what it is all about. It would certainly be an advantage for more effective training if only a smaller number of participants register. Work through the modules with NCSD and all Secretariat representatives in advance to determine the applicability, coverage and content. Prepare detailed briefing books for all participants with background on the modules and information on LA21.

What would you do differently in implementation?

One of the bottlenecks was translation. In most cases it was good, but in some cases we felt that translation was slow and information was lost. The help of NCSD staff to fill the gap in some cases was invaluable. Minor point: attach a Canadian pin to the diploma distributed after the sessions.

Activity 4

Preparations for the selection of the demonstration micro-pilot projects

Multi-stakeholder participation is crucial in the implementation of the micro-pilot projects. Partnership among NGOs and between citizen groups, city halls and local businesses have been encouraged. The nature of the projects required the applicants to cooperate effectively with all those involved in the decision-making process or other issues on which the proposal is focused. CIDA has expected that up to one third of the total budget be financed by other sources. The NGOs submitting the proposal provided sufficient proof that such funds were available for the proposed projects. These funds may have come from the NGOs' own resources, from their partners, from local government, from business enterprises or from other donor organization(s).

Evaluation guidelines and evaluation sheets have been prepared and distributed by the Project Manager. Reviewers were asked to write a brief statement concerning their opinion about each project. The proposals were evaluated according to listed criteria in

the guidelines (see attached in the eighth quarter report). Every proposal was evaluated by a minimum of three evaluators. They included the LA21 Secretariat members, LSC members and/or independent experts recommended by the LSC. The LSC calculated the final score for each proposal; based on the scores, the proposals were ranked and commented on, including funding recommendations for the top three to five proposals, depending on the number and quality of the proposals.

The local proposal evaluators recommended four proposals for funding in Iasi; three in Rm. Valcea; and four in Oradea. The recommended proposals have been reviewed by the NCSD Coordinator and Financial Officer, the Project Manager, and, after their recommendations, CIDA. The Project Manager recommended follow-up meetings with the applicants to clarify pending issues and get answers to the evaluators' questions.

Project results

We are very pleased with the results of the second year. We successfully completed each activity line, and the outcomes have been exceeding expectations in at least two areas of activities:

1. dissemination of LA21 capacity building project experiences nationwide and internationally; and
2. capacity building training for civil society and local governments to implement LA21 Action Plans and manage LA21 projects.

It has been most encouraging to find the great interest nationwide in the LA21 project, and the determination of 50 more municipalities to launch similar projects. The willingness of the national government to fully support this process is a pleasant surprise and, at the same time, the justification of our efforts to connect the local players to national government decision-makers. We are also pleased with the international recognition of the LA21 programs of a couple of the cities supported by Canada.

The other result that exceeded our expectations is the training we delivered in Romania. Details of the results can be found under Activity 3 above. The increased participation, the interaction and the feedback we received after the training clearly signal the importance of such capacity building trainings delivered locally.

Lessons learned and risk management

Some of the most important **lessons learned** are the following:

- *The importance of having a good coordinating team*

NCSD has played a pivotal role in helping the cities achieve the expected results and in several cases exceed expectations. The centre's excellent organizational skills have secured smooth implementation of programs, visits and meetings. The individual Coordinator for the cities has been a driving force, helping the Secretariats and pressing

them to meet targets. The Financial Officer has kept the expenses within limits, though for office supply costs we needed to allocate more than budgeted because of inflation. The centre has played a crucial role also in the dissemination of project results, thereby multiplying the impact of the project.

- *Role of personalities*

When at least one of the Secretariat members has influence with/access to high ranking city hall officials (the Mayor and Vice-mayor in particular), the buy-in has been easily achieved. The individual drive and the presentation of colourful ideas indeed help in the promotion of the LA21 project and the dissemination of results locally and internationally. The personal contact some Secretariat members have with community business leaders has made a significant difference in two cities.

- *LA21 strategic planning process and its impact on City Halls*

The LA21 strategic plans and action plans must be harmonized with the municipal governments' individual planning exercises. If they are not fully incorporated in the official municipal plans, the effectiveness of the LA21 plans will be limited and people could feel that they have wasted their time and energy, even if the process provided useful experiences and learning. The use of sustainability reporting and indicators to measure the success of implementation is still a grey area; there are no adequate skills, institutions and data processing capacities on local level.

- *Shaky foundations of NGO financial sustainability*

The primary case in point is NCSD itself. While it could secure project funding, the lack of core funding coupled with increased operational costs (due to the economic and monetary changes in Romania) jeopardize its long-term existence.

Risks

- effective outreach to significant sections of the population in cities in disseminating LA21 strategies and action plans;
- making public participation in discussions meaningful;
- creating business partnership in the process;
- financial sustainability of participating and/or new institutions; and
- unrealistic expectations for Canadian investments and business cooperation due to the LA21 project.

Mitigating Risks

- raising the profile of the project through high level Canadian visits, such as the series of meetings of IISD President David Runnalls held with leaders and project participants in each city and with national government officials, including a Minister and chair of Parliamentary Committee;
- engaging high level national leaders, including the President of the country, in the dissemination of project results and extending the project to other municipalities;

- organizing special meetings of the Project Manager with targeted groups of local entrepreneurs;
- conducting needs assessments and compiling training materials and delivering training sessions that respond to the needs and the issues identified by analyzing experience and feedback from earlier stages of the project;
- suggesting an institutional capacity building plan for NCSD, creating a concept paper as the basis of further fundraising drives; and
- the unrealistic expectations for Canadian business involvement remains a serious risk and it seems to be a bigger problem than the Canadian executive agent can solve.

Result-based Management

IISD and the Project Manager continuously relied on result-based management in the different activities of the project. The most important examples for the effectiveness of RBM are the following:

- relying on needs assessment and participant feedback in designing and implementing the next phases and activities of the project;
- modifying and restructuring the training in Romania according to continuous feedback of the participants;
- organizing additional visits and meetings in the cities to promote the project, help to improve dissemination and solve emerging problems;
- involving new Canadian partners to address specific issues that need additional expertise, identified during project implementation, such as 3P (public-private partnership) and gender equality;
- advancing project achievements through promoting national level partnerships for the participating institutions; and
- utilizing relevant international events such as WSSD to support the project.