

## ➔ JORDAN: A NON-THREATENING APPROACH TO INTERDISCIPLINARY COLLABORATION

### **In a Nutshell**

In 2000, Jordan produced a National Agenda 21, as well as the country's first environmental impact assessment guidelines. It also became the first country in the Arab region to prepare a National Environmental Information Strategy and a National Awareness, Education and Communication Strategy, using the Agenda 21 methodology. Jordan harnessed the powers of ICT and used participatory planning techniques to mobilize local capacities, build new development concepts, and bring together groups that had never worked together to formulate bold national policies. External support facilitated innovative practices that strong national commitment and local policy "champions" carried forward.

### **The Story**

Jordan's Capacity 21 programme produced its National Agenda 21 in 2000. It was launched under the patronage of Her Royal Highness Princess Basma Bint Talal, who is considered a key political figure in supporting development activities, and whose presence conferred priority and credibility. Subsequently, using the Agenda 21 methodology, Jordan passed its first environmental impact assessment guidelines, and the Arab region's first National Environmental Information Strategy and National Awareness, Education and Communication Strategy. To back implementation of the National Agenda 21, the Sustainable Development Networking Programme was set up, along with 28 information technology community centres and a community knowledge portal.

The process of preparing Jordan's National Agenda 21 was a learning experience for all concerned. Over two years, six task forces of technicians, decision makers, academics and representatives of local communities met regularly to share and debate ideas, and broker consensus on sustainable development priorities. Participants included staff members of the General Corporation for Environmental Protection – which has since been replaced by the Ministry for the Environment, based on the recommendations of Agenda 21 – and representatives of the Ministries of Agriculture, Water and Irrigation, Mineral Resources and Energy, as well as the Natural Resources Authority. Members of NGOs, including the Royal Scientific Society, Jordan Environment Society and Friends of the Environment, also took part, along with private consultants, engineers, and scholars from the University of Jordan and the Jordanian University of Science and Technology.

The degree of open exchange of information among such a wide range of experts from different disciplines had never been seen in Jordan before, providing

an opportunity for collective thinking and facilitating genuine transparency in the ensuing formation of policy. While all the participants were experts in their respective fields, many were unfamiliar with the fundamental principles of sustainable development. A chemical engineer, for instance, who had no background in environmental issues, gained new ideas about the design of hazardous waste landfills, how other countries cope with waste management, and the role of environmental protection agencies. By the end, the participants had become conversant with the ideas and principles of Agenda 21 and other key international conventions – on subjects such as desertification, biological diversity and climate change – that followed the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. In addition, each was required to contribute his or her specialized knowledge, so technicians learned from managers and policy makers and vice-versa.

The sharing of information soon generated some tangible results in important areas, such as solid waste management. Many people had not appreciated the importance of managing the collection, separation and disposal of municipal solid waste, and as a result, human and financial resources were being used inefficiently. To localize Agenda 21 concepts, a solid waste management programme began in Zarqa, Jordan's second largest city. Since then, Zarqa has become a model for action on this issue, and similar programmes are planned for other municipalities.

Since the National Agenda 21 debuted, the Sustainable Development Network Programme has carried it forward, continuing to provide a platform for development practitioners to exchange views and information electronically. Initially, ten institutions representing the public, private and non-governmental sectors were equipped with the necessary hardware and software. Subsequently, other institutions joined the programme, as well as local communities in remote areas through the information technology community centres and the community knowledge portal.

In 2002, the Ministry of Planning established a Sustainable Development Office to work on issues related to Agenda 21, particularly in mainstreaming them across economic, social and environmental programmes. A Liaison Office for Agenda 21 has been proposed for the newly established Ministry for the Environment to ensure proper follow-up and monitoring.

### **Results and Critical Factors**

- Strong national commitment and the crucial role of national “champions” were key to progress.
- Capacity 21 offered the country a groundbreaking and non-threatening opportunity to test participatory approaches and partnership building among different stakeholder groups in policy-making and dialogue. The process was an inclusive learning experience.

- Access to information, facilitated by ICT, and opportunities created for multi-stakeholder dialogue were powerful tools in mobilizing local capacities, building ownership for new development concepts and bringing together groups that had never worked together.
- The interdisciplinary approach has now been used during consultations related to Jordan's signing of the Free Trade Agreement with the United States in 2000, the drafting of the new Environmental Protection Law in 2001, and the preparation of the national assessment for the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development.

**Further information**

Community Knowledge Center ([www.ckc-undp.org.jo/](http://www.ckc-undp.org.jo/)).

Jordan Information Community Center ([www.jitcc.gov.jo/](http://www.jitcc.gov.jo/)).

*Capacity 21 Evaluation Report 1993-2001*  
([www.undp.org/capacity21/docs/cap21GlobalEval2002.pdf](http://www.undp.org/capacity21/docs/cap21GlobalEval2002.pdf)).

Capacity 21 ([www.undp.org/capacity21/](http://www.undp.org/capacity21/)).

Sustainable Development Network Programme ([www.sdn.jo/](http://www.sdn.jo/)).