

Stockholm Workshop on the development of a “Manual for the Identification, Documentation, and Dissemination of Successful Sustainable Development Practices,

Stockholm, Sweden, January 29-30, 2008

Background and Context

Management and experts in all sectors of society at all levels face daunting challenges as they attempt to adopt and implement sustainable development policies. These challenges begin with the realisation that sustainable development must be the underlying principle of all policies and actions. The adoption of foundational principles of sustainability – be they in national laws, local ordinances, or corporate policy – requires vision, leadership and stakeholder inclusion. Following the adoption of foundational principles of sustainability, many challenges remain in translating these principles into actions that address issues of importance to a given locality, region or entity.

Access to the international body of knowledge of experience and best practice on the development of foundational sustainable development principles and their translation into action is difficult and fragmented. *Best practices is a broad concept, that includes both policy instruments, management tools and technical-practical systems.* Public agencies at all levels, companies and NGOs are often forced to go through the process of designing and implementing policies without benefiting from the available global expertise. There is much re-invention and progress is unnecessarily retarded. Much of the challenge in accessing useful knowledge on best practice is that no systematic framework currently exists with which to evaluate, document and disseminate policy and practice of sustainable development. Such a framework that would include simple and generally applicable criteria that would allow a practitioner or policy professional to evaluate a broad range of published practices as to the ability of such practice to achieve desired outcomes.

This UNEP/MSWG/EEA/SEPA sponsored initiative has the objective of incorporating a best practice framework into a manual or handbook for the practitioner. The manual will be created by an expert group of practitioners for practitioners. The manual and the evaluation criteria it includes are envisioned to be part of an evolving document created by a growing network of those responsible for creating and implementing sustainable development policies. The workshop to be held in Stockholm, January 29-30, 2008, is designed to create the first edition of this “Best Practices Manual”. Interested experts and practitioners will be invited to discuss the focus, structure, evaluation criteria, and outreach strategy to maximize the value of this work to the community.

The proposed structure for the best practice manual is described below. Each of these points will be discussed and vetted in the Stockholm workshop so as to reach a consensus on inclusion in the manual.

- A statement as to the purpose of the manual, its intended audience and utility to that audience.
- A clear description as to the policy, practice, and project domain within the broad subject of sustainable development with which the manual will focus.
- An in depth discussion based on case studies of implemented practical measures and the aspects of such measures that led to successes
- A discussion of what is meant by best practice, good practice, success story, innovation, demonstration, and the many other terms used to describe useful knowledge on what actually works with good environmental and other effects.
- A set of evaluation criteria with utility to practitioners in sorting and reaching decisions as to the value of examples of good practices
- A typology matrix relating objectives (i.e. policy implementation, management strategies, technology development, public awareness and education) and practices (i.e. government initiatives, sustainable management systems, technology development and promotional strategies, and public outreach and education programs)
- An analytical tool that will facilitate decisions on use of practice based knowledge to achieve a desired outcome
- A structure to document good practice examples, that will be practical, transparent and facilitate dissemination.
- Web links to the underlying body of practice based knowledge of what policy instruments, management tools and technologies that actually have a good environmental and general performance.

Best Practice

The concept of best practice (BP) encompasses a broad diversity of examples. These include policy instruments, management procedures, methods of collaboration between stake-holders, good project or programme results, and technical-practical solutions (e.g. constructions, (new) technology or products, services). A typology of different BPs needs to be outlined and how different type of BPs related to different sustainable development (SD) outcome needs. There are many of synonyms to this concept, used in various contexts: "good examples", "(positively selected) project results", "success stories", "good practice", "inspiring examples", "innovative practices", and "demonstration projects", "show-cases". The expression "best practice" can be considered to be a collective description for all of these concepts.

Characteristics of BPs:

- Best practices are examples of applications of policy, methods or technology that are currently in use, and that are available, in principle, for others to copy, in relevant parts.
- Best practices have an environmental benefit or an environmental effect that is better than average.

- Best practices either have a positive effect on other areas of policy, such as economy and employment, for example, or they at least do not have so large negative effects that the environmental gains are overshadowed by other negative effects in a comprehensive assessment.
- Best practices are relative, not absolute (e.g a method that is among the very best in, say East Africa, may be considered BPs even if they in a west European context may not be state of the art).
- Many elements of best practices are context-dependent in that there are local situations, institutional frameworks or natural geographical conditions that define the nature of BPs. However, there are also elements of BPs such as technology, information and communication, and stakeholder involvement which transcend local and regional contexts and are broadly applicable.
- BPs are not timeless, and should have a “best-before”-date. Something that is a cutting-edge method today, will hopefully be ordinary ten years from now.

The dissemination of best practices important and possible.

There are many examples globally of best practices which provide relevant lessons or can “copied” in relevant parts, with both good effects on the environment, supporting sustainability and also having beneficial effects on other policy areas such as poverty alleviation, employment, technological development, health, capacity-building, participation and other social issues.

There is considerable information available on the web and in other information sources on BPs. However, as the evaluation from the Swedish EPA and others has pointed out, there are significant shortcomings in the methods of selecting, describing and distributing information about innovations and best practices. A proposed solution to these identification, documentation and dissemination problems is the development of a practitioners manual or guidance document. The primary purpose of this manual is to improve the quality of information sharing and resultant use of BPs within the sustainable development community.

There are many reasons for various stakeholders to document BPs and inform other actors of their BPs:

- Disseminating of project results is a usually a responsibility for the programme owner, either on the global, national or regional level (An example is the UN Habitat consistent dissemination of their project results as BPs)
- BPs might be identified by International or National Auditing Bodies or by other evaluators, as part of their work with assessments or evaluations of policy, methods and products.
- BPs may be identified by eco-labelling organisations nationally and globally (or organisations worked with a broader perspective, “sustainability labelling”, e.g Fair Trade.).
- Reinforcing the environmental profile of the organisation.

- Demonstrating the sustainability work of one's own members. Trade or Industrial Associations and other member-based organisations (NGOs) want to demonstrate the good work of their members.
- Demonstrating the environmental work of pioneers – Environmental agencies and environmental organisations sometimes create compilations containing examples of what the most visionary members of a particular industry or group can achieve, and what is actually practically possible, with the aim of inspiring or convincing all actors in the industry to follow the examples of the pioneers.
- Inspiring the general public and other broad groups to a deeper commitment to the environment
- Accelerating the transfer of innovations in environmental technology, and building a knowledge-based economy.
- Promoting new perspectives and new schools of thought related to sustainability
- Part of a public agency's tasks.
- Demonstrating how positive examples can support or conform to a national or global strategy – National authorities and EU bodies with the responsibility for establishing policy use in many cases BP examples to clarify and exemplify the foundation of a strategy.
- Demonstrating the cutting edge of an industry.
- Providing a comprehensive image of the environmental competence within a nation or a region

A practical method for creating high quality collections of best practice examples

It is possible to identify, document and disseminate BP examples relatively easy and with a reasonable resource allocation and with good quality. However, a lot of balances need to be considered when doing this. One example is the consideration of the need for quality documentation and quality checked information (which require some kind of assessments and/or evaluations) balanced with the limited amount of time and resources for doing this work. A structured method facilitates this work, encourages management / decision makers to embark on this endeavour and provides a “quality mark” on the dissemination of info on BPs. The main message of this section is the rather pragmatic working method itself, outlined in the following eight steps:

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| Step 1 | Determine the aim of the information on best practice examples |
| Step 2 | Determine the target group |
| Step 3 | Determine the information channels and the distributor |
| Step 4 | Search for examples |
| Step 5 | Determine the criteria for selection |

- Step 6 Use the criteria in assessments and evaluations to find the best results
- Step 7 Select the correct type of description – a Popular version, an In-depth Description in depth, or a Thematic Topic Report.
- Step 8 Distribute the information and make it available – where the users are.

Criteria for selection of best practice examples

Assumptions used in proposed criteria:

- Beware of excessive ambition! It is extremely important to create a balance between a credible and well-analysed selection process, on the one hand, and a selection process that is too ambitious, on the other hand.
- The criteria for selection should be adapted to the particular aim and target group of the particular project each time a compilation of examples is to be produced. There is, however, a common core of general criteria that it should be possible to use on essentially all occasions.
- These criteria are, however, somewhat disparate depending on whether the examples are primarily concerned with policy instruments, methods, mobilisation and education, environmental technical innovations, or everyday practical solutions.
- Some criteria can be evaluated ex post, others (particular those related to possible strategic long term spin-off effects) must necessarily be based on ex-ante assessments.
- A selection should be made from the following general criteria every time a compilation is created, and these criteria can be subsequently interpreted and made more specific based on the aim and target group of the compilation.

Proposed Criteria

A. For project results and practical-technical solutions with direct, immediate effects

- 1) environmental – often quantifiable, such as energy saving, water savings, reduction of pollutants
- 2) Economic effects (Resources required for start-up, periodic investment costs, possible revenues and cost savings etc)
- 3) Other direct effects, such as immediate, observable spin-offs to other sectors of society
- 4) Degree of innovation- such as the application of new technology (in its widest meaning, not just "technology" in its conventional meaning, but also ecological technology such as, for example, new ways of using ecosystem

services such as the use of wetlands for purifying water) or the application of previously known technology in new contexts or examples that are based on a large number of technologies and measures in e.g. new “green cities”, “sustainable cities” or for example a comprehensive “greening” of a tourist resort.

5) Opportunities for transfer and for commercialisation

6) Relevance to environmental policy strategy. Is this particular BP relevant to a key issue in environmental or sustainability policy, e.g. climate change, water accessibility, etc?

7) Relevance for other policy goals. Is this particular BP relevant to a key issue in other policy, e.g. *Promoting growth, supporting social development, e.g. the UN Millennium goals*

8) Other Programme-specific aims. Using BP examples to further some kind of broader goal, might make it relevant to include also other selection criteria. For example, if public participation is an important goal in a programme or policy, these criteria should be used when selecting BPs.

B. Criteria that are relevant for policy instrument, management tools, , intellectual tools, stake-holder collaboration and information / education measures

BPs and good examples can be found with respect to policy instruments, management protocols and immaterial working methods and policy instruments. It is a matter of drawing attention to the best applications of the working methods and policy instruments that are already used, and of identifying new and efficient combinations of them.

It can be difficult to apply the first group of criteria (1-3), which deal with direct environmental and economic effects. Other criteria such as, for example, resources consumed, the need for competence development, degree of innovation, ease of transfer, strategic benefit, etc., can be applied for policy instruments and working methods just as they can for technological systems and for various forms of practical measures. For the group (B): the effects for the stakeholders or target groups must be assessed/evaluated:

9) *Impact*: How many stakeholders are reached by the policy instrument or working method?

10) *Fitness to target group*: Is the correct target group reached?

11) Does this lead to *new knowledge, attitudes* and eventually *new behaviour* (including up-take of desirable behaviour or adopting of environmentally benign technologies, products and services?) by the target group?

12) Does the application of the policy instrument lead to *dynamic, indirect effects throughout society in general?*

This might at the first glance seem like an enormous task to assess and evaluate. Therefore it is important to emphasise that in many cases a very simple assessment (e.g. high, medium, low) for each criteria is sufficient. However, especially for the group (B) this selection process should preferably be based on already produced ex-ante assessment and ex-post evaluations.