

**Name of Exercise:** Creation of the Community Environmental Educational Development (CEED) NGO

**Location:** City of Sunderland

**Participation Exercise under which Article?** *Capacity Building*

**Purpose of Participation Exercise:**

*CEED was set-up to promote public environmental and educational awareness of environmental issues in Sunderland, involving real communities, groups and individuals.*

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**Background:**

In 1986, a group of students and a lecturer from the University of Sunderland started Community Environmental Educational Development (CEED) to actively apply their environmental interests to help local communities and solve local problems. CEED is an NGO.

**Capacity Building Techniques:**

At the beginning, CEED had very few resources and relied on goodwill, enthusiasm and any information or advice it could find. CEED's first activities were environmental awareness raising events with the local community which included a week long environmental fayre involving school children and the community in tree-planting, environmental art and interpretation. CEED gave enthusiastic local people who were interested in their environment and community the support and confidence they needed to start and contribute to projects. By running these events, CEED built a network of contacts in the environmental community and gained knowledge on relevant initiatives in the local area and in the region.

CEED became a registered charity in 1989. In the UK, this brings tax advantages. It also began to receive support and advice from other environmental and community groups and to receive small grants and financial support from the City Council, Development Agencies, local trusts and grant giving bodies.

CEED made a case to the University of Sunderland that it was a valuable training and industrial practice organisation for University students. It was also a valuable link between the University and the city itself offering something back to the local community. The University agreed and generously gave free office accommodation, help towards telephone and stationary costs and initially supported the international exchanges of students between CEED and Poland. CEED received support and ecological advice and knowledge from the City of Sunderland council.

CEED negotiated the practical management of a site in Sunderland, leased from a private company. The site, formerly derelict land, was slowly transformed into an urban nature space for wildlife. This was a large project for CEED to manage but presented new opportunities for working with new groups and building new links. Over the years several grants were obtained to finance the site from regeneration agencies, private businesses and partnerships of City and government schemes for inner city areas, but most work was undertaken by volunteers. CEED became part of a local co-operative (a non-profit making group of companies or charities), called Hendon 2000, and employed its first employee, funded through grants and sponsorship in 1990. This employee helped to co-ordinate a large amount of work with the local community and CEED developed strong links with other community groups and NGO's in the region. CEED had a very active group of volunteers, still mostly from the University, but it began to include members from the local community as well.

CEED bid for and received a European Social Fund grant in 1993 to run environmental awareness projects and vocational environmental training courses, and soon started operating courses under franchise agreements with local Further Education colleges.

CEED networked very strongly with local organisations but also tried hard to be known by and work with larger more established groups, umbrella organisations, businesses, the local council and even national bodies relevant to its field. CEED produced newsletters, held events, created publicity, worked to fund-raise and held social events.

CEED was successful in its work and this led to more funding agreements through the further education colleges and a UK National Lottery grant, helping CEED to employ four more staff (at present). As CEED became a more stable and established organisation its very wide voluntary base declined in number but it is still run by members. The management team are not employed staff but trustees working in a voluntary capacity. Recently, the lease for CEED's urban wildlife site has been revoked and the site was used for development. However, this unplanned event has led to CEED being offered other sites by the local council and developing new links with organisations and businesses on sites not previously considered. CEED's links with the Sunderland City Council's Environment Department are probably stronger now than at any other time in CEED's history.

CEED still very much responds to events and activities in its field. It has a very flexible management system, and is very responsive and open to change. This can be a weakness at times when it can lose focus. The strength is that a volunteer can still be interested in a project, receive support and come under the umbrella of CEED, without having to be involved in every day-to-day aspect of the organisation. It is not a very bureaucratic organisation and is still very relaxed and adaptable in style.

CEED consults its members and its community through meetings, formal annual committee meetings, events, newsletters, posters and social events. CEED is now represented at a range of levels from small networks through to regional, national and the international stage. CEED is still capable of working at different levels at different times.

### **Who participated?**

Since 1986, hundreds of people have participated in CEED's work. This may have ranged from volunteers working over several years, to those helping only at one or two events. Participation has included people from the local region, schools and community groups, and trainees, as well as representatives and students from the University, other NGO's, local businesses and members of environmental groups from other countries.

### **Participation and Impact?**

CEED has grown from a small environmental community NGO into a well established organisation with a national and international dimension. At present it does not have the wide voluntary base it once had, and due to its structure and resource base has probably not been able to utilise all opportunities for development that have come its way. CEED tries to match local and global concerns and adapts to changing circumstances, but remains relevant to the environmental agenda.

CEED is not bureaucratic and operates with minimal administration, but relies heavily on goodwill, individual skills, resources and enthusiasms of a few key paid and voluntary personnel.

### **Capacity Building with Other Countries**

CEED has links with organisations in several other countries, but its longest partnership has been with Poland. The initial contact was made in the mid 1980s, through University links and this led to a long running environmental youth exchange supported by the University of Sunderland, the City of Sunderland College, institutions in Poland and grants from the Youth Exchange Centre. This has helped CEED to make links with other Polish environmental groups and after many visits and discussions a new project was developed. CEED and the partner NGO's received funding from the European Union to run vocational training courses focusing on urban nature conservation. This work began in 1994, and over the years has included environmental exchanges and a vocational training project working in both the UK and Poland. The partnership now continues, supported by UK Government 'Darwin Initiative' to work with Polish NGO's, local government and communities to define and protect areas of biodiversity importance in southern Poland. The partners work with NGO's and communities to raise public awareness, support public participation in environmental decision making and promote community involvement the creation of biodiversity plans and putting them into action. The project will aid urban regeneration, and work with Poland's process of accession to EU, whilst helping to protect local biodiversity.

The following factors that have been important in developing capacity building work between countries:

- allowing lots of time for project ideas to develop, and the length of time over which contact between organisations has built-up;
- personal contacts which have strengthened the partnership, and helped to develop trust between the organisations;

- time for partners to get used to each other's styles of management and ways of operating;
- face to face meetings (although technology can help provide quick and easy transfer of information it is no real substitute for genuine communication and the development of understanding);
- real communication to create an opportunity for debate, ideas to be proposed, discussed, perhaps adapted and then implemented;
- planning to co-ordinate the roles and responsibilities of all partners;
- demonstration of the results of the project, feeling that things were being achieved; and
- provision of information in an appropriate form helping create an open environment and to encourage new possibilities.

CEED has found that the development of a project brief is vital, with clear aims, which are discussed and agreed by all partners. This provides not only a useful guiding framework but also the way in which this outline is created and revised is a valuable review process. The hardest part is finding the balance between implementation of the project aims and allowing new ideas to evolve. "You must have a plan to allow the plan to change!".

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