

MISSION DRIVEN BUSINESS PLANNING for SEE NGO electronic networks

Process evaluation (public version)

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1. Introduction

The Mission Driven Business Planning workshop for SEE NGO electronic networks was organised by the Regional Environmental Centre and the Association “L'Umano Dimora Lazio Onlus” with funding from the Italian Ministry for the Environment in Rome from 25 to 28 February 2004. It was facilitated by Mark Surman of the Commons Group, Toronto, Canada and Jan Haverkamp of the ZHABA facilitators collective from Prague, Czech Republic. Participants came from 8 electronic NGO networking initiatives from the South East European region: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Kosov@, Macedonia, Romania, and Serbia and Montenegro. There were three resource persons from ChangeNet in Slovakia, UniMundo and ERM in Italy, as well as additional participants from the organiser L'Umano Dimora. On the first morning, there was a greeting introduction by a representative of the Ministry of Environment.

The three and a half days of programme were very intensive and the final evaluation shows a large degree of satisfaction with the achievements during this time.

A few quotes from different participant's evaluations:

- “I'm going home happy and with a lot of energy”
- “If this works, I'm happy”
- “We wrote a good business plan”
- “Everything was good – Nice people! Nice days! A lot of inputs”
- “I learned important things that I needed which could help a lot! Thanks! :-)”

Also an analysis of expectations expressed at the start of the workshop with the received results reveals that although the expectations were very high, they almost all have been met. Differentiations from the expectations are noted under.

2. Programme planning and programme

The programme was built upon the expectations set by the Regional Environmental Centre as well as on the needs assessment and reports of the Balkan Bytes project. After a draft full programme was made in seven versions by Jan Haverkamp and Mark Surman, it went to another 7 revision rounds in on-line discussion with co-facilitator Pavel Antonov and workshop organisers.

ZHABA is a collective of facilitators that co-operates with NGOs, to tackle barriers that hinder them in working for a change. ZHABA translates as FROG, Facilitators Reaching Out to Grassroots.

ZHABA is an affiliate of the



International Association of Facilitators

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It was decided in an early stage to adapt the over-all expectations to a feasible level. One of the consequences was that the programme would focus solely on the needs of the South East European (SEE) project partners. During further programme development and the workshop itself, it appeared that this focus was on the right level. Also goals and learning objectives were defined in an early stage by the facilitators and workshop organisers together. This functioned as a basis for the programme format. Goals and learning objectives have all been met.

The facilitation team decided to ask only voluntary and minimal preparation from the participants – this choice was the right one, as none of the participants started with an insufficient basis, but also the level of preparation was relatively homogeneous.

The Italian Ministry of Environment originally wanted to start with a welcome speech by a representative of the Ministry as well include a presentation by an Italian expert. However, the format we used does not really allow for presentations (because of possible disruption of power dynamics in the group). We decided to give space to the Ministry's welcome speech on a moment that participation and interaction would already be firmly established (at the end of the first morning), and negotiate directly with the proposed Italian consultant about the format of her participation. This appeared to be a right approach. In future close cooperation on the way how to participate in these kind of workshops is strongly advised.

3. Facilitators team

The facilitation team consisted of two main facilitators (Mark Surman and Jan Haverkamp) and one co-facilitator (Pavel Antonov from the REC). Because the Italian consultant was not that experienced in these kind of participative processes, her role shifted in practice to that of resource person. We advise strongly, only to have people (co-)facilitate that are indeed trained in group process facilitation. Facilitator preparation was done on the day before the workshop together with the people from the organising team. In this way we could create a strong supportive team of people – a factor that was highly beneficial on moments of improvisation.

4. Resource people

The workshop was set up in a way that participants would be able to benefit also from experiences from other APC members. This worked out very positively.

It is also important to notice that all participants – also those that do not come from the priority region – should be encouraged to participate during the whole process. This, in order to use the opportunity to let them immerge in a new culture, instead of only observing it from outside.

5. Workshop dynamics

One factor that gave us some concern in the start of the workshop was timing –

starting and break times. During the workshop this appeared only to be a minor problem – mainly during the last two days when some people came in a little late. Breaks were kept well without any problems. Also the flexibility of the participants concerning ending times (we ended every day between 18:15 and 19:00) was very helpful.

The presumptions on dynamics during the preparation of the workshop were mostly completely adequate. Only in two cases it was necessary to choose a more strongly interactive tool to keep the energy flowing.

The main factors in the workshop dynamic were:

- *Level of experience of the participants I:* During the preparation of the workshop, it became clear that the largest factors of influence on the workshop dynamics would be the difference in experiences between the different networks. We adapted the programme to support the position of the less experienced, however, by teaming them up with more experienced resource people and believe that with a strong follow-up the investment in them could be made to pay off.
- *Level of experience of the participants II:* The participation of two more experienced networks worked positively. This widened the horizon for the others, and gave a good measure stick for making a reality check on plans. It was for the more experienced networks important, however, to have even more experienced resource people available in order to have a similar dynamic for them.
- *Position in the organisation:* Most of the participants are in a decisive position in their networks. For those who are not, a more intensive follow-up could address this issue.
- *English language skills:* English skills were adequate but not fluent. Although we had introduced hand-signs to help the participants slowing down fast speakers or stopping them to ask for further explanation, this was not completely sufficient.
- *Serbian/Croatian/Bosnian/Macedonian/Bulgarian language skills:* Participants from these countries could converse well in their native language. Also the people from Kosov@ and Albania could work in a common language. During the workshop this led to increased learning and feedback and we welcomed possibilities to have people working in their own language next to English. It is important that lessons learned can also be processed in the own language, and only coffee breaks will not be sufficient for that. The programme could have used these common language skills more intensively, especially because national / ethnic background with this group did not seem to play an important role.
- *Sense of relevance of workshop:* This was at the start of the workshop a reason for concern – the facilitators feared that the workshop might not be felt as relevant by 2 or 3 people. This fear appeared to be largely unfounded – but the programme format played an important role in this by adapting strongly to the concrete local circumstances.

6. Materials and logistics

In general materials and logistics went without too many problems. Concerning logistics, one participant furthermore noticed: *“perfect time management – enough time for coffee and lunch”*.

It was noted by the logistic organisers, that they were not used to this type of workshop, but their flexibility could take care that this became rather a learning experience for them than a frustration with the small odds and ends that were not anticipated.

7. Outcome and results

As stated in the introduction, almost all expectations of both the participants as well as the organisers were met and several more than that.

A few expectations mentioned by participants were not fully met:

- *New ideas that could be implemented in Central and Eastern Europe* – as stated already above, the amount of learning possibilities for the resource persons from CEE was limited due to the focus on SEE. In case CEE participants were to participate fully and also learn fully from the process, the process would have to be adapted strongly and from each CEE network also two people should be present.
- *Complete business plan ready* – this expectation was set too high. We have made clear in the introduction of the workshop that we would not make this, but be a good part on the way.
- *To see the Vatican/ Rome* – The time for sightseeing was limited and Rome is a big city. Reason for the fact that little time was available for sightseeing was that we were already struggling with 3,5 days (where the Kvacany workshop in 1999 was 5,5!). Most of the participants used the Saturday afternoon to see at least some sites.

Expectations from the participants that were met very well:

- *To get to know the participants of the workshop* – In several of the final evaluations, participants remarked that they had been able to meet wonderful people. Also orally several people remarked that relations were closer than they had been before. This is partly due to the strongly participative and interactive approaches used in the workshop.
- *To get knowledge from the training* – During the final debrief, Mark and I have discussed one of the remarks in the final evaluations that indicated a possible information overload. Looking back at the programme, we concluded that the amount of information passed was large, but that it was processed in depth. We therefore interpreted the remark *“There is so much info I need to stir them and pull out on the surface”* rather in the sense that the info indeed sank in and that some of it will need further processing.
- *To get knowledge and experience from colleagues and partners* – This expectation

was certainly met because of the used format. There has been a very high level of multi-directional information and experience exchange.

- From the final evaluation: *"I have some brilliant new ideas after the workshop"*

8. Follow-up

Of course, a workshop like this cannot be evaluated as a stand-alone activity. It is part of the larger electronic networking project of REC Balkan Bytes, as well as of the REC-independent cooperation between the participating organisations and APC. Its success will also depend on the follow-up. Two important remarks were made in this respect during the final evaluation:

- *"This way led me towards a way of improving , but need more practical things to help to understand"*
- *"More time for individual consultations (in depth)"*

We come with the following suggestions:

- *Finalisation of business plans* – It is suggested to have this done as part of the REC Balkan Bytes project and the preparation for the next round of funding by REC.
- *Feedback on final business plans* – This feedback could come from the workshop facilitators.
- *On-site support visits* – On site visits by one or two consultants to follow up on the plans and help improving their implementation (funding advice, organisational advice, etceteras).
- *Follow-up workshop Mission Driven Business Planning* – Timing: half a year after this workshop – This format worked very well with APC CEE in 1999. The follow-up workshop addresses problems and opportunities met during the first implementation phase.
- *Reference to the business plan in other trainings* – REC and L'Umana Dimora are planning a series of other trainings. Implementation of the business plan can be integrated in such trainings, provided that their format is again participative and interactive.

9. Role of ZHABA

The role of ZHABA, as in the previous Mission Driven Business Planning workshop for Central and East Europe, was crucial in the development of an interactive and participative format. It became very clear that such expertise is not readily available in Italy. ZHABA therefore proposes facilitation training for the Italian organisers, resource people and possible others. This kind of expertise can be used in all ongoing cooperation work of the organisations involved, as well as their internal organisational development.