

Executive Summary

This report analyses an experimental action research programme to enhance local management capability for addressing serious environmental problems in developing countries. The programme is called IDEA – Institutional Development for Environmental Action. IDEA consists of core project teams and networks led by senior scientists or public administrators in Malaysia, Mauritius, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Ghana, Nigeria and Guyana. There is also a small, worldwide interdisciplinary support team. The projects are addressing problems of watershed management, waste management and the management of mineral natural resources. However, the lessons of the programme are applicable across a wide range of situations requiring environmental management.

IDEA is part of, and administered by, the Commonwealth Consultative Group on Technology Management (CCGTM), recently established by the Commonwealth Heads of Government within the Commonwealth Secretariat. The experimental programme has been funded by the Natural Resource and Environment Department of the Overseas Development Administration (Research grant R4516A, September, 1989-August, 1991).

There are four chapters in the report. **Chapter One** summarises the IDEA Programme and its approach. **Chapter Two** describes each of the projects in some detail. **Chapter Three** describes the generic constraints on good environmental management in developing countries, with reference to the literature of development and public administration, and the experience and contributions of the IDEA projects to overcoming these constraints. These constraints include the complexity of environmental problems, a common failure to integrate national policies, the limitations of the ‘command and control’ management style of the traditional bureaucracy, lack of reward within these bureaucracies for integrated approaches, a failure to learn from experience, and various contextual constraints, which arise from

national political systems, religious and tribal factors, and other cultural factors.

Chapter Four describes in more detail how the IDEA approach and methodology helps environmental managers to overcome these constraints by initiating task-oriented, informal groups, or networks, to assist in defining the problems and developing consensus around the best way forward. The IDEA projects validate that such parallel networks, drawing legitimacy from their interest in clearly defined environmental problems, can be useful complements to formal bureaucratic structures in environmental management. They are not, however, a replacement for the traditional bureaucracy as they do not carry out any routine functions of government. Rather government will find it helpful to sanction and participate in such networks, as equal partner to business and community/NGO groups to address special and urgent environmental tasks. The characteristics of the parallel network are: team or equal partnership relationships; vision and value-driven leadership by a key individual; flat, flexible organisational structures; emphasis on participation; and undertaking continuous performance review and improvement.

IDEA is based on the assumption that improvements in the outcomes of management are best sought within the management process itself, rather than from external inputs. The notion of 'nested' networks within IDEA also explains how local network members also become members of the wider IDEA/CCGTM network, and can call on that network for support, advice and peer review. This support is not external to the management process, as a consultant might be, but expands the 'team' addressing the environmental problem to include expertise from other countries. The team is then engaged in a process of mutual learning, and relationships among team members are non-hierarchical.

The main concepts behind the IDEA approach are:

- An individual to serve as a catalyst, called the Team Leader, selected for his/her ability to take a broad, process-oriented perspective on local environmental problems.
- The selection of a serious environmental problem of national or regional significance, but one capable of significant progress towards its amelioration. The problem provides a case study for learning about the environmental management process and for developing new skills.

- A local project advisory group, which provides relevant stakeholding agencies and individuals the opportunity for participation in the definition of the problem and in its resolution.
- An IDEA researcher, hired locally, to develop the project under the guidance of the team leader and advisory group. These three, taken together, make up the local IDEA team.
- A facilitating and/or a mediating role for the team. These are defined within the report. The process is one of iterative problem definition to broaden the perspective, and the gradual building of consensus and commitment to the resolution of the problem.
- The development of a local network around the problem, and support, advice and peer review from the international IDEA/CCGTM network.

Of particular importance are the local networks, which are the key to environmental problem solving, but which also at first glance may appear threatening to existing institutional arrangements and individuals in positions of power. A strength of IDEA is that these are developed only at a non-threatening pace which is politically and culturally sustainable, by a process much akin to traditional community development, but at a regional or even national scale.

Chapter Five considers the main outputs and lessons to be derived from the programme. Most significantly, IDEA has helped to develop a greater understanding of the potential for cost-effective, network support for national or regional action on environmental management tasks. The programme has also generated new knowledge on the means of linking government to non-governmental organisations and to the private, business sector, both large corporations and small-scale, ‘backyard’ industrialists. Such linkages are essential for the realisation of sustainable development, however defined. IDEA also validates that the environmental control task is most productively perceived as a regional land use and water management task, requiring planning at the level of the ecosystem. IDEA also generated additional knowledge in areas such as environmental legislation, pollution control technology, state of the environment reporting and others, which is documented in the many reports. Each of the project teams has become a ‘node’ of expertise on particular topics within the network.

Finally, in addition to the generic knowledge derived from IDEA, the projects mobilised local human resources for direct action on serious environmental problems, and provided high value

interventions at modest cost. The projects lead to the discovery of talented local people, linked them to the challenging tasks, provided an opportunity for further, mutual learning, linkage and recognition, and thus developed a pool of local human resources with diverse skills in environmental management. An Appendix to the Report describes each of the seven pilot projects, in terms of problem, action and outcome.