

**Name of Exercise:** Local initiative to create environment for sustainable development projects to evolve in Mustvee and Kallaste

**Location:** Towns of Mustvee and Kallaste on western shore of Lake Peipsi

**Participation Exercise under which Article?** *Article 7, Capacity Building*

**Purpose of Participation Exercise:**

*To promote local sustainable development and public participation in the development of the local community.*

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**Background:**

The Centre for Transboundary Co-operation (formerly Lake Peipsi Project), with UNDP financial support, is carrying out a project "Local sustainable development projects in Mustvee and Kallaste". The project started in June 1997 and will be implemented in September 2000.

The closing of the border between Russia and Estonia has caused severe socio-economic problems in rural communities on the western shore of Lake Peipsi, border region to Russia. These communities used to earn their living by fishing and farming, and by selling their produce to Russia and Estonia. Now, due to Russian fiscal policy and changes in the Estonian economic system, farmers and fishermen have lost their markets and their main source of income. A history of living within a centralised economy meant that the skills to analyse local problems and the ability to generate actions to address them were not widely developed.

To support the local sustainable development process, the Centre for Transboundary Co-operation ('CTC') started a project in June 1997 in the towns of Mustvee and Kallaste, located on the Estonian side of the lake. Kallaste town has a population of 1,200 people, Mustvee around 1,500 people and both towns are among poorest municipalities in Estonia. The financial support of the project was provided by UNDP. The overall aim of the project is to promote local sustainable development and public participation in the issues of local development.

**Participation techniques used:**

In the preparation phase of the project, intensive communications were held with local authorities. Information about the project was published in local newspapers and personal contacts and meetings were held with community leaders. Local co-ordinators were hired in both towns in order to maintain close contact with the community. At the start of the project, local groups of active residents were formed. Both groups consisted of 15-20 people (members of town council, teachers, NGO activists, pensioners, fishermen). The groups, run by local co-ordinators, held monthly meetings to discuss social, environmental and economic problems in the area. The meetings are aimed at helping people to develop ideas for improving their communities and to find ways of implementing those ideas to address these problems.

There were some initial difficulties. Organisers faced a lack of understanding of the role and activities of NGOs from local people. Project staff put a lot of time and energy into explaining the democratic basis for people to act and the role of NGOs in society. Information about the basis of civil society and NGOs was published in local newspapers and provided through meetings. Information was distributed to local government and community centres and several training sessions were organised on NGO development.

Lake Peipsi Project staff have worked as mediators in helping to solve problems between local governments and NGOs. There are still lack of understanding at the local level about how these two sectors of society could work together as partners. Quite often, the other side is seen as a competitor, or as someone who wants to gain too much power. Of course, in small communities, contacts and relationships between individuals have an important role and may be obstacles to co-operation.

Project staff had regular meetings with Kallaste and Mustvee town governments to discuss and plan the project's activities in these communities. We have participated in town meetings to answer questions about local NGOs and the ongoing UNDP project. We have advised local NGOs in writing project specifications, finding support for their project and in organisational issues.

Several training programs were organised with the help of the Rural Development Institute, Business Development Centre and other experts. The need for training programs was carefully discussed with local groups and town administrations. Training programs on sustainable tourism, business development, project writing and learning English and Estonian have been very popular. The training programs have been supported by UNDP although participants were asked for contributions for the language courses.

With the Mustvee and Kallaste town governments, three-day brainstorming sessions on town development plans were held in both towns in order to discuss the priorities of the community. Information about the sessions was published in the newspapers, advertisements were put to the local government building, library and community centre. Participation in the brainstorming sessions was high with 40-60 people (town council members, teachers, NGO activists, pensioners, fishermen). Kallaste town council ratified local agendas in 1999, Mustvee town is still working on it.

E-mail and Internet connections in Mustvee and Kallaste community centres have also been established which can be used free of charge. As local people have little experience in e-mail and Internet use, training has been held on these topics.

### **Results of the project**

One of the objectives of the UNDP program was that the representatives of community groups and NGOs would have started to work out their own local development projects. Several NGOs have been established and local sustainable development projects have been started. Project staff are assisting community groups in identifying the sources of their problems, finding possible solutions, writing project proposals and monitoring project implementation.

Local people write their own projects with the help of staff and some of the projects have received funding. Among them are:

- Kallaste Ecotourism Foundation received funding from the Open Estonian Foundation to hold training session for social workers. This will specifically address the needs of homebound, elderly residents.
- Mustvee town received funding from the EU CREDO program to develop recreational infrastructure in the region. The project partner is Gdov town from the Russian side of the lake. Several environmental studies on the condition of the shore are envisaged. Experts will work out detailed plans of the recreational and infrastructure of the Lake Peipsi shore. The bigger follow-up project would be establishing international ports in Mustvee and Gdov town, to promote trade and tourism between the two states.
- The Kallaste initiative group is developing a program of environmental education for local people. Training sessions will be held for local businessmen and local government employees regarding environmental protection issues. One of the results of the project would be working out an environmental development plan for the Kallaste region.
- The idea of printing a local newspaper grew out of discussions by the Kallaste local group. The first issue of the newspaper was printed with financial support from UNDP. Support for subsequent issues was provided by other organisations. The greatest value of the newspaper is in bringing town government news and events directly to the readers. Drafts of Kallaste's development plans were published in the newspaper so everyone could read it and give their comments.
- Kallaste Ecotourism Foundation received funding from the Baltic-American Partnership Program for their project "Lake Peipsi Agenda" (local development plans). Other training sessions will be held for local businessmen, local government employees and others about local agenda environmental protection, social and economical issues.
- Mustvee Ecotourism Foundation received funding from the Baltic-American Partnership Program for their project "Mustvee – capital of Lake Peipsi". They will organise English language courses as well as training programs for entrepreneurs. Information materials and brochures about Lake Peipsi region will be published.

**Comments of participants in process:**

We have seen a growing interest amongst people living in Mustvee and Kallaste areas to establish their own NGOs and solve local problems as a result of our project. We can see that local people have begun to understand what they can do themselves to resolve these problems, and what are the tools that can help them to do so. We believe that the UNDP project has helped local people to better understand their problems and to plan their own actions to address them.

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