

SUSTAINABILITY IN DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

*Adopted by the Board of the Danish Project Advisory and Training Centre, PACT
December 2008*

PATC WILL PROMOTE:

- A nuanced perception of sustainability, where sustainability is viewed in a total perspective and assessed in relation to the concrete character of the development activity, its size and its objectives – so that it is not a single aspect (e.g. financial or technological or environmental sustainability), which alone is decisive.
- That in the total perspective the capacity takes part in the construction of the partner organization and target group (as part of the strengthening of the civic society) and the potential for inspiration or direct spill over effect in relation to the surroundings which the development activity will promote..

SUSTAINABILITY – WHY?

Sustainability is one of the decisive criteria in assessing development aid and projects. The objective to contribute to creating sustainable development is central in the Civic Society Strategy and in many other strategies and declarations.

The strong emphasis on sustainability reflects among others experiences from development projects in the sixties and seventies. The purpose of the activities was to show fast, concrete and physical changes often headed by Danish expert delegates and Danish organizations who implemented the projects. The experience showed that these changes often were not permanent and that only a relatively limited target group benefited from the foreign aid. Local capacity was not built in order to continue the effects of the projects and they were often used to fulfil the holes in which actually in order for it to be permanent and sustainable- should be fulfilled by the local state/ authorities.

PATC will support that development must have a long term perspective and that we must contribute to create permanent positive changes in conditions of life for poor people. As an absolute minimum, the activity must not put cooperating partners or target groups in an unintentional dependency relationship after the end of the project or activity



SUSTAINABILITY - DEFINITION

Like many of the other central concepts in development aid, there are many different definitions of the concept sustainability (see chosen examples on page six). PATC has chosen the below mentioned definition of sustainability as a basis for courses, advisory services and the administration of the Project Fund.

“ A concrete development activity is sustainable when the partner organization and/or the target group as a consequence of the activity gain long-term advantages and effects which continue after the activity has ended. The sustainability must be made probable prior to the start of the activity and it must be assessed in the light of the character, size and objectives of the activity”

This implies:.

- The sustainability of the activity must be assessed in relation to long-term gains for the partner organisation/ the target groups. It is the activity´s advantages/effects which must be maintained and carried through, not necessarily all the activities or the project organization.
- The extent of these permanent advantages/effects depends on the specific project and must be assessed in relation to the activity´s own objectives.
- The advantages/effects must be carried on for a prolonged period - not necessarily indefinitely.
- The advantages/effects must be able to be carried through after the majority of the aid has ended, not necessarily it all. The cooperation with the partner organization can continue with other projects with either new target groups or new objectives.
- Continued spill-over of the activity´s advantages/effects to other partners or target groups can also be considered a continuation.

DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF SUSTAINABILITY

The concept sustainability has a number of different aspects. For example, the political and social sustainability will be decisive in a project which works with farmers' rights to own land while financial and organizational sustainability will be important in the assessment of a project which works with the construction of micro-financial institutions for poor target groups.

It is not necessarily all of the below-mentioned aspects or questions which are equally relevant for the specific development activity. However, it is important that, when formulating a project and a possible application, one considers:

- Whether the different partial questions are relevant in relation to the specific context and if affirmative
 - how to plan the project so that it is likely to result in permanent improvements and effects.
-
- **Political sustainability:**
 - Does a political group have the political will and ability to work for the purpose of the project?
 - Do groups or individuals work against the purpose of the project?
 - Are the partner organization and the target group committed to the project and its purpose?
 - **Organizational sustainability:**
 - Are organizations built on existing organizations?
 - Are parallel structures built (particularly in relation to the public service)?
 - Are competing structures built?
 - Does the cooperating partner have sufficient capacity (for example knowledge, organizational strength, personnel and strategies, etc.)?
 - Is the cooperating partner suited? Is the project within the organization's natural work area? To what extent does it represent the cooperating partners' target group/ is it anchored in the target group?
 - How can the projects results, experiences or methods spill over to other organizations or target groups?

■ **Finansiell bæredygtighed:**

- ⊙ Can activities or the effect of the project be carried on after the financial support ends?
- ⊙ Can the partner organization take over the relevant operating costs after the projects closure?
- ⊙ Is it possible to create some kind of local resource mobilization?
- ⊙ Is the level of expenses appropriate to local conditions and are there local ways for an assignment to be solved (to a lower price)?
- ⊙ An assessment of the total cost-benefit (including an analysis of how much money is given to the direct target group per individual).

■ **Technological sustainability:**

- ⊙ Is the technology which is used appropriate and accepted in relation to the surrounding society and the partners' capacity?

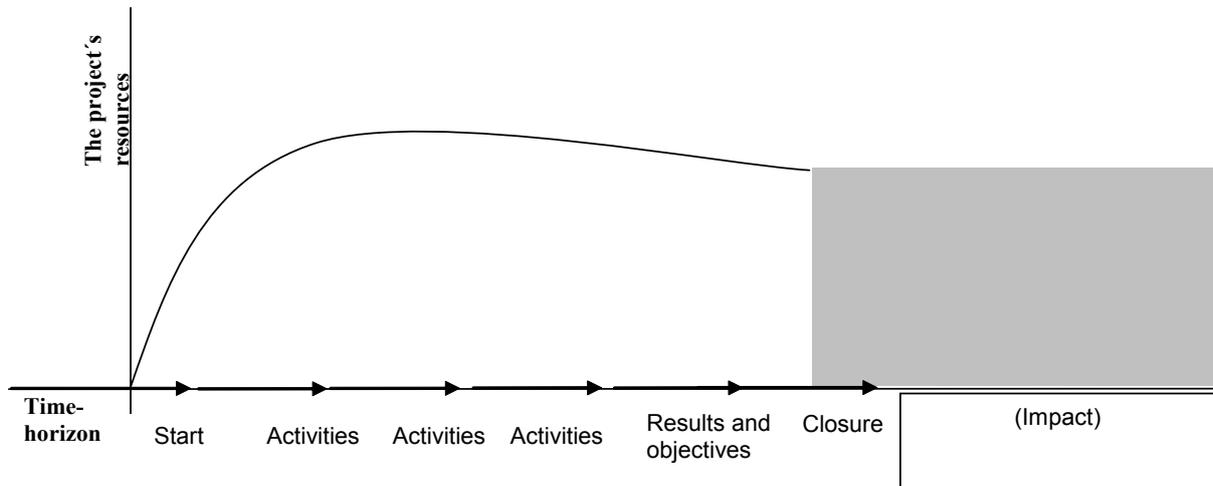
■ **Social and cultural sustainability:**

- ⊙ Are the changes which the project aims to create socially and culturally acceptable?
- ⊙ Do social and cultural forces exist which will support the changes?

■ **Environmental sustainability:**

- ⊙ How will the project influence the surrounding environment?
- ⊙ How will the project influence the consumption of natural resources?
- ⊙ Does the project take into account how changes in the future might effect the environment and the climate?

SUSTAINABILITY IN THE PROJECT FORMULATION



The figure illustrates the significance of considering how permanent advantages and effect can be carried on after the project has ended and as such, carrying on the results and objectives which the project is committed to achieving. The considerations about sustainability in the project formulation must, among others, lead to:

- A description of how the achieved goals of the project will be continued in the grey area as lasting

advantages or effect (e.g., strengthened consciousness, durable structures, increased income opportunities, changed behaviour by the target groups/ authorities, etc.).

- A description of how the project will support that the desired continuation is probable.

SUSTAINABILITY IN RELATION TO THE PROJECT FUND

In assessing applications for the Project Fund, the demands for sustainability will be adjusted to the project's character and size as well as the experience of the applying organization. Larger projects and greater project experience will imply that it has been made probable in advance that the project will lead to improvements for the target groups' conditions of life and/or the partner organisation capacity which can be maintained after the end of project.

We acknowledge that it can be difficult to get results with long term sustainability in smaller projects (and to less experienced organisations). In the assessment of these activities, the capacity building of local organizations and structures will be looked upon as well as the possibility that a long lasting partnership can be built through the specific project which reaches above and beyond what is provided for by individual activities.

If larger projects are innovative or experimental, the assessment of sustainability will focus on how these new experiences can be used after the project ends.

SUSTAINABILITY AND DIVISION OF PHASES

If a project requires many years in order to come to its full potential it will be possible for experienced applicants (with a good track record and with a partner with the necessary capacity) to divide projects into phases where all the elements are not necessarily present at the beginning of the project but where it is likely that the elements will unfold during the different phases.

The objective is to work in phases and to give Danish organisations and their partners more space and room to be able to think long-term from the beginning and plan the projects so that real learning processes can take place. Adjustment can be made on the way due to experiences thus assuring the greatest possible local anchorage and a higher degree of sustainability before the project ends.

However, a number of demands are set concerning the project's division of phases; among others, a long term strategy, progression concerning the total project, systematic experience gathering and clearly delimited phases which are to be planned so that the partner or the target group are not put in an unintentional dependency relationship if the following phases cannot be implemented.

THE PATC POSITION PAPERS

The Steering Committee of the Project Advisory and Training centre, PATC, has adopted a number of position papers that describe our view of how various key concepts in the development work must be understood and interpreted in practice.

The position papers are prepared on the basis of our practices and experiences from member organizations, development projects and

activities, our consultancy and training activities as well as our administration of the Project Fundl.

The papers are not static documents but will at appropriate intervals be revised in the light of experience gained. Simultaneously, several position papers being prepared on other topics.

See the latest version and other position papers on www.prngo.dk



projektrådgivningen