

# "AGENDA 21 – How to Develop your Action Programme?"

## Preparing for "Rio + 10"

by Kerstin Bernecker<sup>1</sup>

### 1. Introduction

Nine years ago, in 1992, the "AGENDA 21 – the United Nations Programme for Action from Rio"<sup>2</sup> was established and concluded. It is supported by more than 180 Nations and their Governments. The basic concept of AGENDA 21 is *achieving sustainability by integrating environment and development on the basis of a global partnership among the nations*. The "Leitbild", kind of a **Guiding Principle** of AGENDA 21 is *sustainability*, to be achieved through an integrated approach respecting the social, environmental and economic requirements in a "One world system"(see Chapter 8 of the "Rio AGENDA 21").

The "Rio AGENDA 21" is a very serious document, covering in four main sections and 40 detailed chapters almost all relevant issues related to sustainability requirements. Chapter 28 – "Local authorities' initiatives in support of Agenda 21" suggests a very ambitious time schedule: "By 1996, most local authorities in each international community should have undertaken a consultative process with their populations and have achieved a consensus on "a local Agenda 21" for the community;" "By 1993, the international community should have initiated a consultative process aimed at increasing cooperation between local authorities"...

In reality, by 1996 very few local Agenda 21 processes had been initiated. But meanwhile, a dynamic

development is ongoing<sup>3</sup>. In view of the Johannesburg Summit in 2002 which is planned to evaluate the achievements so far and to draw conclusions from the "first Rio decade", most Governments are making "extra efforts" now. National strategies are being developed (e.g.: Germany), and also at the lower administrative levels, efforts are being made.

However, at all levels – from national or even supra-national down to community levels, certain methods and approaches are adequate and useful for establishing an AGENDA 21, a strategy, an action programme with a Leitbild (Guiding Principles) relevant for that level.

The following chapters cover interrelated topics, i.e.:

- First, a summary of the most commonly used approaches and methods is given (at various levels, in different countries, but mostly with reference to Germany – Chapter 2).
- Chapter 3 proposes a definition of an Action Programme in the AGENDA 21 context.
- Then, the approaches and methods which turned out to be most useful are outlined (Chapter 4).
- Subsequently, the relevance of certain conceptual issues, the usefulness of "concept modules" for the development of a sound strategy and an action programme are discussed (Chapter 5).
- The need to take into consideration the relevant horizontal and vertical linkages at each level of an AGENDA 21 strategy and action programme is outlined in order to be able to finalise the strategy and the programme (Chapter 6).
- The conclusions of Chapters 2 to 6 lead to the recommended approach, proposing a combination of adequate methods, the integration of concept modules and the systematic consideration and updating of the horizontal and the vertical linkages. The adequate involvement of as large a part of the population as possible remains a crucial and

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<sup>2</sup> UN: Earth Summit – AGENDA 21 – The United Nations Programme of Action from Rio, New York 1992; referred to subsequently as the "Rio AGENDA 21".

<sup>3</sup> By end of 1996, 1800 local governments in 64 countries were involved in Local AGENDA 21 activities (ICLEI and UNDPCSD: Local Agenda 21 Survey, 1997). Meanwhile, more than 600 LA 21 processes are ongoing only in Bavaria (6/2001). In the non industrialised countries, this process is ongoing, too, but at a lower speed.

difficult issue which requires special attention. It is related to the “multiple strategy” approach but is even more complex (Chapter 7).

- Of course it is not sufficient to *have* the action programme, it is also crucial to be clear how to implement and manage it. This issue is not the focus of this paper, – it will be treated in one of the next issues of BeraterInnen News, but an outlook on this – equally important – aspect of the AGENDA 21 process is given (Chapter 8).

## 2. Experiences made so far, best practices

The experiences made so far with the AGENDA 21 on various levels, especially “how to establish your (local) AGENDA 21?”, are not homogenous – and should not be so<sup>4</sup>: Already the scopes and levels of the various AGENDA 21 approaches, documents and processes vary considerably.

- Supra-national Regions as the Mediterranean Countries (Agenda MED 21) and the Baltic Sea area have their overall “AGENDA 21”,
- a considerable number of countries has established their “National Agenda 21”<sup>5</sup>,
- many administrative divisions of various countries have developed their own “AGENDA 21”; e.g. in Germany, several federal states dispose of their specific AGENDA 21<sup>6</sup>,
- many districts have their own AGENDA 21<sup>7</sup>,
- certain regions have or are about to develop their own AGENDA 21 (e.g. Island of Djerba, Tunisia;

North-Western catchment area of Tunisia<sup>8</sup>; Lake Chiemsee, Germany),

- many communities have their AGENDA 21<sup>9</sup>.

The various examples cover a wide range of approaches: there are very systematic ones, others seem to be quite arbitrary “shopping lists” or lists of projects. On the one hand, the basic idea of the AGENDA 21 is rather supporting the systematic approach, with a vision, a perspective and clear objectives with indicators. The participation encouraged and necessary for the AGENDA 21 process, on the other hand, results very often in less systematic proceeding, especially at lower levels (communities, cities). Many “lay-people” are working with their good will. Little specific know-how and experience is available how to arrange, organise (and manage) such a new process with various heterogeneous groups participating in different ways.

It turned out, however, that quite frequently the need for a systematic approach was felt by the “AGENDA-21-citizens” after a while of non-systematic proceeding. The frequently found “shopping lists” – project lists – lack very often a perspective. Many local AGENDA-21-processes have been observed which got stuck due to this lack of perspective. Others, even based on project lists, came up eventually with interesting concepts and perspectives<sup>10</sup>. But also very systematic and methodologically sound “AGENDA 21” are being found, even at community level: They are built on a series of analyses, vision building and planning – all with the general “Leitbild” (kind of guiding principle) of *sustainable development* as background<sup>11</sup>.

The higher the level, the more important is a more systematic approach – for various reasons, especially:

<sup>4</sup> There was no recent survey available about the various on-going A 21 approaches. So what is said above is of methodological but not of statistical relevance.

<sup>5</sup> E.g. China: „China’s Agenda 21 – White Paper on China’s Population, Environment and Development in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, Beijing 1994; Republique Tunisienne, MEAT: Programme d’Action National de l’Environnement et du Développement durable pour le XXIème Siècle – AGENDA 21 NATIONAL, Tunis 1995; (see also: Bernecker, K. : AGENDA 21 Development on National Level and the Tunisian Example, in: BeraterInnen News 1/00, Lindau CH 2000).

<sup>6</sup> E.g. BStMLU: Bayern-AGENDA 21 (Bavaria), Munich 1998; Umweltbehörde Hamburg: Kursbuch Umwelt, Ziele für ein zukunftsfähiges Hamburg, Hamburg 2001 (Federal State „City of Hamburg“).

<sup>7</sup> E.g. in Bavaria, Germany: Landratsamt (district administration) Fürstfeldbruck: Agenda 21 – Aktionsprogramm des Landkreises Fürstfeldbruck. FFB 2001.

Landratsamt Starnberg: Agenda 21- und Umweltbericht, Landkreis Starnberg (Entwurf), Starnberg 2001.

<sup>8</sup> Bernecker, K. and N. Bechraoui: Projet AGENDA 21 pour le bassin-versant du nord-Ouest tunisien – conception et processus de concertation, Tunis/ Herrsching 1999; El Cadi, F.A. : Agenda 21 de l’île de Djerba : La participation d’une ONG locale., in GTZ/CITET : L’environnement et l’économie dans une perspective de développement durable. Gammarth/Tunis 1998.

<sup>9</sup> Lokale AGENDA 21 Herrsching: Aktionsprogramm 21. Jahrhundert – Eine lokale AGENDA 21 für Herrsching, Herrsching 1999; AGENDA 21 Tutzing: Leitlinien für eine nachhaltige Entwicklung Tutzings, Tutzing 2000; Bagonza-Birungi, J.: Local Agenda 21 in Uganda: The innovative approach of Jinja Municipality. In BeraterInnen News 1/00, Lindau CH 2000.

<sup>10</sup> Landratsamt Fürstfeldbruck, op. cit. and Landratsamt Fürstfeldbruck: Energiekonzept.

<sup>11</sup> See e.g.: Lokale AGENDA 21 Herrsching, op.cit.

- the lower levels tend to refer to the higher level, may consider it as a model,
- at higher levels, a more comprehensive and systematic coverage of the field of sustainable development is indispensable: e.g. a district in a swamp area in Congo may not need to consider Chapter 12 of the Rio-AGENDA 21, “Combating desertification and drought”; however, the Federal Republic of Germany has well to consider that Chapter and Germany’s contribution to it world wide, although Germany is not a drought prone area!

A conclusion of the consideration of a large number of AGENDA 21 processes at various levels is: It is safer, more likely to lead to sustainable approaches, if more systematic proceeding is chosen. In the case of unsystematic working, the likelihood of reaching sustainable approaches is quite low, the risk of getting stuck, getting the participants frustrated, is quite high.

In several cases, a “multiple strategy approach” was chosen:

- E.g. the AGENDA 21 of Hamburg (“Kursbuch Umwelt”, op.cit.) is distinguishing between “three ways of methodological proceeding”, i.e.
  - project oriented and exemplary proceeding by means of specific “singular” undertakings such as the projects “work and climatic protection” and “100 households on new ways”;
  - participatory and process oriented proceeding aiming at involving the citizens – such as the support of the “future council” or the citizen involvement for a certain town quarter development (“Niendorf”);
  - systematic and integrative proceeding, e.g. for the development of specific objectives and indicators for the management of sustainable development.
- The AGENDA 21 of Herrsching (“Aktionsprogramm für das 21. Jahrhundert“ op.cit.) suggests „an iterative and multiple strategy“:
  - a rough, preliminary definition of the objectives,
  - an assessment of the present situation,
  - parallel to that, starting projects which fitted evidently into the preliminary objectives structure,

- after a few months, making systematic analyses on the basis of the assessment of the situation so far,
- developing visions by making use of the analyses,
- further working out an objectives structure, a planning framework and the action programme,
  - including action plans, one for each sub-objective and comprising various projects each<sup>12</sup>, and
  - a “Leitbild”
- and, pursuing the different elements of this multiple strategy: the data base is improved, especially for the indicators, a yearly review and replanning takes place, projects are being implemented, some are revised, some skipped, others added, – but all within the Leitbild and the objectives framework.

### 3. Action Programme 21: Leitbild and Action Plans

The definition proposed here was implicitly used already above. An action programme has a certain strategic character. Hence it is necessary that it comprises a guiding principle, an orientation “where to go”, the “Leitbild”.

For the “Rio-AGENDA 21”, the Leitbild is

*Sustainable Development, under the assumption of respecting ecological, economic and social aspects in an integrated and mutually compatible manner, all this within a global partnership.*

This may sound quite general. But the Rio-AGENDA 21 has to be general enough as to accommodate all countries of this planet. For any specific AGENDA 21, however, the Leitbild has to be more specific. But the basic aspects of the Leitbild of the Rio-AGENDA 21 should also be stated explicitly in any A 21 Leitbild – at any level. In addition, it is useful if the objectives structure of the action plan are outlined in the Leitbild, i.e. a goal plus purpose, sub-objectives which contribute to that goal and purpose.

Beyond the Leitbild, action plans – one for each of the sub-objectives – should be and are normally part of

<sup>12</sup> With a principle which has to be reminded of again and again: the implementation of this planning should not require more than 50% of the time of the participants available. The other 50% should be reserved for “contingencies”...

the Action Programme. The action plans comprise the projects which are necessary and sufficient to achieve the objective, a time frame, resource planning and the persons responsible for the project. Usually, an analysis of the present situation is also summarised in the action programme. Sometimes each action plan comprises the specific part of the analysis of the present situation. Sometimes, it is structured according to the 40 chapters of the Rio-AGENDA 21. This is the more interesting, the higher the level of the AGENDA 21 under consideration: then a more comprehensive contribution to the global partnership of the entity (state, country..) is required, and a more systematic presentation of the AGENDA 21 is expected (reference/model..). Otherwise, if the action plans are based on the objectives of the Leitbild, these objectives should cover the essential aspects of the Rio-AGENDA 21, and references to the various chapters should be made<sup>13</sup>.

#### 4. Approaches and methods

Various methods are being applied in order to prepare or develop an AGENDA 21 (Action programme) for a community, a district, a region, a state, a country etc. Relatively "classical" methods – preparation of special parts, sector papers – by experts or sub-groups, discussions in round tables are often used. More and more, however, innovative methods are being applied in AGENDA 21 processes, too, e.g.:

- future workshops,
- future search conferences,
- Objectives Oriented Planning <sup>14</sup>.

The three approaches/methods have a number of aspects in common. They have usually a double purpose:

- a) They aim at *systematic and participatory* analysing and planning.

- b) They aim at contributing at *systematic, future oriented thinking and communicating*:
1. thinking in linkages and contexts,
  2. thinking in cause-effect and means-end relationships,
  3. thinking and communicating under consideration of the situations, understandings, values of other people and other cultures ("stepping into the others shoes").

All three methods require experienced facilitation and they may be applied at different stages of an AGENDA 21 process. Especially their usefulness for establishing the action programme is considered below. In all cases, different types of participants are possible. For establishing the action programme, representatives of the various relevant groups of the AGENDA 21 "region" under consideration should ideally participate.

#### Future Workshops <sup>15</sup>

Future Workshops have been "invented" more than 20 years ago by Robert Jungk, a "future scientist and researcher". It was aimed at shaping the future in an efficient and participatory way. This concept coincides with basic AGENDA 21 ideas. Hence they have been adopted by a considerable number of AGENDA 21 processes.

The workshop is carried out usually in four phases; a fifth phase represents the transition to process implementation and management:

1. Orientation phase – getting participants acquainted with each other, the context, the methods and the rules of the method.
2. Phase of perception and criticism: Strengths and weaknesses in view of sustainable development of the region are analysed.
3. Phantasy phase – solutions to the problems identified and completely new ideas are encouraged and developed, visions and creativity are the crucial qualities in this phase.
4. Preparation of implementation: From vision to action. On the basis of the visions, a proposal for the Leitbild may be discussed and selected, key projects may be chosen and first action plans may be drawn up.
5. Accompanying of the process – including documenting and managing the process with defined responsibilities, time and resource planning and monitoring.

<sup>13</sup> In this case, there is a certain risk that important aspects – especially "the global partnership" are omitted or not sufficiently taken into account.

<sup>14</sup> OOP or OOPP is the English term for the original „ZOP“ or „ZOPP“ (ZielOrientierte <Projekt>-Planung) which was introduced and promoted by GTZ, the German Technical Cooperation. The method is based on the logical framework analysis and planning.

<sup>15</sup> See e.g.: Jungk, R. and N.R. Müllert: Zukunftswerkstätten. Mit Phantasie gegen Routine und Resignation (Future Workshops. With Fantasy against Routine and Resignation). München 1989.

The rules are:

- Verbal communication is largely replaced or supported by visualisation (writing the statements on little cards),
- each statement should be as specific and concrete as possible,
- any idea may be thought, written, presented – except: killer phrases should be avoided (“that is impossible, ..absurd..”),
- any ideas, thoughts may be taken up by somebody else to be further developed,
- and the common group work / workshop rules.

The duration of a future workshop is not strictly defined. But a general rule for any strategic workshop is: it should be more than one day, at least one night for digesting the ideas is necessary. Generally, the future workshop may result in a (draft) Leitbild and an outline of an action programme. A more frequent result is a list of possible projects.

### Future Search Conferences

There are some similarities, but also some specific differences between the above described Future Workshop and Future Search Conferences. In a Future Search Conference, a larger number of people should come together for three days in order to elaborate certain objectives under well defined conditions. There should be individuals as well as people representing the relevant groups and organisations.

The objectives of the Future Search Conference are:

- to elaborate objectives and projects,
- to generate a common culture and motivation.

Here also, well defined phases are used to structure the workshop. Two main phases with three sub-phases each:

1. Main phase I: generation of a common basis – with the sub-phases
  - the consideration of the past in order to develop a common picture of the world, the values and the common past,
  - the analysis of external trends in order to generate a common picture,
  - the analysis of internal trends in order to identify common values.
2. Main phase II: Generation of a desirable future with the sub-phases

- “futures” are elaborated, in different groups in a way that people are ready to devote some of their time and energy,
- similarities of the different group results are identified, consensus about the models or elements of them is searched,
- elaboration of action plans necessary to achieve the objectives which are agreed.

Usually, an outline of a Leitbild and action plans may be the result of the workshop. Very important for the Future Search Conference is a very good preparation (selection of participants, clear structure of the proceeding of the conference), well prepared conference facilitation (group mixes and alternating individual working, group work, plenary sessions..) and post-conference work, especially making the results accessible to a broad public, further elaboration of initiated plans and especially the topics where no consensus could be achieved.

### Objectives Oriented Planning (OOP)

OOP was originally developed for project planning especially in development cooperation, more than 20 years ago<sup>16</sup>. The method turned out to be very flexible (if applied in a flexible manner, as originally intended) and is now used for process management, as well<sup>17</sup>. It is a participatory, workshop-type method using also group work and plenary sessions in an alternating way, as well as visualisation. The following steps are usually carried out:

1. Participation analysis: analysis of all relevant groups, institutions, individuals involved in or affected by the future or on-going AGENDA 21 process;
2. Potentials analysis: which potentials – resources, human capital ... are there, used or unused?
3. Problem analysis: the AGENDA 21 environment – community, district... – is analysed with regard to existing problems; they are identified and organised according to their cause-effect relationships; a “problem network” is developed;
4. Objectives analysis – visions: the problems solved, a sustainable future achieved are developed on the

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<sup>16</sup> A summary of the method and its possibility combining with other participatory methods is given, e.g., in BERNECKER, K. and M. RIBI “Combining ZOPP and PRA: ZOPP-PRA Twinship”, Lindau CH, 1997.

<sup>17</sup> E.g. GTZ: Project Cycle Management. Eschborn 1995.

basis of the existing problems; an objectives network is developed (cause-effect relations become means-end relations);

5. Analysis/discussion of alternatives within the objectives network: one or a few possible alternative sustainability objectives are identified, different means-end sub-networks leading to one or a few alternative objectives may be identified;
6. A programme planning matrix is developed from the objectives structure: the most important aspects of the project are summarised, considering also external factors "important assumption", according to OOP terminology;
7. Each of the sub-objectives is then further detailed into a "plan of operation" or action plan, with projects/ measures/ activities and sub-activities, time and resource planning, responsibilities.

In principle, this method covers the whole process from the analysis of the given situation to the development of detailed action plans. However, this cannot and should not be done within one workshop: It should be a process which needs to develop also in the heads of the people involved and concerned. That means this process should be conceived as a series of workshops during a period of a certain duration – depending on the complexity of the AGENDA 21 under consideration. Usually the objectives structure developed provides a good basis for a Leitbild.

### 5. Conceptual issues

In a complex process of analysis and planning, it is often helpful, sometimes even necessary, to have alternative technical "concept modules" for different parts of a strategy, of the action programme available at a certain stage of planning. During the process itself which takes place basically in workshop form, there are no adequate conditions to go into "technical details": the process concentrates rather on the strategic aspects. If, e.g., a district is about to develop its action programme/AGENDA 21 for its sustainable future, the overall direction is usually clear, due to the Leitbild of the Rio-AGENDA 21. But there may be different options on how to get best to some of sub-objectives. There may be, e.g., a sub-objective "*Energy consumption and production on renewable basis (within the district or region) is balanced (by year x)*"<sup>18</sup>. There may be a number of different potential renewable energy sources (solar, wind, bio-mass, water, tides etc.). There may be various main energy consumers (e.g. individual car users/ owners). The

consumption and the production side have to be analysed and there may be various technical, economic, social and political options on how to achieve this sub-objective and by when. In such a case it is very useful to have a planning module "Energy" which treats the various alternatives, comprising possibly different scenarios.

In some cases, such a need may be evident already before planning has reached the stage where it is eventually required. Then the module may be prepared beforehand, and planning becomes easier. In other cases, the need occurs only during planning, when the specific issue comes up. Then it is useful to develop ("brainstorm") some alternatives within the workshop. In a complex case as the example above it is then recommended to get the detailed module with the necessary alternatives prepared by specialists, normally outside the workshop. As such a process is normally organised as a series of workshops, this fits into the concept.

### 6. Vertical and horizontal linkages, the subsidiarity principle

The AGENDA 21 approach may be called a "systems approach": Each AGENDA 21, at which level or scope – from local to global – is part of a system, kind of an element of a system which should eventually be consistent. That does not mean that various AGENDA 21 processes at comparable levels should be very similar. But it means that the linkages within the system need to be taken into consideration for each action programme and each Leitbild.

Equally, to be observed in action planning and Leitbild development and very typical for the AGENDA 21 idea is the "*subsidiarity principle*", meaning: what can be solved on a lower level should be solved there; only what requires the higher level, should go there. Example: if a community has adequate water resources, they should organise the water supply on their level and take the responsibility for their water quality. Waiting instead for a regional water supply may increase dependence and costs and reduce the attitude of taking responsibility for the resources.

The *vertical linkages* mean the linkage on different politico-administrative levels. The sustainability objec-

<sup>18</sup> Another common example may be „sustainable waste management“, comprising equally the waste production side, the waste treatment and reuse...

tives of a community in a certain district should not be contradictory with the district sustainability objectives, those of the district should be compatible with the next higher entity (county, state) etc. and vice versa. This is expressed in the AGENDA 21 slogan “*think globally, act locally*”. If, e.g., the national CO<sub>2</sub> reduction objective is 25% by year 2012, based on 1990 figures, a very straight forward approach would be: each AGENDA 21, each element within this nation, aims at reducing its CO<sub>2</sub> emission also by 25%. A more sophisticated approach would be by means of a sectoral consideration, by analysing and hierarchising the emitters. Then a more complex strategy could be developed about how to achieve the national objective. Ideally, both should happen and lead to at least achieving the objective, may be even better.

The *horizontal linkages* represent what is called in the Rio-AGENDA 21 (preamble) “...an integrated approach...”. Instead of the classical approach of considering sectors separately, “side by side”, the linkages between sectors (locally and globally) have to be worked out (see 4. above: “network analysis”) and observed in planning. Example:

1. For economic and social reasons, a certain road construction may be favoured. Its linkages to, impact on e.g. nature destruction, rural exodus however, has to be considered, as well.
2. The purchase of cheap hand made carpets in industrialised countries has to be critically analysed in view of e.g. child work and exploitation in some developing countries.

## 7. The recommended approach

The conclusion from the preceding chapters is quite evident: The following recommendations would facilitate the development or revision of an AGENDA 21/action programme (including Leitbild):

- Following a multiple strategy by
  - defining preliminary objectives, based on the “Sustainability Leitbild” of the Rio AGENDA 21,
  - starting a process of developing action plans and the Leitbild, with preceding analyses, within the overall framework of the preliminary objectives, within the “Sustainability Leitbild” of Rio,
  - starting parallel with “sustainability projects” which fit into the preliminary objectives structure and which are interesting for the public.

- Using an adequate methodological mix. OOP is certainly the most adequate method to provide the overall systematic and objectives oriented framework. However, especially vision building should be enriched by the approaches used in Future Workshops which facilitate more openness and fantasy. Generally, other methods should also be used at different stages of the process:
  - PLA or OOP plus PLA are very useful when working with groups of people who are interested but not so much involved in the strategic aspects of the process,
  - Future Workshops and Future Search Conferences are useful for starting the process, for specific developments, e.g. newly shaping/ designing a certain area or to overcome some blocking of the process,
  - further methods should be applied<sup>19</sup>, according to upcoming needs.
- For sustainability reasons, it is not sufficient to have well facilitated workshops. It is also necessary – and should be part of each action programme – to teach and train sustainability and methods which facilitate sustainability (thinking and doing) at all levels.

Special attention has to be paid to involving a sufficient number of people over sufficiently long periods: this is necessary to get an action programme on a participatory basis, on the one hand. On the other hand, the active involvement of people into such a process is enhancing their sustainability consciousness, thinking and acting.

## 8. Outlook: Implementation and management of the Action Programme

It is not sufficient to develop and establish an action programme, the AGENDA 21. Such a programme requires implementation, management with evaluations and replanning. I.e., this is an ongoing process which has not reached its end once the first action programme is established. Clear management structures and responsibilities have to be defined for an adequate management. An example of such a process will be published in one of the next issues of BeraterInnen News.

<sup>19</sup> For an overview of participatory methods, see e.g. BERNECKER, K, A. Dampha and M. Ribbi: ZOPP marries PRA? Yes? But Why? (Table 1), Lindau CH 1999, in BeraterInnen News 1/99.