Workshop Report

BUILDING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT:
Moving Atlantic Canada forward as a model of socially and environmentally responsible development

November 18-19, 2005
Oak Island Spa and Resort, Western Shore, Nova Scotia

1. Workshop Overview

On Friday, November 18 and Saturday, November 19, 2005, GPI Atlantic hosted a two-day workshop, *BUILDING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: Moving Atlantic Canada forward as a model of socially and environmentally responsible development*. This workshop was a follow up to our recent *Rethinking Development* conference held in Antigonish in June 2005, and was generously supported by the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (ACOA) and Environment Canada. We did not intend the Antigonish conference to be just a one-time, feel-good event. The point of inviting 450 delegates from 33 countries and six continents here for that conference, including some of the world's most brilliant practitioners of socially and environmentally responsible development, was always to turn our inspiration into action here in Atlantic Canada.

Building on the partnerships and initiatives developed at the conference, the goal of this workshop was to begin to develop concrete and meaningful actions that will make genuinely sustainable development practices the norm rather than the exception in this region, and ultimately in the world. There is no reason that Atlantic Canada cannot become a laboratory from which others, both in Canada and abroad, can learn. We have all it takes to enhance prosperity in this region, strengthen community, and meet human and social needs while respecting our magnificent natural heritage.

The workshop time was divided between more formal presentations and group discussion, with the emphasis on the discussion portion. On the first day, a presentation from Yvonne Devine of ACOA gave a good overview of the issues ACOA found to be important in its sustainable development consultations here in Atlantic Canada. Presentations by Liliana Gwidzowska of Environment Canada and Jessica Norup from Natural Resources Canada highlighted some of the federal programs and initiatives that are available to help support and provide funding for projects with a focus on environmentally and socially responsible development. A presentation by Lynn Langille of the Atlantic Health Promotion Research Centre gave excellent guidelines and tips for writing a successful funding proposal to assist people in accessing financial resources for the projects they developed at the workshop.

On the second day, a panel presentation and discussion engaged participants on the successes and challenges of sustainable development initiatives. Panel presenters were Nadine MacKay from Nova Scotia's Climate Change Centre, Kathy Palko from the Nova Scotia Department of Environment and Labour, Peter Christiano, owner of Finewood Flooring and Lumber, Ltd., Debbie MacKenzie, an active citizen working on marine issues, Lynn Langille with the Atlantic Health Promotion Research Centre, and Kim Thompson of Straw Bale Projects. Each presenter spoke briefly about their work, focusing on their achievements, but also acknowledging the challenges that they have overcome in the past, and that they continue to face.

The presentations and panel mentioned above gave good information and helped to inspire participants. However, the focus of the workshop was not on these formal presentations, but rather on discussion and interaction among the participants in large and small groups. On the first day, the whole group participated in a brainstorming session on the sustainable development issues that need to be addressed in Atlantic Canada. All of the issues raised by participants in this brainstorm were then organized into 6 broad themes identified by workshop participants as key issues for discussion: education, the political dimension, strengthening communities, engaging industry, resource use, and energy. See Appendix A (page 9) for a list of the issues raised during the brainstorm, grouped by theme. Participants were then invited to

join the group in which they were most interested for smaller and more focused discussions. Each small group had between 7 and 19 participants, with the strongest interest shown in the discussion on strengthening communities. The natural resources group had the fewest participants, so its members decided to join other groups instead – so there ended up being five very productive and lively discussion groups.

In these five break-out groups, participants were asked to answer five basic questions about their topic (see Appendix B, page 11 for group info sheet with questions). The questions were meant first to stimulate discussion about the issue and help participants visualise positive future goals to work towards. Then, participants were asked to focus on developing specific and concrete actions to move the Atlantic region toward those goals. Participants were asked to consider planning elements such as time-lines and resource requirements as they developed their action plans.

All of the break-out groups reported back to the whole group twice, describing their discussions so far. Although the topics in each group were fairly broad, groups were able, for the most part, to agree on some specific initiatives and actions that they could work towards. The political dimension group came up with a complete list of short, medium, and longer-term activities that people could undertake to further engage in the political process. These included outreach activities to get to know one's neighbours and local politicians, joining a political party and being a voice for responsible development practices, joining existing non-governmental groups and networks, and getting The Natural Step framework adopted as a development model in Atlantic Canada. Of the various initiatives discussed, the group decided to put forward the last item to the full group as its key and most practical recommendation. As a result, the engaging industry group then focused, in its second discussion period, on first steps required to assess the adoption of The Natural Step framework as a development model in Atlantic Canada. The group then recommended that a short research report be commissioned on successful applications of The Natural Step framework in other jurisdictions and the potential applicability of the framework in Atlantic Canada.

The education group made plans for a project to bring the ecological footprint concept to schools by working both with students and teachers and with administration and facilities management staff, and it set a partners' meeting date of January 24 to follow up on implementing this initiative. The strengthening communities group, while it came up with many ideas, was the group that had the most difficulty choosing a concrete action to pursue. Participants in this group highlighted the importance of engagement and capacity-building at the community level, but did not end up with a concrete initiative on which to focus. The energy group also did not focus on a specific project. However, there was a good discussion about the need for greater links between individual energy projects in order to support and encourage growth in this area, and there was detailed discussion on the potential for further development of tidal power in this region. It was also suggested that ACOA may conduct a review of existing energy projects to highlight the ones that have the greatest potential for furthering sustainable development in the region. This could be part of a larger project to help brand the Atlantic region as a leader in sustainable business practices and environmental innovation. For a more in-depth discussion of specific projects resulting from the workshop, please see Section 3 of this report.

This workshop was highly successful, not only in engaging participants in meaningful dialogue with each other, but primarily in developing some formal projects that are now moving forwards. Rather than an end product, however, the workshop should be considered another step on the road to making Atlantic Canada a model of socially and environmentally responsible

development, and it will be important to follow up on what was achieved at the workshop. The workshop did an excellent job of linking like-minded people and organizations, and broadening the network of those committed to sustainable development. Ideas were generated through discussion and debate, and some of those ideas are now being transformed into concrete actions. Participants are continuing to communicate with each other about ways of moving forwards, and we hope to be able to continue to provide people with opportunities to meet, to talk, and to act. Above all, the workshop was successful in breaking down sectoral silos and fostering very productive dialogue among government, non-government, business, and academic groups and individuals. Thus, the workshop is a step in positioning the entire Atlantic region as a leader in sustainable and socially responsible development that promotes prosperity, strengthens community, and meets human and social needs – a laboratory from which other jurisdictions, both in Canada and around the world, will learn.

2. Participants

The workshop drew 84 participants (including staff) from all four Atlantic provinces. Participants were fairly evenly divided between government officials from federal, provincial, and municipal levels, representatives from a variety of non-governmental organizations, business people, academics, community leaders, and a strong contingent of young people. The break down was as follows:

Academic	3
Business	10
Government	16
NGO	15
Individual	10
Youth	19
Student	6
Staff	5

The participants also represented many different sectors and areas of expertise, including health, waste management, environment, education, politics, economic development, rural development, agriculture, energy, international development, and many others.

In terms of regional diversity, the workshop did not attract as many participants from the other three Atlantic provinces as was hoped for. Nova Scotians made up the majority of the participants, though there were at least some participants from the other three Atlantic provinces. For any future workshops, it will be very important to do more outreach to groups and individuals in other provinces in order to achieve better regional representation.

The overall mix of participants was, in fact, one of the strongest elements of the workshop. Many participants noted that they made new contacts, and several people commented that the workshop helped them to realize that there is a shared community around sustainable development issues, and that people from government, business, and the non-governmental sector all have similar goals and values. The networks built and strengthened at this workshop will not only help support the projects resulting from the workshop, but will also help people work together on new projects that develop in the future.

3. Objectives and Outcomes

The objectives of the workshop were as follows:

> a) continue to support, as at the conference, a strong inter-disciplinary approach to sustainable development practices by gathering a broad cross-section of participants from Atlantic Canada, including those from government, non governmental organizations, environmental organizations, businesses, academia, and cultural and youth leaders; and
> b) develop concrete initiatives and actions that will begin to address some of the issues important to building sustainable development in Atlantic Canada.

These objectives were achieved, as detailed below.

a) Section 2, above, describes in detail the broad range of participants who attended the workshop, and the networks that were built and strengthened. The inter-disciplinary approach continues to be an extremely useful and important way of examining issues and tackling problems. GPI Atlantic hopes to be able to continue to facilitate this inter-disciplinary approach by encouraging ongoing communication and networking between workshop participants, as well as reaching out and expanding the network to include other groups and individuals.

b) Several larger initiatives resulting from the workshop are now beginning to take shape. The frameworks and resources for these projects are still in development, but a summary of the work as of March 2006 is given below.

<u>The Ecological Footprint Project</u>

This project was initiated by the education group at the workshop. The project will include two related ecological footprint activities, with GPI Atlantic and the Sierra Club of Canada, Atlantic Canada Chapter as the lead organizations. The first part of the project will be a program delivered to schools in Nova Scotia (beginning with a small number of pilot schools) that will show students how to calculate their own individual ecological footprints. This program will be developed by the Sierra Club and will be delivered to younger students by older youth who have already learnt about the ecological footprint concept. The goals are to introduce the ecological footprint and personal sustainability concepts to both students and teachers, and to teach older students environmental leadership skills. Once students have learnt about the ecological footprint concept, they will be encouraged to make changes in their personal lives to reduce their footprints.

The second part of this project will be focused more on the technical uses of the ecological footprint as a planning and facilities management tool and will require working more with school administration and facilities management staff. GPI Atlantic will take the lead role on this part of the project, and will begin by producing a research report on how to calculate the ecological footprint of a whole school. This report will include an assessment of the data required to calculate the school's ecological footprint and the creation of easy-to-use templates to facilitate data collection and analysis. The research will also ensure that this local-level project produces results that are comparable to ecological footprints calculated at the provincial and national levels. GPI Atlantic has existing expertise in this area, as well as contacts with the Global Footprint Network and with others who have worked on similar projects. Once the research

phase of this project is complete, project partners will begin working with a small number of pilot schools to calculate their ecological footprints and use this as a tool to encourage schools to make more sustainable choices (e.g. reducing waste or using less energy).

Project partners hope to begin working with pilot schools starting in January 2007. Further planning and the preparation of funding proposals are currently underway. Once the project is successful at the pilot level, the project partners will work to expand the program to an increasing number of schools. The goal is to eventually have the ecological footprint used as an assessment tool in all schools in Nova Scotia, and then to expand the program to other provinces as well. When a larger number of schools are involved, new elements of the program can be introduced; for example, a challenge or competition between schools to see which school can achieve the greatest reduction in their ecological footprint from one year to the next.

The Natural Step (TNS) Project

The idea for the Natural Step Project came first from the political group, and then was further developed by the engaging industry group. The long-term aim of the TNS project is to eventually have all four Atlantic provinces adopt the TNS framework as their primary planning tool. However, what has been discovered is that although many people have heard of The Natural Step, we need people to have a better understanding of the framework and how it actually works in a very practical sense as a planning and development tool. Therefore, the first step taken with this project, as recommended by the engaging industry group at the workshop, is to produce an introduction paper, or primer, on the TNS framework. The aims of the paper are to describe the TNS framework in easy to understand language, to look at some of the countries, communities, and businesses where the model is being successfully applied, and to look at its applicability for the Atlantic region in particular. This paper is being written by Peter and Janet Eaton, both researchers with excellent reputations and familiarity with The Natural Step framework. Once the TNS Primer is completed, it will really help to promote the idea to communities, governments, and business leaders in the Atlantic region. This paper is expected to be completed and released in April 2006.

In December 2005, GPI Atlantic and the Nova Scotia Environmental Network (NSEN) organized a public presentation in Halifax, NS by Chad Park from Natural Step Canada. The talk was quite well attended. Immediately following the presentation GPI Atlantic and NSEN hosted a strategy meeting with Chad and about 15 others who are interested in working on this project, many of whom were workshop participants. There was an opportunity to ask questions about the TNS framework and the different possible ways to implement a project in the Atlantic region, and a very good discussion of potential next steps for this project. NSEN and GPI Atlantic are planning to hold a second strategy session once the TNS Primer is complete. As well, the two organizations will hold a study circle in the spring for those interested in learning more about The Natural Step by reading and discussing the book *The Natural Step for Communities*.

The Atlantic Canadian Universities Consortium Project

Dr. Almut Beringer, a workshop participant and a professor at University of Prince Edward Island, is working on a proposal to form a consortium among Atlantic Canadian universities to facilitate university-community partnerships in environmentally and socially responsible development in the region. The idea for this project came out of what Dr. Beringer saw and heard at the workshop, and the connections she made there. The goal of the project is to build Consortium member universities into centres of excellence for research, education and training,

and community linkages in sustainable development. Research may include projects such as assessing respective universities' ecological footprints and assisting community-based organizations to do likewise. Dr. Beringer is currently consulting with other faculty at UPEI and working on the development of a full proposal.

4. Workshop Feedback and Evaluation

All participants were asked to fill out and submit a workshop evaluation form (see Appendix C, page 12), either anonymously or via email. In the evaluation forms, participants expressed an overall appreciation for the workshop and what it offered. People commented on the difficulty of working with multi-sectoral groups, and of focusing on action rather than just discussion of problems, and tended to be most appreciative of those aspects of the event. Many people also emphasized the need to keep the dialogue, begun first at the June 2005 conference, and continued at our workshop, open and growing. The importance of a focal point for communication and information, such as a website or listserv, was highlighted.

Some constructive criticism was also received from the evaluation forms, and these points will be important to consider for any future workshops. Communication was an issue for some participants. Some people did not feel comfortable speaking in the group setting, and indicated that facilitation methods and guidelines for speaking could be improved (e.g. use of a talking object, allowing people to write their input as well as speaking in front of the large group, assigned facilitators for small group discussions) in order to ensure that everyone can express their ideas and thoughts in a respectful environment.

The evaluation form also asked participants whether or not they would attend a similar workshop in one of the other Atlantic provinces. The answers were overwhelmingly yes, although many people indicated that they would need travel and/or workshop fee subsidies in order to attend, as were provided at this workshop.

Selected Comments:

Below are a few selected comments from the evaluation forms.

"As a newcomer to the Atlantic Region I was able to meet many people working for building sustainable development and to know the issues and perspectives people have. I can appreciate that an incipient and growing network is underway."

"I felt there were a number of single or solo actors who really benefited from being able to hook up with a network for support and ideas."

"I came looking for a thought-provoking discussion and I got what I wanted. Also met some people whom I had not had occasion to work with before, always a pleasant thing in a small place like Nova Scotia"

"It [the workshop] gave us an opportunity to actually DO something (i.e. action plans)"

"I learnt a lot about where the money is and how to access it, who's out there working on things, and ways I can get more involved."

5. Website

An overview of the workshop is now posted on the GPI Atlantic website, at http://www.gpiatlantic.org/conference/oak.htm. This page can also be found under the "Outcomes & Follow-Up" section of the website for the June 2005 *Rethinking Development* conference. The presentations given by ACOA, Environment Canada, Natural Resources Canada, and Lynn Langille are all posted online and available for participants to download. There are also some notes from different break-out groups and other parts of the workshop proceedings. This summary report of the workshop will also be circulated to workshop participants and posted on the website.

We hope that this website will continue to be a source of information for workshop participants, and others who are interested in follow up from the June 2005 conference. We intend to post information about the projects resulting from the workshop on the website, and to create a listserv for communication among interested individuals and organizations. In this way, the community that was created around sustainable development, first at the conference and then at the workshop, can continue to thrive and grow.

6. Workshop support

Generous support from the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (ACOA) and Environment Canada enabled GPI Atlantic to offer subsidised rates to attend the workshop. This significantly improved the attendance of students and youth, representatives from the NGO community and other individuals who could not afford to pay the full workshop fee. GPI Atlantic was also able to offer some travel subsidies to participants coming from Newfoundland to encourage attendance. This support was cited and gratefully acknowledged in workshop materials, correspondence with participants, on the workshop website (http://www.gpiatlantic.org/conference/oak.htm), and in announcements at the workshop itself. GPI Atlantic is extremely thankful to ACOA and Environment Canada, as this workshop could not have happened without their support.

7. Next Steps

As we proceed with work on the projects described above, it is also important to consider other next steps. It is essential to foster continued communication and dialogue among participants. One idea is to organize ongoing opportunities for discussion of issues, such as a monthly breakfast or lunch that all are invited to attend, or a speaker series, followed by discussion groups. As well, use of the website and workshop listserv, hosted and organized by GPI Atlantic, are important communication tools for sharing information.

Several participants expressed the desire for a follow up workshop to be held in six months or a year. It is important that people feel that the actions they developed at the workshop were indeed carried out with some success, and that progress is being made in the Atlantic region. Holding a similar event in another province could also help to connect more people in the region with this work. As projects develop over the next year, GPI Atlantic feels that a second workshop in the fall of 2006 would be an excellent way to continue to engage participants, to expand our networks to include others, to chart our progress, and above all, to continue to develop new initiatives.

Below is a selected list of additional ideas for follow up which groups or individuals may also pursue in future. This list is taken directly from participant evaluation forms.

Communications within the group:
- identify and strengthen a website to be the focus for information on the Building Sustainable Development network
- follow up emails, continued organization of action plans
- facilitate networking and fundraising
- provide more networking opportunities
- compile goals and actions and disseminate information to participants and others
- keep people in touch with one another especially in geographical and topic areas
- convene a follow up workshop to assess progress and new developments
- develop a time line to revisit assessing progress

Spreading the Message:
- raise issues in upcoming elections
- meetings around the province, more local participation
- hold a Natural Step workshop
- speaking tour of various leaders focusing on the moral-ethical-spiritual vision integral to ecological thinking – focus on world view with its core the living animist view that we are not separated from all of the earth and must respect it
- expand the network to include CCN, RDAs, other NGOs, other government departments, NS Rural Team, NS Sustainable communities initiative, union of NS municipalities, aboriginal communities, African-NS communities, Acadian communities

In closing, this workshop could not have happened without the support and encouragement of ACOA and Environment Canada, and the active and engaged participation of those who attended the workshop. The organizers are deeply grateful to all workshop participants and supporters for their understanding of the importance of building on the networks and initiatives begun at the *Rethinking Development* conference, and their commitment to turning the attention inward to focus our energies in our own region. This workshop was highly successful in building on and strengthening the commitment to sustainability in this region by bringing people together and developing some concrete actions that will help to move Atlantic Canada forward as a leader in socially and environmentally responsible development.

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APPENDIX A: Break-out groups, with topics identified in initial brainstorming session

Engaging Industry:
- energy
- local recyclables processed locally
- engaging chambers of commerce, boards of trade
- working with big businesses (e.g. Irving, Sobeys)
- get them to buy locally
- marketing the region as a "boutique of sustainability"
- creating a good image for the region

Resource use (abuse):
- solid waste
- forests, fisheries/oceans
- consumption patterns
- housing
- demonstrate same action throughout the province
- environmental degradation
- scientists/fishers/other resource workers/environmental council research society

Education:
- to empower public, engage on core values
- on consumption habits/patterns and resource use
- use of ecological footprint as a teaching tool
- teaching the biological world view from a young age
- influence media reporting/teach media literacy
- health promotion

Energy:
- tidal power, renewable energy
- local energy production (including wind)
- support for small energy projects
- healthy housing
- make technology accessible and affordable
- promoting conservation and efficiency
- showcase green energy hubs
- engage large businesses in the region on energy efficiency (e.g. Irving)

Political Dimension:
- demonstrate the same actions everywhere
- enlighten leadership (e.g. visit Denmark)
- empower local communities/sustain democracy
- engage politicians
- create active citizens
- participate in public consultations
- benchmarks for sustainability
- de-siloise government
- enhance accountability: honest, transparent government
- take control of the agenda: people lead and the government will follow

Strengthening Communities:
- buy locally
- transportation/planning
- affordable housing
- making the region attractive by sustainable/responsible brand and employment in rural communities
- community economic development
- community youth development
- take control of the agenda
- social equity

APPENDIX B: Group Info Sheet

<u>Breakout Group Question Sheet</u>

Once you have chosen the issue that is most important to you and assembled into your small groups, first make sure there is a designated presenter for your group and someone to take notes. In your group, with the paper and markers, we would like you to work on developing a visual road map for your issue as you have your discussion. The road map will describe where we are, where we want to go, and the path to get there, as well as the roadblocks and challenges we might face and the connections with other issues.

Questions:
1. What is the current situation with the issue? What has been done in the past? Have past actions been successful? Why or why not?

2. In an ideal world, where do we want to be on this issue in 10 years? What are we aiming for?

3. What are the actions in the next year that our group can take, as individuals and organizations, to move us down the road towards our goal? It is important here to be specific and to address things like objectives, time lines, and resources needed (e.g. money, staff, support).

4. What are the challenges we might face in the action plan we have decided on and how might we address those?

5. How does this issue relate to the larger picture of sustainable development in Atlantic Canada and the other issues raised at this workshop?

"You must be the change you want to see in the world."
                                        -- Mahatma Gandhi

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."
                                        -- Margaret Mead

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APPENDIX C: Evaluation Form

BUILDING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT:
Transforming Atlantic Canada into a model of socially and environmentally responsible development.

Evaluation form

1. Did this workshop meet your expectations?

_____ yes   _____ no

Please explain.

3. What did you like best about the workshop?

4. What did you like least about the workshop?

5. What do you think would be the most useful next steps for workshop organizers and participants to take?

6. Do you have any comments or feedback for any of the presenters or for the workshop facilitator?

7. What did you learn? What connections did you make?

8. Would you attend a similar workshop held outside your home province?

_____ yes   _____ no

If not, why not?

9. Any other comments or feedback?