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Establishing a Sustainable Local Group

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Features of a sustainable group

- Requires minimum input for maximum output.
- Clearly defined functions needs and products.
- Initial leadership role in implementation stage no longer required as the group evolves.
- Self seeding; smaller groups may form within the larger group for specific purposes.
- People keep coming back and new members feel welcome.

Identifying priorities

Functions needs products analysis

- Important to define what people want to gain from the group.
- Newly formed groups should make this a top priority and people new to the group can be encouraged to express their needs once the group is formed.
- Needs may change over time; a flexible group will cater for this.

Applying principles of permaculture to establishing a group

Starting up a local group can be treated as a design exercise in itself. Applying relevant permaculture principles can help keep the group focussed and truly permacultural in its practices.

Relative location

Elements of the group are placed in relationship to each other to assist each other, eg:

- Teams of people may be formed based on interest in order to take on specific projects
- A telephone tree may be established based on locality so people who live near each other contact each other. Encourages more interaction.
- Try to link the group in with other established groups (eg LETS, Community houses) so that resources can be shared effectively and more people can access the group

Each element performs many functions

- Meetings perform many functions (social, bartering, information sharing, etc).
- Working bees can be designed to be multifunctional (resource sharing, building gardens while building knowledge, social, etc).
- Multifunctional groups more likely to be diverse therefore more stable; attracts more people.

Major functions supported by many elements

- Determine the major functions of the group:
 - Social interaction with like minded people.
 - Information sharing.
 - Resource sharing (tools, seeds, skills, bartering).
 - Achieving a specific goal or project (providing a community with food, community garden, demonstration site, etc).
 - Spreading the word about permaculture (recycling projects, composting workshops, etc).
- Need to support each of the stated functions in as many ways as possible; brainstorm all the ways the group could meet each function, then form a strategy for achieving this. For example, information sharing could be met by:
 - Courses.
 - Workshops run by members or guests.
 - Subscribing to *Permaculture International Journal*.
 - Developing a shared library of books.
 - Informal study groups on topics of interest.
 - Videos.
 - Newsletter.
 - Site trips.
 - Working bees.
 - A sharing session at meetings, etc.

- Encourage different people to have input and contribute in different ways, possibly in teams.
- Ensures that if one person leaves the function will still be met
- Keeps the group focussed and productive

Energy efficient planning

- Determine zones of energy for the group.
- Develop a strategy for each zone (see handout for example).
- Utilise resources wisely, link with other groups.
- Give long and protracted thought to processes and develop strategies before jumping into action.

Small scale intensive systems

- Develop an ethic of keeping the group local and small; when the group becomes large it can split into smaller local units.
- Ensures that everyone can still have input and that individual needs are met.
- Group stays focussed and productive.
- Can still retain the larger group entity with special functions, a newsletter, insurance purposes.

Attitudinal principles

- Turn problems into solutions.
- Be prepared to be labour intensive at first and look forward to reaping the fruits later.
- Always examine your own motivations in establishing the group, and try to ensure that your role is that of facilitator rather than group leader; a truly sustainable group is one that will function without you after it is established.

Good luck with seeding your own local groups!!!