Public Participation in Environmental Decision-Making Processes: Experiences and Lessons Learned from Asia

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Public Participation can influence decision-making in many ways. Diverse and meaningful public input helps decision-makers integrate environmental, social & economic concerns into decisions and produce decisions that are more fair, legitimate, and environmentally sound.
Public Participation

Public Participation Topics Include:

1. Law – The national legislative and judicial frameworks
2. Process – Approaches to public participation
3. Effectiveness – Does participation affect final decisions – Is it cost-effective?
Scales of Public Participation

1. Formulation of Legislation
2. Policy Making
3. Regulatory Decisions
4. Project-level Decisions
5. Enforcement of Existing Frameworks
Issues for decision-making

• Site/location selection
• Choices of technology
• Choices of Investment
• Management/operation form

• Monitoring & Evaluation

(Video show on public participation in waste management)
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Aj17wFZGAFU
**Traditional Dev. Model**

Development Oriented
- Beneficiaries
- Target Groups

Community Involvement

Experts Know Best
Top - Down

**Participatory Dev. Model**

Socio-economic Needs

Stakeholders → Partners

Community Participation

Facilitators
Bottom - Up
Why Public Participation?

1. To obtain & share information: From both project proponent & community
   - Community Needs

2. To discuss technical Issues
   - Agree on common information base

3. To Identify win-win outcomes
   - Can use technology, e.g., sensitivity analysis
Why Public Participation? (2)

4. To Agree on Project ‘Targets’ and ‘Priorities’

5. To Agree on ‘Project’ Content
   - Shared responsibilities
   - Acceptance of the Project

6. To Win Trust
What is ‘Public Participation’?

Participation is a process through which stakeholders influence outcomes of development initiatives and the decisions and resources which affect them, improving the quality of the initiative.
Stakeholders

- Beneficiaries
- Affected People (directly + indirectly)
- Implementation Agencies (public sector) / Proponents (private sector)
- Public Agencies (Government) / Regulators
- NGOs, People’s organizations
- Experts / Academics
Intermediaries

- NGOs
- People’s organizations
- Community-based organizations
- Economic & Professional Associations
- Civil society groups
- Religious leaders
- Community well-respected persons
Public Participation Pyramid

Minimum

Information Giving

Persuasion/Co-Option

Consultation

Involvement

Partnership

Self-determination

Maximum
Techniques/Tools (1)

- Conduct Background Study – Evidence Based (Beneficiaries, Affected People, Proponent)
- Round table Discussion / Focus Groups
- Questionnaires
- Citizen Advisory Group
- Public Meetings
Techniques/Tools (2)

- Workshops: Exploring Alternatives
- Physical Models, Simulation Programs (e.g. SimCity), Sensitivity Analysis (Economic Analysis)
- Internet / Social Media Sites / Micro Blogs (Especially China)
- Formal involvement in drafting laws, legislation (Participatory Legal Drafting)
- AN EFFECTIVE PARTICIPATORY PROCESS MIXES/MATCHES DIFFERENT TECHNIQUES
Findings from 10 Asian countries (37 cases)

• 16 out of 37 cases saw public involvement occur at a later stage of project initiated by the authorities without legal requirement.

• Almost all cases, there were consultations of the public organized by the authorities.

• Only one third offered a procedure for clarifying the rules of participation and the dialogue between stakeholders and developers.
Findings from 10 Asian countries (37 cases) (2)

- The technique most commonly used was survey methods (14 cases), appointed citizen committees/panels (12 cases), group work techniques with selected groups (9 cases).
- Local level was regarded as the most important involvement (10 cases), regional and district level (10 cases), national (in federal states) (9 cases) and provincial (in federal states) (8 cases).
Findings from 10 Asian countries (37 cases) (3)

• Most institution involvement occurred when detailed planning was already taking place (18 cases), after the preliminary decisions on the implementation of the activity/project had already been made (13 cases).

• Only 7 out of 37 cases, the public were invited to get involved when the detailed plan were ready.
Findings from 10 Asian countries (37 cases) (4)

• Public opposition to the project was found in virtually all countries.

• The opposition came from local people, fishermen whose livelihood would be impacted by the project, NGOs, alternative energy groups, students and academics.

• Form of opposition: demonstration or protest (9), expressing opposition via mass media (5) and filing petitions (3). Violence is rare in this region.
Findings from 10 Asian countries (37 cases) (5)

• Authority’s response to the oppositions?
  – The Project was halted after the opposition
  – The participation process was extended to all more dialogue.
  – Authorities ignored the opposition and the project continued
  – Only one case, the gov. modified the spatial plan, but the implementation of the decision was not done.

  ▪ High incidence of public support for the project.
Lessons from Asia – TEI (1)

Benefits

- PP leads to better project preparation, easier proposal acceptance, better project management & innovative solutions
- When objections are heard early, solutions can be sought, & the problems settled by discussions, negotiations and information exchange
- Local people can most benefit from a project when they participate in design
- Peoples participation can prevent potential conflict, building trust & a sense of ownership
- Negotiated settlements through PP are faster & less costly than legal settlements
Lessons from Asia – TEI (2)

- Local people, through local knowledge, can improve project design (exploring alternatives; customization) increasing local benefits, profitability & sustainability

- Peoples participation, through local knowledge, can improve project management, making (their) labor more productive & satisfying to the workers, e.g., forestry harvesting modes
Lessons from Asia – TEI (3)

How-To

- The authorities should first drop their ‘authoritive’attitude and adopt a cooperative approach instead.
- Survey can be also be used to get answers regarding worries, fear and the culture of local people.
- Efforts to educate and inform people, esp. to pose problems to them directly and as early as at the level of project idea formulation
- Baseline studies may be necessary.
NGOs as intermediaries for participation

- NGOs should play the role of intermediaries.
- NGOs have to take an active role in mediating and decreasing tension between local people and local policy makers.
- Media helps attract the attention of the gov. and inter. Org. They can thus help to initiate public participation.
Institutional support

- Policy shift from top-down to a decentralized and democratic process helps facilitate the participation process and contribute to enhancing local governance of policies and plans.
Participation is a 2-way process. It needs to be continuing and begins before the project starts.

The mix of techniques and forms of participation can be adjusted at different stages of a project.

Public participation processes can be expensive (TEI Study: $700- $133,000) but benefits usually outweigh costs.
Conclusion (2)

• Principles promoting people’s participation:
  • All stakeholders share the benefits & costs
  • Targeted people must have meaningful involvement & sense of ownership in projects
  • Guaranteeing the integrity of the public participation is one key concern.
  • Agencies need to respond to people’s opinion
  • People need to thoroughly understand the technical language of impact assessment and benchmarks and standards that need to be upheld in conducting process.
Effective participation reduces chances of community resistance & post-project compensation demands.

Effective participation can speed implementation, benefiting all parties.

People’s participation is a ‘means’ not an ‘end’.
For More Information

Visit:
www.accessinitiative.org
www.pp10.org
www.tei.or.th

Contact:
Thailand Environment Institute (TEI)
16/151 Muang Thong Thani, Bond St.
Bangpood, Pakkret, Nonthaburi 11120,
Thailand
E-mail: chuthatip@tei.or.th