Public Participation Applied to the Environmental Planning

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**ABSTRACT** This paper focuses on the public participation in environmental planning. After the decade for inaccessible information related to the decision taken, actually, the program of public participation is the reference of all the decision making process. However, there are some factors that limit this process, such as poverty, illiteracy, ignorance and often the social inequality. Therefore, this study focuses first on the benefits of public participation in environmental planning, then the involvement of the local population, and finally the decision making access using a case study of Madagascar.

**KEYWORDS** public participative; local population; decision making for environmental effects; project

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Introduction

The public participation, which means here active involvement of people in making decisions about the implementation of processes, programs and projects which affect them, is one basic element of environmental planning which permits to protect our natural resources and support the sustainable development. The public includes everyone in the community. Members of conservation and environmental groups, long-time residents, and people who are active in the community are good candidates to become involved in creating the environmental plan. Therefore, the environmental movement arose and made the public increasingly aware of the seriousness of air pollution, water pollution, soil pollution, and the dangers of chemical agriculture and food production.

The people’s constitutional right and duty is to protect the environment. This also implies that everyone has a right to participate, to have a say in the decision making process, in the formulation and the implementation of environmental policies, and in drafting general regulations and laws concerning the environment. The modalities of participation have been determined in many countries by law, public authorities, tradition and culture. The right to participate may be executed individually or collectively. Everyone has the right to cooperate with others and to form organizations and associations representing and defending specific environmental interests.

The public participation applied to environmental planning deals with dynamic relation between local population and authorities. In this case, the main objective of this paper is first to demonstrate the benefits of public participation in environmental planning. Secondly, the method for public involvement in decision making and the access of the decision making are described.

1 Benefits of public participation

Environmental protection is a cooperative process, requiring concerted action by government, individual citizens, and industry. Public involvement in this process can benefit each of these groups individually, perhaps, more importantly, it can benefit society as a whole as well.

1) Participation in the environmental protec-
tation process benefits the public because it allows individuals to have a greater impact on the environmental decision making process. It also enables people to learn about the environmental risks to which their families and communities are exposed and to adjust their activities accordingly. In addition, public participation also empowers citizens and helps them to feel that they can have a positive effect and influence on concrete conditions in their countries.

2) It can also assist industry by increasing its knowledge of the impacts of its own operations on the environment. Mechanisms for public involvement in environmental decisions often require companies to engage in detailed assessments of their pollution-producing processes or activities. These comprehensive evaluations can lead the companies to discover inefficiencies in production methods, raw material use, or energy consumption that can actually reduce operating costs and eliminate the need to install expensive pollution control equipment. These cost savings may be especially important when difficult economic times threaten industry’s ability to attain compliance with environmental regulations. Public participation also increases industry’s understanding of consumers’ concerns and teaches industry how to market its products more effectively. Finally, because industry itself is a non-governmental institution, legal and other avenues for input from non-governmental sources can also allow companies to have a voice in governmental decisions that affect them directly.

3) Significant benefits to the government can also result from public involvement in the environmental protection process. Citizens have direct, immediate knowledge about environmental conditions in their communities. Encouraging them to share this knowledge with the government can create more informed government decisions and can reduce the likelihood that significant environmental impacts of proposed actions or policies will be overlooked. The sheer number of the citizenry can also supplement scarce government monitoring, inspection, and enforcement resources, thus saving money and time for the government. Members of the public can act as the government’s “eyes and ears”, identifying and taking action against environmental threats or violations of applicable laws. In addition, significant public involvement in an environmental issue can strengthen the position of the environment ministry in relation to other government interests and ministries—the public can reinforce the environment ministry’s views and ensure that the government as a whole does not ignore environmental concerns.

Giving the public an opportunity to influence government decisions from the outset also defuses opposition to particular government actions and builds broad-based consensus for environmental programs as a whole. If the public is involved in the full decision making process, their concerns may be met early in the planning process when changes may be easier to make, rather than late in the process when even small changes may cost both time and money. In addition, by being involved in the full decision making process, the public is exposed to the multiple factors involved in each decision. Even if the public does not agree with the final decision, they are more likely to understand why the decision was made and thus may not oppose it. Thus, even though allowing public to participate into an environmental decision may delay the decision making process in the short term, it can save valuable time and money in the long run by avoiding lengthy and divisive disputes after the decision is made.

4) Although the public participation makes a valuable contribution in each of these separate spheres, the overall value to the society of public involvement may be even greater than the sum of these various individual benefits. Actually, applying democratic ideas to improving environmental conditions reinforces basic principles and practices of self-governance, thus strengthening the legitimacy of a country’s environmental protection regime. Acceptance of the public as a valued partner in the environmental protection process can inspire the cooperation between citi-
How to involve the public participatory in decision making

Several steps can be valuable for the public to participate in decision making.

First, the main support which can enable the public to participate in environmental planning is the communication tools. Supposing that the local population must be sensitized and educated about the planning action and their benefits. According to our research we remark many aspects of communication tasks, such as access to media (green programs on radio and television, green pages in newspapers, ecological services, green telephone hotlines, NGO newsletters, some environmental journals); distributing flyers and other information; talking to local groups (volunteer organizations, service clubs, and business associations); publicizing the meetings of your planning team, or holding special meetings to get community input; inviting the public to attend planning team meetings; doing a survey; organizing school activities on local environmental issues; talking to your friends and neighbors.

Therefore, it is important to have independent green media and/or access to the media in order to present green views in general and on particular issues and to lobby for a sustainable way of life. The media is very often controlled by government or business interests while environmental issues do not get the proper presentation and weight.

To distribute flyers and other information, such as one page fact sheets on local environmental issues written by local experts, minutes of planning team meetings, or information about important team decisions. You can give out these materials at public meetings, through mailings (such as with utility bills), and at local stores, and publish them as notices or articles in the local newspaper. The planning team should make a mailing list of interested groups and individuals. In addition, it is necessary to talk to local group and tell them about the issues of how the planning team will address how the community will be affected, and why it would be valuable for them to participate at this stage of the planning process.

Furthermore, the residents, experts, and team members can express their concerns, exchange views, and explore possible solutions. These meetings can be large (in the school auditorium) or small (in someone's living room). If they are held as part of a town meeting, you may have the benefit of more people attending. Be sure to advertise the meetings well in advance by the information, through public notices in the town hall and in local businesses, and in mailings to interested parties. Hence, ask for volunteers for tasks such as conducting surveys, taking minutes at team meetings, organizing public meetings, and reviewing information.

In the other part, doing a survey is also important. Ask people how they feel about local environmental issues. The survey can include questions such as: "Which of the following do you think is the most important environmental issue in our community, and why?", list areas of particular concern in your community. Also, use the survey to find out whether and how much people would be willing to pay for improvements in the areas about which they are most concerned. The survey can be done in several ways, such as mailing the survey to all or a percentage of town residents (perhaps with a utility bill) or interviewing people about their concerns. Make sure that survey respondents explain their views (such as why drinking water quality is an important concern to them).

In the second aspect, one of the most important tools for raising public awareness and encouraging public participation is education, both in cooperation with the official school system, governmental and other efforts, and by alternative methods. A growing number of NGO groups are engaging in educational activities and there are official governmental initiatives to introduce environmental issues into the existing education system as well.
In addition, organize school activities on local environmental issues. This involves workshops, classroom program, or festival on water conservation, recycling, or other environmental issues. These events can be for children only, or can be set up so that the activities are fun for both adults and children. Children often communicate ideas from school projects to their parents.

To inform the public about the environmental planning program is not enough to get their mobilization; hence, it is necessary to imply the population in all the planning actions. The realization can be efficient with its recognition by the population as their own actions. Those must be managed by actors chosen from the local communities. The members of this group are elected freely and according to the criteria such as ability, honesty, and integrity. Control, protection, management and the follow-up of the actions are their first responsibilities. It will be supported by experts. The environmental policies must take in consideration the appreciations, the conception, and advises of all the social structures. This partnership enables a good management and follow-up in short and wide term of positive and negative impacts' actions. Therefore, it is possible to adjust and correct errors.

However, the involvement of the public participatory is different according to social characteristics and situation, each countries, of such as ethnical diversity, language’s pluralities, governmental reforms, illiteracy, limited finances and poverty.

3 Decision making access

Together with conception and realization of action reliable to value assessment is one task which reinforces a significant way in planning program. Thus, the local population is desirable to realize the occurrence action; and attempt as the principal actor. In this way, the social structure, precisely both women and man should have their real responsibilities to make account for the program.

According to the description above, we can notify the relationship which is possible to be instituted between all the partners (NGO; experts; public population; the authorities). The relationship without comprehension to the experts and the public is impossible to impose the real planning. In Africa, such as in Madagascar, it is recognized that the lack of environmental planning can be explained by the public marginalization. However, in 1991, the national environmental charter permitted to impose the real policy of environmental planning. Therefore, the local population is the first concerned to maintain respect and contribute the project recommended by the experts to improve the environmental quality. Supposing that the population growth requires the population needs. In this case, the country considered in his environmental policy the family planning strategies. Moreover, that can effectively influence the population needs and their environment. This policy concept is suitable for all undeveloped countries.

The conservation of biodiversity movement in Madagascar was also emerging in the early 1990s by NEAP (national environmental action). An important goal was to reverse the alarming rate of deforestation which threatens with extinction the last remaining habitants of the island’s biodiversity. A key principle exposed by the NEAP was the need to improve the economic livelihoods of the Malagasy people while also preserving the country’s unique biological heritage through an economic development program based on the sustainable use of natural resources.

For the environmental partners, these family planning programs were originally undertaken with the aim at contributing to human development and to biodiversity conservation in their zones of interest.

In fact, we realize that the population growth expend the population needs, such as goods, the land use, industrialization rise, urbanization and so on.

In order to open up the ways of participation,
however, the public needs some legal mechanisms to give them the substantive and procedural rights to affect decisions.

Whenever any government body is considering the adoption of a law, ordinance, rule, or regulation and calls a public hearing to consider the proposal, a legislative type public hearing will be suitable, for example, when the selectmen call a public meeting to discuss a proposed ordinance for road construction standards or the planning board calls a public meeting to discuss proposed subdivision regulations. Each of these are legislative because they will have a general application throughout the town. The purpose is to get public reaction to a proposal which will restrict and regulate whoever may be affected by the proposal in the future.

The legislative public hearing, up to now, has been the most common. It is generally an informal affair with all of the proponents having their say and then all of the opponents. Speakers can say just about what they want and usually do even if it is not terribly relevant. There are very few procedural rules for the conduct of this type of hearing. Generally, notices are published in a newspaper and posted in town. Since the purpose is to get public input, an effort should be made to get as much reaction as possible from as many people as possible. Every government unit and agency will from time to time hold a legislative public hearing. The goals are the greatest possible public input, broadest public notice, a clear proposal, and a simple procedure, the more people who know about it, the better. The legislative public hearing is most efficient when multiple copies of a clear and written proposal are widely distributed for discussion. Any degree of vagueness increases in proportion the chaos of this type of hearing can sometimes be caused. Most Mainers have the healthy attitude that if we cannot understand it, we do not like it.

4 Conclusions

The public participation in environmental planning is one basic to improve our environmental quality. It is therefore necessary to keep the population informed through sensitization and education by able agents before passing into action taken. This, however, implies that the population too contributes to the identification of the problems and the search of their solutions. The public and private organizations have to convince more the citizen to understand the legal system of environment. As regards to the realization of solution to problems, population must also be at the center of focus. That is, must also take part in the field work and play an active role.

The contribution of experts and donors are also very necessary. The solutions or the work can be effective and long lasting only when there is good management. This is why there must be local agents or community organs to assure this efficiency. To do this, there must be an installed and permanent controlling body which will from time to time check on the evolution of the work.

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