



Stakeholder Involvement

Briefing Sheet



Promoting Involvement in the Search for Sustainability - We are all Stakeholders Now

"Inaction on the part of the individual, is often simply not knowing what to do"
Barbara Ward (1972). Only One Earth.

"Environmental solutions no longer come in the form of a simple top-down plan or government mandate. In the future, substantive, practical solutions will require the concerted efforts of a host of "stakeholders" from across society. Still, governments and international organisations remain crucial – though often as catalysts and motivators of change rather than as implementers." Brown, L. et al. (1997). State of the World 1997

"Anything that is about people or people's lives is political. Therefore you have to engage the broadest possible community, recognising that you will never engage people enough." Gary Lawrence 1994

Seeking Common Ground

The extent to which people feel able to, and actually do take part in decision-making about society and the environment is widely felt to be an important measure of the "health" of a democratic society. It reflects the strength of political and social institutions. Agenda 21, the international action plan agreed at the 1992 Earth Summit has created or strengthened civil society involvement in the decision-making process. This participation by those concerned with, or affected by, proposals (stakeholders) is reflected in new forms of decision-making processes being initiated at the local/national/international level. It breaks away from the 'business as usual' approach.

Sustainable living requires fundamental change in the attitudes and behaviour of people. Changes can only be real and lasting if they involve a transformation of attitudes, values and beliefs. Here resistance to change, and fear, enter the debate.

"Values are difficult to alter. They are so integral to the individual and the community to which the person belongs, but values can change provided the skills, abilities and insights and knowledge are acquired. Ultimately, there is nothing more cohesive than shared values, the most powerful force we have for change."

Dowdeswell, E (1994): UNED UK Conference 'Values for a Sustainable Future'

What does stakeholder participation mean?

Within this context, a stakeholder is a group or organisation who has influence in a particular area of policy or who is affected by policies. Agenda 21 identified 9 Major Groups: women; children and youth; indigenous people; NGOs; local authorities; trade unions; business and industry; science and technology, and farmers.

Multi-Stakeholder processes aim to bring together different 'actors' to develop a dialogue at different levels. They involve working together towards a common goal or purpose. They are based on democratic principles of transparency, accountability and participation. The result is usually a stronger partnership. Achieving sustainability requires an immense collective effort. Can it be done? Experience from dialogues developed via the UN Commission for Sustainable Development (CSD) and the Rio+10 review process is positive. Input is carefully prepared and co-ordinated through working groups (caucuses). Done properly, these processes take time. There is plenty of scope for change. For example, there is a growing international movement advocating greater part of civil society in international financial institutions such as IMF, World Bank and the World Trade Organisation. For decades these in-

stitutions have been making decisions that affect the lives of people all over the world, without a clear system for accountability and democratic participation.

What is partnership?

Partnership is an alliance between two or more public agencies, local authorities, non-governmental or community-based organisations, the private sector and other sectors or stakeholders. The most successful partnerships are those with a specific focus; there should be a clear set of objectives for partners to address. There must be commitment to good communication to avoid misunderstandings and all contributions should be credited. Ownership of the partnership by all parties is critical. This can only be achieved by opening up decision-making to wide participation, and showing that there are real benefits to be gained from co-operation. Partnerships require transparency – the intentions and actions of each partner should be clear. Transparency helps ensure accountability to each other.

Local Agenda 21 as an example of a participatory process

In many parts of the world, considerable efforts are being invested in Local Agenda (LA21) initiatives, or their equivalents. LA21 programmes have been important in spreading ideas on sustainability, and by encouraging participation in local policy and practical action, they are starting to deliver genuine and progressive change. Local people are acting as agents of change even if their work does not have a 'Local Agenda 21' tag. There is no set formula or approach for Local Agenda process – local conditions determine what works best, but they are based on Rio principles of co-operation, building local capacity for change, equal rights and empowerment. The key to LA21 and what makes it more than just a collection of initiatives at the local level is the ideal of involving the community in working together towards sustainable development.

Change needs to happen at every level, from long-term institutional and policy changes within governments/decision-makers, to local environmental improvements, through to personal behaviour and lifestyles. LA21 challenges people to come up with their vision of a sustainable future – going through this process is, according to some viewpoints, more important than the actual outcome.

Working together for local sustainability

Because so many of the problems and solutions being addressed by Agenda 21 have their roots in local activities, local authorities play a vital role in educating, mobilising, and responding to the public to promote sustainable development (Agenda 21 Chapter 28.1). So Local Agenda 21 involves:

- Managing and improving the local authority's own environmental performance
- Integrating sustainable development aims into local authorities' policy and activities
- Awareness raising and education
- Consulting and involving the general public
- Partnership
- Measuring, monitoring and reporting on progress towards sustainability

Successful programmes have common factors:

- Extensive consultation to create a shared vision, to identify priorities for action
- Active participation of groups in preparing a sustainable development action plan
- Participatory assessments of local needs and conditions
- Targets and goals to achieve the vision and goals set out in the action plan
- Monitoring procedures, including local indicators, to track progress

Benefits of LA21:

- Effective local programmes can help increase understanding of, and support for, national level planning for sustainability
- Participation of the community in drawing up an action plan is likely to increase public support for the policies in the plan

- Can improve the effectiveness of policies by helping to develop long term partnerships between local governments and other local organisations
- Provide the opportunity to develop 'win-win' strategies for mutual benefit
- Can help promote equity and stability. LA21 can help identify and resolve local conflict
- Can stimulate interest in local democratic processes and increase citizen involvement

Obstacles facing LA21

- In many countries local authorities often find their powers insufficient for effective implementation of Local Agenda 21
- A lack of environmental awareness among citizens
- A lack of guidelines that set standards or objectives for regions or municipalities who are expected to help deliver national policy plans
- Poor enforcement of existing environmental and other laws by government agencies
- Poor availability of environmental and social data
- Lack of government policy supporting local initiatives
- Some government policies have a negative effect and may hinder local action for sustainable development e.g. subsidies
- Local governments also lack power over local affairs due to increasing globalisation

Increasing participation

"People must participate in environmental protection from the time they are young, and involving generation after generation. When we protect the environment, we protect ourselves: our lives depend on the environment."

Wang Zuo Hua, a teacher at the Long Jiang Lu Elementary School, Chengdu, China.

Taken from 'The Long March' Life II series (Television Trust for the Environment)

Aiming for better participation is an important part of the fabric of sustainable communities and city life. A vibrant democracy relies on the active involvement of well-informed citizens. The opportunity to participate in decision-making processes is, for many people, an important dimension to their quality of life. But time and time again, we hear the experiences of people excluded from the local decision-making process. Poor consultation processes lead to a lack of accountability, disillusionment and withdrawal of stakeholder groups.

Promoting fairness, justice and equality

"All human beings are born equal in dignity and rights."

Article 1, Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Respecting human rights is fundamental to local democracy and participation. But many groups within society and within our communities suffer from bias, prejudice and misrepresentation. The term 'social justice' is used to describe efforts to create conditions of fairness and equality for people of all backgrounds, irrespective of their gender, sexuality, race, age, ethnic/cultural background or physical difference, enabling them to participate fully in society. Equality is the basic belief (and practice that follows) that all human beings are equally important, that each person should be respected in their own right, and that resources and opportunities should be available to anyone who needs them.

Helpful links and information sources

Official UN web site Rio+10: www.un.org/rio+10

UN CSD: www.un.org/esa/sustdev/csd.htm

ANPED - The Northern Alliance for Sustainability: www.anped.org

Earth Council: www.ecouncil.ac.cr

International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI): www.iclei.org/rioplusten/article.html

National Strategies for Sustainable Development: www.nssd.net

UNED Forum Central information resource with document downloads (UN etc), newsletters, briefing material, national reports plus links to the Road Map of how all the processes fit together: www.earthsummit2002.org

UNED Forum website on Multi-Stakeholder Processes: www.earthsummit2002.org/msp

Glossary

Sustainable Development: "Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (Brundtland Report, 1987) also "development which improves people's quality of life, within the carrying capacity of the earth's life support system." 2nd World Conservation Strategy (UNEP)

Sustainability: Working towards sustainability involves:

- Social development: increasing social equity
- Environmental protection: protecting and improving the environment
- Economic development: developing economic security for everyone

Stakeholders: Groups or organisations who have influence in a particular area of policy or are affected by policies. Agenda 21 identified 9 Major Groups: women, children and youth; indigenous peoples; NGOs; local authorities; trade unions; business and industry; science and technology, and farmers. This is not an exhaustive list; at any stage in a process there can be other specific stakeholder groups.

References

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Lawrence, G. UNED-UK Conference - New Directions for Urban Action. July 1994.

Young, S. and Church, C. (2000). LA21- The future of Local Agenda 21 after the Local Government Act, University of Manchester UK. EPRU Paper 1/100

Brown, L. et al. (1997). State of the World 1997 – A WorldWatch Institute report on progress towards a sustainable society. London: Earthscan.

Also see

This short Briefing Sheet is one in a series specially prepared by UNED Forum for Life II. It aims to outline key issues covered within the topic and to act as a sign-posting service to further information sources and official documentation. Many issues are cross-cutting so we encourage you to investigate the other material available. Other sheets include:

- **Cities as Symbols of Hope: The Habitat and Istanbul+5 Process**
- **A World of Difference? The Earth Summit 2002 process**
- **Investing in the Future: Financing for Development Process**
- **Making Women Count: The Beijing Process**
- **Promoting Development with a Human Face: The Social Summit Process**
- **Whose Decision it is Anyway?**
Decision-making Processes at the national & international Level
- **Resource Sheet - more Background Information and Inspiration**
- **Frequently Asked Questions**

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