



STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION COURSE

MODULE 3C: ENGAGEMENT TECHNIQUES: STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS

The need for effective communication will be discussed in Module 3c. Strategic communication is used to change behaviours and can help engage people.

The notes presented for this module are drawn from:

[1] SAIEA, 2005. A One Stop Participation Guide—A Handbook for Public Participation in Environmental Assessment in Southern Africa. Prepared by Commonground. Southern African Institute for Environmental Assessment (SAIEA).

<http://www.saiea.com/calabash/handbook/index.html>

[2] ELI, 2007. Public Participation in International Waters Management—A Handbook. Draft for Review. Environmental Law Institute.

[3] GTZ, 2006. Strategic Communication for Sustainable Development: A Conceptual Overview. <http://www.cbd.int/cepa/toolkit/html/resources/59/5939C452-2E5A-4DAC-AE58-653BB66D0FAC/Strategic%20Communication%20for%20Sustainable%20development.pdf>

[4] World Bank, 2002. Strategic Communication in PRSP. Draft for comments, October 2002. http://poverty2.forumone.com/files/12981_comm0916.pdf

WHY AND WHAT TO COMMUNICATE?

Of all of the information relating to the issue at stake in the stakeholder participation process, what needs to be shared with stakeholders and the public? It is the results of the stakeholder analysis (Module 2) and the specific objectives for stakeholder engagement that will help identify what information needs to be shared.

What information? [2]

1. The assessment of the levels of understanding that various stakeholders have with respect to the issues at stake will help identify the types of information that stakeholders are likely to need and/ or want and the formats that are likely to be most accessible to them.
2. A necessary complementary analysis involves what the objectives are for stakeholder engagement. For example, the type of information that will be created and disseminated for broad public awareness-raising and education will be very different in structure and content than information used to solicit feedback from the private sector on what they consider to be priority issues related to their sector. At each stage of the project, therefore, it is important to carefully consider what the goals are for stakeholder and/or public participation and to tailor the use of information to achieve those goals.

It is important to note that not all information will flow from the project to stakeholders. Different stakeholders hold important information that is useful not only to the project and the participation process, but also to other stakeholders. Local knowledge on environmental and social conditions, linkages between different social groups or parties, use of resources, and values held in relation to resources, for instance, may be particularly important for the process.

Participation as a Two-way Information Exchange [2]

Projects can benefit greatly by structuring public participation to ensure that information is flowing both to and from stakeholders and the public. Stakeholders frequently possess information and expertise that can inform the substantive development and implementation of a project. For example, communities and resource users often have an intimate knowledge of local environmental, political, social, and cultural conditions that are highly relevant to project planning and execution. The various needs, priorities, and perspectives that stakeholders have related to their resources and the ways in which they perceive project interventions are also relevant to project feasibility and sustainability.

Analysis of information from all parties can broaden understanding of complex issues and identify innovative options for solving problems. The public can also review the quality and accuracy of information being used in decision-making. Stakeholder feedback should be solicited and incorporated into various stages of a project to improve project structure and facilitate implementation, monitoring, and evaluation.

But what affects communication? When tailoring information and communication approaches to specific purposes and stakeholders, it is important to keep in mind both internal factors (human features such as norms and values, attitudes and behavior, emotions and beliefs, culture and social relations) and external factors (the 'carrier' of a message) influencing human communication [3].

Broad issues to consider when communicating [2]

- current level of awareness among different stakeholders on the relevant issues,
- the preferred types of information and delivery mechanisms or sources for receiving that information,
- the barriers, weaknesses and threats to existing information-sharing networks and activities, and
- the opportunities for building on those networks and activities.

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

One of the major constraints to effective communication is the fact that stakeholders do not fully understand their role in the participation process: why should they participate and what

benefits will it bring to them? It is thus important to discuss with the stakeholders, from the outset, why it is important for them to participate.

It is also crucial to select communication channels that are able to reach the target audience and are adequate for the intended scope in terms of geographic area, content or network. The message should be carefully designed so that is understandable (in terms of language) and culturally sensitive.

Potential pitfalls in the communication process [4]

- **Inappropriate choice of vehicle** that does not reach its target audience because it is inaccessible (such as Internet) or inappropriate (policy papers for a semi-literate farm community)
- **The vehicle may be limited in scope:** media may be urban and uninterested in rural issues or poorly integrated with government and NGOs.
- **The media have not been sufficiently briefed** to understand, appreciate and provoke debate about the issue.
- **Inappropriate messages** that are not understandable (language) or cultural insensitive will not be understood or acted upon by the target audience, or will simply alienate the potential audience.
- **Poor dissemination.** If the message is not distributed effectively and does not reach its target, it does not really exist.
- **Wrong packaging of the message.** The message will remain static if it is not absorbed or is rejected by its target audiences (for example, the level of the message is too simple for the audience, its language is patronizing or socially offensive, the message is unacceptable to cultural traditions).
- **The message is distorted or disbelieved.** If each level of audience/future communicator is not correctly briefed with the right level of message, it may be distorted and introduce an element of incredulity.

The value of accessible and effective communication in stakeholder participation processes should not be underestimated. The guidelines below provide a checklist on how to communicate simply [1]:

Tips for written communication

One idea only per sentence

- Organise information so that sentences are logically ordered and paragraphs deal with a single topic of information. Where technical words are necessary, include them in a well-organised sentence structure.

Use active, positive language:

- Maintain one tense within a single sentence.

- Use active voice, not passive voice language, e.g., write “the assessment team is drafting a report”, rather than “a report is being drafted by the assessment team”.
- Use first and second person rather than third person, e.g., write “you can send your comments to ...”, rather than “one can send one’s comments to ...” ;
- Use positive not negative sentences, e.g. write “The administration may only endorse the report after consulting the community”, rather than “The administration cannot endorse the report unless it consults the community”.

Avoid jargon and difficult or offensive words:

- Avoid unnecessarily difficult words.
- Avoid unnecessarily technical words.
- Explain difficult or technical words where these are necessary to use.
- Avoid sexist and offensive language.
- Avoid foreign words and phrases.

Keep your language plain and simple:

- Delete words that are wasted or padding.
- Use simple verbs instead of long phrases to describe actions, e.g., use “consider” instead of “take into consideration” or “apply” instead of “make an application”.
- Use simple adverbs rather than longer phrases, e.g., use “near” instead of “in close proximity” or “monthly” instead of “on a monthly basis”.
- Avoid overused expressions, e.g., “the bottom line”, “at the end of the day” or “explore every avenue”.
- Avoid outdated words, e.g., write “in this document” rather than “herein”, “a person who” instead of “whosoever”, or “so” instead of “hence”.
- Exclude repetitive or overlapping words, e.g., use “owing” instead of “due and payable”, “now/today” instead of “in this day and age”, or “able/suitable” instead of “fit and proper”.
- Be sensitive not to overuse popular words or abbreviations.
- Use simple connecting words, rather than complex ones.
- Be careful with referral words, e.g., write “these people” instead of “such people”, or “in point 4” instead of “above mentioned”.

Tips for speakers

- Speak from brief point form notes so that you maintain constant contact with the audience.

- Explain the structure of your presentation.
- Address the group in an appropriately respectful way.
- Don't talk too fast.
- Avoid vague phrases.
- Ensure sentences and points are completed.
- Look out for signs that your audience follows you.
- Provide summaries of your presentation at key intervals.
- Allow time for questions.
- Explain things patiently.
- When you speak using a translator, agree with the translator before you start on the approach to translation. Work with the translator as a team.

USE OF NETWORKS

Using the existing networks of various stakeholders or creating new networks to achieve the target goals is essential for communication. Using existing networks (such as media, government and NGO networks) and providing the opportunity for dialogue and further dissemination of information through those networks is essential to ensure effective communication.

Potential new networks include radio programs, incorporating messages into the community through meetings, festivals, theatre groups, through spokespeople such as religious and community leaders, midwives, itinerant medical personnel in isolated areas and sectoral networks and organisations (agriculture, health, etc.). New networks can be a combination of government officials, media, civil society, and the wider public. The most effective ones will be those that arise from and involve the socially excluded [4].

Create opportunity for dialogue [4]

- Provide question and answer opportunities to provoke discussion in press conferences, seminars and meetings - build in a phone-in opportunity in radio programs
- Invite responses in newspaper articles
- Have essay contests in magazines, on the radio
- When distributing print materials, include short questions (What would you like to know more about? Can you comment on this project?)

BEING STRATEGIC

In stakeholder participation processes, communication will be shaped in different ways in different contexts, so as to engage people and motivate them to participate. Being strategic

means using information to influence stakeholder perceptions and behaviours in relation to specific issues.

Strategic communication is more than the dissemination of information, but the active solicitation of stakeholders' perspectives. It ensures a two-way flow of communication and addresses human factors such as sociology, psychology, culture, behaviour, and politics [3].

Strategic Communications Tools can be used to encourage people to change damaging behaviours; build public support for the introduction of other incentives and rules to change behaviours; and raise public awareness of existing problems [2].

Strategic communication means working to move [3]:

- from developing and implementing a fixed plan, ideas and solutions towards operating an adaptive system that can continuously improve governance to promote coherence between responses to different challenges,
- from a view that it is the state alone that is responsible for development towards one that sees responsibility with society as a whole,
- from centralized and controlled decision-making towards sharing results and opportunities, transparent negotiation, co-operation and action, from a focus on outputs (e.g. projects and laws) towards a focus on outcomes (e.g. impacts),
- from sectoral towards integrated planning,
- from a dependence on external assistance towards domestically driven and financed development, towards a process that can accommodate monitoring, learning and improvement.