**INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL TECHNOLOGY CENTER**

**Environmental Management and Community Participation: Enhancing Local Programmes**

United Nations Environment Programme
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The UNEP-International Environment Technology Centre (IETC)
**Environmental Management and Community Participation:**
*Enhancing Local Programmes*


UNEP-IETC Urban Environment Series

UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME
INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL TECHNOLOGY CENTRE

# Environmental Management and Community Participation

## *Enhancing Local Programmes*

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# Environmental Management and Community Participation: *Enhancing Local Programmes*

**M**anaging the environment – of using natural resources sustainably and of disposing and keeping the wastes generated to a minimum – has become an increasing priority over the last few decades. The unbridled industrial growth of the last century has created impacts, mostly negative, on the environment that is only now being realized.

The increasing focus placed on the environment globally, through multilateral norms, agreements and conventions, has shifted the responsibility from the governments (particularly the national governments) as a 'provider' to a more consensus-based approach, where all stakeholders have a role to play, bringing to the table different resources during the different processes of environmental management.

Of particular significance has been the role of the ubiquitous 'community' as the primary stakeholder in these processes. Participation of the community, and its partnerships with other stakeholders, has become an important component of all environmental programmes and projects, both in terms of subsidiarity of decision-making processes, and of creating an enabling environment for the community to have a say over aspects that affect their lives.

It is this intersection between community participation, and environmental management – the focus of this paper – that provides significant opportunities and challenges for sustainable development at the local level.

At the local level, how does community participation help environmental management goals? And vice versa, how do environmental management principles facilitate greater community participation?

The contents of this paper is based on lessons learnt from extensive research and studies conducted at the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) on the themes of environmental management systems and ISO 14001, community studies, urban management and the interlinkages of environmental issues.

## PART 1
**How do environmental management principles facilitate community participation?**

*Environmental Management*

The development of an environmental management system[1] provides a cohesive and comprehensive framework for a city or local government to identify significant aspects and manage its environment - both opportunities and risks - and to document, evaluate and communicate its environmental plans and programmes to local stakeholders.

There are five key principles for the management of the local environment. They are (a) development of strong local government commitment to environmental management, (b) proper planning and compliance, (c) creation of enabling systems, (d) appropriate performance and accountability, and (e) the continual measurement and improvement of policies and programmes. Each of these five principles are analyzed below in terms of the way in which it facilitates participation of the community.

## 1. Local government commitment

Commitment from the local government to improve environment performance and establish policies for the purpose is very important for obtaining political support, developing policy, integrating into operational system, and showing environmental leadership.

How does this facilitate community participation? A strong commitment from the local government to be inclusive, develop political support, or show leadership will necessitate the involvement of the community. A prudent local government will involve the community in order to ensure broad commitment from all residents of the city. This will also ensure acceptance and ownership of its policies and programmes with the community.

## 2. Planning and compliance

The local government plans and implements proactive programmes to identify and address environmental problems and corrects deficiencies in the local environment. These programmes also broadly aim to, for example, comply with environmental laws/regulations, prepare for natural and man-made emergencies, and prevent pollution and conserve resources.

How does this facilitate community participation? The planning of environmental management systems needs to include views of the community and residents in order to ensure its success and become effective. It will essentially be through participation (meetings, seminars, hearings etc.) that views of the community can be incorporated.

## 3. Enabling systems

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[1] For example, principles based on the ISO 14001 standard

The local government develops and implements the necessary measures to enable various urban stakeholders to perform their tasks and implement their programmes/projects on the environment[2]. These measures provide opportunities for learning, and support with standards, systems, and programmes. Information management, communication and documentation policies also create the necessary enabling environment.

How does this facilitate community participation? One of the key criteria that will enable urban stakeholders to perform their tasks for environmental management is an effective system of community participation. Participation becomes easier if it is built into the management system and process.

## 4. Performance and Accountability

The local government develops measures that addresses environmental performance of all urban stakeholders, and ensure full accountability of their functions that help in instilling responsibility, authority and accountability. These include the development of performance standards in consultation with all local actors. Accountability is ensured by keeping actions and processes transparent.

How does this facilitate community participation? It is essentially through effective community participation that good performance and accountability can be built. A decentralized approach where all actors play their role to achieve overall goals and objectives, works best when effective participation is linked to effective performance and accountability.

## 5. Measurement and Improvement

The local government develops and implements programmes to assess progress towards meeting it environmental goals and uses it to improve its environmental performance. This is done through the development of an evaluation programme or gathering and analyzing relevant data. It could also compare its performance with other local governments, or incorporates continuous improvement of its policies, programmes and their impacts.

How does this facilitate community participation? Measurement and improvement of environmental management processes can be done to established indicators and parameters. But it is third party views, particularly coming from the community and its representatives that will lead to better performance and improvement. This can be generated through good community participation and involvement.

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[2] This is a departure from the usual position of a local government as a 'provider' of services to a 'facilitator' of action

## PART 2
**How does community participation help environmental management goals?**

*Community Participation*

Community participation calls for people to participate in planning, implementing and managing their local environment. Community participation means a readiness on the part of both local governments and the citizens to accept equal responsibilities and activities in managing their surroundings. It also means a commitment to bring to the table resources, skills and knowledge for this purpose, and a respect for the capabilities and capacities of all partners.

It means that the value of each group's contribution is seen, appreciated and used. The honest inclusion of a community's representatives as "partners" in decision-making, makes for successful community participation.

What is a "community"? A community may be defined as a group of people coming together on the basis of a geographical area, a work place, even an idea or a theme/issue, or on the basis of gender/age. The shape and size of a community varies, and hence definitions of communities have also varied.

Why community participation? Once again, there are five key issues that illustrate the importance of community participation and involvement. We need to keep in mind that (a) choices and preferences on quality of life and lifestyle - are made at the community, household and individual levels, (b) it is important to maintain subsidiarity of decision-making, since local, daily decisions need to be taken at the local and community levels, (c) community participation calls for clear commitment and involvement of all members of a community in order to ensre success of various joint activities, (d) community participation pools resources and diverse skills and working strategies from within the community, creating pride and ownership of a programme or project, and (e) community participation will ensure that checking and corrective action through monitoring/evaluation can be done by and for the community itself.

1. **Choices and preferences on quality of life and lifestyle** are key starting points of the process of impacting on the environment, are made daily at the community, household and individual levels. These have both short-term and long-term impacts locally, but also remotely and globally – in terms of resources consumed.

How does this impact Environmental Management processes? These choices and preferences have a direct impact on the local environment, as well as long-term indirect impacts, sometimes far beyond the physical boundaries of the community. Incorporating quality of life and lifestyle issues in environmental management ensures that problems are tackled at its source, and long term benefits accrued.

2. It is important **to maintain subsidiarity of environmental decision-making**. Local daily decisions need to be taken at the local and community levels. Effective community participation creates forums where such issues can be discussed and effective action planned.

How does this impact Environmental Management processes? Daily decisions at the individual and community help in maintaining the scale of decisions, and ensures that

commitment is built at the appropriate level. Such community dynamics of awareness-building and decision-making need to be built into the core of an environmental management plan.

3. Community participation calls for **clear commitment and involvement of all members of a community** in various joint activities. Bringing the community together to work on an issue that affects their everyday life, particularly in relation to the environment, is the first step n a continuous process of awareness building and behavioral change.

How does this impact Environmental Management processes? Focusing on different aspects of the local environment will provide a rallying point that can build commitment and involvement from the community. Linking environmental problems, both local and global, to everyday lifestyles is critical in motivating communities and planning for action.

4. Community participation **pools resources and diverse skills and working strategies from within the community**. Within the homogeneity of a 'community' lies a broad diversity of resources that are prerequisites for the implementation of any plan or programme. Inherently, these have to be taken into account.

How does this impact Environmental Management processes? Pooling resources and diverse skills particularly enables a complex issue such as managing the local environment. It also enables creative brainstorming that identifies 'problems-behind-problems' and ensures 'solutions-for-solutions' – maximizing the benefits derived by a small resource base.

5. **Checking and corrective action through monitoring/evaluation** can be done by and for the community itself. Vigilance can substantially be ensured through community involvement, with respect to its own actions and outputs (for example, wastes generated), and to external processes and outputs that affect it (for example, pollution from a local factory).

How does this impact Environmental Management processes? Ensuring that the environment is healthy and that the views of the community are included in the management processes is critical - community participation enables and facilitates the process of environmental monitoring.

In conclusion, involving the community in local environmental management has been prescribed as a panacea for a whole lot of environmental ills – in some cases, to also avoid responsibilities and accountabilities of the concerned entities. Real positive impacts can be ensured through partnerships that respect the stakeholders involved, and the resources that they bring to the table, and to enable actions that each stakeholder is best suited to perform. Consensus-driven visions and goals are also important, to coordinate activities and to monitor and evaluate actions.

The UNEP - DTIE International Environmental Technology Centre

Established in April 1994, the International Environmental Technology Centre (IETC) is an integral part of the Division of Technology, Industry and Economics (DTIE) of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).  It has offices at two locations in Japan - Osaka and Shiga.

The Centre's main function is to promote the application of Environmentally Sound Technologies (ESTs) in developing countries and countries with economies in transition.  IETC pays specific attention to urban problems, such as sewage, air pollution, solid waste, noise, and to the management of fresh water basins.

IETC is supported in its operations by two Japanese foundations:  The Global Environment Centre Foundation (GEC), which is based in Osaka and handles urban environmental problems; and the International Lake Environment Committee Foundation (ILEC), which is located in Shiga Prefecture and contributes accumulated knowledge on sustainable management of fresh water resources.

IETC's mandate is based on Agenda 21, which came out of the UNCED process. Consequently IETC pursues a result-oriented work plan revolving around three issues, namely: (1) Improving access to information on ESTs; (2) Fostering technology cooperation, partnerships, adoption and use of ESTs; and (3) Building endogenous capacity.

IETC has secured specific results that have established it as a Centre of Excellence in its areas of specialty.  Its products include:  an overview on existing information sources for ESTs; a database of information on ESTs; a regular newsletter, a technical publication series and other media materials creating public awareness and disseminating information on ESTs; Local Agenda 21 documents developed for selected cities in collaboration with the UNCHS (Habitat)/UNEP Sustainable Cities Programme (SCP); training needs assessment surveys in the field of decision-making on technology transfer and management of ESTs; design and implementation of pilot training programmes for adoption, application and operation of ESTs; training materials for technology management of large cities and fresh water basins; and others.

The Centre coordinates its activities with substantive organisations within the UN system.  IETC also seeks partnerships with international and bilateral finance institutions, technical assistance organisations, the private, academic and non-governmental sectors, foundations and corporations.

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