Chapter 12
Putting People into Policy

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Good policies are the product of effective policy formulation, articulation, and implementation. As they are implemented policies should be monitored and readjusted to stay on target. Each component can be enhanced with a quality communication program that engages stakeholders, fosters partnerships, and mobilizes a common vision.

Policymakers throughout the world are coming to terms with a new agenda—one that pragmatically brings together concerns about environmental protection with those of economic growth. At issue is how to achieve environmentally sustainable development by meeting today's human needs without compromising the Earth's natural resource base upon which all life depends. But often policy makers focus on only the natural, political, and economic *systems* and leave out the primary actors—the people.

Environmentally sustainable development requires:

♦ A healthy political environment, characterized by environmentally aware leaders and greater popular participation in decision making

♦ Effective policies, laws, and regulations that empower citizens to make environmentally beneficial choices

♦ Capable institutions to implement policy, advocate reform, and educate both the people and their leaders

Ultimately, environmentally sustainable development is about more than sound policies, politics, and institutions: it is about people. People conserve resources or destroy them through their everyday actions. And people can serve as catalysts for the development of equitable and just policies.

Environmental education and communication (EE&C) can help bring people into the policy pro-cess in a meaningful and effective way. When people see the link between policies, their livelihoods, and their children's futures, they become stakeholders in the policy process. As stakeholders, people catalyze policy change. They can organize, advocate, educate, and elevate local issues and concerns to national policy fora. And they are more apt to see that policies are understood by others and enforced.

As the complexity of achieving environmentally sustainable development is increasingly appreciated, the involvement of multiple stakeholders becomes a factor. Increasingly broader groups of people need to become engaged. In addition to natural resource consumers and managers at the grassroots level, stakeholders may include specialists (e.g., economists, sociologists, business leaders, farmers, foresters, engineers, lawyers, educators, health professionals, communicators, and many others). Environmentally sustainable development also calls for building bridges between groups, such as industry and environmental organizations that sometimes find themselves in adversarial positions. And it calls for building cross-sectoral coalitions to integrate all sectors—donors, industry, grassroots groups, etc.—that affect social and economic development.

Policies are intended to promote specific actions or behaviors at international, national, regional, or local levels. For example:

♦ *Local*—a fisherman adopting sustainable harvesting practices

♦ *Institutional*—a corporation integrating environmental concerns in configuring its bottom line

♦ *National and global*—a set of policies that support sustainable development.

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SHAPING, EXPLAINING, AND IMPLEMENTING POLICY

Environmental education and communication strategies contribute to three, interrelated facets of the policy process: formulation, articulation, and implementation. EE&C helps shape policy, explain it, and make it work.

Formulation

Formulation of good policies hinges on getting input from the people about their needs and wants. Most elected officials are extremely sensitive to public needs and desires, and communication can assist them to understand those needs. Often, the officials can't hear public opinion unless it is well articulated and strategically presented. EE&C skills can enhance this presentation. When people—particularly poor and vulnerable groups—are involved in the policy process, more equitable and effective policies reflecting real needs are likely to result. Empowered as shapers of policy, people begin to exert their rightful role in holding their governments accountable for carrying out appropriate policies.

Sometimes affected groups of people—stakeholders—are invited to participate in the policy formulation process.

EE&C methods can help get the right information to the right people at the right time during this process. Research and communications skills are needed to gather, analyze, interpret and communicate to diverse audiences facts about problems and proposed policies. EE&C helps define *what* information is needed *by whom* and *in what form* to formulate appropriate policies. EE&C also provides both policy makers and advocates with the skills to define and articulate their agendas. This results in promoting constructive dialogue.

Articulation

Once made, a policy needs to be explained. In policy articulation, EE&C helps specific people understand how key issues affect them. It bridges the information gap between governments and their constituents, the national level and local communities, and producers and consumers. EE&C can ensure that policies are explained to all members of a community, and can establish feedback mechanisms to examine consequences for environmental, social, economic, and cultural impact.

Implementation

If EE&C contributes to policy formulation and articulation in the ways described, implementation may progress more smoothly. People will more readily understand their stake in both the broad policies and the consequent laws and regulations. Ideally, stakeholder support will also contribute to an adequate allocation of resources for policy implementation, key to moving policy from words to action.

To implement policies more effectively, EE&C builds the capacity of national and local institutions to educate, inform, and communicate. Education and communication by governments, interest groups, political parties, and others, helps legitimize and activate policies.

Finally, it should be noted that policy development does not necessarily follow a linear pathway from formulation to articulation to implementation. Articulation, for example, may stimulate reexamination, and perhaps even reformulation of a policy. Similarly, implementation may identify glitches that can trigger reexamination. This circular process, which education and communication can help facilitate, in fact improves policy relevance and effectiveness.

EE&C AND STRATEGIC PLANNING

The strategic planning process adopted in many countries has resulted in National Conservation Strategies (NCSs), National Environmental Education Plans, Tropical Forestry Action Plans (TFAPs), and National Environmental Action Plans (NEAPs). This process provides an opportunity for national debate on environmental priorities and the formulation of related policy and action pro-

grams. Although most have yet to represent all stakeholders, these preparatory processes have attempted to involve a cross-section of society.

On paper, most plans recognize the importance of EE&C. For example, almost all NEAPs attest to the need to include education and public awareness in their environmental strategic objectives. In practice, however, these plans succeed only if the government can raise or allocate appropriate resources; if the plans receive high-level support; and if the people understand and are committed to the process. Therefore, effective communication is crucial. For example, when Madagascar first formulated its Environmental Action Plan, most support came from external advocacy groups. No internal constituency developed, partly because the benefits of sound natural resource management were not effectively communicated to the Malagasy people. Over time, a backlash resulted, setting back efforts to act on the nation's environmental agenda. On the other hand, when GreenCOM worked in Malawi and El Salvador on National Environmental Education Strategies, it began with broadly inclusive workshops that articulated the stakeholders needs in a policy. Both countries now have popular environmental education strategies.

FOSTERING POLICY DIALOGUE

EE&C facilitates policy dialogue between government and people, national and local levels, and among multiple stakeholders. For example, in the Philippines where national policy encourages greater sharing of power by communities and public agencies in forest management, field offices of the environmental ministry may not know how to make this policy work locally. EE&C can provide the needed training and materials. With the trend toward increasing decentralization and greater autonomy for regions and provinces, EE&C can help local governments, NGOs, and citizens work together.

In addition to fostering dialogue between people and their government, EE&C strengthens connections among other groups. For example, it can provide the tools to bring multiple stakeholders like corporations and environmental groups together by identifying common ground and facilitating productive dialogue. Some corporations, for example, have instituted environmental changes in their policies as a result of listening to their customers, their employees, and/or the people who live near their facilities. Others have set up citizen advisory groups to help shape workable environmental reforms in corporate practice.

PUBLIC AWARENESS

Public awareness programs may be targeted to specific, local audiences, such as taxi drivers, to maintain their vehicles, thus reducing air pollution. Conversely, public awareness campaigns are typically conducted on a national, or even international, scale. For example, the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) mounted international campaigns to protect tropical rainforests and wetlands through coordinated national action of its member countries worldwide. These and other campaigns use mass media; advertising; special events; exhibitions; conferences, seminars and workshops; school-based programs; merchandising; and other activities. The Gambia's National Environmental Awards Scheme, developed by GreenCOM, is a good example of a public awareness program that engages people from a variety of walks of life (see Chapter 14).

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Communication can also play an important role in linking the public to policymakers to establish direct lines of communication. New communication tools, as well as new ways of using those tools, have made these links easier to forge. Community groups have become more sophisticated about use of, and access to, communication media. Simplified technologies, such as the portability of video and editing equipment, desktop publishing, Internet communication and a host of others, have equipped regular citizens with new ways of influencing policy undreamed of even ten years ago.

Political upheavals, such as the overthrow of the Shah in Iran and the collapse of the Soviet Union, owe much to the tools their proponents were using, such as fax and the Internet. Advocacy, one of the recent strategies to emerge from the new role of civic participation, puts promotion of environmental issues into the hands of civic groups. To support the democracy and governance initiatives of USAID and other donors, communication plays a vital capacity-building role in the training and mobilization of advocacy groups.

BROADENING PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Participation of multiple stakeholders at an early stage increases the likelihood of policy or program success. Actively involving stakeholders from various levels, sectors, and disciplines develops consensus among diverse and sometimes disparate interests. Bringing other key groups into development of environmentally beneficial policies also contributes to a stronger process. Engaging business, religious and academic organizations, the media, and other sectors of society broadens the constituency for environmentally sustainable development, leverages additional resources, and amplifies the popular voice for appropriate policy formulation and enactment.

In addition, as communities assume greater responsibility in managing their natural resources, members are encouraged to monitor, examine, and regulate the policies that they helped generate.