

Communication, Education & Public Awareness towards Participation in Sustainable Development

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The role education and communication can play when dealing with issues of sustainable development

by

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Introduction

Communication, Education and Public awareness are a mix of social instruments underpinning Agenda 21 that - when efficiently applied - will support the countries in their work to follow up on Agenda 21. However, even though Agenda 21 recognized the importance of education and communication early on, many countries so far approach sustainable development focussing primarily on research and technical measures. They are often not aware of the benefits of using communication as a management and policy tool; and how it can be used to streamline the complex processes involved in multi-stakeholder situations in environment and development issues.

“The communication and education strategy is very important. It should be very clear and very simple. And should be understood by all stakeholders, it should not be a strategy for scientists to stroke to each other, but it should be a strategy to the public at large.”

Hamdallah Zedan, Executive Secretary, Secretariat Biological Diversity Convention, Canada

Sustainable development: need for mainstreaming

Sustainable development depends on a complex interplay of ecological processes, culture, economy and human action. Sustainable development affects many sectors in society. It involves sustainable use and equitable sharing of natural resources and sharing knowledge. To deal with threats to biological diversity, the causes of negative pressures on the ecosystems and their services have to be addressed. Because of this complex dependency on other processes, the conservation of biological diversity has to be mainstreamed, or incorporated into the work of all sectors, rather than being treated as a separate agenda.

“When reduced diversity is observed, it is too late to reverse such negative trends. Everyone should be aware of this and should be enabled to act, both individually and collectively, in a way so as to minimize those stresses and even enhance diversity.”

UNESCO, Division of Ecological Sciences and Man and Biosphere Programme.

Social change

Biodiversity conservation, sustainable use and equitable sharing call for social change. Education and public awareness are long-term investments towards this change. At the same time, biodiversity issues need to be communicated effectively to ensure the participation of major stakeholders from different sectors in the short, medium and long term. To stimulate the development of biodiversity agendas across sectors, those who are primarily responsible for biodiversity, e.g. in the Ministry of Environment, have to reach out and involve other ministries and sectors in society. This means that NBSAP coordinators do not only need to deal with technical and scientific issues, but also with involving stakeholders. Article 13 of the CBD positions the instrument for this involvement.

Convention on Biological Diversity

The Convention on Biological Diversity recognizes in article 13 the need for instruments to increase public awareness, to secure active involvement of all sectors that have a stake in biodiversity and to educate target groups at various levels in society. Article 13 states that the Parties shall:

- (A) Promote and encourage understanding of the importance of, and the measures required for, the conservation of biological diversity, as well as its propagation through media, and the inclusion of these topics in educational programmes; and
- (B) Cooperate, as appropriate, with other States and international organizations in developing educational and public awareness programmes, with respect to conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity.”

Article 13: CEPA

Article 13 talks of Education and Public Awareness alone. It is recognised, however, that involving other sectors in society calls for more than education and awareness. It calls for a two – way process of communication: establishing relationships, exploring common understanding and motives for action. Therefore it is better to add the word communication and follow the initiative of the Ramsar Bureau introducing the term CEPA: Communication, Education & Public Awareness. CEPA deals with the processes that motivate and mobilise individual and collective action. UNESCO and SCBD recognize this in the preamble to the Work Programme for Education and Public Awareness which they developed for COP6¹.

***Awareness** brings the issues relating to biodiversity to the attention of key groups who have the power to influence outcomes. Awareness is an agenda setting and marketing exercise helping people to know what and why this is an important issue, the aspirations for the targets, and what is and can be done to achieve these.*

***Education** is a set of processes that can inform, motivate and empower people to support biodiversity conservation, not only by making lifestyle changes, but also through promoting change in the way that institutions, business, and governments operate*

***Communication** is the two-way exchange of information and is a means to gain co-operation of groups in society by listening to them first and clarifying why and how decisions are made. In an instrumental approach, communication is used with other instruments to support biodiversity conservation to address economic constraints and to motivate action.*

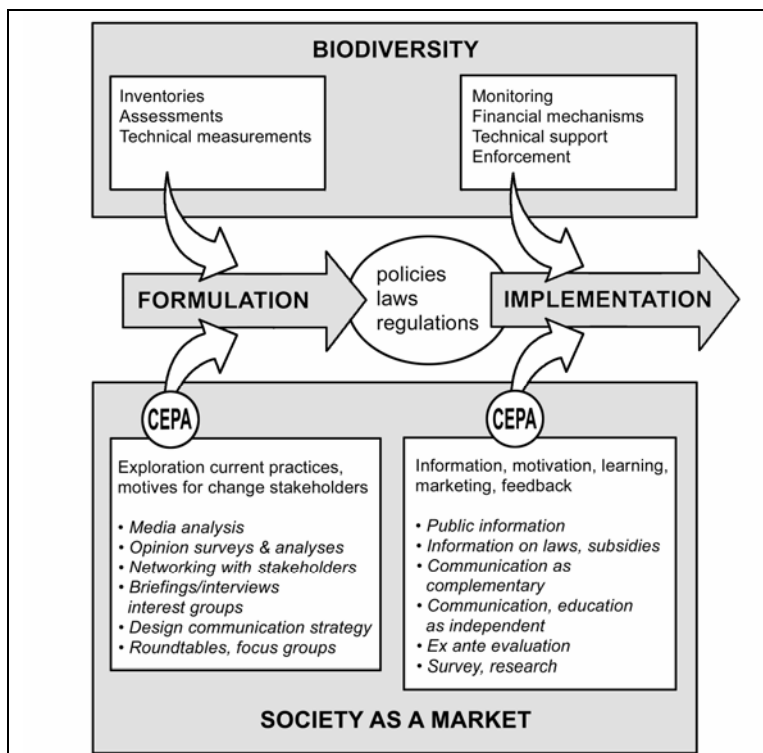
¹ Source: Education and Public Awareness (UNEP/CBD/COP/6/13/Add2)

Planning

CEPA is a tool to manage the process of individual and community engagement of stakeholders. With appropriate handling this engagement provides a sense of ownership of the problem and solutions that helps to support people's more sustained involvement. Effective use of CEPA requires a planned systematic approach to really understand the interests of stakeholders and beneficiaries. Approaches need to be tailor-made to the local context, culture and traditions. None-the less, international experiences can guide national planners in formulating country-specific operational plans.

CEPA as a policy tool

CEPA has different roles in different parts of a National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP). During *formulation* of the biodiversity policy, CEPA plays a role in listening to how people feel about the issue, putting the issue on the agenda by raising awareness and identifying the issues to be dealt with by the project or policy. As a policy is formed, communication works to draw out and balance the different ideas about how to proceed. During *implementation* CEPA is used to mobilise networks and stakeholders, to explain benefits of participation and to build social responsibility. CEPA has different tasks around monitoring, evaluating and maintaining quality control of the policy. While the operational context for the use of CEPA instruments differs per country or cultural setting, some processes and functions of CEPA are valid worldwide.



The dream that never comes true

Many biodiversity experts dream of 'educating' the general public, thinking that making everyone an expert will automatically involve everyone in the objectives of the convention. In many cases CEPA is thought of by biodiversity experts as an end of pipe tool: after your research you give a lecture, you do a publication, you print a poster. But in reality this does not lead to involvement of other non-experts. Scientific information alone is not enough. One need to do more than just transfer of information.



Involving others: a special discipline

CEPA comprises a range of social instruments including information exchange, dialogue, education, and marketing. To know which social instrument to use, at which moment and how, calls for a special discipline and expertise, as important for biodiversity as science: communication, education and public awareness. It involves communication planning, target group research, media planning tailored to these target groups and management and evaluation. Target group research can mean: telemarketing, street interviews, focus groups or other research methods. The involvement process can be a series of dialogues and or negotiations.

To involve other sectors, some have to be approached by lunch lectures or ‘*diners pensants*’, others by workshops or training. Other target groups need to be touched in the heart by interventions such as street theater, folk art, music or statements by TV or sport celebrities. To make action possible by different sectors and target groups, information and knowledge has to be managed appropriately depending on the use in each sector. Internet can play a role here, next to a range of capacity building instruments.

“Effective implementation of conservation policies can only be reached through involvement of stakeholders. There is simply no other way as key problems for biodiversity are not generated in nature conservation but in other sectors.”

Peter Skoberne, PhD, Adviser to the Government for Nature Conservation, Slovenia

From theory to practice

The challenge for the Contracting Parties, and organizations involved in the Convention, is to develop effective communication to stimulate a change in those practices that act against biodiversity conservation and the wise use of natural resources. This means that CEPA should form a central part of implementing the Convention by each Contracting Party. To get an idea what the needs in the field of CEPA are among NBSAP coordinators, the IUCN Commission

on Education and Communication conducted a needs analysis², which provided important input to the UNESCO SCBD Work Programme. It also served as the basis for a capacity building workshop and networking initiative for Asian National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan Coordinators³.

“I must say that communication and public awareness is probably 80% of our work and the rest is more this technical part, which we are normally using, but when we are not knowing what we are protecting about and why, all our work is in vain.”

Peter Skoberne, PhD, Adviser to the Government for Nature Conservation, Slovenia

Limiting factors

Common factors stated hampering the implementation of National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans:

- Limited human and financial resources
- Lack of knowledge about biodiversity priorities
- Lack of integration in other policies
- Conflicting interests
- Lack of knowledge of ‘marketing’ of biodiversity
- Not understanding the added value of CEPA
- Not understanding the complex processes involved, and hence the need for expertise
- Treating local stakeholders as ‘targets’ of conservation or education projects, instead of equal partners
- Giving local stakeholders no true determining role, resulting in short term success but no sustainable change or impact.

Needs

Coordinators see as their most important challenges in the field of CEPA:

- Realistic priorities, easy to communicate
- Developing networks
- Developing solutions for conflicting interests
- Acquiring support from decision making units in other ministries or regional authorities
- Developing strategies, methods and media to market and communicate to different target groups and the general public.

Work programme

The work programme that has been adopted by the Parties in April in The Hague (UNEP/CBD/COP/6/13/Add2) aims to provide the Parties with access to those tools and skills they need to overcome the above obstacles in the use of CEPA. The work programme consists of the following three main elements:

- Towards a global communication, education and public awareness network

² Hesselink, F.J. , “Communication Training for Asian Biodiversity Coordinators: a Needs Assessment”, Utrecht December 2000 & Presentation for the UNESCO CBD working group of Experts, Bergen Norway, 19 - 21 November 2000; see also Puyol, A., “Comunicacion Efectiva para Involucrar Actores Claves en las Estrategias de Biodiversidad, Report of an IUCN CEC training and networking workshop for South American NBSAP coordinators, Galapagos, IUCN SUR, Quito, March 1999

³ Hesselink, F.J. , Cowasjee, D. , “Communication Challenges for Asian Biodiversity Coordinators, Report of a IUCN CEC Training workshop for Asian NBSAP coordinators”, IUCN Asia, Bangkok, February 2001

- Exchange of knowledge and expertise
- Capacity building for communication, education and public awareness

The video and brochure ‘Mainstreaming Biological Diversity: the role of Communication, Education and Public Awareness’ that were developed by UNESCO, SCBD and the IUCN for COP6 of CBD were first steps towards providing the Parties with access to the network of communication professionals that exists in the form of the IUCN Commission on Education and Communication. With the continued support of these experts and increased commitment of the Parties and the Secretariat towards the use of CEPA, it has become more feasible for the Parties to put the added value of CEPA in practice.

Illustration CEPA modalities⁴

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Case studies⁵

Case “lack of communication is also communication”

⁴ Photos nrs 1 and 4 are by Gwen van Boven, Northern Sierra Madre Natural Park Conservation Project (1999-2001); photos 2 & 3 are taken from the web.

⁵ The case studies are collected by the authors through the CEC network of experts and in their work as consultants for the IUCN CEC program “Effective communication for Biodiversity” in the frame work of the CEC activities as co-leader for Action Theme III of the Pan European Biological and Landscape Strategy.

People often perceive lack of communication as an insult to their intelligence or achievements. Lack of or limited communication can then result in opposition to a policy plan or project.

To make quick progress in fulfilling its international obligations under CBD the central government of Spain commissioned the development of its national biodiversity strategy to a team of civil servants and experts. The task was to prepare a draft of the national strategy. After some nationwide studies, the plan was finalised and officially published. The regional governments and the NGOs refused to adopt the plan: it did not take into account the biodiversity actions they already had developed and the specific situations in their regions. After the next elections, the central government started a new process in consultation with the regional governments and other stakeholders to develop a NBSAP, using the first one as a draft.

Case “memos do not communicate”

Communication through formal hierarchical channels does not necessarily lead to the desired results. Often other (informal) channels can be used that are more effective.

In Laos a deadlock occurred in starting phase of the NBSAP, as it was no priority for the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. The Science Technology and Environment Agency (STEA) feared the GEF project would be in danger. During a IUCN CEC workshop the STEA director and his peers from other countries worked out a communication strategy. First STEA should assess through informal contacts the perceptions, priorities & ‘language’ the Ministry uses with regard to CBD. Then a ‘credible sender’ was identified in the Prime Ministers Office, to induce questions from the PM to the Ministry regarding progress with the GEF project. At the same time new formal communication from STEA to the Ministry was to be initiated on the GEF commitment and the priority of selection & briefing of NBSAP coordinator. The combination of informal and formal approaches finally made the Ministry give more priority to the NBSAP formulation.

Case “communication means listening”

Involving other ministries does not work when they are told what to do. It is more effective to first explore motives and opportunities they may have for developing their own biodiversity agenda.

In Slovenia after a few years of starting a process to develop a NBSAP in dialogue with major stakeholders, the process halted. The responsible civil servants found themselves in a situation where they talked more among themselves about the process rather than engaging others in it. With the help of IUCN they planned the communication with other Ministries. This included agenda setting and identification of (real) focal points (even if they were not the official ones) through roundtables. Target group managers were appointed from the Environment Agency to establish good working relationships with various ministries and assess their perceptions and opportunities in key policies. First easy policy commitments were bilaterally explored, to be followed up as a next step by ‘tougher negotiations’. The target group managers meet weekly to coordinate their actions, chaired by the Head Nature Management of the Environment Agency.

“It was a very interesting when we came to the ministry of Defense. They just said—“Do your business and we’ll do our business. But then, we said – “Yes, we would like to do so. But you know, the problem is that we’ve signed the Rio Convention, each sector should find its place. Then, we started to look for the common points. At once, we realized that for military’s exercises it is the same

to have it in April or in July. But for the birds, in this area, it is not. So, we can plan. Land have no exercises in these periods, so they started to cooperate.”

Peter Skoberne, PhD, Adviser to the Government for Nature Conservation, Slovenia

Case ‘start within your own Ministry’

The IUCN programme ‘Biodiversity Conservation: Building Capacity for Communication’ has helped the Hungarian Ministry of Environment to integrate the agendas of the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Pan European Biological and Landscape Diversity Strategy PEBLDS with that of Ramsar – the Wetland Convention. The National Authority for Nature Conservation prepared the National Strategy for Communication, Education and Public Awareness in support of Wetland Conservation which provides focus, develops networks, strategies and tools to communicate policies along with guidelines for local level implementation. The capacity to do this was developed during the project.

Case ‘management priorities dictate communication priorities’

If the success of a biodiversity intervention is for 80% dependent on a certain major stakeholder, a similar investment in communication should be made and not vice versa.

In Slovakia a deadlock occurred in protection of the endangered species *Spiranthis Spiralis*: studies, lectures & posters about the species with the message ‘returning to traditional agricultural practices’ did not have much effect. With the help of IUCN CEC a communication plan was developed aimed at establishing relationships between National Environment Association and local stakeholders to gain trust and credibility. Round tables and field visits were organized to involve villagers. It appeared that most communication investments were made in mobilizing support of villagers, and only little had been done towards the authority: this endangered the sustainability of the practice. Negotiations with the regional agricultural authorities were key to induce them to broaden the criteria for agricultural subsidies for grazing of sheep to protect the species.

Case ““assuming that you know” is the biggest communication loophole’

Whatever we know about statistics and other facts, without proper communication research we should not too easily assume what stakeholders’ perceptions and motives are.

A Regional Nature Management Authority in Slovenia came to the conclusion that one of its landscape parks was a ‘Paper’ Park. They were convinced it was because the decree establishing the park was made without any involvement of the stakeholders. They decided to develop a new decree in dialogue with the stakeholders. On the advice of IUCN CEC they first organized ‘focus groups’ to explore motives of local villagers. They found out that the villagers were not interested in a new decree! The lack of interest the authorities had shown so far was the biggest problem for the villagers. Further round tables were then organized to establish relationships with major stakeholders. This resulted in increased credibility and support. Within the Authority itself, it led to a change in policy approach towards the park.