

# PRACTITIONERS

## A Snapshot View of this Chapter

### ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

**Role:** Your overall role is to facilitate the process. You must make it easy for stakeholders to engage with the environmental assessment process. Remember you are independent. Your role is not to promote the interests of the developer. See **2.1.1** for more information.

**Teamwork:** You should work as a team with the other professionals undertaking the environmental assessment. See **2.1.2** for more

**Best Practice:** Follow the best practice checklist:

Best Practice Checklist	
Value Adding	Approach public participation so that it adds value to the environmental assessment
Inclusivity	Include all relevant stakeholders in your process
Accessibility	Give stakeholders easy access to your process
Early Engagement	Give stakeholders the opportunity to participate from the earliest stage possible
Transparency	Make sure your process is transparent and gives access to information
Fairness	Treat all stakeholders in a fair and unbiased way
Accountability	Be accountable and seek accountability from all stakeholders
Cooperative	Seek to manage conflict
Equity and Justice	Seek to redress inequity and injustice through your process
Capacity Development	Seek to develop the capacity of all stakeholders in your process
Flexibility	Design and implement your process so that can adapt to changing needs and conditions
Excellence	Strive to constantly reflect on and improve your public participation processes

See **2.1.3** for more information.

**Relationship to stakeholders:** Relate equally to all stakeholders. Give each stakeholder group equal access to participate in the process. Don't give special privileges to those

## PLANNING AND APPROACH

When you plan your public participation process, make sure you understand the project, stakeholder and resource contexts.

**Project Context:** Make sure you understand the location. It can tell you about the stakeholders, the resources they have, their networks, and their level of development. Make sure you understand the scale of the project and the possible impacts it might have. A project with extensive impacts will mean involving a wider group of stakeholders. Understand what the law and funders require in your participation process. See **2.2.2** for more information.

**Stakeholder Context:** Include all relevant stakeholders by identifying:

- Who will benefit from the development being assessed?
- Who might be negatively affected by the development?
- Who might stand in the way or obstruct the development?
- Who may have resources, such as skills and finances, to contribute to development?
- Who are the relevant decision makers in the process?

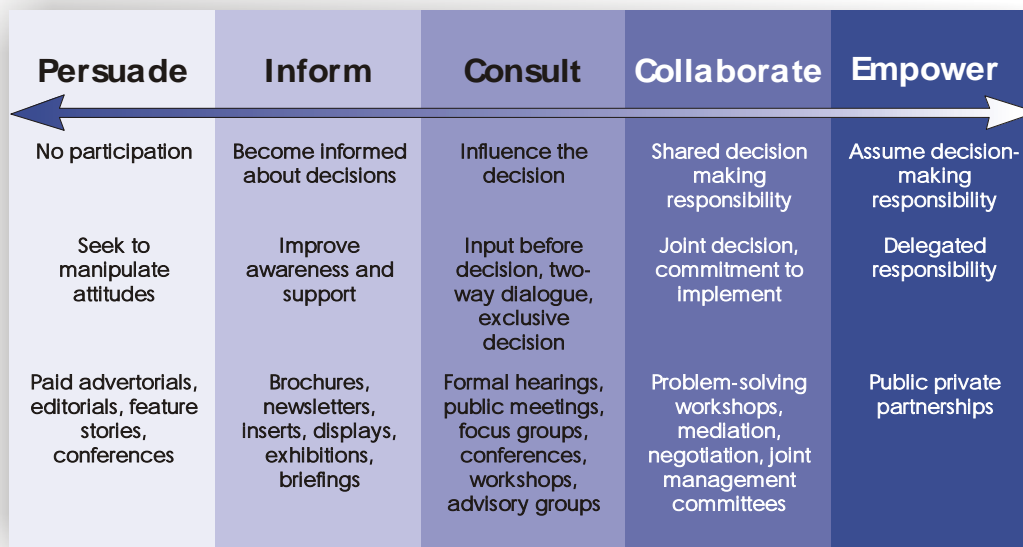
Make sure that marginalised groups, like women, young people and the poor are included. Take practical steps to ensure that these groups are involved.

Prepare a social profile to develop a good understanding of all stakeholders. The social profile must consider issues like power and authority, culture and communication, special interest groups, capacity, and previous participation experience.

See **2.2.3** for more on the stakeholder context.

**Resource Context:** Make sure that you have an adequate budget and the appropriate skills to conduct a good public participation process. See **2.2.4** for more information.

**Participation Approach and Techniques:** There are many ways to do participation. The continuum of participation shows the spectrum:



Select your approach independently and confidently so that all stakeholders can benefit from it. See **2.2.5** for more information.

**Communication:** Build communication activities into your participation plan. Understand what message you want to get out, why, to who, and how. But make sure that you are not running a public relations exercise for the development being assessed. See **2.2.6** for more information.

**Learn Lessons:** Keep track of the lessons you learn in participation processes. Build these into future plans. See **2.2.7** for more information.

## INFORMATION AND INFORMING

**Communicate:** Use one of the many ways to communicate. This can involve personal, written or electronic communication. See the annexures which provide detail. See **2.3.1** for more information.

**Be available:** Be available to stakeholders throughout the course of the environmental assessment process. See **2.3.2** for more information.

## ENGAGING

**Use all available techniques:** There are many different techniques that you can use when you engage stakeholders in an environmental assessment process. See the annexures which provide detail. Be flexible in how you implement your engagement activities. Be prepared to change your approach if your planned approach isn't working. See **2.4.1** for more information.

**Specialist studies:** Specialist studies give you a good opportunity to involve stakeholders in participatory research activities. Make sure that the specialists you work with use their studies creatively. Make sure they have a good knowledge of your participation process. See **2.4.2** for more information.

**Local knowledge:** Stakeholders have a wealth of local or indigenous knowledge to contribute to environmental assessment processes. Be respectful of it and don't take it for granted. See **2.4.3** for more information.

**Follow through:** Make sure that you accurately record all stakeholder inputs. Also ensure that stakeholders can check that you have recorded their inputs accurately. See **2.4.4** for more information.

**Issues outside the assessment:** Often stakeholders raise issues which are outside the scope of the assessment process. Do not shut stakeholders up. Listen to their concerns and gently shift their focus back to the assessment process. See **2.4.5** for more information.

## DECISION MAKING

**Inform stakeholders:** When the decision-making authorities reach a decision on the environmental assessment, inform stakeholders of it as soon as possible. Give them guidance on steps they can take if they wish to appeal against the decision. See **2.5** for more information.

## 2 PRACTITIONERS

### 2.1 Roles and Responsibilities

#### 2.1.1 Roles

You as the practitioner are at the core of public participation in the environmental assessment process. You are the critical pivot around which the process will turn. Your role is therefore one of extreme responsibility. More specifically your role is to:

- Design the public participation process;
- Organise all of the public participation activities;
- Communicate with stakeholders in order to provide them with sufficient essential information to enable their participation;
- Facilitate interactions with and between stakeholders;
- Record the inputs of stakeholders; and,
- Ensure that stakeholder input is integrated into the environmental assessment report and is communicated to the decision makers.

Remember your overall role is to facilitate the process – to make it easy for stakeholders to engage with the environmental assessment process.

**Remember, you are independent:** You have a responsibility to ensure that all stakeholders participate fairly in the environmental assessment process. They must all make a fair contribution to the outcome. The only way you can ensure this is to remain independent of any of the interests. You have a duty to serve the common interest. Your role is **NOT** to promote the interests of developer even though they pay for your services.

#### 2.1.2 Your role within the professional team

In more complex and larger environmental assessment processes, it is appropriate to have a practitioner or team who is dedicated to dealing only with the public participation process. The public participation and the environmental assessment practitioners must work together as a team. They are joint facilitators of the process, with the public participation practitioners having the primary responsibility for the stakeholder engagement process. Respect the independence and integrity of the public participation practitioner within the team at all times. See Section 2.2.4 below for the skills that a public participation practitioner and other needs.

#### **Case Study:**

In the environmental assessment of container handling in the Port of Durban, South Africa, the technical and process professionals worked as a closely integrated team. They approached the process as a joint activity, and saw their roles collectively as being the process facilitators. This created a seamless and productive working relationship. This also created a single point of reference for stakeholders.

### 2.1.3 Principles of behaviour

Bad behaviour practices can affect public participation in environmental assessments. Review the list of inappropriate roles. Then follow the checklist of best practice that follows.

#### Caution: Some Inappropriate Roles to Watch Out For

You need to be alert to your power as a practitioner. Also take note of the power of other stakeholders. Power can be destructive when used in the wrong way. Take note of the following types and ways to deal with the misuse of power:

**Heavy Handed Authorities:** Government authorities can be heavy handed in how they exercise power. This can undermine environmental assessment processes. Take active steps to encourage an attitude of empathy and respect by decision-makers. Encourage them to buy into the groundrules of the participation process and accept that it is independent for good reason.

**Dominating Clients:** Clients can become too involved in attempting to direct the environmental assessment and public participation processes. This can undermine the independence of the professional team. You need to give guidance to clients on why it is important to them that your independence is not undermined.

**Biased Practitioners:** As an environment assessment practitioner, you must encourage and create opportunities for debate. You must actively work against any one party being unfairly biased. Use independent facilitators to ensure an absence of bias.

**Intellectual dominators:** When you, environmental assessment practitioners, specialists or developers use inaccessible jargon, unfamiliar languages or behave in a way that is superior, you will encourage a bad participation process. Elsewhere in this handbook there are tips on how to overcome this.

**Gatekeepers:** Be wary of self-appointed leaders of civil society groups. They often insist on being the only point of contact between practitioners and the community. See the section on social profiles for guidance on how to avoid this.

#### Best Practice Checklist

<b>Value Adding</b>	Approach public participation so that it adds value to the environmental assessment
<b>Inclusivity</b>	Include all relevant stakeholders in your process
<b>Accessibility</b>	Give stakeholders easy access to your process
<b>Early Engagement</b>	Give stakeholders the opportunity to participate from the earliest stage possible
<b>Transparency</b>	Make sure your process is transparent and gives access to information
<b>Fairness</b>	Treat all stakeholders in a fair and unbiased way
<b>Accountability</b>	Be accountable and seek accountability from all stakeholders
<b>Cooperative</b>	Seek to manage conflict

## Best Practice Checklist

<b>Equity and Justice</b>	Seek to redress inequity and injustice through your process
<b>Capacity Development</b>	Seek to develop the capacity of all stakeholders in your process
<b>Flexibility</b>	Design and implement your process so that you can adapt to changing needs and conditions
<b>Excellence</b>	Strive to constantly reflect on and improve your public participation processes

### 2.1.4 Appropriate relationships between various roleplayers

As the facilitator of the public participation process within an environmental assessment exercise you fill a role of great responsibility, requiring the highest standards of professional integrity. The principles set out above need to be your guide. They give direction to how you should relate to the different stakeholder groups in your process.

The core principle guiding your relationship to developers, government authorities and civil society stakeholders is equality. Each stakeholder group should have equal access to participate in the process. This means that you cannot prejudice any one stakeholder. Equally, you cannot allow any stakeholder with greater access to resources like money or information to undermine the participation of others. It may mean that you need to give special attention to marginalised groups, like poor communities or women, as they may be disadvantaged in the process. By giving them extra resources and capacity you will equalise their participation.

**Caution:**

Be watchful in your relationship with the developer. Inevitably developers are your client and may feel that they deserve special treatment. Do not fall into this trap. By giving them special treatment you will undermine the integrity of your process, prejudice the participation of other stakeholders and damage the professionalism of the outcome of the environmental assessment process.

**Tip:**

Remember you are in all likelihood an outsider in the stakeholder community. Respect the community and its culture. You may be seen as an alien and need to take steps to build the confidence and trust of stakeholders. Spend time with people. Take time for informal conversations. If you can, stay in the community. Recruit a local person or organisation to assist you in entering and engaging with a community. Above all, make sure you follow the appropriate local traditions, conventions and protocols.

**Case Study**

In the assessment process on container handling in South Africa's Port of Durban, the project team was explicit in publicly treating all stakeholders equally. This included criticising the client's behaviour at one point in the process. This helped to build trust and confidence among stakeholders. It also created an atmosphere which encouraged deep and constructive dialogue.

## 2.2 Planning Your Approach

### 2.2.1 Introduction

**Use the Template:**

Go to **Error! Reference source not found.** It contains a template that can be used in both the design and assessment of participation processes. It is a useful checklist for when you design your process.

When you design the public participation aspect of your environmental assessment process, make sure you have all the necessary information you need in place. This will provide a framework for you to decide what kind of process you should adopt, who should be involved, how they should be involved, what methods to use, and how the participation process will link to the assessment process. Understand the following three elements well when you set about planning your process:

- **The Project Context:** What kind of development is being assessed? What is its scale and scope? Where is it located? What does the law in that area tell you about participation?
- **The Stakeholder Context:** What do you know about the society around the proposed development? Who are the stakeholders? What do you know about them?
- **The Resources Context:** What budget do you have for public participation? What is your timeframe? What skills do you have?

When you have answers to these questions, you can move on to designing the process that best suits you.

## 2.2.2 The Project Context

### a) Project Location

The physical location of an environmental assessment gives us clues about the stakeholders associated with it. Consider these questions:

- Is the assessment in an isolated place where the community lacks resources and is underdeveloped? What is the level of development within the community? What economic activities does it engage in and how is land currently used?
- Does the community have networks and linkages to a broader geographic region and beyond?
- Is the assessment in a highly developed area with a complex social make up? What are the relationships between the stakeholders?

### b) Scale and possible impacts

Consider the scale and magnitude of the potential impact of the development that you are assessing. Is the development:

- Small and highly local in its impacts?
- Small but with a broader impact?
- Large with an impact that affects a broader region?
- Strategic and relevant to the broader region, and possibly the country or beyond?
- Linear and crosses regions, jurisdictions and countries?

A difference of scale means different stakeholders to involve. Developments with potentially significant impacts may require more intensive involvement of stakeholders than developments with minor impacts.

#### Tip

The broader the scale and impact of the development, the broader the scale of stakeholder groups to involve. This means that in the case of strategic or regional scale processes, the focus should fall mainly on regional or very large-scale stakeholder organisations. In local level processes, focus on organisations within the local area of focus, while not forgetting broader scale organisations where these have a direct interest in, or are affected by, the area of the assessment. Scale up or down from this principal.

#### Case Study

In the Sasol Natural Gas Project environmental assessment it was agreed with the Mozambican government that the main process of involving stakeholders would extend down only as far as district level stakeholders. This was mainly because of fears of creating unrealistic expectations with lower level stakeholders. But the latter group was engaged during a specialist study on socio-economic issues.

### c) Legal and Contractual Requirements

You need to adhere to all of the relevant laws in the area as well as contractual conditions. Some times the law provides a minimum standard for public participation.

Can you go beyond the basic minimum on your process? Be guided by these questions:

- What laws and regulations about public participation are there in the area?
- If there aren't laws, what international or industry guidelines on public participation can you follow?
- Are there any specific contractual requirements such as those imposed by financial institutions financing the project?

### 2.2.3 The Stakeholder Context

Think about the stakeholders that are relevant to your environmental assessment process. Who are they? What do you know about them? Take the following steps to get the answers.

#### a) Relevant Stakeholders

Work through the questions below to ensure that you cover all relevant stakeholders. Think about the scale of your process. Think about local, regional, national, continental and global scales.

- Who will benefit from the development being assessed?
- Who might be negatively affected by the development?
- Who might stand in the way or obstruct the development?
- Who may have resources, such as skills and finances, to contribute to development?
- Who are the relevant decision makers in the process?

#### Tip: Stakeholder Information

For efficient and effective stakeholder participation you will need to compile and maintain a database of key stakeholder information. Give it regular and ongoing attention. Use an effective computer database programme and give a member of the environmental assessment team the dedicated responsibility for doing so.

Make sure that the database includes the following:

- Basic information for each contact: name, title, organisation, capacity, postal and physical addresses, telephone contact numbers, email address.
- A category to which each stakeholder is allocated, such as national, provincial and local government, community organisations, business, trade unions, NGOs, and so on.
- A record of every contact made with each stakeholder. Provide information on meetings attended, correspondence, and other less formal contact.

When you start a new process assess the validity of information in your existing database. Update information by making contact with stakeholders, advertising in the media for stakeholders to become involved in the process or through referring to databases developed for other projects.

#### Case Study

In the environmental assessment on the Sasol Natural Gas project, there was a very varied set of stakeholders. They covered two countries and came from many different social, political and economic groups. The process needed to involve all relevant stakeholders. At the same time it needed to be efficient. The project team conducted a diversified and textured process. This allowed all groups to be involved in different ways.

#### b) Marginalised Groups

Be alert to the fact that many of those who remain silent in environmental assessment processes do not do so by choice. Groups and individuals are often marginalised socially. They are in many cases unable to participate, or find it difficult to do so.

This may be because cultural beliefs and practices, or because of gender discrimination. Age, occupation and physical disability can also lead to marginalisation. Hierarchies within stakeholder groups are also significant, as well as important times, days of the week and commemorative periods.

Women are a particularly marginalised group within the community. They have a vital role to play as stakeholders in the process of sustainable development in our region. A concern is that women often have difficulty in finding the time to be involved with such activities due to family and work commitments. Also, women are often discriminated against by men in their communities or organisations. As a result, they are often reluctant to participate. Make an effort to ensure the active involvement of women from the range of civil society groups, not least women's organisations.

#### Case Study

A concern expressed by observers of the environmental assessment for the Sun International hotel development at the Victoria Falls in Zambia was that very few, if any, poor people participated in the process. They said that poor people had other priorities like the desperate need to earn a living. They also said that people were called to meetings and events using advertising in local newspapers, which was not the way people in local communities were used to being mobilised.

#### Case Study

In reflecting on the assessment process on the Popa Falls Hydropower scheme in Namibia, participants said that the local chief dominated the views of local people. This may have intimidated them, causing them not to raise concerns that could be seen as opposing the project.

Take the following practical steps to deal with marginalisation in your environmental assessment processes:

- **Do a social profile:** The profile will help you to identify the groups which are particularly marginalised and why.
- **Design for the marginalised:** The social profile will identify issues that need to be addressed in the design of the participation process. Identify practical ways to deal with the marginalisation factors when you design your process. Take guidance from members of the marginalised groups, or well informed advisors. Conduct separate activities for marginalised groups. Focus groups which bring a small number of representatives together for a dialogue can be useful
- **Be sensitive:** Be sensitive when you implement your process. Ensure that marginalised groups are constantly considered. Address their needs adequately.
- **Get support:** Identify a local specialist or lay person who can

#### When groups don't participate:

You may be forced to accept that in certain instances there will be important stakeholders who do not participate in your process. This would be in cases beyond your control. Social and cultural pressures would be such that they do not participate. This is unfortunate and to the detriment of both your process and the environmental assessment exercise. At the very least give an account of this situation in your report of the process. Explain why key groups have not participated.

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help you. Draw on people who have skills and experience in working with the marginalised groups you want to engage with.

- **Protect the vulnerable:** Protect vulnerable marginalised groups who are threatened or intimidated by other stakeholders. Create separate opportunities to engage with them. Negotiate with other stakeholders to secure the right of marginalised groups to participate. Seek legal protection for them when their rights are threatened.

### Lawbreakers?:

Do you engage with stakeholders who are very relevant to your project, but are breaking the law? These could be illegal miners, or poachers who need access to a natural resource for their survival. Illegal stakeholders may be opposed to your client's development as it may threaten their livelihoods. The client in turn may pressurize you not to engage with them.

Remember you are an independent facilitator. The legal status of stakeholders does not necessarily make them less relevant to your environmental assessment. Engage with all stakeholders equally. Allow all voices to be heard to ensure a thorough and useful process of stakeholder engagement.

### c) Prepare a Social Profile

A social profile is a useful tool for gathering and analysing information on stakeholders. It is a document that pulls together key information on stakeholders.

#### Tip: Ways to prepare a Social Profile

We can obtain the information we need to prepare a social profile in these ways:

- Find out if social profiles have already been prepared in the area. Obtain permission to use them if they have.
- Review existing information in public documents available from government or other agencies. Also make use of any research undertaken by academic institutions.
- Consult with experts on the stakeholders you are focusing on to gather information.
- Engage with stakeholders in individual or group discussions.

Be careful not to create undue expectations when undertaking the social profile activity. Be direct and accurate in the information about the activity that you are undertaking.

#### Case Study

A key activity in Transvaal and Delagoa Colliery environmental assessment process in South Africa was the preparation of a social profile. Through it, the project team developed a refined understanding of the relevant stakeholders and the relationships between them. This gave them vital information to design an improved participation process.

A social profile should cover the following issues:

### **Power and Authority:**

Understand and be sensitive to the power relationships within the stakeholder groups. The following are key issues to investigate:

- What role does government play amongst the stakeholders? What is the power of government structures, representatives and officials in relation to other stakeholders?
- What traditional systems of power, government and authority are there? What is the relationship between these and the formal structures of government? Does the local community attach importance to the traditional systems?
- What is the role and authority of traditional leaders within the community? Do they have significant power?
- Who are the dominant individuals and groups amongst stakeholders or a community? Do they have the support of the rest of the community? Are there groups contesting for control and power within the community? Are particular groups excluded from access to power within the community?
- Which groups or individuals are influential amongst the stakeholders or community? Which groups, by contrast, are important to your process? Do the two groups coincide? How can you conduct your process so as to ensure that both those that are influential within the community, and those who are important to your process, are adequately and fully involved?
- What are the correct channels to use when you engage with stakeholders?

### **Culture and Communication:**

The following questions are important to explore:

- Do religious or spiritual practices play an important role? In what way?
- What languages are spoken? What would be the appropriate language for communication in the environmental assessment process?
- Are there specific cultures, traditions or rituals that are important? How might these have an effect on the process?
- What mechanisms of communication are there in the community? What kind of electronic media, if any, can be used to communicate with the community? What are the levels of literacy and can written materials be usefully used?

#### **Tip:**

Take care not to judge the cultures of the stakeholders you engage with. Often you may find a clash between your values and those of stakeholders involved in the process. You may have to accommodate customary practices, which, for example, discriminate against women. Your role is not to change these cultures. It is to ensure good stakeholder engagement in your environmental assessment process. But remember; ensure that you hear the voices of marginalised groups.

### **Special Interest Groups:**

You can develop an understanding of marginalised special interest groups by addressing the following questions:

- Are there special interest groups that need to be noted and incorporated into your process?
- What is the status and role of women within the targeted stakeholder groups? How can they be incorporated into the process?
- What is the status and role of young people within the targeted stakeholder groups? What role can they play?
- Are there any particular groups who are specifically marginalised or given a lower status within the targeted stakeholder groups? How should they be dealt with?
- What organisations are there that can help you to gain access to marginalised groups? Often religious organisations are a good way to access women who might otherwise not participate.

See Section b) above for more.

### **Capacity to Participate:**

Stakeholders need the capacity to be involved in environmental assessment processes:

- What capacity to participate do community and civil society groups have? Do they have access to time, finances, knowledge, and skills to enable them to get involved? Do they lack access to these resources and so have limited capacity to get involved? What can be done to overcome this problem?

#### **Caution:**

When you implement capacity building activities be careful that they do not promote one point of view. This can be seen as a form of "brainwashing". Be fair to all points of view when conducting capacity building activities around the environmental assessment issues.

#### **Case Study**

In the Sasol Natural Gas project, funds were set aside to cover the travel, accommodation and subsistence costs of participants in Mozambique. Without this support, many government officials would either have had to cover these costs personally, as there were no government funds available, or not participate at all.

### **History of Prior Activity:**

Understand the prior experience of stakeholders:

- Do the stakeholders have experience of involvement in environmental assessment or related participatory processes?
- What lessons can be learned from this previous experience?

## 2.2.4 The Resources Context

Public participation requires finances, time and skills. Develop a good understanding of these elements before you design your process:

- What budget do you have for public participation?
- What is your timeframe?
- What skills do you have?

### Skills for Facilitators

Independent facilitators of public participation in environmental assessment processes need many skills and attributes. These include:

- **High ethical and professional standards:** The facilitator or mediator must act with confidence in their independent role in a process.
- **Research and analysis capability:** Facilitators need to develop a good understanding of the political and socio-economic dynamics within the context of the assessment process.
- **Design skill:** Facilitators need the ability to design participation processes for diverse circumstances.
- **Project management and administration:** Facilitators must deliver the diverse range of participation activities on time, within budget and to the requisite quality.
- **Liaison ability:** The facilitator must comfortably and freely liaise with a wide range of stakeholder groups.
- **Facilitation:** The facilitator needs working skills in the range of facilitation approaches and tools.
- **Mediation:** The ability to mediate in situations of dispute is an additional capability that would be welcomed of facilitators. Many facilitators, however, are not skilled to engage in mediation activity. An external mediator may need to be used.
- **Documentation:** The independent facilitator needs the ability to produce a wide range of useful and accessible documents.
- **Public Speaking:** The facilitator must be able to present complex ideas to groups of stakeholders in an immediate and accessible way.

## 2.2.5 Participation Approaches and Techniques

There are many ways to do participation. Choose an approach and techniques that suit your needs.

The International Association for Public Participation has developed a continuum of public participation approaches. You can see from Figure that there are diverse approaches to participation ranging from influencing at one end of the spectrum in which there is an attempt to manipulate the views and behaviour of stakeholders, to empowering at the other when decision making power and authority is transferred to one set of stakeholders.

Influencing or empowering – the two ends of the continuum – are not appropriate approaches for environmental assessment processes. Stakeholders must be entitled to participate in

### Case Study

The project team in the Transvaal and Delagoa Colliery environmental assessment process held regular meetings with a core group of stakeholders. This gave them valuable direction on appropriate communication and participation activities.

environmental assessment processes. Influencing is not genuine participation. In most countries in the SADC, decision making responsibility lies with government officials and empowering is thus not an appropriate approach.

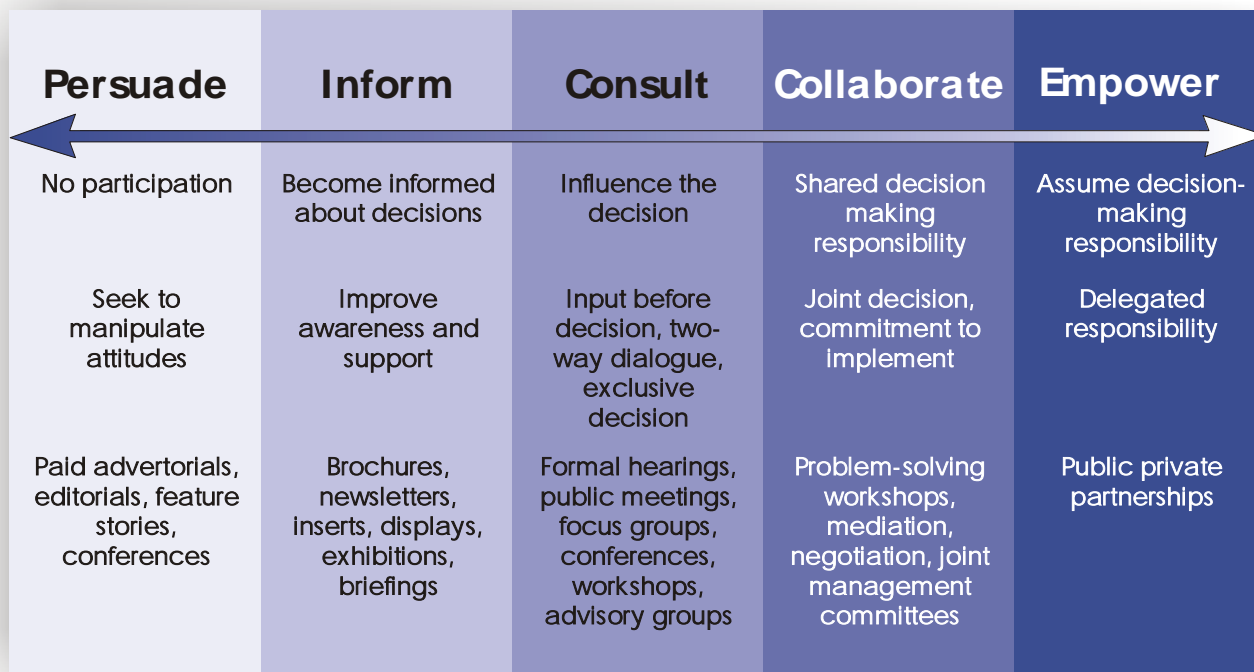


Figure 2: Continuum of public participation approaches

Think about how you can use the other three approaches. They are not exclusive of one another, so that within one environmental assessment process, it is possible to conduct informing, consulting and collaborating activities. The focus of the participation activities in most environmental assessment processes falls on informing and consulting. But you could design your process to seek as much agreement as possible among stakeholders before submitting your environmental assessment report to government decision-makers. In this case you would add the collaboration approach to your participation mix.

**Input from Stakeholders**  
 Involve stakeholders in the design of your process. They may have good ideas as to what process approach will work best in their circumstances. They are also likely to support the process more than if they aren't involved in the planning. Involve stakeholder leaders when you are designing the process.

Figure gives you a feel for the kind of activities that are typical for each of the approaches. These are discussed in much greater detail in Annexure B, which provides tips and guidelines on a range of techniques. Look also at Annexure E, which includes another extensive guide to techniques. Called the Participation Toolbox, it was created by the International Association for Public Participation.

**Do it right!:**

Select your approach confidently. Do not be pressurised by the developer to choose an inappropriate method, or to take short cuts. Developers more often than not see environmental assessment processes as a “necessary evil” – something they have to do, but would prefer not to. You may need to motivate strongly for a meaningful stakeholder engagement approach. Remind the developer that a bad participation process can have serious consequences, including:

- The authorities could reject their application because there has been inadequate stakeholder engagement in the process;
- The authorities may approve their proposal but they may lack the endorsement of stakeholders and so not have a “social license to operate”;
- Critical issues may not be raised by stakeholders because they are not adequately involved. This could lead to flaws in the subsequent development;
- The development could lack many value-adding improvements which would have been identified through a good stakeholder engagement process; and,
- The developer may not be able to build long-term and mutually beneficial relationships with stakeholders.

**Case Study**

In the assessment process for the Popa Falls Hydropower project in Namibia, the developer came into the process with a history of difficult experiences of engaging with stakeholders. This time around it aimed to learn from these experiences. It consciously aimed to support a constructive process of stakeholder engagement. This had a positive effect on the environment within which the assessment process was conducted.

## 2.2.6 Communication Plans

Don't forget about a communication strategy. You need to design a communication strategy as part of your participation approach. When you do this think through the following questions:

- What messages or information do you need to get out?
- Do you need to get different information out at different stages of the assessment process?
- Who needs to receive information?
- What is their level of understanding and literacy?
- What access to media and technology do they have?
- When does the information need to be disseminated?
- What kind of language style would be appropriate?
- What media would be best to use?
- Should the communication call on stakeholders to take any particular action?

**Case Study**

In the environmental assessment process for the Skorpion Zinc mine in Namibia, there was an increase in the frequency and diversity of communications as the project proceeded. Newspapers, radio, leaflets, local newsletters, word of mouth and direct contact with organisations and individuals were used.

**Caution:**

Communication must support and reinforce participation in the environmental assessment process. It must not be confused with public relations activity. This tries to convince stakeholders of a particular point of view. The role of the environmental assessment team is to be independent and not promote one point of view. The information you distribute must be objective and informative. It must help participants to understand the issues, to clarify their role in the process, and help them to reach their own conclusions.

## 2.2.7 Previous Experience

An essential guide to planning your process should be the lessons you and others have learned in previous processes. Put in place a system that will help you to reflect on your processes and identify successes and failures. Record these lessons in a way that will make it easy to review them from time to time as you start up or engage in new processes.

## 2.3 Information and Informing

### 2.3.1 Communication Techniques

There are many ways to get the message out. This can range from speaking personally to individuals through to hi-tech electronic communication. Regardless of the type of technology you use, it is vital that you communicate simply and accessibly. Have a look at **Error! Reference source not found.** It gives tips and guidelines on ways to get your message out.

There are sections on:

- How to communicate
- Accessible communication
- Brochures
- Newsletters
- Information distribution points
- Media coverage and advertising and newspaper inserts
- Mailed flyers
- Videos
- Websites and email
- SMS (Short Message System)
- Radio and community theatre

### 2.3.2 Contact Person

As a practitioner, you need to be available to stakeholders throughout the environmental assessment processes.

Make sure that you or your contact person are easy to get hold of. Make your contact details well known to stakeholders whenever you have the opportunity.

**TIP:**

The contact person needs to be:

- Someone with good liaison skills.
- Well briefed on the process and issues.
- Committed and enthusiastic about the process and public involvement.
- Well informed on the process.

## 2.4 Engaging

### 2.4.1 Engagement Techniques

Go to **Error! Reference source not found.** and **Error! Reference source not found.** for a guide on the wide range of approaches and techniques at your disposal.

Be Flexible. Circumstances can change during your process. Your well-intentioned plans may need to be changed because of new conditions or stakeholder demands. You need to embark on your process with a degree of flexibility. This will allow you to adopt different approaches and techniques from those that you initially planned.

#### Case Study

In a process focused on rehabilitating a coal mine in South Africa, the project team realised that they were not reaching out appropriately to stakeholders. They recognised that a broad process of awareness raising was necessary in the local community. With the enthusiastic support of the clients they changed the direction of the process. They adopted creative and innovative approach, using township theatre and school drama workshops.

### 2.4.2 Specialist studies

Certain specialist studies that are part of the environmental assessment process provide good opportunities to deepen public participation. This is the case in particular for studies that focus on local communities and other stakeholders. For example, these could be studies on social impacts, health impacts, and economic development.

Encourage the specialists doing the studies to include participatory research methods. These could include surveys, interviews, focus groups, and field visits involving stakeholders. The specialists can also help your process by providing information about the environmental assessment process to the stakeholders they engage with. They could distribute documents and leaflets, or give briefings to stakeholder groups.

#### Caution

Make sure that the specialists are fully aware of the broader public participation process. They must ensure that their activities do not work against your work in the stakeholder engagement process. Give them a good briefing on the process.

#### Tip

Specialists involved in environmental assessment processes often have to be part of your public events. Make sure that any presentations or inputs they give are appropriate to the audience, accessible and understandable. Do a run through with them before the event to check that it will be appropriate. Give them feedback and advice on how to tailor their presentations for the audience.

### Case Study

In the process on the Sasol Natural Gas project in Mozambique the team used extensive participatory research techniques in a specialist socio-economic study. This allowed grassroots stakeholders to get involved.

## 2.4.3 Local Knowledge

Stakeholders have a wealth of local or indigenous knowledge to contribute to environmental assessment processes. Don't take this knowledge for granted. It will emerge slowly, and only if you are sensitive to the needs, traditions and culture of the stakeholders you are working with. Ask for permission to use the knowledge. You may need to pay for it, just as you would have to pay specialist consultants for their knowledge.

### Tip:

In rural areas, older women carry much knowledge about the area and its history. Involve them in the process so that you can draw on their valuable input.

## 2.4.4 Follow Through

Good participation means ensuring stakeholder involvement at all stages of the assessment process. As a practitioner you need to ensure that there is ongoing contact and follow through with stakeholders. This builds trust and confidence in the process, and sends out the message that you respect and value stakeholder input in your environmental assessment. Follow these guidelines:

- Ensure that you accurately record and file all stakeholder comments. This includes comments made in public meetings, workshops, individual consultations, focus group discussions, telephone or other verbal inputs, as well as written submissions received by mail, email or other means.
- Verify your record of stakeholder comments. You can do this by giving the public an opportunity to review the documentation of comments received to ensure their accuracy. Alternatively, verify your record of comments at events with stakeholders.
- Acknowledge in writing all written comments that have been received.
- Where necessary clarify comments made by stakeholders to ensure their accuracy and meaning.
- When stakeholders request specific information, or answers to specific questions, make every effort to respond to their requests. If possible, make the information available to other stakeholders so that all involved in a process have equal access to information.
- If necessary, conduct additional public engagements if these will result in good follow through. If you or the assessment practitioner produce considerable volumes of information in your assessment report that needs to be explained, consider setting up additional meetings or workshops to communicate with stakeholders.

### Tip:

Accept that certain people will hold with their views, despite evidence or facts to the contrary. Acknowledge their views and record them.

### 2.4.5 Issues outside the Scope of the Assessment

Stakeholders often raise issues that are outside of the scope of the environmental assessment process. This could be because they are making use of the opportunity to promote a particular issue, or because there may not be sufficient other opportunities for them to do so. Be sensitive. Identify these issues. Acknowledge them when they are raised and undertake to channel them to the relevant parties, usually government. Actively show that that you have heard and understood the issues raised, but be firm about the scope of your process.

Do not shut stakeholders up when they raise outside issues. Rather give them a sympathetic hearing and then move the discussion back to your focus.

## 2.5 Decision Making

As the practitioner you have an important role in assisting the flow of information once a decision has been taken. Once the authorities communicate their decision to you, make sure of the following:

- Inform all stakeholders immediately about the decision;
- Provide stakeholders with information about their rights and how they can go about making an appeal against the decision if they do not agree;
- Assist stakeholders with access to information they may require in preparing appeals; and,
- Provide all of the information in an accessible format.