

Public Participation in Environmental Decision- making

Definition of public participation

Continuous, two-way communication process which involves **promoting full public understanding of the processes and mechanisms** through which environmental problems and needs are investigated and solved by the responsible agency; **keeping the public fully informed** about the status and progress of studies and implications of project, plan, program, or policy formulation and evaluation of activities; and **actively soliciting from all concerned citizens** their opinions and perceptions of objectives and needs and their preferences regarding resources use and alternative development or management strategies and any other information and assistance relative to the decision

- Provides both information “**feed-forward**” and “**feedback**”

Merits and Demerits of Public participation

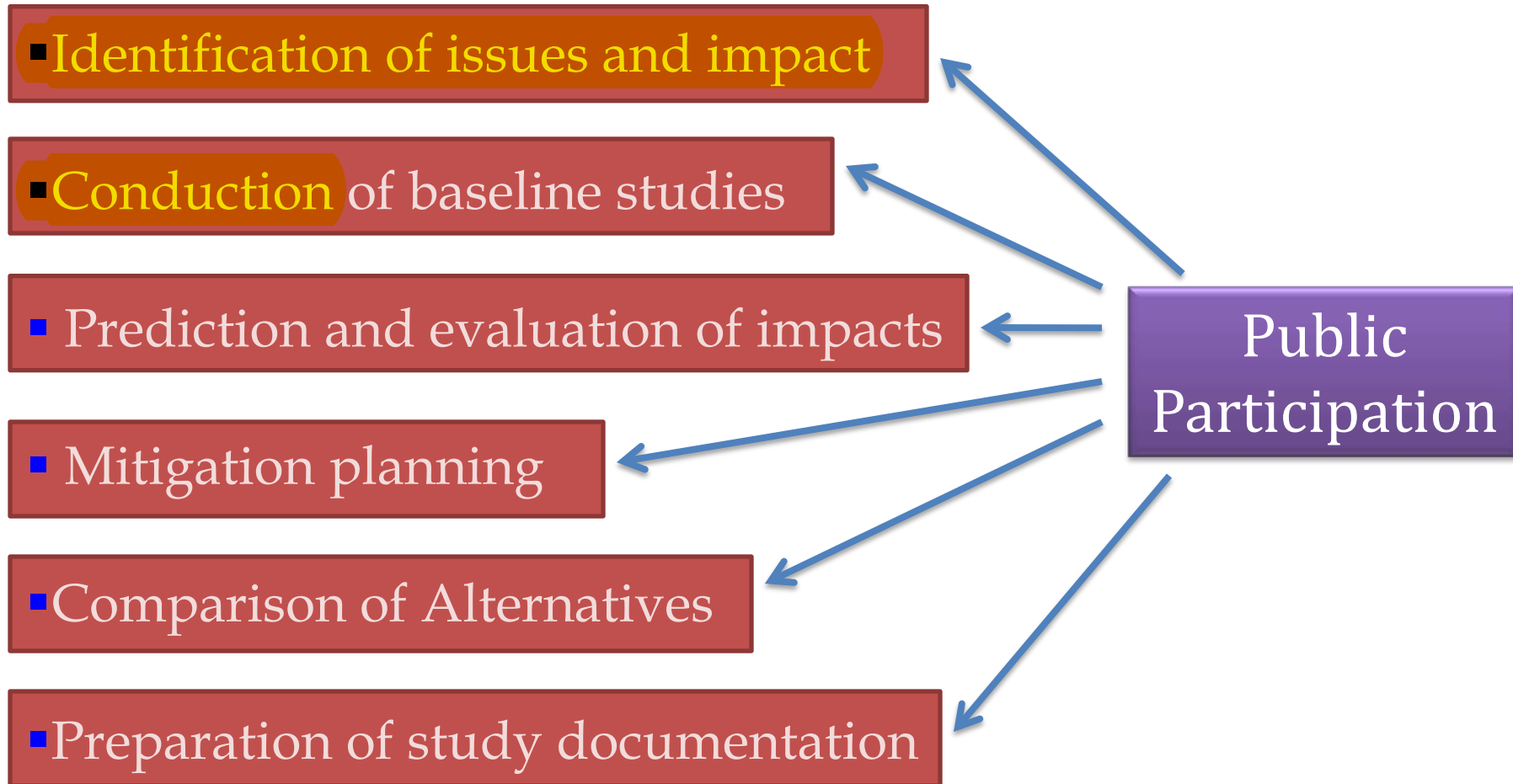
Merits

- Can serve as a mechanism for exchange of information, may provide a source of info. on local values, can aid in establishing the credibility of the planning and assessment process
- Added accountability placed on political and administrative decision makers to adhere to required procedures

Demerits

- Potential for confusion of the issues, possible to receive erroneous information resulting from lack of knowledge of the participants.
- Uncertainty of the results of the process, potential delay and increased project cost

Public Participation in EIA



Planning Public Participation

The following elements should be addressed

- Delineation of objectives of public participation during the pertinent EIA stages
- Identification of publics anticipated to be involved in the pertinent EIA stages
- Selection of public participation techniques which are most appropriate for meeting the objectives and communicating with the publics.
- Development of a practical plan for implementing the public participation program.

General Objectives of Public Participation

- Information dissemination, education and liaison
- Identification of problems, needs and important values
- Idea generation and problem-solving
- Reaction and feedback on proposals
- Evaluation of alternatives
- Conflict resolution by consensus

How to Identify Publics?

A “public” is any person, or group of people, that has a distinctive interest or stake in an issue.

One approach is to target those persons who believe themselves to be affected by the study outcome on the following bases:

- Proximity
- Economic
- Use
- Social
- Values

Individuals or groups may step forward and indicate an interest to participate (“self-identification”)

Consulting with known representatives to recommend others who should be involved

Selection of Public Participation Techniques

- *Public hearings*
- *Public meetings*
- *Informal, small group meetings*
- *Information and coordination seminars*
- *Forum of other agencies or groups*
- *Operating field offices*
- *Local planning visits*
- *Field trips and site visits*
- *Public displays and model demonstrations*
- *Workshops*
- *Charettes (mini-workshop aimed to resolve conflict)*
- *Special committees*

Additional techniques: *interviews, hotline, surveys, participatory television* etc.

Practical Considerations for Consultations

1. Be concerned about the details

- handout materials
- registration of attendees, note their willingness to speak
- informing media representatives regarding the project
- Panel members should arrive well ahead of scheduled time
- personally greet local officials/residents who helped in the past
- start meeting on time
- hold Q&A until the last, do it in a manner to encourage participation
- allow sufficient time for Q&A and discussions

Practical Considerations for Consultations

2. Carefully plan the meeting agenda

- Always check out the agenda before starting
- Limit speakers only when necessary, fair chance to all
- Never put down or ridicule a speaker (courtesy is necessary)
- Leave enough time for hesitant people to come forward
- Become a facilitator, not a judge
- If people seem uncomfortable with the way things are going, ask for comments and deal with them directly
- Take appropriate measures if the meeting is running too long

3. Keep data presentations simple

The purpose is to inform, not to confuse or disillusion. Use simple visual aids

Practical Considerations for Consultations

4. The speaker/facilitator of the event should possess oratory skills as well as technical expertise

- The ability to speak is not the only trait that on which the speaker is selected
- He should be able to answer questions quickly from a an audience in which the sentiment is mixed or opposed (develop a positive relation with the audience)

5. Be familiar with the area

6. Be earnest, sincere and willing to work on problems with individual groups