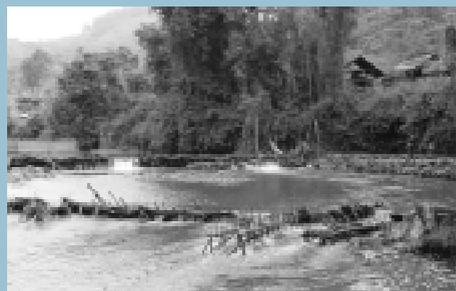


Approach Papers



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The role of communication

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SUMMARY

Effective communication with people is vital for the conservation of biodiversity because the loss of biodiversity is often caused by humans. Planning for conservation requires managing communication to gain the commitment and cooperation of people who use, have an impact on, or conserve biodiversity. This is particularly relevant in South and Southeast Asia, since many countries have developed or are developing National Biodiversity Strategies and Plans. All countries have adopted consultative processes, although these differ in extent and nature. None of the countries have used strategically planned communication activities to their full potential to support the preparation, presentation and implementation of NBSAPs. Overall, communication efforts have been ad hoc; as a result, most NBSAPs lack the support from government and various sectors that is needed for success.

There are two common assumptions: that awareness about biodiversity issues ensures conservation action and commitment; and that the public will readily accept biodiversity plans if they are promoted through strong communication programs. This is not usually the case, however, due to poor communication planning in all phases of plan preparation and implementation.

Using communication effectively in NBSAPs requires better analysis of the issues and the required remedies, better understanding of the target groups, a clear understanding of the communication objectives, and the identification of appropriate means and media for consultative processes and communication products. Communication also needs to be seen as more than mere information transfer or marketing and promotion, and communicators have to face the challenge of dealing with complex biodiversity issues in varied circumstances and audiences.

To ensure the success of Asia's NBSAPs, communication and communicators should be an integral part of the planning process at all stages. Effective communication underpins a good strategy, and will ensure the commitment of those who are involved with its preparation and implementation.

Key issues:

- Overall, communication efforts have been ad hoc and poorly resourced in Asia's biodiversity planning initiatives, which has undermined the success of the plans and strategies developed.
- Communication must be part of the entire process of plan preparation and implementation and not merely used to "sell" the products.
- Effective communication needs to be viewed as a two-way process.

Introduction

Communication is something everyone does, and hence may seem too obvious to write about. In simple terms, communication here is defined as a two-way process of information sharing, reflection and feedback. It is an interactive process to develop shared understanding of and strategies for common problems. Effective communication is vital for the conservation of biodiversity and requires careful planning and management. It underpins all efforts to gain the cooperation of various government sectors, business and community groups, and to bring commitment to implementation.

Many countries in the world are engaged in the preparation or implementation of National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans to better conserve and manage their national biodiversity. An effective NBSAP is one that is accepted by different social groups because their representatives have been involved in its preparation. If this is to be achieved, communication has to be strategically managed throughout plan preparation. Yet, in most cases, little explicit thought is given to how communication is best achieved during this process.

Communication is generally perceived only as a way of convincing people that the conservation of biological diversity is important. An assumption is made that society does not value nature, and the preferred solution is to impart information about this value through schools or the mass media. This is one-way communication, and has many limitations. What is important in NBSAP preparation is 'interactive communication' so that feedback and learning become the main forces in shaping the messages.

Many countries of South and Southeast Asia have developed, or are in the process of developing, strategies and plans for the conservation of biological

diversity at the national or provincial level. At one time or another, all of them have faced the problem of ensuring the collaboration of the varied parties involved in biodiversity use and conservation.

Overall in Asia, there has been an “encouraging trend towards greater consultation” in preparing the NBSAPs, as reported in the workshop on lessons learned in Bangladesh (the report of this workshop on NBSAPs is available online at www.rbp-iucn.lk). Biodiversity planners have also recognised, however, that there is a “clear need to strengthen consultative processes at all levels” and to give greater emphasis “to consultation with resource users and local communities, and the private sector and key government resource development sectors”. In many Asian countries, biodiversity planners have learned from their NBSAP experiences that consultation has been too limited. By not involving all relevant sectors in the planning process, their plans are less likely to be feasible, practical and acceptable to society. Communication and consultation go hand-in-hand.

Misconceptions about communication

Awareness is the answer

A common perception is that greater effort and resources need to be channelled to raising awareness of biodiversity concerns. Certainly, this is a very important first step; if people are not aware of a problem, or their role in creating it, they will take no remedial action. But awareness is not action. A number of events are required to encourage people to accept or adopt a practice or idea. It is rare to find awareness alone leading to results.

Box 1. Is awareness enough?

Awareness is the first point at which a person gains basic information about a new idea and how others are using it. At this stage information given has to be credible to the listener.

Interest is needed for people see how the issue or practice could apply to their own value system and life style.

Trial is where people are prepared to make a preliminary attempt to use the practice or ideas, though these may still be rejected.

Adoption/acceptance is the point where the benefits of acceptance are clear, and there is commitment to a new practice or action.

To achieve the adoption of a strategy or a plan, creating awareness will not be enough. People have to become engaged in talking and thinking about the issue. Communication processes that create dialogue and participation aimed at ownership are essential. In Indonesia, for example, where the consultation process with several key groups of stakeholders was inadequate, it is now difficult to obtain the necessary support of some government sectors and local people. These problems are being rectified in the second round of NBSAP planning.

Communication may also need to be linked with other tools such as economic incentives and legal frameworks as a means of achieving change, especially when there are economic or structural barriers to overcome.

Knowing about the NBSAP leads to acceptance

If a plan is conceived without the involvement of the stakeholders, then there is an uphill battle to communicate it. A common assumption is that the public will respond to communication about the biodiversity strategy if the messages are well structured and based on an analysis of the interests of target groups. But this fails when the government or planning agency decides on the strategy in consultation with a few like-minded experts, and then announces the plan to others. What often happens is that the plan does not find broad acceptance and considerable effort is spent on communication in its defence. This is typical of the Decide, Announce, Defend (DAD) approach to communication adopted by many countries.

Even though this type of communication can be informative, motivational, and based on good planning, it rarely creates the desired acceptance in society because it lacks relevance and credibility. Confrontation and conflict are inevitable because the approach neglects two vital factors:

- the need for adequate consultation and dialogue at the outset so that plans and policies are sensitive to people's perceptions and livelihoods and address issues that are uppermost in their minds; and
- the need to ensure that during the consultative processes people are involved in learning and have the chance to change their ideas as a result of the discussion.

The DAD approach overlooks the way citizens perceive social problems; how they define them, how they think about them and how they see themselves resolving them. The perception is that government has the solutions and only has to create awareness for them to be accepted. The result is policy decisions directed at target groups who are not involved in decision-making, leading to

a low level of acceptance. This approach undermines government credibility, especially when measures proposed are not seen as realistic, affordable, enforceable or able to be funded.

Countries engaged in the NBSAP process need to consider a new approach to communication so that the content of policy and strategy is more in line with existing community attitudes and realities. The approach must be based on interactive communication or dialogue if implementation of a biodiversity strategy is to be taken up by different stakeholder groups. The NBSAP manager and team will have to spend a good deal of their time on communication activities. This is particularly applicable when the NBSAP adopts a community level focus, as is the case of Bangladesh. In that example, involving local communities in preventing over-exploitation and poaching is considered fundamental to long-term conservation goals. Communication mobilisers are needed in developing and implementing the plan; for example, in finding ways to value and reinforce the conservation of genetic diversity by farmers.

In Cambodia too, the preparation of the NBSAP is expected to “involve wide consultation with a range of government agencies at the national, provincial and local levels”. Adoption of an interactive communication approach will ensure that all key stakeholders become engaged in the planning process.

How has communication been used so far?

Involving stakeholders in developing the strategy and action plan

Consultative processes have been vital to the preparation of all NBSAPs in Asia, although the level and range of consultation and the type of communication approaches adopted differ greatly. If consultation is limited to the conservation community, government, universities and NGOs it will provide a different result than one which draws in a greater diversity of sectoral interests.

In Sri Lanka, the consultative approach adopted by the Ministry of Environment and IUCN Sri Lanka ensured that the state and NGO sectors collaborated in preparing the National Biodiversity Action Plan (BCAP). This resulted in its acceptance among the various government sectors and much of the NGO community. Consultation with the private sector was minimal, however, and a special communication strategy targeting this group will be required to involve it in BCAP implementation.

In Pakistan, the Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) was prepared jointly by IUCN Pakistan, WWF Pakistan and the Ministry of Environment, Local Government

and Rural Development. The participation of the provincial governments and regional NGOs was ensured through regional consultative workshops. In addition, the draft BAP was circulated widely to NGOs, government departments, and individuals involved in biodiversity conservation. Consultation with the private sector and at the community level remained a challenge, though. One positive outcome of the BAP was the compilation of a National Biodiversity Registry or “Who’s Who” of biodiversity, listing all key institutions and individuals involved in biodiversity-related issues. The registry has assisted in communication and will be updated periodically as a key tool in defining the BAP communication strategy.

In the Philippines, a multi-disciplinary team of experts has prepared the NBSAP through multi-sectoral consultation at the national and sub-national level, involving stakeholders in both planning the NBSAP and integrating it into other sectoral plans. A significant initiative was an outreach program by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, targeted at sectoral agencies and the regions, to explain and promote the NBSAP process. The consultative processes adopted have contributed to the document receiving the support of local NGOs as well as the support of the President. The Philippines, however, acknowledges the inadequacy of regional and community-level consultation during the preparatory process.

In contrast, the consultative process in China has been limited due to the lack of involvement of important stakeholder groups such as NGOs. China found that successful implementation of the national BAP requires enhanced coordination at the national and provincial levels as well as training, public awareness, education and funding.

Indonesia has acknowledged the lack of real involvement by the private sector and local people as well as many sectors of government in plan preparation.

Overall in Asia, consultative processes have not been adequate or appropriate to achieve the effective involvement of all stakeholders; women are particularly under-represented in the NBAP consultative process. In some cases where consultation has been taken to the local level, key sections of communities have been overlooked.

Even when consultative processes are perceived as important, they have not been seen as part of the communication activities which need to be strategically planned to support the preparation, presentation and implementation of biodiversity plans. As a result, well planned or strategic communication programs have not been part of most of the Asian biodiversity plans and strategies.

Promoting and marketing the plan

The NBSAP, once approved, is a product with a price tag. The nature of the product, the cost of the plan's implementation and how it will be promoted need to be considered as integral parts of the Action Plan. If the plan is so ambitious it can never be funded, it will not be implemented. Many of the strategies and action plans developed so far can be better thought of as visions without immediate practical application. Sri Lanka's BCAP addresses this problem by spelling out a mechanism to translate selected actions into operational plans during plan implementation.

The plan has to be marketed or promoted to those individuals, groups and organisations that will play a strategic role in its implementation. Two important requirements are that all stakeholder groups receive copies of the plan, and that its broad ideas are communicated among them. Even if the consultative process has been very successful, failure to show appreciation of stakeholders' contributions by the simple act of providing them with a copy of the final document may negate much of the communication effort made to that point, and will turn them away from contributing to the implementation process. A marketing plan includes ways in which these key groups will be involved in the launch and stimulated to declare a commitment to its implementation. It includes where the product will be promoted and made available for distribution; for example, how a sector ministry will position the plan on its agenda and promote it.

In the Philippines, where communication initiatives have been specifically addressed, the plan received Presidential approval in a relatively short period of time, and a policy directive was issued directing that the NBSAP be integrated into sectoral plans at the national and local level. The nature and timing of these interventions were a critical part of the communication strategy.

Similarly, the Pakistan BAP has been approved by the Pakistan Environmental Protection Council, a high-level body headed by the Prime Minister with provincial Chief Ministers, Environment Ministers, the private sector and NGOs as members. Recently, federal and provincial steering committees have been constituted to move forward with BAP implementation, although lack of funding and insufficient government commitment to implementation may be hurdles.

One remedial measure some countries are planning to generate support for biodiversity strategies is the preparation of popular versions of the NBSAPs for the general public, communities and school children. Funds and effort are

needed to produce and disseminate these products. This approach might be justified if the major obstacle to supporting biodiversity strategy implementation were the lack of awareness about the strategy among the general public. Most often, however, this is only part of the problem. In several countries, such as Indonesia and China, the main challenge in implementing NBSAPs is a lack of government and cross-sectoral support for biodiversity conservation. In cases such as these, the priority should be on inter-sectoral communication rather than in broad-based awareness programs. The main communication efforts should be focused on those stakeholders whose actions are having the most significant effect on biodiversity and, within that group, on those groups where remedial short-term action will make the greatest difference.

Managing communication in plan implementation

Asian NBSAPs have generally focused on using communication to create awareness of biodiversity or disseminating the final plan. There is also considerable emphasis on formal education strategies. While this is important, people in the formal education sector are usually not going to be the ones involved in solving the highest priority biodiversity conservation issues.

In Sri Lanka, for example, where a specific communication strategy was not part of the BCAP preparation process, nine of the 16 recommendations on cross-sector biodiversity awareness identified through the stakeholder consultations relate to formal education. The means and media for non-formal education are identified as films and videos and promoting newsletters, with no indication that these tools should be selected on a customised basis. While sectoral awareness needs are integrated into the recommendations under the forestry, wetland, coastal and marine systems and the private sector, there is no link between them and the recommendations for cross-sectoral awareness. Although enhancing the capacity of NGOs for awareness creation is recommended, strengthening the communication ability to address sectoral and cross-sectoral issues by other groups is not addressed specifically. An overall deficiency is that communication in its broader role is not addressed directly.

In Pakistan, a detailed communication plan was followed for the National Conservation Strategy process in 1988–91. A less systematic approach to communication was followed for the BAP, but it was still given unusual emphasis. There was a recognition of the need to develop a comprehensive strategy for public education and awareness, linked to other frameworks, such as the NCS and provincial conservation strategies. This would be implemented through a series of very specific actions; for example, to develop: “more focused campaigns designed with a particular goal in mind, such as working

with a local community adjacent to a protected area to foster local knowledge relating to protected areas and [to] promote understanding of the need for protected areas.”

In this case communication is instrumental in informing people about the need for protected areas. It is a defensive approach, however; better communication would involve deciding with the stakeholders the best means of keeping the variety of life in the area, and working with them to determine how this might be achieved. The nature of communication approaches should be decided as part of the strategy to implement the plan.

Pakistan also recognises the need to provide assistance to others who can undertake educational programs to “develop locally relevant resource materials on the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity for the use of agencies developing informal educational programs”. Mostly, however, the actions proposed are linked to general “biodiversity awareness raising”, and are not focused on high-priority issues. They sometimes include principles like “make better use of traditional channels, identify key audiences and the most effective traditional channels for each audience.” These communication prescriptions may be too generic to be useful.

What can be improved?

Most often NBSAP communication efforts have been carried out in an ad hoc manner. Communication is not widely recognised as a critical part of the process. Consequently, planning of communication in all phases of strategy planning and implementation has been weak.

As part of the strategy process, the communication plan has to define the support to be provided to stakeholder groups so that communication can be undertaken within their constituencies. There is also a need to plan how to engage target groups in implementation. Significantly, as noted in the Bangladesh NBSAP workshop report (see page 3), biodiversity planners in Asia are increasingly of the view that “a communication strategy which defines the communication methods best suited to key target audiences should be developed at an early stage in NBSAP preparation”.

When human resources and funds are scarce, it is important to be disciplined in communication. There is an inclination to jump to decisions about making videos and brochures and posters without thinking through what the problem is and what communication can do to solve the problem. Thinking through key questions, as highlighted in Box 2, is important in order to avoid mistakes.

Box 2. Steps to develop a communication plan for an issue

These are the steps required before attempting to implement a communication activity. Rushing to implement before carrying out adequate planning and research wastes money.

1. Analyse the issues.
2. Outline the role of communication.
3. Determine target groups, stakeholders and intermediaries.
4. Determine communication targets or objectives.
5. Determine the strategy and message.
6. Determine the means.
7. Determine the budget.
8. Define the tasks and responsibilities and determine how they can be coordinated.
9. Plan who (person/institution) has to carry out which activity and when.
10. Evaluate how results will be assessed (knowledge, attitudes, practice) and how activities will be adjusted on the basis of that evaluation.

Analysing issues

One of the main mistakes in communication is insufficient analysis of an issue. Without adequate analysis, the communication effort can be poorly focused. Communication can be compared to the actions of moving a boat's buoy: although the float at the top can be pushed in different directions — just as you can seemingly convince someone of an idea — the buoy will always come back to its place over the weight on the floor of the sea. If you want to move the buoy you have to move the base. Similarly, to really change something, the root of the issue has to be understood and addressed.

It is essential to be clear about the problem that is of greatest concern and the desired result of interventions to solve it. One common mistake is to think that people are not acting in the interests of conservation because they do not know enough. This results in programs intent on giving them more knowledge about biodiversity. It is more important to find out why the person or group does what they do, not what they know. Acting on what they do leads to possibilities for change. Communication then needs to be directed to overcoming resistance in terms of how people measure what might be asked of them, such as "what will it cost me in effort or money?" "What will I have to gain?" "How will my friends see me?"

Interviews and focus groups are powerful means of preparing for communication, to obtain information about what is happening in practice. Addressing the following questions (Byers 2000) is part of the preparatory process to communication action:

- what are people doing that affects the biodiversity resources in this place;
- what is the effect of those practices, both positive and negative, on the resources;
- which uses are ecologically sustainable and which are not;
- which practices are most critical to change or maintain;
- do people know that this practice damages resources;
- do they care that the resource is being damaged;
- do they care what other people in their community think of them if they carry out this behaviour;
- do people have viable options that do not damage the resources, and do they have the skills to take advantage of these options;
- are there overriding economic factors that motivate the practice despite knowledge, values, sociocultural factors, options and skills;
- do laws and policies encourage or discourage this practice.

After an analysis of the issue the following questions need to be considered:

- what solutions do stakeholders see in the future;
- what practices will have to occur for that to happen.

An order of priority to address major problems facing countries could well be as follows:

- internal communication in their own ministries at the national and provincial level;
- communication with other sectors to develop shared ownership of the problem and its solutions;
- communication support for these sectors and stakeholders to implement the plan;
- communication to target groups who can contribute to solving the issue.

These problems are best addressed through a structured approach to communication that recognises the levels of knowledge, acceptance or ownership of the plan and is oriented to the barriers to changing what people do. One of the main constraints to overcome is the attitude “this is not my idea”, which often leads to rejection.

In Sri Lanka an effective half-day briefing session on biodiversity conservation and the NBSAP was organised for the Secretaries and Assistant Secretaries of a wide range of ministries prior to commencement of plan preparation. This greatly facilitated sectoral support during the planning process. In addition, a round table involving key NGOs was organised prior to plan preparation to explain Sri Lanka's obligations to the Convention on Biological Diversity and the relevance of a national BCAP. The NGOs had been sceptical about the need for a BCAP and the implications of the exchange of genetic resources and biodiversity information with other countries. The round table helped to alleviate fears, obtain the support of most of the NGOs which participated, and address their concerns in the plan.

Understanding whom to work with and how

In the enthusiasm for consultation, a large number of groups may have been involved in workshops, conferences and consultation process. For most people this is not really an interesting exercise, and often many of those participating have little input or involvement. The events may have a minimal effect on long-term communication. In many countries the communication strategy for important stakeholder groups (such as the business community, women, local groups and even some sectors of government) has not been defined to attract their active participation. Instead of trying to cover all stakeholders it is better to identify and strategically concentrate communication on those who have influence, either negative or positive, on the important issues.

Workshops often combine very different groups; for example including officials of the Ministry of Agriculture and village farmers. Usually, this is not conducive to active participation because of differences in power and outlook, and the dominance of some groups. This approach fails to ensure ownership among those groups that were not able to have their say.

In many instances, little effort has been spent on taking into account the stakeholders' point of view and trying to understand their motivations and how they relate to issues that NSBAP teams are trying to address. The main goal of a dialogue should not be to convince the audience but to try and understand and learn about their different views, and to identify solutions that are acceptable to them. While these solutions need to be balanced against conservation goals, there has to be a readiness to modify or adapt conservation goals to the social realities.

For example, Sri Lanka's coastal communities that engage in non-mechanised fishing practices have very different ideas from the government sector which is concerned with promoting mechanised fishing in offshore waters in view of

the depleted near-shore fisheries resources. Both parties have important viewpoints, and are concerned about the long-term livelihood of fishing communities. Hence, both viewpoints need to be involved in negotiating what actions to take.

In Vietnam, the government assessment of NBAP implementation recognised the need for a strategic approach to biodiversity communication, but failed to mention the need for actively involving stakeholder groups in its implementation. It seemed to view communication as an activity separate from the critical issues identified in the NBAP, such as strengthening the protected areas system. To be effective, communication must be intertwined with biodiversity conservation actions.

Objectives need to be clear

Poor definition of both conservation and communication objectives has sometimes resulted in recommendations in NBSAPs and biodiversity projects that are too ambitious to be practical. For example, a vague objective of educating local people about the importance of conserving threatened species may have little impact on the desired goal of conserving a critically threatened but economically important species, especially if habitat conservation is the issue. And the more specific and results-oriented an objective, the easier it is to assess whether it has been achieved.

The communication objective has to be separated from the conservation objective, because communication can only contribute to changes in knowledge, attitudes, skills and a preparedness to act. Other instruments may be required to trigger the action, such as compensation, access to infrastructure for alternate economic activities, or changes in land tenure or ownership of the resources. In Pakistan, for example, a number of methods have been used to encourage collective actions by the local communities for conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity. These include sponsoring construction of irrigation channels, establishing Village Conservation Funds and providing de facto ownership of wildlife resources under a GEF/UNDP funded biodiversity conservation project.

Identifying means and media

There is a widespread tendency to try and address biodiversity conservation issues through broad mass media campaigns aimed at the public at large. Biodiversity is a complex subject, and it is hard to help people adopt new actions that they can take to conserve it. The issues have to be broken down into smaller components which can form the basis for action. Educational

research argues against broad-based approaches. There should be a greater emphasis on designing initiatives for specific groups within specific contexts. People are more likely to accept issues to which they can relate.

Frequently, commitments to the use of mass media, posters and illustrative materials are made before determining the most effective communication tools for a target group or for the required task. While each of these tools has a role in communication, its use has to be appropriate to the task. Use of communication tools can vary enormously from situation to situation. The most powerful communication tool is face-to-face conversation, a fact almost entirely overlooked by biodiversity planners.

If local people are the best target group to solve a particular problem, the most cost-effective approach may be interviews and focus groups and engaging them in finding solutions. Similarly, if the problem is lack of high-level political support or private sector support, an inexpensive face-to-face presentation where questions can be asked and answered may be more effective than producing a costly video that may never be seen by the target group.

Perceiving communication as more than information transfer

Initiatives for biodiversity planning have accorded high priority to supplying target audiences with facts and scientific information, even though it may be too complex and boring to have the desired impact. It is sometimes difficult for conservationists, passionate with their cause, to limit the level of information they try to transmit. There is also a tendency among scientists to strive for accuracy, explaining with footnotes and details, for fear of oversimplification. The target group, however (for example, senior decision-makers), seldom has time to take in every detail. People need to understand what is critical to the issue: what they can and cannot do, and the consequences of various actions.

For many target groups, the focus should be on using symbols or visual stories to affect their emotions. Communication aimed at persuasion has to be linked to incentives that are apt to trigger change. When communicating it is important to keep in mind the following axiom: "what we say is not necessarily heard, what is heard is not necessarily understood, what is understood is not necessarily acted upon, what is done is not necessarily repeated".

Solving the complexities of communicating biodiversity

Communicating biodiversity has its own special challenges and a number of lessons have been learned from the NBSAP experience. Although many countries use the term "biodiversity", it may sometimes be better to use a more

familiar term like “nature”, though even it has many meanings, or to split the concept of biodiversity into specific component issues such as conserving the borassus palm forest or the coastal mangroves.

Most people have never heard of biodiversity and different groups may have different perceptions of what it means and its importance. Many people are unfamiliar with conservation terms used at the political and international level. The first step in communication is therefore to remove jargon and clarify meanings.

Biodiversity issues should be made real and personally relevant to ordinary people by being defined in terms familiar to them, and in terms of what they can do about it. NBSAP teams need to speak the “language” of each target group.

The issues have to be simple and easy to grasp instead of complex and intimidating. A large issue, like catchment area protection and ecosystem management, should be separated into a number of issues that are small enough and practical enough for different groups to solve.

To raise the profile of biodiversity conservation, issues should be connected to other important concepts that are more easily understood, such as disaster prevention, poverty alleviation, health, tourism, climate change and clean and adequate water.

Conservationists are often seen in a negative light, criticising whichever development is planned, or spreading doom and gloom, or telling people what they cannot do. It is important to look for positive aspects, for good news stories, and for opportunities to make inputs at early stages of decision-making on development before commitments which infringe on biodiversity resources are made.

Care should be taken in communication not to pass on unintended messages. Asking a forestry department to review its forest management plans in terms of biodiversity conservation, for example, implies current neglect on the part of the agency and could be taken as a criticism of its work.

Time for the process

One of the most common failings of planners is underestimating the time required to carry out a full consultative process with all the people who will be responsible for implementing an NBSAP.

Consulting with representatives of stakeholder groups means that each of them in turn must have the time (and resources) to be able to consult his or her own group. Support is required to provide information to these constituent groups, support joint research and work on the problem.

It is also possible to waste time. A result that is acceptable to major groups can be obtained by a more limited approach if there is clarity about the information being asked for, and if more focused interviews and small group discussions are held. It is vital to maintain the feedback loop so that all participants are carried along with the process.

Managing communication to monitor effectiveness of implementation

In monitoring the NBSAP communication should sustain newly adopted attitudes and behaviour. The aim is to provide information about the policy or issue that is being pursued as well as to provide feedback on reactions to it. Communication may be used to explain complex legislation and regulations, or it may be used to announce modifications to them.

In addition, there should be regular contact with stakeholders and intermediaries, learning lessons from mistakes and celebrating success. This can be undertaken with newsletters, web sites, e-mail list serves, expert exchange workshops, and facilitated exchanges between groups.

The effectiveness of communication and associated activities needs to be monitored to guide learning about and improvement of the approaches used. Monitoring and evaluation requires clear communication objectives against which to measure progress. One of the biggest problems is being able to set up clear communication objectives that deal with the way people perceive the problem. Communication objectives should set results in terms of changes in knowledge, attitude or practice, and it is against these results that evaluation is required. These communication objectives are different from the objectives of the project, which may measure changes in resource status.

The communication efforts in this phase of monitoring effectiveness of policy or plan implementation require that there is feedback as to the opinions and attitudes of people. Secondly any changes or shifts in approach need to be communicated.

Conclusion

As problems connected with biodiversity loss escalate, and conservation needs become more complex, sharing perceptions with different groups becomes the

best way to develop and implement realistic plans for sustainable use. The way in which communication is managed is vital to the success and acceptance of these plans and strategies.

The lessons from Asia amply demonstrate that every NBSAP requires a comprehensive communication strategy covering both preparation and implementation. Communication has to be used from the start of the process and for varied purposes:

- to promote and position the organisation dealing with plan preparation;
- to improve the communication performance of all staff involved in the process;
- to identify key stakeholders and target groups;
- to obtain stakeholder participation, and guide meetings, negotiations and advocacy; and
- to prepare effective and appropriate communication products.

Effective management of communication should ensure that the planning process is not jeopardised by communication mistakes that will impede collaboration, implementation and funding.

Communication as an interactive process should not be viewed only as an instrument of biodiversity conservation planning. It is also vital for effective implementation of new regulations, technologies or economic incentives that may be needed to achieve conservation goals. Moreover, communicators can help planners to be conscious of the effect of communication of non-communication instruments. For instance, a “law” in itself sends a message to society: if the government declares a landscape protected, it may restrict the activities of local people. People are likely to act negatively in such a situation since the law communicates a message that their incomes may be curtailed in the future, or that they were poor managers of the resource. Communication management can help planners to prevent such negative messages from being conveyed.

Communication specialists are an essential part of ensuring that Asia's NBSAPs achieve success. They should help design and manage strategic processes and assist in using communication efficiently to ensure that the strategies and plans meet their intended objectives. While effective communication alone is not sufficient to ensure that all of a plan's conservation goals are achieved, it underpins a good strategy, and ensures the commitment of those involved with its preparation and implementation.

Suggested reading

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