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CAPACITY BUILDING FOR STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT IN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

1. Introduction

Environmental decisions and sustainable development policies that are accepted after a process of engaging and empowering the public take into account different perspectives and are better reasoned and widely based on the knowledge of various stakeholders. Participation in the decision-making process allows stakeholders to have a sense of “ownership”, which helps to encourage effective implementation.

The Rio Declaration on the Environment and Development and Agenda 21 asserted both the interdependence of the environmental, social, cultural and political dimensions of sustainability and that people are at the centre of development. Agenda 21 also defined the general principles of a system of public participation: access to information (information about the environment, decisions that might affect the environment and the decision-making process); access to decision-making and the opportunity to participate (chance to give opinions and to influence decision-makers) and the opportunity to redress and find a legal solution, when stakeholders consider a decision to be unfair. The implementation of these principles is of great importance to participation in decision-making on sustainable development.

Principle 10 of the Declaration of the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio states that “Environmental issues are best handled with the participation of all concerned citizens at the relevant level. At national level each individual

shall have appropriate access to information concerning the environment [...] and the opportunity to participate in the decision-making processes. States shall facilitate and encourage public awareness and participation by making information widely available. Effective access to judicial and administrative proceedings [...] shall be provided." The Partnership for Principle 10 was launched on August 29, 2002 at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, South Africa. The Partnership for Principle 10 is an incentive that brings together non-governmental organizations (NGOs), governments, and international organizations. This partnership provides a way for these entities to work together to provide the public with access to information, as well as the possibility of participating and seeking justice in the decision making procedures related to environmental sustainability.

Agenda 21 emphasizes the importance of capacity building for sustainable development stating that "the ability of a country to follow the path of sustainable development is determined to a large extent by the capacity of its people and its institutions" [UN, 1992]. Thus, it is important that governments work to build the capacity of citizens and NGOs, as well as other stakeholders, to obtain and understand environmental information and participate in decision-making, since the public may be unaware of its rights of access to information and the ways of obtaining it.

The subject of the research. The article analyses capacity building, social capital and government effort to build capacity of stakeholders.

The objectives. The article critically investigates strategies and practices of capacity building.

The tasks. In order to fulfil these objectives, the following research tasks had to be accomplished:

- to analyse strategies of capacity building;
- to evaluate governmental efforts to build the capacity of the public.

Research methods. Logic abstraction, which encompasses generalizations using a theoretical analysis of the problems of capacity building developed by the research of scientists from various countries. Analysis of documents, questionnaires and requests for information were used to collect the information needed in order to analyse government effort to build the capacity of the public.

2. Social capital and building the capacity of stakeholders

Stakeholder involvement is one of the cornerstones of sustainable development. *Agenda 21* stresses the need for cross-sectoral coordination and

the integration of environmental concerns into all development processes. It also emphasises that broad public participation in the decision-making process is important for achieving sustainable development.

Successful sustainable development programmes in a community are impossible without human capital, but are also hardly possible without social capital. Social capital, which refers to the social networks, relationships and processes within a community, has become an important issue in academic debate, public policy and the practice of community development.

This is how Putnam [2000, 19] expressed this idea: "Whereas physical capital refers to physical objects and human capital refers to the properties of individuals, social capital refers to connections between individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them. In this sense, social capital is closely related to what some have called "civic virtue".

Putnam suggested that social capital has the properties of a public good and "refers to features of social organizations such as networks, norms and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit" [Putnam, 1993, 67]. Thus, according to Bourdieu [1993], Putnam [1993] and Coleman [1988], social capital can be understood as networks of social relations which are characterised by norms of trust and reciprocity and which lead to outcomes of mutual benefit. Defined in this way, social capital can be thought of as the potential for positive action, which may lead to a broad range of outcomes.

According to Grootaert [2003], building social capital, which can more effectively address complex problems with the participation of a wide range of stakeholders, requires greater capacity for access to information concerning the environment and participation in the decision-making processes. "Investing" in social capital is more difficult than "investing" in human capital. It is the interaction between people that makes the difference between the formation of "social capital" and of "human capital". The latter refers to the capability of individuals and may be developed using a number of well-tested, available approaches, such as education, training teachers, developing appropriate curricula, etc. It should be stressed that educational institutions also develop social capital in the form of social rules and norms [Grootaert, 2003]. Increasing the capacity of social capital is a complex process influenced by social, political, and cultural factors, as well as by the dominant types of economic activities.

Agenda 21 states that: "A fundamental goal of capacity building is to enhance the ability to evaluate and address the crucial questions related to policy choices and modes of implementation among development options, based on an understanding of the potential and limits of the environment

and of the needs perceived by the people of the country concerned" [UN, 1992]. The development of human capital is stressed by the definition of capacity building as the process by which individuals, groups, organizations, institutions develop their abilities, both individually and collectively, to perform functions, solve problems, and achieve objectives. However, for more effective participation in sustainable development processes, individuals have to cooperate, create networks and build trust. It should be noted that the process of capacity building involves understanding and accepting new roles and new responsibilities, being accountable, as well as engagement in the form of learning-by-doing. Also, capacity building is a long-term, continual process, in which all stakeholders participate (*i.e.* ministries, local authorities, non-governmental organizations, professional associations, academics and others). Capacity in this context includes awareness, skills, knowledge, motivation, commitment and confidence, which strengthen social capital.

Encouragement of informed participation could be perceived as an instrument for greater effectiveness, as well as a source of investment in building the capacity of social capital. Participatory processes help to avoid failure, due to the utilisation of in-depth knowledge of local realities, which external agents or governmental bureaucrats do not possess [WRI, 2003]. With regard to sustainable development, everyone is a user and a provider of information. Opportunities for stakeholders to articulate their concerns, present proposals and discuss them in detail with the appropriate authorities, result in better-informed governments and improved decisions. Meaningful collaborative participation makes a positive influence. On the one hand, stakeholders can identify conflicts and potential problems that might have been overlooked at an early stage. On the other hand, failure to enable public input can bring conflict and resistance [WRI, 2003]. It is appropriate to work together in collaborative partnerships using the available social capital, which is common to all the stakeholders.

Accessible decision-making, *i.e.* decision-making that is transparent and open to public input and control, is at the heart of good governance. Access to environmental information is the most fundamental condition for initiating the involvement of various stakeholders in sustainable development processes and, according to Petkova et al. [2002], it enables the public to make informed personal choices, contributes to environmental protection and encourages improved environmental performance by industry. Thus, government efforts directed toward creating an effective system of public information and participation in building both its own capacity and public capacity are important for developing the involvement of various stakeholders in sustainable development. The government

should take steps to build its own capacity, so that its officials have the knowledge and incentive to provide the public with access to information, participation and opportunities to redress and remedy mistakes. Capacity building through training and providing resources encourages government officials to provide information, engage the public in decisions, and enforce appropriate legislation. Likewise, the government has to be active in build public capacity, so that different stakeholders are aware of their rights to and opportunities for participation.

3. Efforts of the Lithuanian government to build public capacity

The task of our research was to evaluate governmental efforts to build public capacity. This research was carried out as part of the project based on the methodology presented in The Access Initiative (TAI).¹ *Capacity building* refers to efforts to enhance social, educational, technological, legal and institutional infrastructure for providing public access to decision-making that affects the environment.

The following methods were used in order to collect the information needed for the research²: reviews of documents, websites, media, interviews with governmental officials, teachers, representatives of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), as well as requests for documents and information.

Government efforts to build the capacity of the public, *i.e.* different stakeholders, for informed participation was assessed on the basis of two groups of indicators:

- the availability and comprehensiveness of information from selected agencies;
- government support for NGOs and education.

Public authorities should exercise their responsibility to build public capacity by informing the public how to contact employees or offices of governmental institutions for advice, information, and support. The government should also make active efforts to inform the public how to gain access to environmental information, how to bring a complaint

¹ The Access Initiative (TAI) is a global coalition of civil society groups working together to promote national-level implementation of commitments to public access to information, participation and justice in decisions that affect the environment. For more information see: <http://www.accessinitiative.org>

² The assessment process in Lithuania was coordinated by the Environmental Centre for Administration and Technology (ECAT-Lithuania), a leader of the national TAI team. For more information see: <http://www.ecat.lt>

to administrative and/or judicial proceedings and how to participate in environmental decision-making. All these aspects were evaluated during the research.

Three governmental institutions (the Ministry of the Environment, Ministry of Education and Science, and Ministry of the Economy) with responsibility for providing information were selected for assessment according to the TAI methodology. All these ministries make information available to the public about their mandate, points of contact and procedures for making requests for information. The Ministry of the Environment has a Public Information and Public Relation Department and the Ministry of Education and Science introduced a "one window" service. A person can directly apply to these units of the ministries and obtain the requested information or is informed which departments or institutions can provide such information. The Ministry of the Environment and Ministry of the Economy have placed timetables with consultation hours of high-ranking ministerial officials for citizens on their Internet pages.

By organizing seminars, training courses, and consulting, the Ministry of the Economy is encouraging different stakeholders (mainly business people, who are the main target group of the ministry) to use their rights to obtain information and participate. Contacts are maintained with associated business structures, who disseminate information to a larger number of interested citizens. Representatives of the Ministry of the Economy stated that the right of citizens to obtain information is assured by the existing system for providing information.

The government issued "The Act on the Procedure of Providing Environmental Information", which obliges all institutions of public administration possessing information on the environment to provide this information to public. Ministries analyzed and other public administration institutions approved their own local procedures of service to citizens based on the corresponding governmental regulations. These documents also indicate and explain the procedures of how applications and complaints received from citizens are registered, cases investigated and answers prepared. The full texts of these documents are available to the public on the websites of ministries and local authorities.

Some institutions of public administration (e.g. the city of Siauliai) have digests on environmental information indicating which institution possesses what information and in what form this information is available to citizens (e.g. electronic, hard copy).

Based on the National Anti-corruption Program, the Ministry of the Environment established the "hotline on corruption prevention", where citizens can inquire on different corruption prevention issues or indicate

cases of corruption. In 2005 the Ministry of the Economy approved their anti-corruption program. Information about these programs is available on the websites of the ministries.

NGOs can play an important role in building capacity and social capital by raising awareness, bringing different stakeholders together to carry out joint actions, motivate them and provide education on sustainable development. In order to perform such tasks, NGOs need favourable conditions for their operation, *i.e.* national legislation supporting NGOs and sufficient national and local funding.

Since many NGOs have limited funding, government funds and subsidies can be crucial to supporting their activities. Good funding makes it possible for an NGO to plan long-term activities.

The income of the majority of Lithuanian NGOs comes from many different sources, among them international and European funding, grants from public institutions. Different Ministries (*e.g.* the Ministry of Social Affairs, Ministry of Education and Science, Ministry of Culture) allocate funds to support NGO activities relevant to the profile of the ministry. These activities are supported through projects. According to the Lithuanian Green Movement there are no national funds supporting environmental organizations and governmental institutions “buy” services provided by NGOs. The “Green Flag” program implemented by the Lithuanian Green Movement is supported by the state budget. Local governments have funds to support NGOs acting in different areas, including environmental protection. However, municipal funds are very small, so such support is rather symbolic. Organizations working in the fields of social and youth work have better chances of obtaining funding from national or local government than environmental organizations.

NGOs receive special treatment with regard to taxation. They are exempt from corporate profits tax. Association and charity/support funds are exempted from real estate tax. NGOs can also benefit from VAT exemptions, since cultural, educational, social, health care and other similar activities, in which NGOs are mostly engaged, are exempt from VAT.

The *Law on Income Tax* enables individuals paying income tax to designate up to 2% of their taxes to NGOs of their own choice. Even though, individually speaking, relatively small sums are involved, a large number of taxpayers are willing to make use of this opportunity. However, NGOs are not active enough in promoting this potential source of income.

Representatives of NGOs think that neither national nor local government support is satisfactory. However, they admit that there are also problems with NGOs themselves, since due to the lack of staff and resources, preparation of project proposals and the financial reporting of projects are problematical.

In order to ensure that future generations will be interested in and knowledgeable about the environment, teachers must educate their students on environmental issues. The government can encourage this by providing mandatory teacher training and materials for environmental education [WRI, 2003].

Regional teacher training centres organize training courses for teachers with different specialties according to annual timetables. Five days of training per year are obligatory and teachers can choose the program and the institution where they want to be trained. The state covers expenses related to these courses. Teacher training centres also provide teachers with appropriate training materials. Separate seminars for teachers are also organized by universities, NGOs, municipalities and as part of various educational projects.

Education has the power to make people interested in and knowledgeable about the environment, but only if the government promotes environmental education curricula in schools.

In Lithuania requirements for the quality of education are set in the "General Programs and Education Standards Act". Environmental education at school is integrated, so various environmental issues are discussed when teaching separate subjects (biology, chemistry, physics, etc.). Since environmental education is integrated, teachers of different subjects are obliged to coordinate their activities. Various environmental topics and the number of required hours are set for each age group. According to officials from the Ministry of Education and Science, in schools with deep traditions of environmental education older students often request environmental studies as a separate subject (this is foreseen by the law). If and when they do so, a teacher prepares the course program.

Regarding textbooks, there are various textbooks for different age groups either written by Lithuanian authors or translated and teachers can choose between alternative textbooks to reach the aims set in the "General Programs and Education Standards Act". The state allocates resources for schools to obtain textbooks and support materials.

Informal environmental education should be also mentioned, as it supplements formal education in many practical aspects. One of the most popular activities is research carried out by students *e.g.* research on water quality, biodiversity. In addition to school environmental circles or clubs, naturalists' centres have been established in most cities and regions and they are active in providing various educational activities in the field of environmental studies, *e.g.* they organize competitions for the best research articles written by students. In many cases activities in the field of informal education depend on the initiative of the teachers involved and support from school management.

Affordable and independent legal help ensures that the public will have adequate representation in environmental cases. However, such representation will not be available unless the government supports legal aid.

The Law on Legal Aid Guaranteed by the State defines the procedure of providing help for citizens with legal information, defence and representation in court processes. The law considers legal aid at two levels: primary legal aid is legal information (information about the legal system, laws and regulations) and consultation (advice on different legal issues and preparation of legal documents) guaranteed by local government institutions; state legal aid or secondary legal aid is defence and representation in court cases. Legal assistance may also be obtained from public institutions. This legal aid is coordinated by the Ministry of Justice and provides legal information, consultation and representation in court in accordance with the act.

From May 2005 the amended Law on Legal Aid Guaranteed by the State assured free legal aid to citizens and this function is delegated to municipalities. Primary help, which is related to providing legal information, consultation and preparation of legal documents, as well as helping to settle affairs out of court, can be provided to any citizen of Lithuania on application to their municipality. This aid amounts to one hour of consulting. Secondary legal help, which is related to the preparation of relevant legal documents, advocacy and representation in legal cases, is only provided to people whose income is lower than the norms set by the government. Secondary legal aid is provided by five regional institutions for providing legal aid.

According to the Lithuanian Green Movement, the mechanisms enabling the public to participate are good in theory, but there are a lot of problems related to their implementation. Prosecutions for breaking environmental laws are difficult, due to the lack of lawyers and experience in this field. Other NGOs have stated that there is no tradition among citizens of applying to the court. Citizens, as well as public administrators, do not have sufficient legal knowledge and do not even realise what possibilities exist for solving environment related issues in court. The state provides primary legal help to private persons, but not to organizations. However, in many cases environmental NGOs could also consult individuals on environmental issues or represent them. Representatives of NGOs have indicated that the lack of qualified lawyers able and willing to work on environmental cases is a very big problem and hinders access to justice.

4. Conclusions

1. A long-term and continuous process of capacity building in which all stakeholders participate (*i.e.* ministries, local authorities, non-gov-

ernmental organizations, professional associations, academics and others) involves the understanding and acceptance of new roles and responsibilities, acceptance of accountability and engagement in learning-by-doing.

2. The following are essential in facilitating and encouraging public awareness and participation in sustainable development: access to information (information about the environment, decisions that might affect the environment and the decision-making process), access to decision-making and the opportunity to participate (enabling the public to give their opinion and to influence decisions-makers) and opportunities for legal redress when stakeholders consider decisions are unfair.

3. Government efforts to build its own capacity and public capacity are important in order to involve various stakeholders, because on the one hand officials should have the knowledge and incentive to provide the public with access to information, participation, and opportunities for redress and, on the other hand, different stakeholders have to be aware of their rights to and opportunities for participation.

4. In Lithuania the mechanisms enabling the public to access information and participate are good, but there are a lot of problems related to their implementation. In many cases, stakeholders involved in various sustainable development issues are not ready to hear and understand arguments and are opposed to the concepts of sustainable development. This is mainly due to a lack of awareness. Legal acts could be prepared and adopted in a rather short time compared to the time-consuming process of awareness raising and capacity building.

5. The state and local government allocate funds to support NGOs. However, neither national nor local government support is satisfactory. On the other hand, NGOs admit that because of a lack of staff and resources they themselves have problems with preparing project proposals and the financial reporting of projects.

6. Integrating environmental issues into education curricula in schools and providing mandatory teacher training and materials for environmental education encourage interest in and knowledge about the environment. Informal environmental education supplements formal education in many practical aspects.

7. Regarding access to legal redress, there is no tradition among citizens of applying to the court. Citizens, as well as public administrators, do not have sufficient legal knowledge and do not even realise what possibilities exist to solve environment related issues in court. The lack of qualified lawyers able and willing to work on environmental cases is a very big problem which hinders access to justice.

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It is a truism to say that public involvement is one of the key elements of capacity building and should be one of the priorities of any democratic government. Moreover, it is one of the crucial elements forming the concept of sustainable development, which is a principle of law outlined in the Polish Constitution of 1997. As far as the instruments that serve the fulfillment of the principle of sustainable development are concerned, one should consider the contents of supranational law, both international and European. Before I present these regulations, it is worth outlining various goals of public involvement, both conceptual and practical. Conceptual goals may be understood as meta-goals, such as: strengthening democracy, enhancing human rights or downward accountability of the development process. However, some of these issues are more closely connected with environmental issues, such as improving decisions and expanding awareness. Practical goals are connected with effectiveness and efficiency – public involvement is necessary to win support or deter opposition, stimulate action, inform decision-makers, obtain information, understand issues, concerns, effects and causes [George, 2006]. Conceptual goals are more important in post-communist countries, because they are an element of capacity building and creating civil society in every field of application [Jacobs, 2005].