
11. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Public participation has been defined as A producing a process leading to a joint effort by stakeholders representing all relevant interests and sectors of society, technical specialists and the various relevant organs of state who work together to produce better decisions than if they had acted independently, and better implementation of decisions through stakeholders “owning the process” (Greyling and Manyaka, 1999).

Public participation (PP) is required under the National Water Act as an essential process for decision making regarding shared resources such as water. As the RHP is, by its very nature, a **participative programme**, some form of public participation is required to ensure “stakeholder buy-in” in your RHP. The “**who**”, “**what**”, “**why**”, “**when**” and “**how**” questions should be addressed to inform and elicit feedback from stakeholders on how best to implement your local RHP.

Who should be involved in the PP process

Ideally, all stakeholders and interested and affected parties in the river catchment should be involved, i.e. people or organisations which have a vested interest in the river and are dependent on prevailing water quantity and quality. These include industries, farmers and local communities living near or within the catchment (see proposed “target audience” in the Promotion and Marketing section). Remember that representation of the different sectors is more important than obtaining the views of every individual living in the catchment (Figure 2).

Figure 1. Identifying stakeholders from each of the three dimensions of sustainability (economic growth, social equity, ecological integrity) (Greyling and Manyaka, 1999).

How should PP be conducted

The PP process should begin with a public announcement such as an advertisement in a newspaper calling for meeting to discuss your RHP. Depending on the circumstances, public meetings and open fora with local communities or one-on-one meetings with farmers and representatives from industry are PP options (Figure 3).

Your PP should include a presentation of the RHP to provide stakeholders and interested and affected parties with the necessary context of your RHP. The presentation could include a summary of your provisional Implementation Plan and RHP goals and options of how to get there. The various RHP indices should be explained or demonstrated.

Once the stakeholders are on board, the next step is the **identification of problems and needs through consultation**. Through interactive dialogue, the PP should lead to “consensus building” and a convergence of thinking amongst stakeholders, and ultimately **shared solutions**. In other words, your RHP PP programme can play a pivotal role in bringing people from diverse backgrounds together through the common goal of water resource management.

Outcomes of meetings should be made available to all stakeholders so that they are kept informed of progress and developments. Ensure that meetings are properly minuted and that these are circulated to all present and absent stakeholders. Regular progress reports are another option.

When should PP be conducted

Regular PP should be an integral component of implementing your RHP. Consultation with stakeholders and interested and affected parties should be a part of your planning process and should continue on a regular basis, particularly when new developments are planned or expansion of the programme to additional river catchments is envisaged.

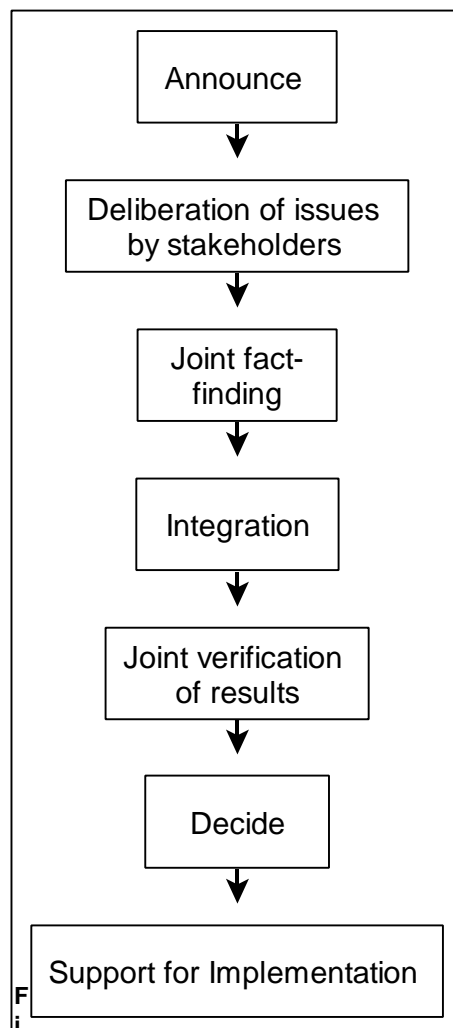


Figure 2. A model for public participation (adapted from Greyling and Manyaka, 1999).

11.1 GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

- \$ Flexibility - accommodation of local needs and circumstances
- \$ Announcement of opportunity for involvement - ensuring that people have ample chance to become involved
- \$ Representivity - broadest range of participants should be involved
- \$ Sufficient and accessible information - language and level of information is important to meet the needs of the stakeholders
- \$ Opportunity for comment - a variety of media should be considered - e.g. verbal or written
- \$ Opportunity for exchanging views and information
- \$ Continuous feedback and acknowledgment - stakeholders should see that their contributions are being considered in the PP process
- \$ Respect for cultural and language preference - this should be considered at all times
- \$ Ability and interest levels of stakeholders - important to take into account when presenting information

- \$ Assigning roles and responsibilities of stakeholders - this should be done at the beginning of the process
- \$ Transparency, openness and honesty - this is essential to inculcate a sense of trust in the process amongst participants
- \$ Efficiency and effectiveness - both essential for the nurturing of stakeholder respect in the process
- \$ Independent facilitation - this may encourage stakeholder participation through the “neutral” facilitator.

Things to remember for public participation and the RHP

There is no prescribed recipe for fruitful public participation, however **wide consultation, openness and transparency** are some of the essential ingredients. How much public participation is necessary for successfully involving stakeholders in implementing your RHP will depend largely on your local circumstances and approach.

Stakeholders and potential participants will probably have widely diverse backgrounds and experiences. This diversity is great in many respects, but of course means that the enthusiasm and the degree of acceptance of the RHP will vary from person to person. Do not despair if at first there is resistance (particularly from older members and skeptics). Be patient and persevere! Practical demonstrations which actively involve your audience is a good way to overcome this.

Involving local communities in your RHP may not be that easy. Local communities will probably have expectations of a direct spinoff of the programme, such as jobs or free water. Be aware of this from the beginning and do not make empty promises.

As a RHP practitioner, you also need to be aware of the socio-cultural and knowledge gap that exists between you and local communities. Your RHP objectives probably do not coincide with the livelihood security priorities of the community.

For community involvement and support for your RHP from this sector, building relationships is imperative. Your approach and attitude is important for this. Respect for local customs and language should be maintained at all times.

Public participation is a **a two way process**. River Health implementers stand to learn a lot from the public participation process, as farmers and members of local communities often possess a long-term and intimate knowledge of their river and will point to where they feel monitoring should be taking place. Other useful information may include possible sites to sample, historical and geographical aspects of the catchment - such as the effects of droughts and floods, whether there have been any recent major pollution events, local hazards and pitfalls associated with the terrain and of course who the friendly farmers are!

In return, the RHP will offer education and environmental awareness and information pertaining to the river to the various interested and affected parties and give local communities an opportunity to be involved in the management of their own water resources. Some of the interested and affected parties may wish to become more actively involved and eventually join your PIT or PMT. In such a way, public participation encourages ownership of the RHP.

For more on public participation, see Procedures for Provincial Implementation of the National River Health Programme. Chapter 4 - Development of Social Tools for the River Health Programme.

NOTE:

Contact Manyaka Greyling (Pty) Ltd for more information and assistance on public participation.