THE IMPACT OF THE PARTICIPATIVE APPROACH TO LAND-USE PLANNING

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Contents

Summary

This paper emphasizes the importance of participatory approaches for successful land-use planning. Participative land-use planning follows a holistic, integrated, and interactive approach in order to create an enabling environment for the sustainable management of land resources. The participation of the representatives of all stakeholder groups is a crucial element for a successful planning exercise and the later implementation of the plan. An evaluation of planning methods used in the past shows that top-down approaches with the focus on technical and/or political aspects related to land did not result in sustainable land management. These conventional planning methods did, however, include a variety of essential instruments that must be integrated together with socioeconomic and legal components.

In 1992, the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, and in 1996, the World Food Summit in Rome, Italy, have called for a natural-resources management approach which recognizes the interrelationship among natural resources, land use, and people. The

integrated approach of land-use planning focuses on different interacting levels of decision making: the international level (example: AGENDA 21 and the UN Convention to Combat Desertification and Mitigate Drought), the national level (example: The National Action Plan to Combat Desertification in Argentina), the subnational level (example: Ecosystem Management in South Florida, USA) and the local level (example: Sustainable Management of Dry Forests, Dominican Republic). Key elements at each level such as stakeholder involvement, the establishment of a negotiation platform, decentralization and participative working methods such as PRA and RRA, are explained.

1. Definition

Participative land-use planning follows a holistic, integrated, and interactive approach in order to create an enabling environment for the sustainable management of land resources. It assesses the biophysical, socioeconomic, institutional, and legal variables that determine the land-use system. More than a technical procedure, it is an advisory capacity which emphasizes the need for active participation of all stakeholders.

A stakeholder is an individual, group, or institution that has interests in, or is affected by, an issue, activity, or transaction, and therefore has a natural right to participate in decisions relating to it. The participative approach intends to be a negotiation process between decision makers at different levels with the objective to create consensus on important land-use decisions. It emphasizes that, at the local level, land users should be empowered to participate in the decision-making process.

2. Context: Need for a Participative Approach in the Planning of Land Resources

In the last two decades there has been a technical progress so dynamic that it goes beyond most people's imagination. At the same time, we are confronted worldwide, not only with the consequences of that progress—the depletion of the land resources showing that growth is limited—but also with other environmental, social, and economic consequences which most development concepts did not foresee. This is a common experience to almost all countries in the world.

2.1. Traditional Land-Use Planning Methods and their Impact

The adoption of a participative approach to planning for the sustainable management of land resources calls for a critical look at planning methods used in the past. An evaluation of planning exercises in projects related to land use over the past years shows that insufficient attention was paid to essential factors for making a project successful.

Conventional planning methods usually were based on a top-down approach and focused mainly on technical and/or political aspects related to land. Social factors like peoples' perception of land-related problems and their immediate needs, as well as the creation of a negotiation platform in order to ensure an informed decision-making process, were rarely taken into consideration. Therefore, many land-use-related projects were not very sustainable and therefore were less successful than expected. However, the conventional planning methods offer a variety of essential instruments, which have

to be integrated together with social components, such as peoples' participation in an integrated and more people-oriented planning process.

2.2. Lessons Learned from the Past

In the past the phrase “land use” was often synonymous with the agricultural use of land and focused on production issues only. It neglected the understanding of land as a complex system comprised of a variety of interacting components such as soil, water, vegetation, other biota, the ecological and hydrological processes, as well as its interaction with the people and their historical, social, and cultural background. All these components together determine and influence the potential of the land.

Decisions on land-use matters were often made based on a top-down approach. Land users were not considered as stakeholders, and therefore not included as active participants in the decision-making process. Land users were told how to use their land in a more productive way based on technical or scientific knowledge, or political priorities. People at the local level are the final implementers of any planned activity in a production system, no matter at what level the decision was made.

The failure to consider all relevant variables of the system, land, and their interactions that determine the use of land resources, resulted in the development of even more sophisticated planning methods by only a few scientific and technical disciplines. As a consequence, technical solutions prevailed, and the importance of socioeconomic, institutional, or legal aspects of land use were mainly neglected.

Traditionally, more the results and less the procedures of land-use planning exercises were presented to the land users by government officials, technical agencies, or international experts, anticipating hereby the automatic adoption and widespread application by the people. Land users were not asked for their opinion concerning existing demands and development needs. Isolated by these procedures, land users did not see their interests and needs reflected in the decision. Subsequently, their motivation and engagement to follow the given options were generally low. In addition, their local and indigenous knowledge on land resource management was not considered valuable, and therefore did not enter in the option pool.

The legal and institutional frameworks, which strongly influence the sustainable implementation of agreed land-use options, were given only minor attention. Many planning procedures failed in countries due to the lack of a clear and consistent land policy that legally backs up plans and their implementation. At the national level, a variety of agencies have a stake in land, and claim the only authority to make decisions respectively. Often, the competencies and portfolios of those institutions overlap and are neither clearly defined nor agreed upon. In addition, a poor capacity of interagency collaboration then leads to contradictory decisions and subsequent conflicts.

Experiences over the past decades have proven that many of the top-down and technical planning procedures finally delivered nothing but theoretical plans which were almost never successfully implemented, while degradation processes have continued to severely damage the land resources.

2.3. A Call for an Integrated and People-Oriented Planning Approach

Since 1992, major international forums such as the Earth Summit (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (1992) and the World Food Summit in Rome, Italy (1996) have called for a natural-resources management approach which recognizes the interrelationship among natural resources, land use and people. An integrated approach requires improved coordination of planning and management of land and its resources. Agenda 21, a result of UNCED, states: "The broad objective is to facilitate allocation of land to the uses that provide the greatest sustainable benefits and to promote the transition to a sustainable and integrated management of land resources. Protected areas, private property rights, the rights of indigenous peoples and their communities and other local communities and the economic role of women in agriculture and rural development, among other issues, should be taken into account."

Agenda 21, Chapter 10, calls for reorganizing and, where necessary, strengthening decision-making structures, including policies, planning, and management procedures. FAO states that this approach recognizes the need for participation of all stakeholders in land-use decision making, and bridges the gap between the production and income objectives of land users and society's long-term objective of preserving natural resources. Economic and legal conditions that encourage and reward sustainable land-use practices are of crucial importance. Inappropriate land-tenure systems are one of the chief disincentives. Linkages are needed between, on the one hand, traditional land-management systems and, on the other, the application of new technologies.

3. State of the Art: Theoretical and Practical Experiences with Participative Land-Use Planning

The participative concept of land-use planning as promoted by FAO and UNEP, guides decision makers at all levels through the process of choosing the best land-use option, or range of options, in accordance with their objectives. The process of planning, which promotes the interaction among land users, political decision makers, as well as professional and technical staff, is much more than the documentation of a plan which results from this exercise.

Objectives, problems, and demands are typically scale dependent, and will differ among stakeholders at the national, regional, and local level. It is important to know a stockholder's interest and perception of land use before the participative planning process starts. The essence of the negotiation among the stakeholders in the following planning process is that all the people affected are identified, that they are fairly represented in the discussion, and that they are informed about the issue at stake.

Key factors of participative and integrated land-use planning are:

- Participative land-use planning follows a multidisciplinary approach, which is based on a set of methods from different thematic areas. It integrates various methodical and strategic elements such as people's participation, land potential assessment, the evaluation of the legal and institutional framework and, finally, the negotiation and decision on land-use options.

- It respects the complex ecological and socioeconomic variables, which determine the land-use system, and considers legal and institutional aspects, which facilitate and ensure the implementation of the plan.
- The participative procedure of land-use planning is objective and problem oriented and focuses on the demands of the actors.

As a consequence, the approach provides a platform for negotiation. It is a process in which land-user representatives, along with political decision makers and—if needed—international specialists, discuss land-use options with mutual benefits.

The approach facilitates the exchange of information at all levels. Using this procedure, governments and local people will be able to work together more efficiently, and provide each other with appropriate information and advice.

The integrated approach of land-use planning focuses on different interacting levels of decision making (Figure 1). The procedures may differ substantially when applied at the village, district, national, and international level. The following sections will demonstrate that each level requires appropriate tools and methods to successfully establish this process.

ACTION LEVEL	POLICIES	DECISION-MAKERS INSTITUTIONS
INTERNATIONAL	Conventions (e.g.AGENDA 21, CCD,CBD)	International Taskforces (e.g. FAO of UN)
⇕	⇕	⇕
NATIONAL	Land Use Policy	National Taskforce (National Planning Committees, Sector Ministries)
⇕	⇕	⇕
MESO (Regional) (e.g. District, Region, Regional State)	District Land Use Plan/Policy Regional Development Plan	District Committees (Regional Planning Boards, Sector Authorities)
⇕	⇕	⇕
COMMUNITY	Village Land Use Plan Community Development Plan	Formal and Informal Land Resources Management Groups (Interest Groups)

Figure 1. Interacting levels as promoted by the integrated approach of land-use planning.

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Biographical Sketches

Andrea Kutter has recently joined the Global Environment Facility (GEF) in Washington, DC, USA as an environmental specialist. As member of the Land and Water Team, Ms. Kutter is involved in the preparation of the operational program (OP) of the new focal area of the GEF: "Land Degradation (Desertification and Deforestation)" to be opened in October 2002. She had her first professional experience at the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in the field of integrated land resources management and was integrated in a group which was the task manager for Chapter 10 of the Agenda 21.

Ms. Kutter worked for three years in a project in Argentina, where she gained valuable field experience. The project, funded by the German Technical Cooperation Agency (GTZ) had a strong link to the implementation of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). She is author and co-author of a variety of publications and articles related to sustainable land resources management.

Veronika Ulbert works in the South America Division of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) in Bonn, Germany. After working with the Friedrich Ebert Foundation in 1999, she became a team member in GTZ (German Technical Cooperation Agency) field projects in Argentina and Chile. In 1998, Ms Ulbert completed her PhD on the effects of environmental problems on gender issues in the Caribbean. She is a specialist in participative planning, gender issues,

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