

INTEGRATING ENVIRONMENT INTO DECISION-MAKING IN AFRICA

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Summary

Decision-making can be understood as the process by which decisions are made, especially important decisions affecting others and made by virtue of one's office or position (Webster's, 1999). Formal decision-analytic tools have been applied in a number of different problem areas such as business, medicine, and military planning.

In recent times, the concept is also being applied in environmental management. The high population growth rate in the developing countries and the rapid industrialization during the past century have caused major changes in the biosphere which are threatening the life support systems on the planet. In order to overcome major problems like ozone depletion, global warming, deforestation and desertification, hazardous and nuclear wastes, it is now widely accepted that the environment has to be integrated into the decision-making process on development policies and programs.

The environmental decision-making process consists of six steps, starting with the identification of the problem, the determination of the goals and objectives, the identification and assessment of the alternatives and options, the taking of the decision itself and the post-decision control. The cycle is repeated at the end of the last step. It is

important to stress that environmental problems are not merely technical; they raise inherent political and social questions as well. It is therefore important that various segments of the population are involved in environmental decision-making. In fact, in contemporary Africa the participation of the population is not only desirable; it is also necessary if good developmental decisions are to be reached.

1. Introduction

The rapid industrialization and the surge in consumption in the world have led to phenomenal levels of economic growth and an accompanying set of complex environmental problems in both the developing and the developed countries. It has now been widely accepted that such a continuous growth of the world economy cannot be guaranteed if the environment is not taken into account in the development decision-making process. This is particularly true for most African countries. The guiding premise of this chapter is that a good understanding of the environment and the concept, methods and process of decision-making in Africa will facilitate a more effective integration of the environment in development programs and projects.

The national development decision-making process in Africa must involve analysis of policy, political, legal, economic, social, technological and environmental factors. Clearly, decision-making should be based on a multidisciplinary approach in which active involvement of the public is crucial. The main steps involved in the decision-making process are first described in order to facilitate a discussion of the subject in detail. This also helps to provide more insights to the integration of environment in the development process and why too many poor decisions are made, especially in Africa.

In order to emphasize the importance of and the practical character of decision-making in sustainable development programs in Africa, the concept is discussed in terms of the conventions relating to industrial and toxic trade in the continent. To illustrate the key problems involved in environmental decision-making in Africa, an industrial toxic waste import into Ghana in 1994 from the United States of America (USA) is analyzed. This case study approach better reveals the appropriateness of environmental policy, the capacity of environmental administrations and the adequacy of the established decision-making mechanisms to guarantee a high level of environmental quality and sustainable development in Africa through effective formulation and enforcement of environmental laws and regulations. Another objective of the case study approach is to show the centrality of public participation in the environmental decision-making process in the continent.

The chapter is organized in five sections. After a brief introduction which argues for the integration of the environment in the development decision-making process, section 2 discusses the problematic of the concept and the six decision-making steps are described in section 3. Environmental decision-making in relation to the toxic waste trade in Africa is reviewed in section 4. A series of decisions taken in Ghana concerning a specific toxic waste import into the country in 1994 from the USA and the consequences of those decisions are also analyzed in this section. The conclusion to the chapter and recommendations for improving the integration of the environment in

decision-making in Africa are presented in section 5.

2. The problematic of environmental decision-making

As indicated in the introduction, recent warnings about the deteriorating state of the global environment have become more insistent and ominous. For instance, human populations everywhere continue to generate very unacceptable levels of air, water, soil and noise pollution that are causing an unprecedented decline in human and environmental health in the world, especially in Africa. In spite of the fact that the negative impact of human activities on the environment in Africa has been known for many years, the developmental decision-making process does not accord it much importance.

Consequently, environmental degradation in the continent is extremely grave and something needs to be done to prevent it from worsening. For example, a very important consequence of many of the development projects in Africa is the generation of all forms of wastes that threaten the health of the human population, as well as the fauna and the flora. The mountains of domestic and industrial waste in Africa pose a serious danger to the quality of the environment and the environmental resources on which the human population heavily depends. The Rio Conference of 1992 pushed many countries in the world to start integrating the environment in their developmental decision-making process.

3. A general description of the decision-making process

Environmental problems in Africa should be solved through decision-making. In fact, decisions are the origin of environmental problems in Africa, but they also constitute the solution to the problems. Environmental problem solving is a *collective* effort requiring sustained co-operation between many different kinds of people.

3.1. Who is involved in environmental decision-making?

Generally speaking, a large number of people usually have a stake in resolving environmental problems. Clearly, a democratic system is required for solving environmental problems in the world. Environmental decisions must not only be taken by technical experts; they should be the outcome of a process of continuing exploration involving the participation of a much broader set of stakeholders, including both institutional representatives and individuals.

Furthermore, the decision-making process needs to be managed at different levels. One level is the political élite (elected politicians and upper level bureaucrats) who hold ultimate responsibility for decision-making. Broad policy statements and regulations provide them with a framework for solving problems. However, there are also a variety of other interest groups at the margin who deal with policy formulation and implementation but who are devoid of any political power. These include people in industry and business, the youth and the civil society. Conventional problem solving therefore involves a mixture of groups using different forms of reasoning and subscribing to different ideologies and goals. Consequently, these different visions can

generate a number of conflicts. A good remedy to the generation of compartmentalized visions is the adoption of an integrated perspective that combines the various views into a more adaptive form of problem solving.

3.2. Elements to be taken into account in decision-making

Environmental decision-making occurs whenever a decision that affects the present or future quality of the environment is made. However, to solve an environmental problem, one should not only seek to reduce the impact on the environment, but also the underlying anthropogenic causes of the problem. Environmental problem solving should therefore address the social and economic as well as ecological aspects. It should also take human psychology into account since it may be argued that psychological ecology provides an interdisciplinary framework that allows the structure and dynamics of environmental problems to be explored in a comprehensive and systematic way.

Decision-making therefore involves the environmental issues requires technical solutions, redistribution of wealth (e.g. in the national system, regarding democracy), and assessing the benefits and costs of redistribution across social groups. In other words, a critical requirement for environmental decision-making is the ability to make decisions that simultaneously consider the economic, social and environmental realities in both the short- and the long-term. It is however important to have clear goals and to make sure that decision is made in a holistic manner and enhances progress (Savory, Allan, 1999).

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Biographical Sketch

Emmanuel Kwesi Boon obtained his B.A. in Economics and Geography at the University of Ghana in 1979. He also has a Master's in Industrial Location and Development from the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB) in Belgium. After obtaining an M.B.A. Degree from the University of Antwerp (UFSIA), he received his Ph.D. in Economic Sciences from VUB in 1986. He lectures at the School of Administration of the University of Ghana in Accra and is a visiting professor to several universities and institutions in Africa, Asia, Europe, and South America. Currently, Prof. Boon teaches four courses to the postgraduate students of Human Ecology at the VUB: "Research Methods and Practical Skills", "Environment and Development", "Communication, Leadership Skills, Multi-media, and GIS", and "Issues on Gender, Youth, Age, Culture, and Ethnic Groups". He is also actively involved in research, consultancy, and extension projects. He is the founder and chairman of the International Centre for Enterprise and Sustainable Development (ICED) based in Accra, Ghana.