



Public Participation in Environmental Management

Environmental management entails an understanding of how the Earth functions and how humans interact with these functions. It is a multifaceted approach to identifying environmental changes and maximising the benefits of the environment, while seeking to avoid or reduce degradation. Environmental management systems are set up to protect the environment and human health by active measures such as control, mitigation, planning and implementation. The goal is to improve the quality of life while ensuring the quality of the environment is not compromised. Effective environmental management is integral to the mandate of the EPA.

Public participation can contribute to better decisions!

Public participation seeks to involve stakeholders and ‘the public’ in problem solving or decision-making, and utilises those inputs to aid in the decision-making process.

Decision-makers have more access to information during their interactions with the public - people who know the proposed project area can share additional facts, values, and perspectives critical to the implementation of the project.

Public input can have heavy bearing on the decision-making process. It affords stakeholders (those that have an interest, such as individuals, interest groups, communities etc.) the opportunity to influence decisions that affect them and/or the natural environment. They can then incorporate the best information and expertise from stakeholders involved to ensure that the most feasible decisions are made regarding the project.

Public Participation involves you!

Public participation is integral to the operations of the Environmental Protection Agency. The Environmental Protection Act 1996 (hereafter, “the Act”) requires the Agency:

- To promote the participation of members of the public in the process of integrating environmental concerns in planning for development on a sustainable basis. (Section 4 (1) (b) of the Act);
- To promote and encourage a better understanding and appreciation of the natural environment and its role in social and economic development. (Section 4 (1) (j) of the Act);

Additionally, for projects requiring Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA), public participation at all stages of the project is critical to the success of the project. Moreover, during the conduct of the EIA, the engagement of appropriate and adequate stakeholders should not be undermined. Further, the Act requires the developer and persons carrying out the EIA to:

- Consult members of the public, interested bodies and organisations. (Section 11 (9) (a) of the Act); and
- Provide to members of the public on request, copies of information for the EIA. (Section 11 (9) (b) of the Act).

Public participation should not be seen as a single event, but as a process. It consists of a series of activities and actions. Moreover, the Agency has established guidelines for projects requiring EIA and will continue to work with developers to ensure adequate stakeholder engagement in developmental projects.

Public participation might take different approaches

This really is dependent on several factors, including the legal and institutional system requirements, capacity of the relevant actors, socio-cultural factors, economic factors, scope of the project, risks the project may pose etc. The approaches to public participation

include information sharing, written submissions, scoping meetings, consultations, disclosure meetings, active participation etc.

Working together with the public to identify alternatives and the preferred solutions to potential adverse impacts can also empower the community to take ownership of the project.

According to the International Development Bank in its “Meaningful-Stakeholder-Consultation” publication, public participation is not limited to the use of one tool only; a variety of tools and techniques can be used to inform the public, generate public participation, collect inputs and ensure some level of consensus is reached.

Why is public participation important?

Public participation is not simply a prudent but necessary course of action; it actually results in better outcomes and better governance of projects. The Agency has always recognised the need for public participation, and has been working on strengthening our stakeholder engagement policies.

When executed in a meaningful way, public participation will benefit not only the Agency but also the project developer and or company, some of which include:

1. Saving cost;
2. Avoiding damage to reputation;
3. Identifying potential hazards and reducing risks;
4. Providing a more holistic view of the project;
5. Identifying available skills;
6. Early warning, better, understanding, more perspectives; and
7. Aiding in acquiring baseline data.

Public participation allows for more informed decision-making that reflects public interests and values.

The EPA publishes Public Notices for written submissions on projects in accordance with the requirements of the Environmental Protection Act 1996. Additionally, public meetings and consultations are held in collaboration with the developer for various projects. Be sure to follow the Agency's social media pages, visit our website, listen to our media programmes and participate in the public meetings/consultations on projects in your area.

You can share your ideas and questions by sending letters to: “Our Earth, Our Environment”, C/O ECEA Programme, Environmental Protection Agency, Ganges Street, Sophia, GEORGETOWN, or email us at: eit.epaguyana@gmail.com. Follow us on Facebook and Instagram and subscribe to our YouTube channel