



Mangrove conservation park in Calatagan, Batangas

ICM Solutions

Harnessing the Power of an Informed Public for Coastal Management

- Mobilizing the public to take specific action for the environment is not so much about lecturing the public, as it is about empowering them with ample knowledge for them to make their own decisions.
- Collaborative governance has proven to be an effective tool within Integrated Coastal Management (ICM) programs, wherein governments have learned to steer rather than row when administering the affairs of coastal management. This approach recognizes that governments alone cannot address all problems associated with coastal management, but can provide an enabling environment for stakeholders to maximize their potentials in planning and managing coastal and marine resources.
- Community groups and community service organizations (CSOs) serve to catalyze development processes by operating down to the grassroots level to organize communities, conducting capacity development activities, and strengthening the voice of various sectors that previously had no voice.



Context

Try to imagine a simple fisherman holding a colorful brochure, half of its contents he does not understand. Picture him attempting to decipher its meaning while struggling to feed his hungry family.

This scenario is not far-fetched. It is a common challenge for development programs across the region. Orchestrating a communication campaign on ICM and sustainable development without considering the sociocultural underpinnings of a particular problem would be a waste of time and effort. The folly of omitting this crucial factor in development programs in general can be likened to mounting a unilateral assault on an audience—a bombardment of unsolicited information or an invasion of space.

For the simple fisherman example, it would be unrealistic to design a communication campaign geared toward him without taking into account his education level, social, cultural and economic status, and his priority concerns. Ultimately, the challenge in communicating with the public, community groups, and individuals lies in how to not come out looking like an outsider who is introducing a totally foreign idea.

Making a conscious effort to optimize the public's latent contributions can create huge impacts on an ICM program and its outcomes. An informed public can push the implementation and sustainability of an ICM program by:

1. Voluntary participation in management interventions that are designed to restore and protect the resources and livelihoods and security, based on full knowledge and understanding of why changes are needed. Providing solid and effective public information is a soft enforcement approach bringing down the costs for hard enforcement;
2. Serving as guardians of the resources against illegal and destructive practices, as well as new projects or policies that could threaten advances made in improved governance and management of the area;
3. Advocating changes in behavior in a community or community group (e.g., volunteerism/participation in IEC activities; providing skills, materials and equipment in order to accelerate planning and implementation processes; inviting/influencing other stakeholders within the sector to participate; and
4. Creating an enabling environment of cooperation, contribution, and co-management of their environment.

How an uninformed public can affect programs

In the early 1990s in Thailand, shrimp farming was a lucrative business, but the cause of massive depletion of mangrove forests. Efforts by the government to curb deforestation and protect the forests failed due in part to the non-inclusion of the communities and NGOs in mangrove management. The government later realized the important role of the stakeholders in program implementation. To foster cooperation and shared responsibility, dialogues, information-sharing, and discussions with community groups and the general public became part of their regular mangrove management activities.

In the Philippines, of 400 legislated marine protected areas (MPA)s it was observed that approximately 90% existed only on paper, with limited implementation or benefit. This number also reflected estimates from other countries of 80-90% of MPAs being paper parks only. Experts say this is caused by lack of community support, lack of funding, lack of guidance and evaluation. One salient characteristic of successful MPAs is the strong involvement of communities and the local government in the planning, management, and enforcement process.

Start with the people and their priorities. It is important to address the basic needs of the community first before progressing to sustainable development and governance concerns. Project managers must be cognizant of the realities and immediate concerns of the communities they are working with and act within with existing social, cultural, and institutional structures, systems, and practices.

In Preah Sihanouk, Cambodia, the ICM program had to deal with the compound issues of poverty, dwindling fish catch, resource use conflicts, degradation of resources, and expansion of infrastructure from large-scale industries. The ICM Project Management Office realized the difficulty of engaging the locals in discussions on environmental management, much less sustainable development. The locals, who were faced with their own problems of addressing basic survival needs, were also lacking in environmental awareness. To get the locals on board with the ICM program, it was essential to start educating them. Information, communication and education (IEC) activities became the first order of business. Field activities, one-on-one training, community-based teaching, and basic skills training were conducted, and coupled with provision of access to livelihood support. With this approach, a sense of ownership and responsibility was instilled. As local knowledge and acceptance of environmental management increased and basic needs were being addressed, the locals soon engaged in community activities that concerned issues beyond the confines of their own homes.



IEC activities in Preah Sihanouk helped in increasing community engagement.

Customize a strategy and plan for effective communication. The communication plan provides the rationale, objectives, expected outcomes, and strategic guide for effectively implementing information sharing and knowledge sharing across the different sectors of the community. First, it defines target audiences and clarifies desired relationships as a result of communication. Second, it determines key messages to be conveyed to target audiences. It clarifies the communication outcomes and objectives. Third, it provides a set of communication strategies and tactics to achieve the communication objectives. Finally, it defines the indicators and means for evaluating the effectiveness of communication activities.

The communication plan developed in Chonburi, Thailand, identified specific target audiences and drafted specific messages and strategies for each target audience. For example, the plan had time-bound communication strategies to reach the youth, teachers, fishers, restaurant owners, and leaders, and identified the content of the messages to be communicated, the channels of communication, and the frequency of the activities to ensure that the different sectors were informed and to solicit their support for specific initiatives within the ICM program.

Tailor-fit information sharing and interactions. In order to communicate effectively, information strategies and public awareness campaigns need to be created in formats and languages that are understood by the intended audiences. This takes into account the culture, beliefs, values, and context of the area and the community groups that

one is dealing with, and is backed by scientifically sound information that has been “translated” into words that the community of stakeholders will understand.

In Denpasar, Bali, Indonesia, one of the strategies in successful ICM implementation was to instill traditional beliefs and values into the ICM program and its objectives. While the area is undergoing sustainable tourism development, it is facing serious environmental issues, such as pollution, threats to sacred areas, human activities that lead to deterioration and degradation of coastal ecosystems, rapid urbanization, and the increased threat of natural disasters (e.g., storms, sea level rise, tsunami), just to name a few. To encourage public engagement, the local government integrated the “Tri Hita Karana” philosophy, which emphasizes the relationships between man and society, the environment and God, into the ICM program. Members of community-based organizations were educated in the importance of preserving and conserving coastal and marine resources, so that they, in turn, could pass on this knowledge to village elders and their respective villages. The increase in public awareness and engagement of the elders and villages in ICM initiatives led to a number of positive effects, including:

1. Implementation of waste management programs for domestic waste in villages, schools, and communities;
2. Reduction in destructive fishing practices, with local fishers becoming guardians of coral reefs;
3. Participation in the start-up of eco-friendly livelihoods, such as marine tourism, fish processing, seaweed culture, and setting up of small community cooperatives to sell fishery products; and
4. Engagement of hotels in good environmental management practices and the establishment of the Tri Hita Karana Awards for Tourism.

Create platforms for consensus-building, partnership, and public engagement. Providing a platform for the local government, the general public, and other major stakeholders to interact, plan, adopt, and implement ICM is one of the key targets of an ICM program. In Chonburi, Thailand, for example, the creation of a multisectoral coordinating mechanism facilitated senior officials of provincial and municipal governments, government departments, academic and scientific institutions, NGOs, private sector, fisher folk, students, local communities, and the public in general to work together. The mechanism provided a forum for consultation, planning and decision-making, resulting in a harmonized and rationalized coastal strategy which all government agencies and municipalities were able to use as their roadmap for environmental action.

The mechanism also resulted in establishment of networks and partnerships, including universities and research institutions in the province providing scientific information to enhance environmental awareness and understanding by the locals. With improved local knowledge and a better sense of environmental responsibility, the local communities are contributing more through their participation in environmental activities and projects within the ICM program.



Community activities in Chonburi include mangrove rehabilitation projects.

Heightened public awareness and an involved public uphold the objectives of ICM. Engaging the public in targeted IEC programs results in enhanced awareness, participation and ownership. The constant and conscious inclusion of the public results in a mutually reinforcing and supportive relationship between the general public and the objectives of ICM programs.

Such was also the case in Xiamen, PR China, in 2006 when the national government entered into a joint venture with a private company to build a billion dollar chemical factory in the Haicang District. Driven by the huge economic potential of the project that would possibly rake in billions of dollars, all environmental concerns took second seat. The planned petrochemical plant, which aimed to produce a highly polluting chemical (i.e., paraxylene) posed a threat to human and environmental health, not only to the 100,000 residents in the district but to the whole of Xiamen with a population of 3.5 million.

But Xiamen had been implementing an ICM program since 1994, and the public was well aware of the benefits of a healthy coastal and marine environment. Residents came together and protested the proposed plant, requesting the withdrawal of the project from Xiamen. This was soon picked up by local media and national newspapers. Pretty soon SMS messages (text messages), blogs, and web-based forums were used to spread information and protest against the plant. Street demonstrations ensued, attended by thousands, eventually forcing the municipal government to rethink its stand through a proper and public environmental impact assessment (EIA).

Finally, in December of 2007, after a review of the EIA and a public hearing where the majority opposed the project, the plant shut down operations in Haicang, Xiamen, but it was eventually relocated in another city in PR China.

In this case, the public clamor and the resulting decisions were facilitated by an existing ICM program and clear operational plans grounded on a multisectoral process of development. The Xiamen ICM program not only provided the vision and direction and structure for the management of the area, but gave the public a clear program to anchor on and rally behind.



Xiamen regularly holds coastal clean up activities.

Lesson Learned

1. Call for cooperation and action by the public. The creation of venues and activities for the public to engage in (e.g., coastal cleanups, tree planting, monitoring, contests, dialogues, etc.) helps to instill a sense of ownership and responsibility. In all of the cases cited previously, the ICM programs created various environmental events and activities wherein the public was engaged and active.

2. Show proof of program and project gains. This will also help entice others to participate in implementing and/or sustaining ICM programs. The flow of continuous information on program updates, decisions, and actions keeps the public interest and acceptance. And while it may be challenging to get the people interested in ICM, it takes extra effort to keep them in the program over the longer term. For example in Chonburi, Thailand, venues and activities to engage the youth in conservation projects were undertaken. Educational field trips, mangrove planting excursions, and seagrass planting activities for school children paved the way to stronger partnerships between the schools and government. The school children themselves have become advocates, sharing their experiences with the local communities; their seagrass

project, which has been conducted for several years now, has served as a demonstration project to raise awareness on the value of the resource. It has also inspired the participation and partnerships with universities for technical support, the municipal government, municipal schools, local fishers, and fishing communities.

3. Work in stages. Performing a combination of short, medium, and long-term strategies enables the public to better appreciate the benefits of ICM implementation. Start with the immediate or pressing issues and progress into more complicated issues.

In Cambodia, a valuable lesson learned and practiced is that building local capacity should be done a little bit at a time, starting from the simple concepts then progressing to the more complicated and bigger issues. Faced with a public with low awareness and interest and difficulty in understanding technical matters, the ICM Project Management Office in Preah Sihanouk sensed the locals' receptivity and willingness to participate when they were taught in stages, being provided the basic information and skills first and on issues that concerned them, then gradually involving them in community initiatives. Locals were engaged in ICM implementation in three

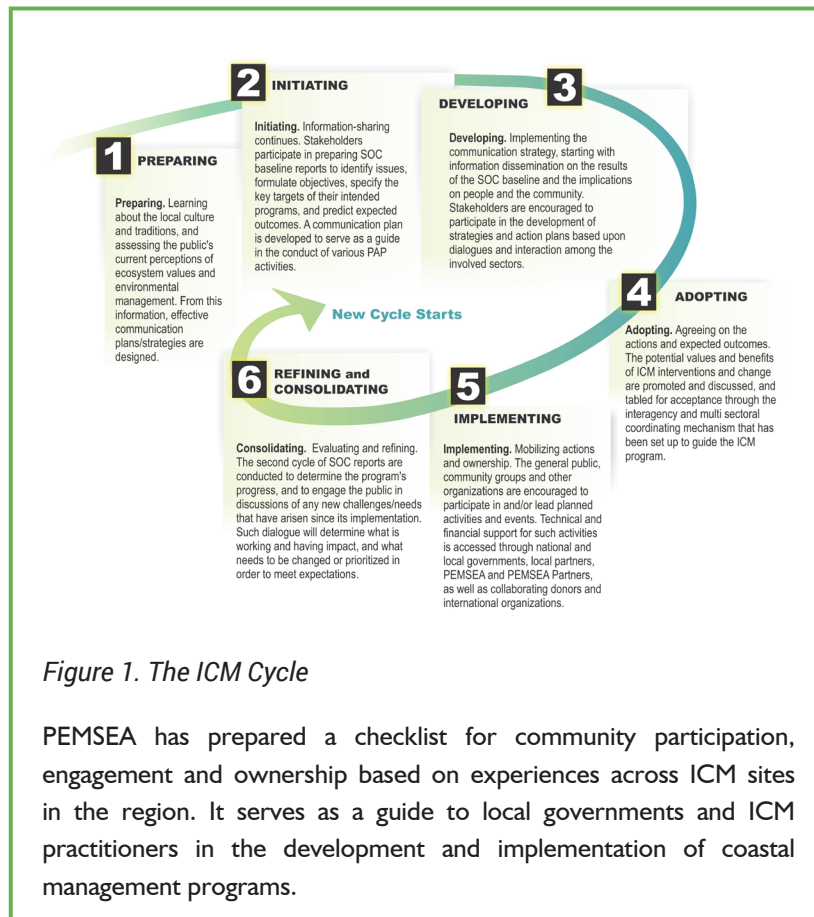


Figure 1. The ICM Cycle

PEMSEA has prepared a checklist for community participation, engagement and ownership based on experiences across ICM sites in the region. It serves as a guide to local governments and ICM practitioners in the development and implementation of coastal management programs.

stages: In the first stage, they introduced practical approaches to livelihood, protection of resources, and basic organizational management; in the second stage, they started addressing issues on water supply and access to safe water, including training on water reservoir rehabilitation; and in the third stage, they tackled the more complicated issues of management of water reservoirs and integrated waste management.

In three years, the ICM program built the capacities of 779 individuals on the various technical programs, environmental concerns, and organizational needs. More than building their knowledge and skills, the program has changed the way of thinking and behavior of these individuals and their families.

- 4. Ground the creation and operation of an informed public within the ICM system.** The ICM framework and process provides an institutional structure, defined roles and responsibilities, a strategic management plan guided by policies and laws and funding mechanisms, reinforced by support programs including capacity development, partnership building, and monitoring and reporting to ensure program sustainability and support. Each stage of the ICM process involves actions and outputs that can help transition the public from a condition of lack of concern or awareness to one of active engagement. Of course, one size does not fit all, and for communication plans to be effective, they must be tailor-fit to the specific public that you want to engage or change behavior. It is critical to study the appropriate strategies and tools to provide information, to help the public understand and believe in the information, and to translate their beliefs into action.

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