

Building public support for environmental change through work with civil society networks

Lessons learned from work with faith groups and community organisations

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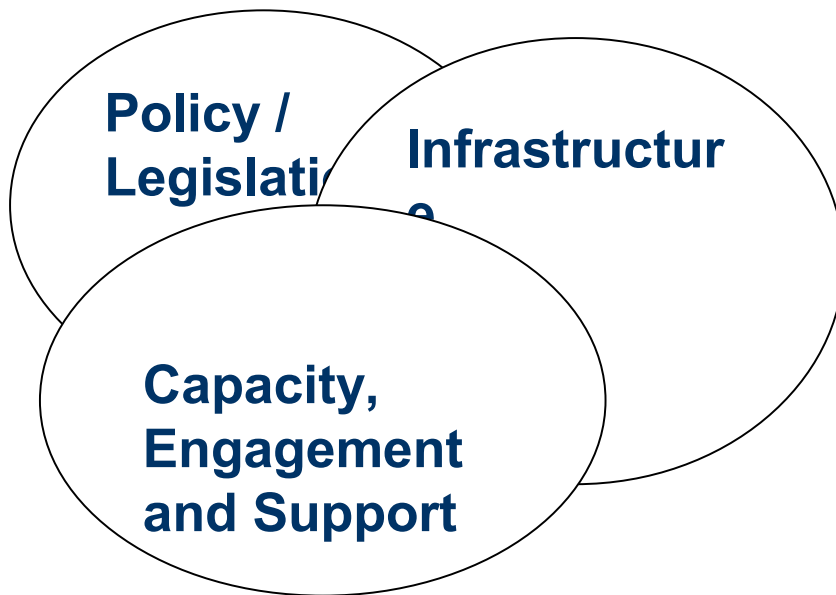
A focus on public engagement and support

**Why does this matter? One answer:
Lasting and sustainable change
requires action on:**

- **Policy**
- **Infrastructure**
- **Community engagement and capacity**

The value of local action for SD

- These three are all linked: it is difficult to deliver change without action on all three.



Linking the social and environmental

- Central to SD is the integration of social, economic, and environmental issues. Research in 2002 described social – environmental links as *'the neglected interface'*
- SD is rooted in the environment, but the environment has been seen by many social sector groups as being of less importance as an issue.
- Many environmental campaigners have in the past seen the social aspects of their work as secondary.

The importance of engagement with the social sector

- Much larger than the environmental sector (UK figures: c. 5000 environmental local and national organisations; there are c. 750,000 voluntary / community organisations)
- Many are running programmes that will have major environmental impacts (good or bad)
- These are groups where people are likely to co-operate and trust each other

Moves to convergence?

There are now several ways in which these concerns are converging.

- It is widely recognised that the poorest communities suffer from the worst environments. This is opening up work on ‘environmental justice’.
- The growing recognition that policy change alone is not enough to generate lasting change and improvement: there also needs to be adequate infrastructure and also public support and capacity building.

Finding ways forward

- There may be interest from both sides of the social / environmental divide in each others work, but moves to bridge the divide are often under-resourced or poorly coordinated.
- Most work has started from a perspective that the environmental issues are of great importance – this is often not the opinion of those that we seek to engage

Making it happen

- Environmental change needs personal and collective change
- It makes sense to promote change through networks where people trust each other
- Environmental organisations need to work to understand social goals and find mutual goals
- ***Listen – don't preach***

The Voluntary and Community sector (now directly targeted in UK around S.D.)

Many different levels and structures:

- National agencies and networks
- Local community / residents groups
- Communities of identity: religious groups, ethnic minorities
- Specific sectors of any community: young and older people
- Leisure and recreation groups

All will have an interest in a better environment.

The V & C sector is often poorly mapped

The value of work with faith and religious organisations

- Often amongst the strongest local organisations
- Often a high degree of trust
- The priest, imam, rabbi etc. may be a key local figure
- Local activity with a national centre

The problems...

- Potential for being socially divisive
- Environmental issues seen as secondary (or tertiary...)
- Lack of leadership on SD issues from the centre
- Cultural barriers
- Finding a common issue

Ways forward (1)

- Effective engagement needs vision, commitment and understanding. That vision needs to be developed both by leaders and by activists in all faiths who are already engaged in environmental work.
- The potential contribution that faith groups can make and the ways in which they work need to be understood by other agencies involved in this work. At present there is a significant lack of such understanding.

Ways forward (2)

National organisations can help start work with these communities and others by:

- Understand the principal issues and drivers for each faith
- Open / develop dialogue with senior faith leaders on matters that link to these issues
- Find ways to support and enable more local activity
- Promote local good practice nationally

Ways forward (3)

There is also a need for external support: funding bodies need to recognise that environment / SD work is an appropriate activity for faith groups to be engaged in.

A national inter-faith meeting (or meetings with single faiths) may help identify ways to start and to build on what is already being done.