

Analysis of participatory processes for sustainability indicator identification as a pathway to community empowerment and sustainable environmental management.

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Bottom up and top down: Analysis of participatory processes for sustainability indicator identification as a pathway to community empowerment and sustainable environmental management

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Abstract

The modern environmental management literature stresses the need for community involvement to identify indicators to monitor progress towards sustainable development and environmental management goals. The purpose of this paper is to assess the impact of participatory processes on sustainability indicator identification and environmental management in three disparate case studies. The first is a process of developing partnerships between First Nations communities, environmental groups, and forestry companies to resolve conflicts over forest management in Western Canada. The second describes a situation in Botswana where local pastoral communities worked with

development researchers to reduce desertification. The third case study details an ongoing government led process of developing sustainability indicators in Guernsey, UK, that was designed to monitor the environmental, social, and economic impacts of changes in the economy. The comparative assessment between case studies allows us to draw three primary conclusions. (1) The identification and collection of sustainability indicators not only provide valuable databases for making management decisions, but the process of engaging people to select indicators also provides an opportunity for community empowerment that conventional development approaches have failed to provide. (2) Multi-stakeholder processes must formally feed into decision-making forums or they risk being viewed as irrelevant by policy-makers and stakeholders. (3) Since ecological boundaries rarely meet up with political jurisdictions, it is necessary to be flexible when choosing the scale at which monitoring and decision-making occurs. This requires an awareness of major environmental pathways that run through landscapes to understand how seemingly remote areas may be connected in ways that are not immediately apparent.



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Keywords

Sustainability indicators; Participatory processes; Case study methodology; British Columbia, Canada; Botswana; Guernsey, United Kingdom

Abbreviations:

CIDA, Canadian International Development Agency; CIT, Coast Information Team; DFID, Department for International Development; EM, Ecosystem Management; IVP, Indigenous Vegetation Project; SLA, Sustainable Livelihoods Assessment; UNDP, United Nations Development Project; UNEP, United Nations Environment Project; WA, Wellbeing Assessment

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