The 12th session of the Expert Mechanism on the Right to Development

Item 5 of the Provisional Agenda
Implementation of the Mandate and Programme of Work –
Focused Thematic Discussions and Interactive Dialogues
Palais des Nations, Room XVI, Geneva

Public participation: a tool for development

Tuesday 28 October 2025, 10:00 – 11:30

Concept Note
Presented by Isabelle Durant

Introduction

The active participation of local stakeholders in the development of the territories they inhabit constitutes a fundamental component of the right to development. This principle holds significant relevance not only for individuals but also for States and governing bodies. Decisions and initiatives in domains such as land use planning, energy provision, and infrastructure development invariably bear implications for a number of human rights, including the rights to health and environment.

Integrating the knowledge, lived experiences, cultural diversity, and traditional practices of local populations can substantially enhance the quality and appropriateness of decision-making processes. Furthermore, when local stakeholders are meaningfully engaged—or even positioned as co-creators—they are more inclined to assume ownership of the initiative, thereby contributing to its long-term success and sustainability.

Such participatory approaches serve to reinforce the relevance and responsiveness of development interventions. In addition, access to information and opportunities for engagement empower individuals to contribute to more effective outcomes and to identify potential instances of mismanagement. Nevertheless, a notable discrepancy often exists between the theoretical endorsement of participatory governance and its practical realization.

Ensuring the representativeness of consulted populations is imperative to avoid the exclusion of groups in marginalized situations and to prevent the disproportionate influence of the most vocal or resource-rich actors. To operationalize the right to participate in an inclusive and equitable manner, it is essential to structure the process across several key phases: conducting a needs assessment, defining objectives and goals, mobilizing individuals and stakeholders through the provision of adequate information, and establishing a robust methodology and accountability framework.

It is incumbent upon national and local authorities to define the institutional framework and regulatory mechanisms governing public participation. The overarching objective is to guarantee that participatory processes are accessible, inclusive, and transparent, that all relevant voices are duly considered, and that there is clear accountability regarding how public input is incorporated into decision-making.

Purpose

The aim of this panel is to critically examine the role of public participation in development processes, emphasizing its importance for inclusive decision-making, democratic accountability, and the effective implementation of sustainable policies.

Guiding questions

1. What participatory experiences do you consider successful, and what lessons have you learned from them? How have you ensured the inclusion of individuals and/or groups or various stakeholders?

2. What information, mobilizing and training tools and channels have you used alongside the process of participation and what positive or negative impacts have they had?

3. What were the factors that contributed to the success or failure of these participatory processes? Were they effective at all stages of the project, from needs assessment to monitoring and evaluation?

4. How did you manage the differences between the various proposals emanating from these participatory processes? Do you offer individuals and/or actors participating in the process the possibility to deliberate and negotiate?

Expected Outcomes

1. Establish realistic and feasible conditions and the essential steps for local community participation.

2. Identify sources of conflict, the emergence of potential conflicts of interest and biases that may impact participation mechanisms in order to prevent them from the outset of a participatory process.

3. Provide the various actors involved with information and materials that contribute to active participation, ownership and trust among populations in a decision-making process.

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