COMMUNICATION AND EDUCATION IN A PARTICIPATORY APPROACH

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This paper does not pretend to answer all the questions about integrated management of coastal regions, but it hopes to raise awareness, as far as communication and education are concerned, of the importance of participation in sustainable management of a coastal environment.

African societies have their own way of looking at their surroundings which stretches back through legends, religion, oral tradition and long-established know-how. In the West, human beings aspire to be the 'owner and master of nature,' but in Africa, as Eric Dardel has pointed out, 'the world is seen as a unity of which human beings are an integral part - as individuals are of a tribe, as the internal blends in with the external. It's a world of participation where humans seek out their likeness in the world's creatures and find themselves by reference to the universe. In Africa, humans live on through plants and animals, through the earth and the sky, through the vital spark, which drives the wind and the stars, the sprouting and the maturing of things, the tides and the rain. It's the same life which they feel in their own bodies'.

The strength of African countries is the involvement of their people in development programmes. This implies involvement in the conception and execution of a project and in safe-guarding its achievements. In this respect, participation is at the heart of integrated sustainable management of coastal regions.

To better understand, we can imagine a situation in which communication and education remain a monopoly of official bodies, with no regard for the eventual beneficiaries. That would make it impossible to achieve the set goals, much less inclusion of the beneficiaries and long-term use of the resources.

In the Comoros Islands, for example, the ministry of fisheries provided fish aggregating devices. But because nobody trained local people how to use them properly, some fishermen unfastened the equipment to re-use the rope it contained. In some coastal villages, however, fishermen organized themselves independently of the authorities to protect sea turtles and the rare coelacanth fish and to oppose practices which were destroying marine resources, such as the use of fine-mesh nets, poison and dynamite.

Participation provides only advantages and opportunities. We must come up with flexible ways to include people, suitable methods of communication, appropriate topics and

training methods and ways to solve the tricky problems which come with involvement, such as how to make decisions and how to implement environmental laws and programmes.

But people do not realize how serious the problems are. As far as communication and education about the environment are concerned, the main obstacles are:

- ignorance of how important the environment is;
- lack of skilled people;
- lack of infrastructure and funding;
- shortage of teaching equipment and organization;
- shortage of integrated, co-ordinated programmes which are reasonable, needed and sustainable;
- very slow growth of the New World Information Order to replace the present one dominated by powerful Western societies;
- 'dependence' of African media on those of the West.

Every country is different, however, so we need to encourage research and action to understand the problems better and perfect the means of communication and education. In the Comoros, for example, it would be risky to rely on government institutions. Local television stations are everywhere, but a national station has not yet been set up. Experience shows that traditional places – village or town squares, mosques, Koranic schools and community centres – are still the best ones for communication and education. The goal is a development approach adapted to local socio-cultural conditions and based on strengthening capacities. To do this, we think the priorities are to:

- develop integrated and interactive communication and education;
- encourage the use of local languages, especially in grassroots communication and instruction;
- emphasize development of human resources and awareness of the importance of the environment and the sustainable management of natural resources;
- encourage the setting up of local and national media organizations in Africa which are diversified, viable and professional;
- strengthen the capacities of the private sector and local communities;
- build networks of communication and information;
- reconcile the needs of the environment with those of the economy (such as tourism) and employment;
- develop socio-cultural factors and add modern scientific and technical knowledge to them.

Integrated management of coastal regions is a laborious process. The ultimate aim is to consider a new approach to communication and education which allows everyone, from political decision-makers and agents of change to those who finally benefit, to be involved in the sustainable integrated management of coastal regions. The goal should be to find a good balance between the formal and informal in the field of communication and education as it applies to the environment.