

Overview

Four thematic seminars have been held since September 2002 on solid waste management, public-private partnerships for urban water supply and wastewater treatment, urban air quality management, and industrial relocation. The fifth thematic seminar in the series focuses on “public participation” for urban environmental management, with particular focus on the fields of water supply and sanitation, and solid waste management.

Participants from cities in Bangladesh, Indonesia, Japan, Pakistan, the Philippines, and Thailand, as well as experts and representatives from donor agencies in the Asia-Pacific Region, were in attendance. The seminar covered the following areas: public participation and its role in urban environmental management, drivers for public participation, formal and informal institutional arrangements to facilitate public participation, challenges and prospects in Kitakyushu Initiative Network cities, and how lessons learned from successful and unsuccessful practices can be transferred to cities with similar challenges.

The two-day seminar was held at the Kitakyushu International Conference Centre in Kitakyushu, Japan, on 20-21 January 2004. A half-day field visit to Kitakyushu’s Environment Museum and Environmental Museum of Water was conducted to see the style of environmental education being carried out by a local government in Japan.

During the seminar, presentations were made on successful cases and challenges in the actions and improvement of public participation and awareness of residents in environmental protection through various modes, such as environmental education. Presentations and discussions were also carried out by experts on the latest trends in environmental education and activities to improve the environmental awareness of residents.

The two-day seminar was divided into three sessions: public participation in water supply and sanitation, public participation in solid waste management, and modes to improve public participation. A brief outline of the issues discussed during these sessions follows in the analysis of the seminar (“Public Participation for Urban Environmental Management: Overview and Analysis”).

Discussions focused on determining the level of usefulness of community participation in urban environmental management, as well as issues and opportunities for community participation. Public participation in water supply and sanitation, and solid waste management were discussed, including the role of the local government and NGOs, levels of management, and ownership of schemes and cooperation. Various modes for community participation were also a focal point, including environmental education, advanced tools, other innovative tools and challenges faced in using these tools.

Participants stressed the importance of political will and determination, as well as public pressure from civil society and environmental awareness, to address the challenges they face in urban environmental management. Dissemination of information was also identified as a key point in improving public participation, however, methods to disseminate that information differed from city to city. A number of participants brought up the method of “training the trainers”, who can then disseminate the necessary information to outside groups of people. The role of media was also determined to be influential in swaying public opinion and raising awareness towards environmental protection.

Other participants provided information from their experiences in selecting a pilot area in which to conduct activities, together with other stakeholders already acting in that location, i.e. NGOs, community organisations, etc. From this, successful points can be replicated in neighbouring communities, as the outcomes are visible to the general population. It is beneficial to first conduct activities on a site-by-site level to develop a successful model.

The following points were identified as important in enhancing public participation in urban environmental management. These points are discussed in detail, together with their inter-relationships, in the subsequent analysis (“Public Participation for Urban Environmental Management: Overview and Analysis”).

- (1) **Challenges:** Water & wastewater, solid waste management, air quality, biodiversity, overall urban environmental management

- (2) **Driving forces:** political will, governance, institutions (decentralisation, regulations and laws), economy/market, public pressure
- (3) **Modes:** Partnerships, management, ownership/local initiatives, Consumer behaviour
- (4) **Tools and strategies:** Formal/informal education, action-based learning, eLearning, campaigns/meetings
- (5) **Partners and integration:** Civil society, Business/private sector, government, international agencies/initiatives

This seminar discussed important issues pertaining to public participation, in particular with regard for pilot cities. All pilot activities under the Kitakyushu Initiative must include among other elements, “enhanced participation by stakeholders;” in this way, public participation by the participating cities will further the implementation of pilot activities in cities in Asia and the Pacific.