The link between participation, capable communities and environmental gain

Liz Chapman, RuralPlan (2002)
"The link between participation, capable communities and environmental gain"

This paper discusses Australian and international literature as it relates to the goals and values of the Goulburn Broken Catchment Management Authority (GBCMA), and makes recommendations for integrating appropriate participative models to aid the pursuit of sustainable regional development.

The GBCMA has drafted a Regional Catchment Strategy (RCS) to focus effort on land and water issues over the next 5 years. The Strategy outlines the primary issues of salinity, water quality, river health and biodiversity; and notes the importance of global warming, and loss of soil health as issues that require priority attention. It also points the way towards landscape change as the means by which challenges facing the region can be addressed.

A key element of the RCS framework is a whole-of-catchment approach that promotes investments that generate "triple bottom line" outcomes and pursues sustainable regional development. Capacity building and community engagement are noted as two important ways that the GBCMA does business.

Introduction

There are strong and opposing views regarding *community participation* as a method for achieving change in natural resource management (NRM).

Part of the problem arises with different definitions. Often it is used to mean the active involvement of landholders in the adoption of best environmental management practices. Unfortunately, adoption of best environmental management practices at best provides incremental landscape change at a time where the threats are daunting and substantial change is essential. Using this definition, participatory methods have not been found to be as promising as initially hoped.

Community Participation can also mean the engagement of a whole district, through various methods aimed at achieving representative diversity of the population. In this participative model the range of community views and insights would be highlighted, not just the views of primary stakeholders. In this manner, it is possible that new ways of thinking about and addressing sustainability issues can come to the fore. However focussing resources on this style of practice risks avoiding action on the substantial environmental threats. Participation can become an end in itself. The realities of goal achievement and funding requirements require physical work to be achieved.

Often, discussion about community participation is linked to discussion about *capacity building*. This further complicates the situation as the term *capacity building* has been appropriated by governments to mean training – a definition quite at odds with its emergence as a community development concept. At other times the term is used so broadly that its meaning is unclear. Yet there is now good information to show that a capable community is good for sustainable regional development, so this concept also needs consideration.

Defining the Concepts

1.   Sustainable Regional Development

The research undertaken by Dore, Keating, Woodhill and Ellis[1] is the most thorough and applicable to the Australian rural natural resource management context. Using their findings, sustainable regional development can be described as -

The application of sustainable development principles at the regional scale, where they are possibly best implemented; that is, improving community well-being and economic opportunity while caring for the environment. The concept includes the target of maintaining and enhancing environmental quality and ecological integrity and not diminishing opportunities for future generations by thoughtless spending of natural capital endowments.

Sustainable Regional Development (SRD) should be paramount in the overarching thinking that drives our regional management and development efforts, plans, initiatives and associated decisions. There is a need for greater awareness and appreciation of unsustainable practices and systems. Some dominant assumptions, mindsets and paradigms need to be challenged. There is a need for a deeper understanding about sustainability and, as this increases, a need to keep clarifying the vision and direction of SRD initiatives.

The GBCMA is one of several institutions that can directly influence the achievement of SRD.   Local Government, State Government departments, community development groups and other non-government organisations have the ability to aid Sustainable Regional Development. The engagement of institutions in SRD practice is discussed later ("Participation of Institutions"). Capable communities can implement SRD practices, and the Regional Catchment Strategy is an important potential planning mechanism for SRD. In this sense, community participation is inclusive of the whole regional population in all its diversity – individuals, communities of interest, and organisations.

Capable communities are a pre-requisite for the achievement of SRD, and community participation is essential to its achievement. There is now considerable evidence that *sustainable* regional development – meaning innovation and the capacity to cope with change - is not possible without a functioning and capable community[2].

However attractive the notion of capable communities, it is difficult to resource as an end in itself.   Development theory and international experience suggests that community capacity can be strengthened if the methods adopted to address environmental issues are overtly designed to also build community capacity. The concepts of "Capacity Building" and "Community Capacity" are discussed below.

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[1] J. Dore et al 2000
[2] Polèse 1994; McGuire et al 1994; Fitzwarryne & Hoile 1999; Lockie et all 1999 and others

2.   Capacity Building

Capacity Building is not training.   Capacity development refers to the ability of countries, regions, organisations and people to manage development in a smooth, efficient and sustainable way. This makes it clear that capacity development is a multi-dimensional concept. It is not just concerned with single components such as training and education or organisational strengthening[3].

It refers to what the community is capable of in the process of development. It involves values, motivations, effort and energy as well as knowledge and skills. It has been defined as the development within the community of knowledge and skills which can be collectively deployed to effect change on behalf of the community.[4]

Unfortunately these concepts have been lost in its current use. Now it tends to be used to describe an instrumental approach where people and their skills are seen as tools or instruments to achieve certain goals which they may or may not have participated in devising[5]. At its most base, there is the view that landholders need to be given the capacity to make the changes deemed necessary by experts.

The difference between this base view and the developmental concepts noted in the former description is very important and goes to the centre of the sustainable regional development (SRD) issues confronting CMAs and other organisations.   A SRD approach to capacity building values local knowledge and local ways of knowing – not just as a way to get landholders to change practices determined by others as necessary, but as a way of expanding the learning and decision making process.

3.   Community Capacity

Land and water asset managers such as CMAs work to repair resource degradation and to manage the use of our natural assets. As noted on the NRM_Changelinks website, undertaking these tasks brings the central concerns of environmental management to the fore –
⇨ managing change,
⇨ resolving conflict,
⇨ managing institutional pluralism,
⇨ enhancing coordination,
⇨ fostering communication, and
⇨ ensuring that data and information are shared.
Addressing these concerns requires a broad and holistic view of community capacity development.[6]   The capacity of the community to achieve these difficult maneuvers needs to be high. It is likely to be high where social capital is strong. Strong social capital acts as support for active, learning communities. Generally it endorses the development of human capital.

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[3] Bossuyt 1994; Gunn&Gunn 1991
[4] Barr,Hashagen and Purcell, 1996.
[5] Dibden 2000 in Cocklin et al 2001
[6] NRM_Changelinks

Unfortunately, social capital can be used on occasion to quash capacity building[7]. This can be seen on occasion where a community-of-interest becomes closed in its thinking, endorsing only the prevailing opinion and sanctioning difference. To avoid this situation it is important that external expertise is welcomed and endorsed by local leaders. Social capital, plus diverse participation from inside and outside the community, enhances community capacity. The importance of bringing in outside 'experts' is discussed in a later section.

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[7] Portes & Landolt, 1996

Participation

1. Landholder Participation

C.Butler-Flora[8] notes that participation in sustainable natural resource management involves both the *discovery* of threats to natural resources and alternative ways of reducing the risks from these threats; and *engagement* in choosing, implementing, and managing the alternatives chosen. Extension practice, by way of contrast, tends to focus at the engagement level rather than the whole discovery/engagement model. Often extension practice is referred to as participatory (in that groups of farmers are engaging with an issue). This section seeks to clarify the different forms of participation and comment on which participatory approaches have been found to be useful to systemic change, and which participatory approaches are limited to single issue effects.

> *"….even in projects that purport to be participatory, only partial negotiation takes pace. Too often, the community is consulted about the project* after *researchers or project managers have established the goals and objectives of the initiative."*[9]

In a summary of approaches taken to participation in natural resource management, C.Butler-Flora notes that they tend to be –
Extractive: designed to help researchers from outside the community get more grounded information out of the community and back to their own home-base so that it may be inserted into the research design.
Non-extractive: where the research and the community work together in designing, implementing, and evaluating the discovery of problems and alternative ways of dealing with them. The research is designed primarily to be beneficial to the local community. In other words, the *non-extractive* methods are built on the concept of joint inquiry by the researcher and the local population. Participation is a critical part of the process of discovery toward the fulfillment of practical needs leading to improved capacity to consider and deal with other issues.

Whilst the Goulburn-Broken invests considerably in ensuring that their Implementation Committees are involved in joint inquiry processes, generally speaking group extension practice tends to concentrate at the *engagement* phase and lacks the joint-discovery phase described above. Thus the CMA structure generally in Victoria is coming under increasing criticism for being extractive and therefore unable to be truly beneficial to development of capacity to address future issues.

The GBCMA will need to make its case to demonstrate its commitment to participatory approaches which aid the strengthening of community capacity. It can do this by:
(a) Communicating the capacity-building effects of the many associated structures that underpin the Implementation Committees. There are myriad working groups established to discover and engage in specific environmental issues. Every Implementation Committee has its own unique structure. In the Shepparton

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[8] C.Butler Flora et al 2000
[9] ibid

Irrigation Region Implementation Committee area, for example, there are currently five working groups such as the Sub-surface Drainage Group and the Waterways Working Group. Other committees advising the Implementation Committees (and the Board) include the Biodiversity Coordination Committee, and the G-B River Health and Water Quality Committee. The coming together of citizens with exceptionally diverse knowledge-bases can be quite profound in terms of improving the ability of the community to address issues as they emerge in future.

(b) demonstrating that its Implementation Committees are one important component of a three-part participatory methodology.

Cocklin et al (2001) note –

> *"If the major changes required are to be brought about, the NRM facilitation systems – such as Landcare and CMAs – must be open to, and prepared to work with, the possibility of broader change. Most of the literature that deals with public participation in NRM indicates that major changes will be brought about when people develop a stronger sense of having control of the programs that shape their landscapes."*

There are substantial questions about the potential of community based extension to achieve significant outcomes in biodiversity conservation and off site impacts.[10] In his assessment of literature re the factors that influence the adoption of improved natural resource management practices on agricultural land, Neil Barr notes that stakeholder groups have generally limited success, being about incremental change rather than systemic change[11]. The GBCMA can learn from this criticism by ensuring that –

- Implementation Committees – which realistically may be dominated by landholders – are valued as *one* of three core components of a participative methodology to aid sustainable regional development. The other core components are community (or public) participation and managing the participation of multiple institutions.
- Implementation Committees continue to be demonstrably involved in identification ("discovery") of issues as well as in the implementation of resolutions.
- The worth of Implementation Committees is not devalued. Implementation Committees are a vital mechanism for changing social norms and developing solutions to local nrm issues. What landholders know about the landscape is often in their heads (tacit) and requires appropriate group processes to combine with the latest explicit knowledge. The power of landholder participation to achieve innovative solutions for local challenges should continue to be valued. This does not shy away from awareness that other mechanisms are required to achieve significant outcomes in biodiversity conservation and off site impacts. Rather, it highlights the complexity of enhancing sustainability and the need to avoid single-issue responses.

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[10] Curtis 1997 in Barr 2000
[11] Barr 2000

2.   Community (or Public) Participation

Although it is a pleasing notion, community (or public) participation is frustrating, risky, difficult to evaluate and resource-hungry. Therefore it begs the question "why?".

Honest, well-designed community participation processes can reduce the cost of non-compliance, provide a solid front against future attacks, engage the community and strengthen its ability to deal with future issues, and bring to the fore new ways of thinking about substantial challenges. As such it needs to be valued as a core component of participatory methods to enhance the achievement of sustainable regional development.

In the 1990's as decline issues in rural Australia became a substantial political issue, the Commonwealth invested in programs to promote the notion that "the cavalry was not coming over the hill" and that, as a consequence, community participation was required to address local issues. This in turn prompted the rise in the number of rural leadership programs. Unfortunately however there were countless examples of flawed community participation processes, where a promising start was overtaken by local politics resulting in the same few individuals participating in maintaining the status quo. Often the motivations for institutional support for participatory process were unclear or institutional goals were at odds with democracy-in-action. At other times the process was so one-dimensional that it became the end in itself, totally at odds with the funding and time pressures of decision makers.

Community Participation was considered for some time to be "a good thing" and the way forward for environmental change. There are now examples of poor outcomes.

> *"Promoting systemic change through participative processes may encounter 'group think', where group norms reinforce existing viewpoints.* [12]

A lack of diversity of values and expertise is often a root cause of failure to achieve results with community participation processes. External knowledge and views should be introduced as part of the process of researching an issue. How such information is linked into the considerations by the local group will help determine their decisions and actions. For example, if the external expertise is presented as "all knowing" it will often be rejected as clearly such a position is flawed. However if the "external" expert is introduced by a respected member of the group as a presenter of additional information to be weighed up, it becomes part of an open inquiry. ("External expert" can mean anyone not belonging to the group such as a scientist from Tatura or a GBCMA officer not directly connected to the group.) Interaction between external expertise and local knowledge, very often brokered by local leaders[13],[14] is essential. Degradation can be hastened where popular public perception ignores other verifiable knowledge. The external expert needs to understand the

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[12] Neil Barr (2000)

[13] for discussion on Local and non-local leadership see S.Stone

[14] The relationships developed between GBCMA officers and their committees and task groups enable them to frequently play the 'local leader' role.

concept of joint inquiry and not presume his/her knowledge is superior to the group's knowledge.

It is the combination of
⇨ local knowledge (often tacit)
⇨ local commitment; and
⇨ external knowledge (often explicit)
which enhances sustainable regional development.

Community (or Public) Participation has come a long way since the early days of believing that any and all issues could be resolved by a short, sharp social action program. Today it refers to the engagement of a geographic area's population in all its diversity in discourse about an issue. It involves clarification of a set of circumstances or events to reach a similar understanding re meaning; and discussion and implementation over a sustained period of time of an adaptable set of responses. It may percolate upwards as a home-grown claim/concern/issue, as it did in the late 1980's with salinity in the Goulburn-Broken. Alternatively, it can be identified by (i) a local institution; or (ii) externally and introduced by a local connection.

Today, community participation is regaining attention as a relevant approach to change-based programs as uncertainty increases about the ability of science or government to 'fix' all challenges, and as evaluation of unsuccessful participatory approaches informs the development of methodologies.

There are examples internationally of excellent processes where not only has a significant issue been addressed, but where the process has helped to improve the capacity of the community to address other issues. In Australia, Land & Water Australia is funding PhD students[15] at ANU to investigate public participation methods, specifically deliberative forums. Their findings to date confirm that lay citizens are more than capable of contributing to complex policy issues; and that reasoned and alternative suggestions for ways forward are an outcome.

They also note that a result of the process is uncomfortable for some as it does challenge roles, which can be difficult for many in authority. The body of work is still at an early stage but has identified that community participation (or 'buy-in') can be achieved where there is demonstrated good process as well as an outcome. A number of deliberative processes have been developed including Deliberative Polls, Citizens Jury Models, Planning Cells, and Consensus Conferences. In Canada, a massive roll-out of deliberative forums were held so that rural communities could determine, in an informed manner, whether a pipeline should be constructed across the country. In Australia a Consensus Conference on Genetically Modified Organisms and a Citizens Jury about the Bloomfield Track in the Daintree have been undertaken.

Who gets to participate in deliberative forums is crucial to the strength of the outcome. Participants should generally reflect the diversity of the community. A process which casts the net widely and aims towards a random stratified sample is recommended. This gives the best possible opportunity for one of the outcomes to be *one or more reasoned and alternative ways to progress the issue*.

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[15] Land & Water Australia, Social & Institutional Research Program

Although there are substantial pitfalls for the unwary, methodologies are evolving which can deliver democratic processes as well as change-based outcomes. These methodologies require a genuine open inquiry. PhD students Carolyn Hendriks and Simon Niemeyer note that attempts to control the result, achieve personal agendas, sideline potential opponents, undertake the process as an after-thought, make the inquiry toothless or bury the results detract from the process, the outcome, or the sponsoring agency. The GBCMA has an excellent track record in adapting its structures and processes to respond to the latest information about "what works". The development of deliberative forums provides it with an opportunity to trial and adapt a new range of community participatory processes for achieving the quantum leaps essential to making sustainable regional development a realistic endeavour.

3. Participation of Institutions

Many organisations are active in the sustainable development of the region. In addition to the GBCMA, Tourism Authorities, Economic Development agencies, water authorities, State government agencies and local government authorities all have statutory responsibilities in aspects of land and/or water issues in the Goulburn Broken region.

Industry and recreational user representative bodies, environmental groups and issue-based community groups are just some of the range of non-government organisations that play active roles.

The GBCMA is in a powerful position to aid Sustainable Regional Development (SRD).   However no organisation has over-arching responsibility, and it is questionable whether any hierarchical structural response to SRD could be productive. Governments and regional communities both acknowledge that "top-down" solutions to sustainability are neither acceptable nor wholly workable. A combination of approaches – from advocacy to legislation - will aid in the achievement of SRD.

> *"Rather than 'command and control', ..aim to 'communicate and co-ordinate'"[16]*

The issue of managing many institutions that have developmental responsibilities has been the topic of considerable research and development internationally. One program in Uganda[17] achieved good results where joint institutional action was formally negotiated.   Collaborative agreements were determined to be successful where -
(a) it led to the development of each organisation's specialisations and capacities;
(b) it enhanced comparative advantage for the area and hence facilitated prudent use of meagre local resources;
(c) it guaranteed timely delivery of services
(d) all partners were answerable to the civic community
(e) all players participated as equal partners
(f) the agreement was maintained

This provides useful parameters for the development of understanding with other key agencies. The GBCMA has recognised that alliances are required at the regional level. Many Board and Implementation Committee members have several formal and informal networks across and within other institutions. This is an effective method that can be developed.

There are seven Local Governments in the Goulburn Broken region, with responsibilities for municipal planning. Local Governments also have their "ear to the ground" to aid community development, with several forms of community consultation embarked on annually.   The GBCMA and irrigation-based local

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[16] J.Ravetz 2000
[17] G.Kasumba

governments also share a municipal officer to provide linkage. The dryland arrangements have not been as successful.

In Victoria generally there has been a risk of a wide variation in interpretation between CMAs and local government in terms of Regional Catchment Strategies and municipal planning schemes. Both mechanisms are crucial to the protection of catchment values and environmental assets, yet these two mechanisms were developed by the State Government independently of each other. As a first step to better integration, the Municipal Association of Victoria[18] recently undertook a detailed review and proposed models for their possible integration. The Goulburn Broken region could advance the effort. Establishing a formal agreement with local governments regarding cooperation, collaboration and issues requiring primacy, would be a very constructive start to achieving participative processes across institutions.

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[18] Municipal Association of Victoria (draft) 2002

Implications for GBCMA practice

1. Community Participation in discovery and engagement

Since the late 1980's the Goulburn Broken Catchment community has been actively participating to address natural resource management issues. The future ability of the catchment community to increase exponentially the protection of our natural assets is dependant on the capacity of our community to engage with the issues – through discovery and informed decision making.

1.1   Implementation Committees

1.1.1   Implementation Committees – membership
There are three formal geographic-based Implementation Committees (ICs) established, with membership drawn from the sub-regional population.   These committees work well for the catchment.   The ICs are engaged in developing the Regional Catchment Strategy, in working with scientists, in developing proposals for funding and in guiding the works program.

However emerging criticism of CMA structures[19] in Victoria is largely based on the perceived weighting of formal committees (such as Implementation Committees) with landholders whose interests may result in the deliberate or inadvertent quashing of full and open discourse re the nature of degradation and the quantum change required. This could result in pressure on CMAs to change their structures – which would be a mistake in the Goulburn-Broken as the structure has enabled a process which is achieving its objectives.   The Goulburn-Broken will need to make its case that its Implementation Committees and associated working groups/coordination committees are a vital mechanism for normalising environmental considerations and developing solutions to local nrm issues.   It will need to make clear that ICs are not expected to be able to achieve significant biodiversity conservation outcomes or off-site impacts. Rather, they are a valued component of knowledge management where sub-catchments guide research, identify issues, provide advice, develop annual plans and implement local solutions.   Realistically, Implementation Committee membership may well be dominated by landholders – in a farming community this is legitimate. However the GBCMA should invest considerable effort in achieving a group of citizens which reflects the diversity of the community.   The skills listed in the membership eligibility criteria (such as Leadership, Vegetation Management, Salinity, etc) could be developed into a matrix which also nominates demographic priorities such as gender, age range, indigenous, generational landholder, etc.   The risk of tokenism should be actively avoided.

By 2007, membership of IC committees should more accurately reflect the diversity of its population.   This may require a more significant process in attracting interest from non-traditional participants.

1.1.2   Implementation Committees – focus of effort
Considerable resourcing goes into enabling the GBCMA Implementation Committees to achieve their workplans.   Also, there are Priority Setting sessions and Business

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[19] see Cocklin et al

Planning sessions; generally around 6 months apart. This system should not substantially alter, however it would be worthwhile to reconsider whether the implementation program is attuned to adaptation based on new and emerging 'discovery'. Whilst it is recognised that pressure may come from the committee members to 'get on with it', it is important that new IC members be encouraged to influence the group by bringing forward their way of thinking. An expanded orientation program – where new and continuing members participate in a set program of presentations/questioning and discussion - may provide an extra mechanism for discovery and adaptation.

A challenge to long term capacity building is the short term need to achieve set targets, monitored by funding agencies. The focus of effort should naturally be reflected in what is being monitored and evaluated. If the higher aim is sustainable regional development (SRD) then the monitoring and evaluation framework must include consideration of actions to build the capacity of the community. This is discussed below. This will justify the focus of IC effort towards discovery, discussion, engagement and innovation as well as to implementation of works.

1.1.3   Implementation Committees – inviting in outside experts

The GBCMA has been very good at networking and opening the door for outside experts to participate in change in the Goulburn Broken. There is no specific recommendation for a change in practice in this area.

The GBCMA can ensure that outside experts continue to be invited, and endorsed by local leaders on the Implementation Committees, where their knowledge can be used for the benefit of the local community – *where the concept of joint inquiry is understood by the external specialist/researcher*.

1.2   Community Participation – "People in the Street"

There are two reasons for expanding the participation of "People in the Street" in the GBCMA's programs –

(a) Normalising natural resource management as a regional priority so that adoption of changed practices is supported

In Mildura, salinity awareness jumped to well above the state rural average when a test well flag was placed in the main shopping street[20]. Although claims of over simplification are a risk, it is essential that physical, visual aids be identified to demonstrate key environmental messages. Such focussed efforts as improving the observability of natural resource issues help develop a local culture which is more likely to engage with the nrm challenges. Additionally, there is more community support for landholders weighing up the adoption of changed practices – another factor in the decision making process: *"weighing up of options is in part a social task"*[21].

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[20] DNRE et al 1997 in N.Barr 2000
[21] N. Barr

(b) Bring to the fore new ways of thinking about substantial challenges, thus enhancing the achievement of sustainable regional development.

A community capacity-building approach to sustainable regional development values local knowledge and local ways of knowing as a way of expanding the learning and decision making process. Such approaches are difficult and often annoying as different priorities will emerge – and they have to be dealt with; either as an extra feed-back loop into the sub-strategies of the Regional Catchment Strategy, or through discourse with other institutions (see next point).

New methodologies to engage communities in decision making are being trialed in Australia and undertaken internationally. These various styles of "deliberative forums" could effectively reduce long-term tensions over controversial issues and improve long-term community ownership of the solutions, at the same time as building the capacity and willingness to identify and address future issues. An issue such as Lake Mokoan (prior to entrenched views dominating a heated public debate) may well have been suited to a deliberative forum approach. The methodologies require development and adaptation – a role in which the GBCMA excels.

The GBCMA should identify one environmental policy issue annually potentially suited to a deliberative forum approach and resource an evaluated project.

2. Joint Action across Institutions

Most members of GBCMA Board and committees have numerous networks involving other organisations with land and water responsibilities. Whilst these networks are useful, there needs to be a more formal approach to the participation of organisations in capacity building towards sustainable regional development. The GBCMA and the Victorian Department of Natural Resources and Environment have a joint commitment to NRM. Other formal cross-institutional alliances require development. For example, there are seven local government areas in the catchment, each with numerous community consultation processes and each with their own planning scheme.

Formal cross-institutional alliances should be developed which focus on streamlining and strengthening participatory systems.

A memorandum of understanding between local government and the GBCMA would be an excellent start to achieve joint action.

Local Area Plans – These should be jointly facilitated by the GBCMA and the relevant municipality. Outputs from the community meetings should be initially jointly assessed, with no issues raised at community meetings at risk of "falling through the gaps". Although this arguably occurs to some degree already, a more formal agreement with local government will deliver a joint, collaborative, process with improved outcomes for residents.

Regional Catchment Strategies and Municipal Planning Schemes –
It would progress the achievement of Sustainable Regional Development if a joint
task force of the seven municipalities and the Goulburn Broken CMA was established
to investigate and make recommendation on –
(a) the preferred model for integration of the Regional Catchment Strategy and
    Municipal Planning Schemes
        - operational aspects requiring understanding between the agencies re primacy
(b) cross-institutional arrangements for community consultation/research
        - joint action re facilitation/analysis of Local Area Plan meetings

3.   Participative Evaluation

As discussed above, funding agencies should be required to demonstrate their
recognition of the iterative nature of achieving change by adopting a monitoring and
evaluation program which reflects sustainable regional development objectives.
Evaluation of sub-strategies should be utilisation-focused – meaning it should be
useful to the program team as well as to the funding agencies. The monitoring
function should consist of a clear and concise set of performance indicators which
satisfy the funding agencies that they can track whether or not the program is
performing as specified. The evaluation component however should be broader than
this, designed to pick up planned and unplanned benefits and constraints. The
evaluation component needs a participatory element so that there can be learning in
comparing community and outside agents perspective. Conducting user surveys or
asking community members to respond to questionnaires does not qualify as
participatory evaluation[22].   Rather, a qualitative approach using individual and group
discussion techniques is required.

**The evaluation of sub-strategies requires a participatory element so that there
can be learning in comparing community and outside agents' perspective re
progress. The participative evaluation should be designed and commenced at
the start of the sub-strategies.**

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[22] World Bank Group

Conclusions

There is now good evidence to suggest that environmental policy and practices driven by landholder-dominated participatory processes cannot be expected to deliver the degree of change needed to address the most challenging natural resource depletion issues. Local knowledge and values are, however, crucial to the change process; and engaging with landholders in the joint-discovery of environmental issues is vital to the development of solutions to local NRM issues.

Engaging with "People in the Street" not only normalises NRM as a regional priority, but also brings to the fore new ways of thinking about and resolving substantial environmental challenges.

The GBCMA has consistently adapted its systems to succeed in natural resource conservation and development. Organisationally, it is in a sound position to meet the significant natural resource challenges that demand the trialing and adaptation of new methods of community engagement. In reviewing the literature on participatory approaches to natural resource management and sustainable regional development it is clear that the GBCMA has been attuned to best practices. In order to lead in the field of community participation and capacity building it needs to move during the period of the next Regional Catchment Strategy to cast the net wider; trialing and adapting emerging methodologies which engage "people in the street" to a greater degree in the discovery of, and decision making around environmental issues. This suggests higher risk; and therefore funding agencies need to be aware of, and support the approach via an evaluation framework that reflects sustainable regional development objectives.

The Implementation Committee and associated working group structure is sound but only as one element of a participatory approach to the achievement of sustainable regional development. The three participatory elements are –

Implementation Committees and associated structures

Community (Public) Participation in discovery and decision making

Joint Action across Institutions

Sustainable regional development requires a long-term view. Funding agencies should note that community visions and values will continually re-define and challenge priorities, and it is how emerging issues are heard and integrated by organisations such as the GBCMA that will determine the sustainability of the region.

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