

Possible solutions for improvements

[Society](#)



“ There is no consensus on Public Participation. To some, Public Participation is a means to empower individuals and communities and improve democracy. To others, Public Participation is a marketing tool for government policy. To still others, Public Participation is simply undesirable”- Erik Mostert

Most public meetings are sparsely attended and those who show up often represent organized interests, certain institutions, have a certain agenda, and are far from representing the interests/views/positions of a broader community.

Start at local level (with small rural communities). It is much easier to ensure a proper participation of all community members in a rather small community. Local public administration can be much closer to its citizens and the level of engagement can be much higher. This might be true in certain cases, but often, citizen engagement should be supported by different tools and instruments. The right procedure also ensures a proper representativity in the consultation process. Other advantages lay in a much clear understanding and ownership.

Research approach to public consultation. Each and every single case/situation is different and unique in its own way. Each consultation process requires a very thorough planning of the following:

- a) Objectives (define the level and focus of consultation)
- b) Target groups (define all groups that might have a stake in the consulted issue and number of citizens from each target group that should be consulted/involved)

c) Appropriate consultation practice and tools (include at least 2 tools to reach the same target group)

d) Plan needed resources and partners support

e) Plan a proper communication/ feedback strategy after the end of consultation process.

Multichannel discussion approaches. Very often involvement of marginalized communities requires “ offline” communication channels, but a mixture of various “ offline and online” strategies is most appropriate approach. In most of the cases a proper consultation methodology requires use of direct, mobile and internet strategies in order to reach/involve all target groups to ensure a proper representation (number of citizens from each target group). At the same time there is a continuous fusion of all online and offline tools which should be taken into consideration while planning a consultation process.

For example: The organizer can increase the participation of an offline round-table by providing remote participation opportunities – this allows participation of targeted marginalized groups (Ex., people with disabilities, migrants, citizens from distant geographical areas of the country, beneficiaries of certain public service, etc.)

Increase role of Social Media. Do not invest in development of additional platforms in case similar platforms already exist: for example social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter or YouTube became very popular during past years and it is most likely that citizens active in these media will

migrate to other new similar platforms. Monthly active users on Facebook in 2012 were nearly 850 million, 250 million photos are uploaded every day, and 20% of all page views on the web are on Facebook, 425 million mobile users, 100 billion connections⁵. These creates enormous opportunities for participation which can be valued by the Governments.

Social Media offers a wide range of free tools. Besides sharing text, photos and videos social media offers a growing number of additional services and apps to: create webpages, group share, polls, events, chat, video broadcasting, create presentations, video-chat, collecting options and voting, sharing files, report on problems, learn about the best schools, others. It is much more efficient to use existent free platforms by engaging social media leaders in the consultation process.

Cross-selling. Use of already existent communication channels is much more efficient as opposed to creation of new tools (which usually requires significant time for getting citizens use them). Using existent call center services or community meetings/events to integrate additional consultation questions into existent processes.

Partner with Civil Society Organizations (CSOs). In many cases, civil society organizations may engage/represent interests of marginalized groups and play the role of social intermediaries. They may organize consultation processes within its group and share a unified position on behalf of the group they represent. An additional advantage to involve Civil Society Organizations is that they usually have better expertize in planning and facilitation of public consultations.

Partner with Mass Media organizations. It is crucial to involve mass media as a partner during the planning process to ensure the ownership of the process, planning of appropriate media tools and share of resources. Mass Media will contribute to significant increase of citizen participation and may deliver targeted messages to selected target groups.

Partner with youth groups and women. Youth and women are an extremely valuable resource at the community level. First, by involving them into all stages of the consultation process we ensure that their voices are part of the process; second, these groups have a great capacity to motivate/engage other community groups to involve in participation process.