

Syria

Environmental Affairs Ministers

Topic 2

Public Participation in Environmental Initiatives

Past and Current International Action

On June 26, 2002, the environmental law--Law No. 50 was approved. It establishes the Public Authority for Environment Affairs within the Ministry of Environment; delegates power to the Authority to “set the basic rules of environmental safety and its protection from pollution” by performing eighteen enumerated duties. After the Law No.50 was formally accepted by the government of Syria, the Law on Environmental Protection and Development of March 1994 was soon repealed. The Law of March 1994 was composed of 10 Sections divided into 46 articles. Section I deals with definitions and terms. Section II provides for the following materials: environmental media protection; water protection water standards and criteria suitable for various uses; air pollution control; allowed limits of noise and vibration; land classification; classification of pollutants; protection of plants and animals, creation of nature reserves; environmental impact assessment of industries; pesticide use count(InforMEA).

Compared to this legislation, the Law No.50 have a system that was more complete. The Law No.50 was composed of 8 Chapters that was divided into 37 articles. The sections in Law No.50 had included more than the agricultural aspect. For example, Chapter 1 provides for terms and definitions; chapter 2 provides for terms and definitions and it also deals with

the competencies and objectives of the General Authority for Environment Affairs; chapter 3 defines the formation and management of the Authority; chapter 4 defines competencies and duties of the Minister of State Affairs for Environment; chapter 5 establishes the Environment Protection Council and defines its tasks, chapter 6 provides for the creation of the Environment Protection and Support Fund; chapter 7 deals with damage liability and compensation as well as with offenses and penalties; and chapter 8 contains transitional provisions.

During the years from 2006 to 2011, Syria experienced 5 years of drought due to the population growth, industrial expansion, and water pollution. Climate change has significantly impacted the drought in Syria, affecting the agriculture resources, which was also a very important part in our nation's economy. The ongoing drought in north-eastern Syria has devastated the livelihoods of more than 1 million people, driving hundreds of thousands to urban areas where they face extremely difficult living conditions, according to OCHA. To date, UN assistance has centered on providing a food aid and agricultural packages to farmers and herders in a bid to keep them on their land and re-start agricultural work, particularly with the promise of rainfall during the winter months(International Labour Organization).

Syria's position

The Syrian Arab Republic holds a proactive attitude and was supportive of the public participation in Environmental Initiatives. Our nation believes that public participation needs to be coordinated. The severe drought caused an abnormal population growth amongst the urban area of Syria since 2006(Climate change in the Fertile Crescent and implications of the

recent Syrian drought. PNAS,). To date, Syria was still facing the threat of drought. Other major environmental issues in Syria include deforestation, overgrazing, soil erosion, desertification, water pollution from the dumping of raw sewage and wastes from petroleum refining, and inadequate supplies of potable water.

To improve these circumstances and avoid similar situations that might happen in the future, legislative like Law No. 50 was approved. Within the framework of planning and strengthening the basis of sustainable development in Syria's national context, out government drafted and adopted strategies, implemented general and qualitative policies, reinforced the role of existing development agencies and found new ones as well(National report of the Syria Arab Republic To the United Nations Conference on Sustainable). Since its participation to the Earth summit in 1992 and the related activities and subsequent international conferences, Syria signed and ratified at an early stage international treaties and conventions on Biodiversity, Climate Change and combating desertification. (National report of the Syria Arab Republic To the United Nations Conference on Sustainable)

Proposed Solutions

Syria suggests that a better way to increase public participation in environmental initiatives is to” properly educate the public on the effects that people have on the environment and what to do about it”(The Environment and the Middle East). In the past, Syria had approved many laws about environmental initiatives. However, it was more important to informs them what they can do to help the environment because it won't have much effect in the communities--or maybe even larger, states--if the legislative was just simply put there. For example, there aren't many people using reusable bags--most of them

only use plastic bags. This situation still happens even when plastic bags were recognized as a major pollution among all of the pollutions. The case of plastic bags is one of many examples of poor environmental management and reveals multiple issues hindering success. My country believes this can be achieved by reinforcing education about environmental topics by publicizing the idea in public places, specifically where groups of people gather from time to time.

Just take the example of the plastic bags as an example: if local organizations and cultural centers (NGOs, mosques/other religious spaces, souqs) seriously began using reusable bags or handing them out as giveaways people may begin to disregard plastic bags and encourage others to do likewise. The creation of a dialogue in the public sphere and a partnership between the various segments of societies (native/expatriate, faith communities, governmental/ non-governmental) could be a very powerful initiative and exceed government-only efforts to preserve the environment(Environmental Initiatives in the Middle East – Challenges and Remedies).

Another way of educating people about environmental initiatives is by the education system itself. So my country believes that it would be very necessary to let children learn how to understand and participate in an environmental initiative. And the best way to achieve the goal is to let children get used to these phrases and their meanings, so listing “Environmental Protection” as a subject in the elementary schools and Middle schools in the states would be another solution.

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