

Lessons of CSO involvement in the Aarhus Convention negotiations

Magda Tóth Nagy, Adviser,
Former Head of REC's
Participatory Governance Topic Area



REGIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL CENTER

Content

- On the way to Aarhus
- Ensuring effective CSO participation in the Convention negotiations
- Speaking with one voice
- Gathering political support
- Influencing the content of the Convention
- Implementing the Aarhus Convention
- Challenges and lessons learned



On the way to Aarhus: From guidelines to a convention

Milestones:

- Sofia Guidelines on Access to Environmental Information and Public Participation in Environmental Decision-making (1994-1995)
- Endorsed at 3rd Ministerial Conference “Environment for Europe”, Sofia, 1995
- CSO proposal for a convention - adopted at Conference
- Convention negotiations, 1996-1998
- Aarhus Convention adopted in June 1998, Aarhus, Denmark (4th EfE Conference)

Role and place of CSOs at the start of the negotiation and how it evolved:

- Early consultations - influencing 0 draft, 1996 (Friends of Secretariat - Draft Elements)
 - Participation in the negotiations
 - Strong and decisive role
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- Formal and informal rules for CSO involvement originating from the Environment for Europe process



Ensuring effective CSO participation

Coordination of CSOs and CSO input



Political leadership (European ECO Forum - PP Campaign Committee, EEB)

Three-tier approach:

- Negotiators
 - Core negotiating group – **NGO Coalition/ECO Coalition, later ECO Forum** persons - 4 persons selected from a pool of NGO experts)
 - Other NGOs in the negotiations (EEB, FoE, CIEL, IUCN, WWF, REC, GLOBE, etc.)
 - NGOs in governmental delegations
- Resource group - advising and commenting on drafts and materials
- Broader network of NGOs and interested individuals (academics) – information, campaigns, local actions to support the negotiation

Preparations for sessions, after session evaluation, inter-session work



Speaking with one voice

The role of the CSO delegation in the negotiation

- Harmonized input
- Strategic perspective in formulating positions

Introducing transparency and public scrutiny

- Voicing public concerns in negotiations and securing accountability and transparency
- Making the negotiations transparent to outside world
 - ECO reports, press releases, media work
- Bringing more transparency to the negotiations
 - Consultations on draft text in 21 CEE and EECCA countries (REC)
 - Country assessment pointing out where improvements needed, Pan-European and regional overviews (Doors to Democracy) (REC with EEB, EcoPravo)
 - Feed back to the negotiations
- Preparing for ratification/implementation
 - Ministers-NGO session in Aarhus (REC with EEB)



Gathering political support

- Meetings, consultations, lobbying with high level officials and politicians
- Cooperation with friendly governments and sending letters asking for support for positions from friendly governments
- Using national NGOs to put pressure on their government)
- Securing resources/funding
- Using online and other tools for communication and networking:
- Discussion list, Participate newsletter



Influencing the content of the Convention

Setting clear priorities for the content/ the main issues:

- Strong Convention
- Right-based approach
- Three pillars
- Broad scope (public authorities, decision-making)
- Inclusive definition of environmental information
- Short time limits for access
- Public interest test, clearly and precisely defined exemptions for confidentiality
- Info on emissions and discharges be publicly accessible
- Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (PRTRs)



Implementing Aarhus: From informal to formal rules

Governance structures

- Institutionalizing the NGO involvement for implementation
- Rules of procedures
- Compliance Committee nominations by NGOs and submissions by the public
- Establishing Task Forces, Working Groups for implementation; and for negotiation of GMO amendment and new instrument - PRTR Protocol
- Strong NGO presence and representation (membership in Bureau, big number of NGOs participating, financial support for NGOs)



Challenges and lessons learned

Key challenges

- Ensuring high standards: expert input, consensus and negotiation
- Coping with complexity and diversity
- Securing resources
- Ensuring balanced regional representation

Some policy lessons

- Ensure openness through self-selection of CSOs
- Appoint a well-respected and capable chairperson (for negotiation and for CSO negotiators)
- Secure adequate resources
- Develop mutually acceptable “rules of the game” for governing CSO involvement



Thank you for the attention!



Further Contact:

Magda Tóth Nagy

mtothnagy@teammembers.rec.org

tmagdi@rec.org

www.rec.org

www.unece.org/env/pp

www.unece.org/env/pp/prtr

<http://prtr.ec.europa.eu>

www.prtr.net

