

## Example from practice

### Participation in the Sustainability Outlook

Our aim in participating in the Sustainability Outlook (MNP 2004) was to find a good way to communicate the complex message simply and clearly. Our second aim was to get feedback on weak points in our argument and to trace any gaps in our thinking on sustainability.

In pursuit of these aims, we presented the Sustainability Outlook to various bodies and groups and discussed it with them. We also held workshops with a group of 'blue-sky thinkers' from industry and the universities. The participants were asked to elaborate on a picture of the future from the Sustainability Outlook and to apply the concept to policy choices in their own policy field.

We learned from the different forms of participation to present the Sustainability Outlook in such a way as to convey the message better and the audience were invited to reflect on their own policy field (or their own approach). We learned not to divulge our own view because this can inhibit the thinking process among the audience. We positioned the Sustainability Outlook as a way to initiate a shared thought process on different policy issues rather than aspiring to come up with clear, solid answers. That had been our earlier aim, but the process of seeking answers together was felt to produce paths to solutions which would enjoy far greater support.

In retrospect, it turned out that the publication of a single report can never be enough to hammer home the message (and the proposed method for seeking sustainability), even when it is accompanied by a large measure of participation. Aftercare in the application phase by, for instance, taking on the role of coach or mediator, and instructing more people in the organisation in the method are necessary for this.  
(Rob Maas)

## 2 Why participation actually?

There are various aims and reasons for stakeholder participation and other forms of participation. In practice they often coincide. Aims or reasons for stakeholder participation can be divided into four main categories: quality aims, instrumental aims, democratic aims and emancipation aims. These categories are explained in turn below. In practice they often overlap and cannot easily be distinguished from each other. Not all of these aims are equally relevant to the work of the MNP, but they are described here because the complete spectrum allows their position to be better defined. Project leaders need to be aware of their own aims and priorities.

### 2.1 A wide choice of aims

#### *Quality aims*

Quality aims are concerned with improving the product itself. Knowledge which is not present in-house is brought in. This includes both scientific and non-scientific knowledge: knowledge about sectors and practices; monitoring of nature and the environment; the balance of power between actors; analyses of administrative processes; knowledge about policy implementation, desirable futures and anticipated developments. Many kinds of knowledge are involved therefore. Participation can be used to fill in gaps in knowledge or as external quality control on the organisation's 'own' knowledge. So participation can increase the validity of the knowledge products.

#### *Instrumental aims*

In the case of instrumental aims, the focus is not on the product itself but on the status of the product and therefore of the MNP. These aims are concerned with winning support for the product and strengthening the image of the MNP as an independent, quality-conscious knowledge provider. Another instrumental aim is the wider distribution of the content of a report in the hope that it will be used more widely in decision-making processes.

#### *Democratic aims*

Democratic aims are concerned with participation for its own sake. The consideration here is that stakeholders are entitled to participate in certain processes, to be informed and to make a contribution. For the MNP this can