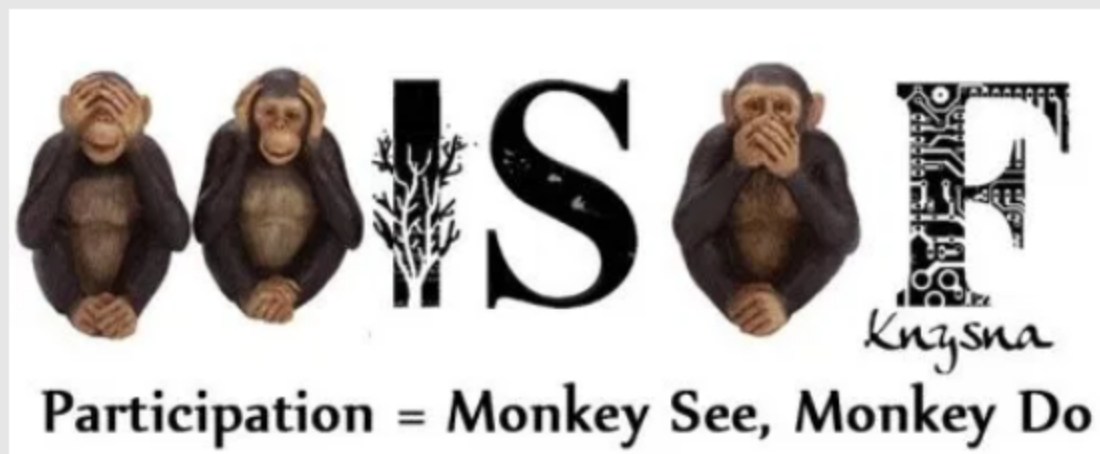


ISDF Report #3: Is There Participation & Communication?

Posted on Jan 31, 2014 by Mike Hampton



Is there balanced participation in meetings and discussions?

Status: Amber

Findings: Some key role players are not participating.

- Some who subscribed and received confirmation of their subscription have not received any info.
- Participation meetings were poorly advertised.
- Sedgefield, in particular, feels left out.
- “There is a feeling that the civil environmental groups should also have been included in the data gathering process.”
- Public apathy is also a problem.

Impartial Report: “The planned approach provides a diversity of means by which the community can participate which provides opportunity for role players to have their views heard. The lack of communication with the Sedgefield community, the lack of wider broadcasting and involvement of the civil sector in workshop cafés and leaves in question if all key role players participated in the development of the status quo snapshot. The exclusion of certain sectors in at this critical stage could create areas of misunderstanding in future meetings and could also create a sense that voices are not being heard in the process. This necessitates an amber rating representing that this aspect of the process needs to be observed closely.”

Mike Hampton (Knysna Keep): I subscribed several times and only on the fourth time, this time through the Municipality's website, did i receive confirmation. It would appear that my attempts through the submission box (twice) and online at isdf.co.za (once), processes the tender award winners control, were deliberately blocked. Has this happened to other objectors to the tender award? Additionally, at the first participation meeting, the public were not allowed to participate. At a follow-up, The Connection Café presentation was advertised an hour early which meant some arriving would not have been able to wait for it to start. Summarily, participation has been severely hindered.

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Is information being shared and understood?

Status: Amber

Findings: Some important information is unavailable, accessible and/or difficult to understand

Impartial Report: “In the Knysna ISDF community engagement process a space called the Connection Café has been created for an information display at the Woodmill Walk in the temporary library on Long Street in Knysna. The Connexion Cafe provides community members with a space where they can gain information and contribute via a suggestion box. This space is also used to display findings at strategic times when called “Expo Cafes”. The online café is a website where information can be accessed about the process and provide a “Calendar of Events”, a “Registration” and “Contact Us” page. The status quo reports and the PowerPoint presentations were posted on the website three days in lead up to the Expo Café.

- Sufficient effort has been made to provide information introducing the process in English, Afrikaans and Xhosa but the status quo report or its summaries and all presentations are not available in Afrikaans or Xhosa.”
- Despite the objective of the project being to develop a framework for the Knysna Municipality which incorporates the review, integration and alignment of the Knysna Spatial Development Framework (SDF), the Knysna integrated Human Settlement Strategy, the Knysna State of the Environment Report and lastly the Draft Local Economic Development Plan, these plans have not been made available to the public.

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Are communication channels open and people participating and learning?

Status: Green

Findings: Communication channels are open and people participate in discussions and share information, make compromises & are willing to adapt

Impartial Report: The small size of the workshops contributed to constructive dialogue between stakeholders and having officials involved.

[However] –

- At this stage in the process the consultants have gathered information to develop a picture of the status quo so no compromises have been identified at the moment. Compromise will become an issue in the up and coming second and third phases were the engagement process aims for communities to understand and agree to the evaluation of the information and will need to prioritise issues.
- Overall there is a willingness to participate in discussions and a general buy in and positive attitude towards the process is evident.
- Unfortunately stereotyping and polarisation are occurring between two stakeholders, the Knysna Municipality and the local civil environmental groups. The unresolved conflict between the two stakeholders can cause entrenched polarisation and distrust in the process and the consultant which has and will further impact other criteria in this report. At this stage in the process a green rating will be given for this criterion, as communication channels are open and no stakeholders are feeling inhibited from participating but with the polarisation developing between the Knysna Municipality and the civil environmental groups this aspect will need to be closely observed.

Mike Hampton (Knysna Keep): There is a feeling of helplessness after the Knysna Municipality refused dialogue with objectors and, as one put it, “the boat has left the shore”, forcing you to participate or not, more “you’re with us or against us” rather than a flexible attitude allowing true stakeholder cooperation. It’s an unrealistic and insulting attitude of expectancy and complacency – monkey see, monkey do. Considering the explanation of this section by the report, it’s highly surprising, even if temporary, that it got “Green status”.

Read *ISDF Report #4: Trust & Distrust, & Winners and Losers* tomorrow.