

THE PARTNERSHIP APPROACH

TO SITING AND DEVELOPING RADIOACTIVE WASTE MANAGEMENT FACILITIES



History shows that the search for sites for radioactive waste management facilities has been marred by conflicts and delays. Affected communities have often objected that their concerns and interests were not addressed. In response, institutions have progressively turned away from the traditional “decide, announce and defend” model, and are learning to “engage, interact and co-operate”. This shift has fostered the emergence of partnerships between the proponent of the facility and the potential host community, as shown in a recent NEA study*. Working in partnership with potential host communities enables pertinent issues and concerns to be raised and addressed, and creates an opportunity for developing a relationship of mutual understanding and mutual learning, as well as for developing solutions that will add value to the host community and region. Key elements of the partnership approach are being incorporated into waste management strategies, leading increasingly to positive outcomes.



The key feature of the partnership approach is the empowerment of local communities regarding decisions that may affect their future.

The partnership approach is a collaborative working relationship between the community and the main developer of the facility. Relevant levels of government, from local to national, may be involved either directly or indirectly, which adds confidence that future decisions or recommendations by the partnership will receive due consideration at higher levels. Other institutions may also play a role in the partnership. The formats chosen for partnership operation

(permanent or temporary working groups, panels, etc.) and the outputs it targets (design plans, recommendations to elected or administrative authority, etc.) are set through legally binding agreements or through less formal arrangements. Overall, the partnership approach contributes to transparency and can support accountability in decision-making. Most importantly, it reflects a determination to empower communities in decisions that may affect their future.

How is the local community empowered?

The composition of partnerships and the tasks they have to carry out may vary widely. Typically, partnership arrangements empower the local communities:

- To access, evaluate and disseminate information;
- To consult experts of their choice and to build up their own expertise in order to assess the project;
- To make suggestions as to facility design features, infrastructure, etc. and influence the

implementer’s work;

- To design benefit packages to ensure social and economic improvement to the community in the short and long term;
- To deliberate and provide recommendations to higher-level authorities;
- To stay abreast of research performed by the implementer, its consultants, the regulators, etc.;
- To monitor the performance of the various players and check their authenticity.

*Partnering for Long-term Management of Radioactive Waste - Evolution and Current Practice in Thirteen Countries (NEA, 2009)

How does the partnership approach differ from public information and consultation?

- Informing citizens and inviting their opinions are legitimate steps in traditional approaches to decision-making. These steps, however, do not guarantee that citizen concerns and ideas will be taken into account in a manner that citizens may find appropriate. In a partnership, power is redistributed through negotiation between citizens and implementers and/or other competent bodies. They agree to share planning and decision-making activities.
- In traditional consultation the main issue is whether the affected parties will accept the proponent's solutions. In contrast, the partnership approach foresees a role for citizens in developing solutions, planning and decision-making. Instead of passive acceptance, the partnership supports active involvement by the community, through deliberating in working groups, interacting in the planning of infrastructure and facility construction, negotiating on socio-economic development measures, etc.

Several types of support measures help to sustain the partnership arrangements.

- Funding for community engagement allows citizens to hire their own secretarial or technical support or experts (scientists, lawyers, etc.) as well as to cover operating expenses. This funding enables the affected communities to participate meaningfully in the collaboration process.
- Supplementary social and economic benefits address other impacts and opportunities. Typically, financial resources support short-term development and/or long-term quality of life in the community. These benefits underscore the recognition that the community is volunteering an essential service to the nation.

Two measures may give additional margin of choice to the community.

- **Voluntarism** – refers to the expression of interest of a community, e.g., in participating in a process to determine the suitability of a site for radioactive waste management in their territory. Such an expression of interest, conveyed by the governing body of the community, may be made in response to an invitation by the waste management organisation or by central government or it may be an unsolicited offer.
- **Right of veto** – refers to the right of the community to withdraw from the process within a certain period of time. In some countries a right of veto is ensured by law; in other countries it is granted based on an informal agreement amongst the parties involved. Implementing voluntarism or veto right may be difficult in some countries because of legal or political rules, or because the country has a limited number of adequate sites.

What is to be gained from a partnership approach?

Involving local actors in designing the facility and the community benefits package is likely to result in solutions that will add value to the host community and region. In all cases social capital is augmented as members of the community develop new skills and increase their knowledge about their interests and ideals. The partnership provides continuity, and a mechanism for addressing in a non-adversarial manner new issues as they may arise. When such issues threaten to divide

the community, the partnership can emit a credible judgment and deflate tensions. Implementers and other institutional players can improve themselves as responsive actors in the governance of radioactive waste and as responsible neighbours concerned with the well being of the community. National or regional governments, who typically oversee partnership arrangements, gain because policies are fulfilled in a constructive manner.

NATIONAL RADIOACTIVE WASTE MANAGEMENT PROGRAMMES ARE IN VARIOUS PHASES OF SITING FACILITIES AND RELY ON DIFFERENT TECHNICAL APPROACHES FOR THE VARIOUS CATEGORIES OF WASTE. IN ALL CASES, IT IS NECESSARY FOR INSTITUTIONAL ACTORS AND THE POTENTIAL OR ACTUAL HOST COMMUNITY TO BUILD A MEANINGFUL, WORKABLE RELATIONSHIP. PARTNERSHIP APPROACHES ARE EFFECTIVE IN ACHIEVING A DESIRABLE COMBINATION OF LICENSABLE SITE AND MANAGEMENT CONCEPT WHILE MEETING THE SOMETIMES COMPETING REQUIREMENTS OF FAIR REPRESENTATION AND COMPETENT PARTICIPATION. PARTNERSHIP ARRANGEMENTS FACILITATE REACHING AGREEMENT ON MEASURES FOR LOCAL CONTROL, FINANCIAL SUPPORT AND FUTURE DEVELOPMENT.