

The Significance of Policy Collaboration in Stakeholder Engagement

Implications for the Role of Local Government

Based on the results and findings of the Japan Ministry of the Environment's Collaborative Initiatives Project

September 2021

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Submitted to

The Peer Learning Partnership (PLP): Putting Stakeholders in the Center: A Global Research and Feedback Initiative About Applying Best Practices for Measuring and Managing Social and Environmental Impacts,

as part of

The OECD Global Action for Promoting Social and Solidarity Economy Ecosystems

<https://socialvalueus.net/sse-plp>

1. Introduction

This paper is based on the findings from the study of the Japanese Ministry of the Environment (MoE)'s Project for the Promotion of Collaborative Partnership (FY2013) and the MoE's Project for the Acceleration of Collaborative Partnership (FY2014-2017) (hereinafter referred to as the "Collaborative Partnership Project", or CPP), for which the author served as the project committee chair. The CPP is characterized by the fact that the project adopted by the MoE is carried out by selected organizations in collaboration with the MoE and its local offices, local governments, and the MoE's Local Partnership Offices, with the collaborative framework linked to policy issues. Sato and Shimaoka (2020) previously summarized and discussed the details of the theoretical background, case studies, and project results on the collaborative governance model that forms the basis of this project.

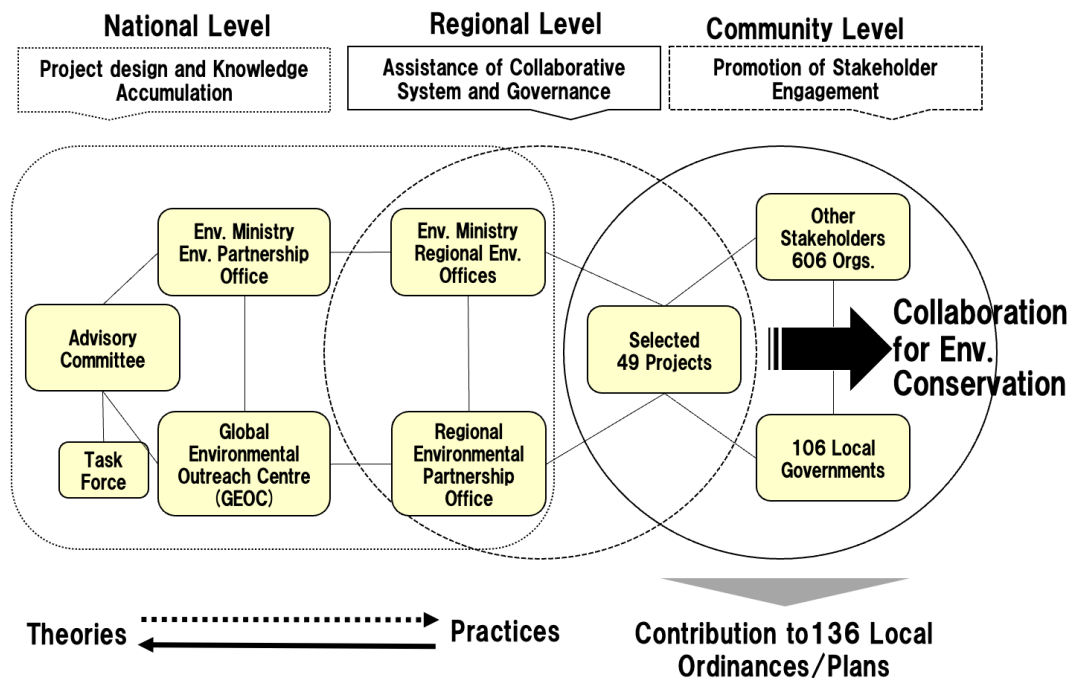
2. The CPP Overview

The CPP started in FY2013, after promulgation in June 2011 (and full enforcement in October 2012) of the Law for the Promotion of Environmental Conservation through Environmental Education and Other Measures. The law was a revision of the preceding law and purported to promote environmental conservation activities and collaboration among government, business, and private organizations which were becoming increasingly important. This law officially recognized the importance of collaboration among these different sectors and organizations and the MoE encouraged collaborative projects, whose mechanics are represented in Figure 1-1.

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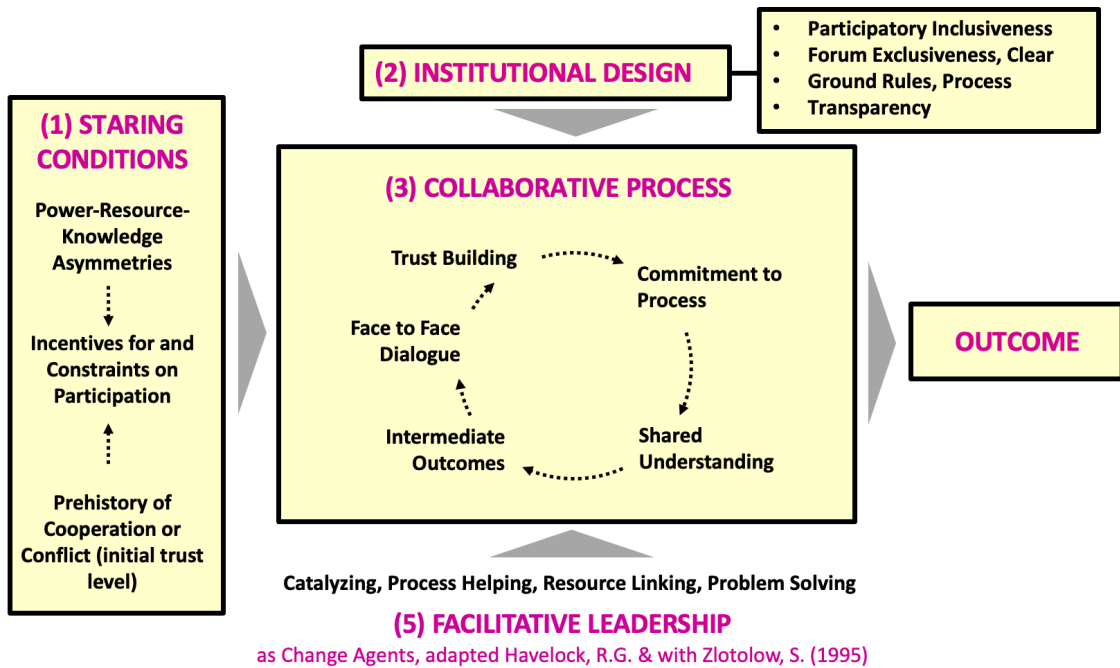
Figure 1-1. Mechanics of CPP Collaboration Model



The 49 projects adopted were not only implemented with the cooperation of local governments, but were also designed to create a collaboration system for organizations in the relevant locality. Such collaborative projects aimed to solve local environmental problems, and to create models that could be disseminated and shared nationwide. The distinctive feature of the CPP was that it approached the complexity of collaboration from both practical and theoretical perspectives, and attempted to create a cycle in which these were discussed in an integrated manner and then put into practice.

The CPP is based on the collaborative governance model (Sato and Shimaoka, 2014a), which is represented in Figure 1-2.

Figure 1-2. Theoretical Foundation of CPP Collaboration Model



Sato and Shimaoka (2014) adapted from Ansell, C. & Gash, A. (2008) with 137 Case Studies in US, Havelock, R.G. & with Zlotolow, S. (1995) 4

During the project’s five years, 49 initiatives were carried out in 31 prefectures across Japan. These efforts focused on various topics such as pollution reduction, local energy development, and forest and seaside environmental improvement. Local attributes, regional scale, and implementing entities were diverse as well. Various nonprofit organizations, private corporations, and community groups played leading roles in each of these initiatives.

3. Results and Lessons-Learned from the CPPs

3.1. Impact on Local Government Policies

This collaborative project achieved various results over the five years of implementation. The 49 case studies involved 606 stakeholder groups and organizations and 106 local governments and resulted in 136 local ordinances and plans. About 90% of the initiatives adopted continued in some form even after the conclusion of project support. In addition, the GEOC (Global Environmental Outreach Centre), which served as the project’s national secretariat, conducted a survey in August 2017, and summarized the impact of the 49 CPP projects on local government policies, and are shown in Table 1-1.³

³ For details, refer to Sato and Shimaoka (2020), pp.107-119.

Table 1-1. Policy Outcomes of the CPP (excerpts, according to the post-project survey conducted by GEOC)

- **Policy Influence:** 62% of the collaborative projects have had an influence on policy. Some are reflected in ordinances and administrative plans, and others contribute to the formulation of plans, supplementary budgetary measures, establishment of study groups, and consideration of model projects.
- **Influence on policy participation:** 64% of the projects contributed to strengthening the process of policy participation. They worked to facilitate the exchange of opinions and information with local government officials through the joint organization of seminars, participation in discussions with local government leaders, and the implementation of training sessions.
- **Government's willingness and its policy effect:** Policy effectiveness rate was more than 90% when the government was willing to collaborate (52%). This indicates the importance of collaboration with the local government on matters that are pertinent to local government policy.
- **Attitudinal changes in the local authority staff:** In a survey of local government staff, 86% answered that they had "changed a lot" or "changed a little" due to the project, indicating the influence of the project on the local authorities. These changes included developing an awareness of the importance of collaboration and cooperation, understanding participatory consultation methods, proactive engagement opportunities and methods (for example: voluntary support for collaborative efforts, and provision for reporting opportunities within the municipality), the need for various departments' participation in initiatives, understanding the importance of the initiative by local government leaders and managers, and recognition by neighboring municipalities.

3.2. Promoting and/or Inhibiting Factors of Collaboration

Sato and Shimaoka (2014a) summarized the factors that promote and inhibit collaboration based on the collaborative governance model, and these are expressed in Table 1-2.

Table 1-2. Factors Promoting and/or Inhibiting Collaboration Success (excerpts)⁴
(Based on the evaluation workshop of intermediary support functions)

The following factors have a significant impact on the success or failure of a collaboration:

- Relationships among stakeholders at the beginning of the process.
- Gaps between stakeholders, such as in purpose, resources or information.
- The presence and role of a "boundary spanner" (see below).
- The degree of involvement of the government.
- The design of the management system.
- Direct dialogue, nurturing common understanding, and the articulation of intermediate outcomes in the collaboration process.
- Setting evaluation indicators for collaboration.
- Sharing goals and strategies of collaboration among stakeholders.
- Thus, it is necessary to build the capacity of intermediary support organizations so they may better fulfill their functions as facilitators of collaboration.

⁴ From Sato and Shimaoka (2020)

3.3. Capacity Building to Fulfill Intermediary Support Functions

Through this project, it has been shown that focusing on and strengthening intermediary support functions is the key to the success for collaborations. MoE's regional offices and the regional EPOs (Environmental Partnership Offices) served as intermediary support organizations and played various support functions as shown in Figure 1-1. Measures proposed to strengthen capacity are expressed in Table 1-3.

Table 1-3. Strengthening Capacity of Intermediary Support Functions (excerpts)⁵

<ol style="list-style-type: none">1) Develop an approach for analyzing gaps among stakeholders at the beginning of the collaboration and the creation of methods for responding to them.2) Design a management system in which boundary spanners can perform their roles effectively.3) Develop methods for setting collaboration evaluation indicators.4) Develop the information gathering and networking skills of intermediary support organization staff.5) Strengthen cooperation between local authorities and the national government.6) Develop a management theory that integrates collaboration promotion.
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(1) Develop an approach for analyzing gaps among stakeholders at the beginning of the collaboration and the creation of methods for responding to them.

Intermediary support organizations must carefully examine and analyze past relationships and the trust that exists among the parties involved, as well as assess the existing and potential gaps in organizational culture, attitudes, local conditions, organizational strengths, weaknesses and knowledge. Based on this assessment, technical assistance should be provided to overcome these gaps. For example, in analyzing past collaboration and/or conflict, two axes can be set to depict a matrix: the existing relationship (good/bad) and the level of interest in the issue (high/low). In addition, a gap analysis among stakeholders can be incorporated by mapping the organizational resources (people, goods, money, and information). Following these steps, it is possible to build a relationship in which specific gaps are filled and support is provided to the stakeholders considered indispensable for achieving the project goal. This relationship building is useful if and when projects are not working smoothly and/or when major issues arise, making project implementation difficult. In such instances, intermediaries can detect and flag issues, and as needed consult with the collaboration's key players.

(2) Design a management system in which boundary spanners can perform their roles effectively

In order to promote collaboration, intermediary support organizations are advised to find appropriate boundary spanners among their partners and build trusting relationships with them. A boundary spanner is the person responsible for contacting people outside their own organization and this person plays a central role in developing relationships between organizations.

The boundary spanner serves the following two functions: (1) facilitates mutually beneficial influence between the spanner's organization and the other party, and (2) demonstrates and properly conveys their own organization's perceptions, expectations, and ideas to the outside organization. In many instances, boundary spanners are in difficult positions because they need to respond to conflicting expectations from the parties. From the intermediary support organization's standpoint, limiting the number of boundary spanners to a single person in a

⁵ From Sato and Shimaoka (2020)

given organization will result in collaboration outcomes being affected by the conflicts within the partner organization particularly when those conflicts are large. To solve this problem, it may be possible to design a management system in which multiple people from the target organization can participate as boundary spanners.

(3) Develop methods for setting collaboration evaluation indicators.

Since the goals and objectives of collaboration vary, it is difficult to establish uniform evaluation indicators. Therefore, agreed upon evaluation indicators need to be established through dialogue with the various stakeholders.

(4) Develop the information gathering and networking skills of intermediary support organization staff.

Particular individuals in intermediary support organizations tend to have access to more information as well network development skills. This hinders support functions as well as the development of the entire organization. Sato and Shimaoka (2014b) examined the case of the non-profit organization, Community Support Center Kobe (CS Kobe). CS Kobe organized its business structure in four quadrants along two dimensions; projects directly related to nonprofit support versus projects related to community development and local welfare, and self-financed projects versus government-funded or collaborative projects. By doing so, individual staff members are given the opportunity to build networks and gather information on particular issues. The network and information are then shared throughout the organization via peer learning among the staff at the planning and coordination meetings.

(5) Strengthen cooperation between local authorities and the national government.

As society moves from the norms of New Public Management (NPM) to post-NPM norms, local governments are still searching for new models for working with and developing relationships with residents. Therefore, the awareness of collaboration currently varies from municipality to municipality. In order to promote collaboration, it is necessary for the government and other stakeholders to share the common understanding that underpins collaboration. For example, a vision of collaboration desired by the government and various stakeholders should be articulated through study group and workshop discussions. For this purpose, it would be effective to have discussions beyond the boundaries of administrative borders, for example, by bringing in cases representing good practices from other municipalities that have made progress in collaboration, while also attempting to jointly study ideal forms of collaboration.

(6) Develop a management theory that integrates collaboration promotion.

Issues surrounding collaboration promotion are diverse and multi-faceted. Among these are the external environment, the dynamics of actual collaboration itself, and the internal working of the intermediary support organization. The relationship between these is not yet clear and there might be important issues that are not yet recognized. Therefore, developing a theoretical framework is needed to clarify and integrate the relationships among these elements.

4. Issues for Further Consideration

4.1 Significance of policy collaboration in this project: its effectiveness

Collaborative efforts deeply linked to policy issues, or policy collaboration, are extremely effective in Japan. This effectiveness is evidenced by the fact that 106 local governments have been involved in this project and have influenced the formulation of 136 ordinances and plans. Furthermore, the effectiveness of the project can be seen in the fact that about 90% of the organizations whose initiatives were adopted have continued their efforts in some form, even after project support officially ended. Based on this experience, five discussion points about the significance of policy collaboration in Japan arose and are described below.

(1) Legislative Backing

It can be inferred that the promotion of environmental conservation activities and collaboration among government, business, and private organizations, which is clearly stated in the Law for the Promotion of Environmental Conservation through Environmental Education and Other Measures, has encouraged the initiation of collaborative projects. The guidelines for the CPP clearly stated that collaboration with the local government was a prerequisite, and that the involvement of the local government was essential. Local organizations wishing to be part of the CPP sought the participation of their local governments explaining that their mutual participation was integral for success. However, local government engagement might not have otherwise happened without the mandate by law and the ministry.

The regional offices of the MoE and the regional EPOs (Environmental Partnership Offices), which function as intermediary support organizations, provide supplementary explanations to the local governments as needed. It can therefore be concluded that policy collaboration in local communities became easier to implement, and that it will be applicable for future efforts.

(2) Collaboration with multiple official players including the MoE, regional offices, and local partnership offices

As a project that is administered by the Office for the Promotion of Private Sector Activities of the MoE, CPP funding came from the national budget and was implemented by the organizations whose projects were selected with the support of MoE regional offices and regional EPOs to promote collaboration in the region. The MoE has offices in each region, and in the implementation of this project, the MoE's regional offices and local Environmental Partnership Offices (EPOs) were fulfilling their functions as intermediate support organizations. Thus, the CPP projects were not only a collaboration between the selected organization and the local government, but also a collaboration among multiple official players through the involvement of the regional offices of the MoE and the regional EPOs, which support policy collaboration.

(3) Increasing cooperation with local governments - gaining credibility in the region

Organizations whose initiatives were selected for this project can gain credibility in the region by deepening their cooperation with local governments. In Japanese society, public policy efforts initiated by the local government are the foundation of local activities, and thus the initiatives started by private entities, including nonprofits,

private corporations and neighborhood associations, need to gain credibility by working with or being endorsed by the local government. In Japan today, the role of civil society or the private sector in solving social issues is not sufficiently recognized, making cooperation and collaboration with local governments essential for deepening the understanding of their roles.

(4) Improving the continuity of collaborative efforts in the region through cooperation and collaboration with policy issues

For local organizations, cooperation and collaboration with local governments will lead to constantly facing regional policy issues. The purpose of the CPP was not for the selected organizations to carry out their own actions but to become aware of local policy issues and to collaborate with local governments to solve these issues. The MoE's regional offices and the Local EPOs, can be expected to facilitate on-going collaborative efforts in the region by raising the level of collaboration for mutual understanding and benefit. As previously stated, the fact that about 90% of the selected organizations continued their efforts, even after the end of project support is testimony to the effectiveness of policy collaboration.

(5) Fostering a collaborative culture that brings together the strengths of different stakeholders

In recent years, local governments in Japan have been facing a decline in tax revenue due to the declining population. The norms of New Public Management (NPM), which aim to make public sector operations more cost effective by applying private sector management methods, have been dominant for local governments. However, due to financial difficulties and the increasing complexity of problems faced, it has become difficult to provide individualized solutions based on specific demands. In post-NPM norms, it is anticipated that various stakeholders, including multiple departments of local governments, experts in various fields and industries, and local residents who are facing the problem, will come together, bring their own wisdom, and broaden their perspectives by surfacing deeper issues. A better grasp of multifaceted issues will develop over time, allowing for the development of solutions.

It is increasingly important to have a participatory process. In the initiative described so far, local governments promoting policy collaboration with selected organizations is a means for moving from the slogan of "citizen participation" towards realising citizens' participation in administrative and policy processes. Through direct engagement, citizens and local governments work together to face complex problems and combine their strengths to solve local social issues. In addition, this will contribute to fostering a culture of cooperation.

4.2. The Role of Local Government in Stakeholder Engagement

Typical policy options for local governments to engage actors involved in environmental conservation include regulations, economic incentives, information sharing, and consensus building. The methods used by local governments in stakeholder engagement include:

- Informational - to guide the actions of actors by disseminating information about their collaborative efforts,
- Educational - to provide educational and learning opportunities and support for actors to voluntarily engage in certain actions and collaborations, and

- Economic - to provide subsidies and grants.

In recent years, there has been a growing awareness of the importance of local actors. The collaborative approach, in which the local government and related stakeholders bring their strengths to work together, is also considered to be effective. Rather than treating collaborative efforts as something external to the local government, it can be said that collaboration in which the local government is aware of the limitations of the NPM approaches and actively engages in participatory approaches will become a more important policy option in the future.

4.3. Considerations of Impact that affects Stakeholder Engagement

In the CPP, awareness building efforts allowed stakeholders to learn the importance of understanding and working with outputs and outcomes, and employed a collaborative process that supports the realization of these outputs and outcomes. The collaborative governance model (Fig. 1-2) was presented before the implementation of the project to raise awareness of the collaborative process (face-to-face dialogue, trust building, commitment to the process, common understanding, and definition intermediate outcomes). The quality of the subsequent outputs, outcomes, and impacts have thus been improved. In addition, through this project, it became clear that not only the process of collaboration but also the process of learning matters. It is important to both implement the step-by-step process of the collaborative governance model, and to create an environment where people can learn from each other through the process.

5. Conclusion

This paper is based on the findings of the MoE's Project for the Promotion of Collaborative Efforts (FY2013) and the MoE's Project for the Acceleration of Collaborative Efforts (FY2014-2017) for which the author served as project chair. In order to improve stakeholder engagement in Japan, the proactive participation of local governments in policy collaboration is important. This project, the CPP, is characterized by the presence of local governments as collaborative partners, the presence of the MoE, its local offices, and local EPOs as intermediary support organizations. The strengthening of the collaborative process and social learning process through the iteration of theory informing practice and practice informing theory was a key to its success, rather than the simple implementation of collaborative initiatives based on budgets obtained. It can be said that the linkage between the collaborative governance as a mechanism and the social learning as a capacity building process is important when a collaborative initiative involves various stakeholders with diverse interests and priorities.

During and after the implementation of this project, (1) Guidebooks for implementing entities and intermediary support organizations, (2) Guidebooks on policy collaboration for local governments, and (3) books representing academic research results (Sato and Shimaoka, 2020) were published. The production of these resources and the accumulation of knowledge was possible by creating a forum for the selected organizations to share results and learn from each other (end-of-year project debriefing meetings), ongoing discussions of the intermediary support functions by the intermediary support organizations involved in this project, and academic discussions among the researchers involved. The experience of this collaborative project has also been utilized in subsequent related MoE policies. This kind of documentation and record keeping is also important for the continuation of policy collaboration.

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