

US EPA ARCHIVE DOCUMENT

# Community Participation in the Environmental Decision-Making Process: Can It Reduce Disproportionate Impact?

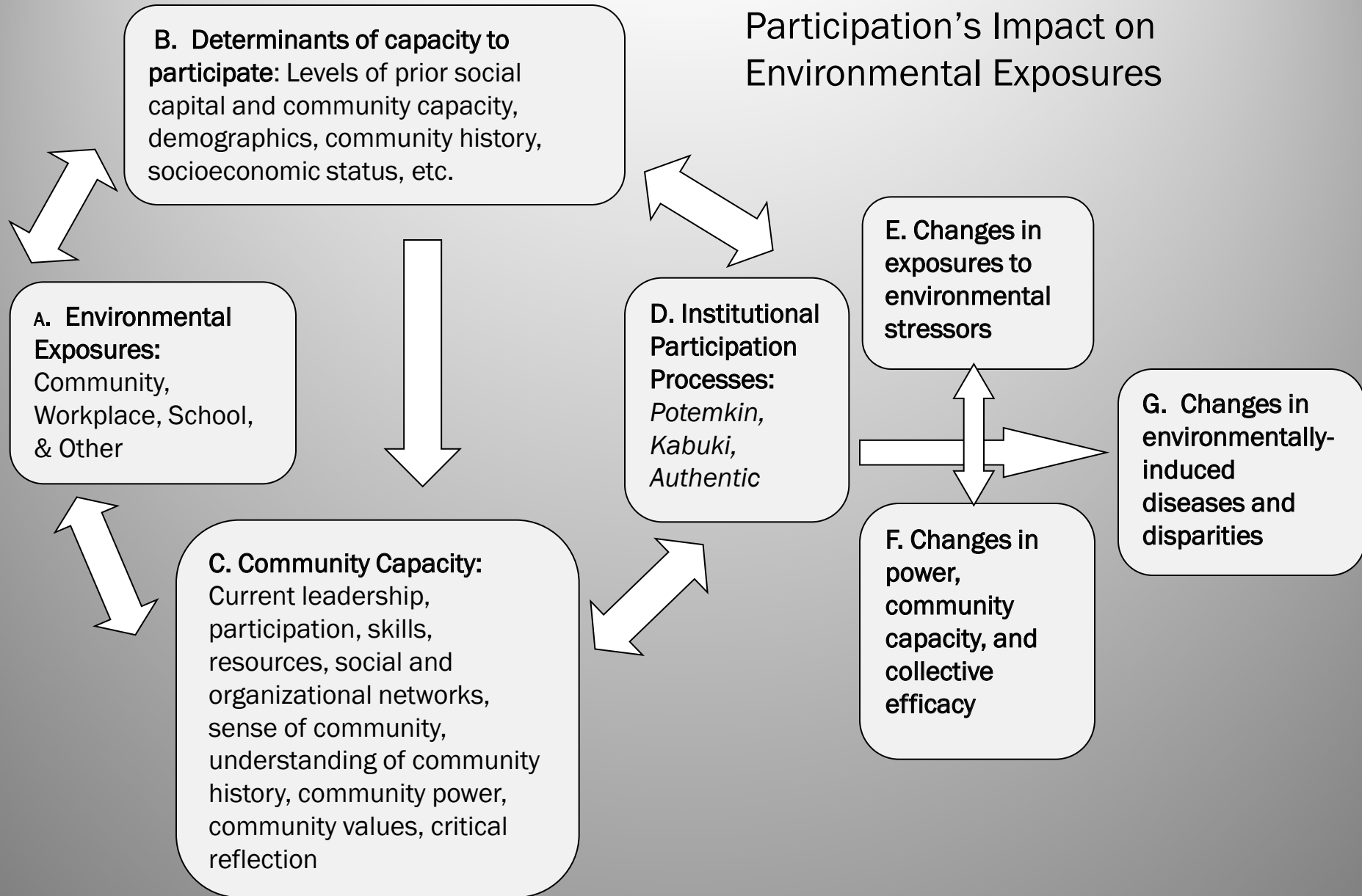
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EPA Symposium, Washington, D.C.,  
March 18, 2010

# Our Questions:

1. What characteristics of communities contribute to their capacity to participate in making environmental decisions?
2. What environmental policy decision making processes invite or discourage participation?
3. How can EPA better support community participation in making decisions that reduce disproportionate impact of environmental stressors on low-income populations and communities of color?



# Conceptual Model for Community Participation's Impact on Environmental Exposures



# Conceptual Model for Community Participation's Impact on Environmental Exposures

**B. Determinants of capacity to participate:** Levels of prior social capital and community capacity, demographics, community history, socioeconomic status, etc.

**A. Environmental Exposures:** Community, Workplace, School, & Other

← Intervention opportunity 1

**D. Institutional Participation Processes:** *Potemkin, Kabuki, Authentic*

**E. Changes in exposures to environmental stressors**

**G. Changes in environmentally-induced diseases and disparities**

**C. Community Capacity:** Current leadership, participation, skills, resources, social and organizational networks, sense of community, understanding of community history, community power, community values, critical reflection

↑ Intervention opportunity 3

**F. Changes in power, community capacity, and collective efficacy**

← Intervention opportunity 2

# Principles of Participation

- Participants bring different values, experiences and priorities to the table
- Context in which an environmental conflict plays out vitally affects the outcome (participation processes need to be tailored to the circumstances)
- Analysis of environmental decision-making should include an assessment of who has power to do what in a given situation



# Some key influences on communities' ability to protect themselves



Credit: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/infinetwilderness/261718673/>

- Community cohesion
- Shared language
- Access to useable information
- “Ethnic Churning”

# What is Community Capacity?



Credit: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/whizchickenonabun/395560682/>

“a set of dynamic community traits, resources, and associational patterns that can be brought to bear for community-building and community health improvement”

Norton B. Mcleeroy K, Burdine J, Felix M, Dorsey A. 2002

A process and an outcome ...

How is it different from social capital?



# Dimensions of Community Capacity

1. Leadership

2. Participation

3. Skills

4. Resources

5. Social and organizational networks

6. Sense of community

7. Understanding of community history

8. Community power

9. Community values

10. Critical reflection

# How does more capacity lead to better participation?

1. *Increased community capacity builds community cohesion thereby increasing collective efficacy.*
2. *Increased community capacity enables a community to bring in new resources that increase its ability to protect residents.*
3. *Increased community capacity provides community residents and leaders with knowledge and skills that can be used to take action to reduce environmental hazards.*

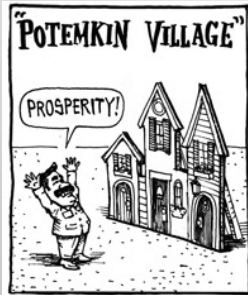


# How does more capacity lead to better participation?

- 4. Increased community capacity allows a community to act more effectively in the political arena.*
- 5. Increased community capacity increases a community's real political power and thereby its ability to exert more influence on behalf of its residents.*



# Three Models of Participation



POTEMKIN



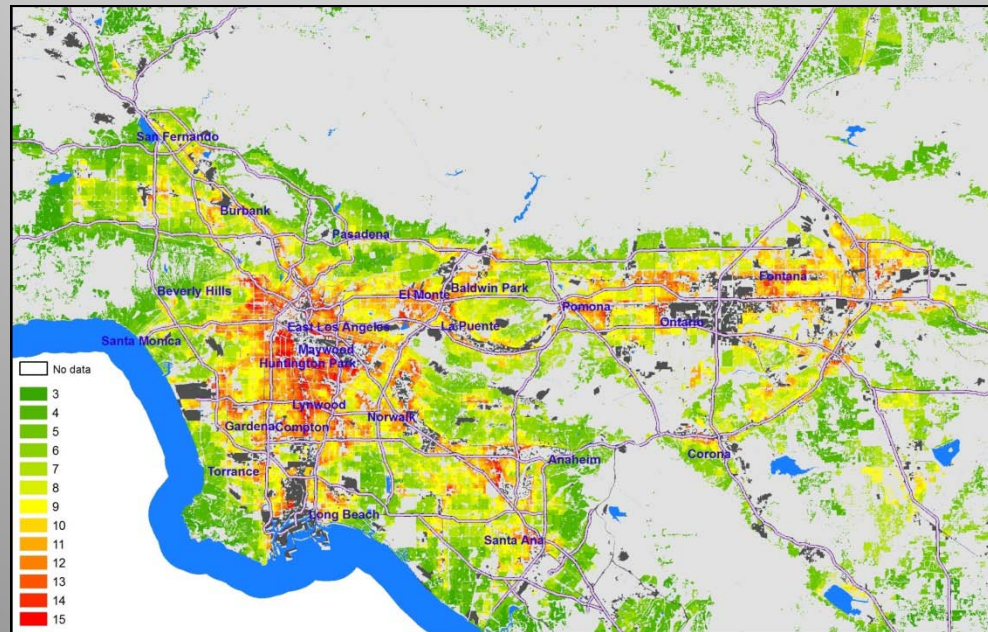
KABUKI



AUTHENTIC

# How to have Authentic Participation:

1. Get people involved early
2. Provide resources and information
3. Insure that outcomes reflect participation



# Intervention Strategies

1. Training and technology transfer
2. Technical assistance
3. Community-Based Participatory Research approaches
4. Empowerment approaches
5. Community organizing/social action



# A Continuum of Community Power

## Dimensions of Power

Rights	Examples
Right to be informed	Right to know laws, freedom of information act, mandatory reporting of toxic emissions, public environmental impact reviews
Right to sit at decision-making table	Mandate for citizen participation in zoning or siting reviews, negotiation for settlement of lawsuits
Right to say no	Legal challenges for violation of due process in zoning or environmental impact review, other lawsuits
Right to frame issue and identify options	Participatory processes in which citizens have equal voice with other players and ongoing role in planning processes
Right to make decisions	Ballot initiatives

# Recommendations for EPA and other public agencies

1. Start the involvement early
2. Make time to build trust
3. Create effective mechanisms to listen to community concerns
4. Develop culturally competent outreach processes and
5. Demonstrate institutional support by making government/agency resources available
6. Adopt the viewpoint that the community is beneficial to the process





# Recommendations for EPA and other public agencies:

7. Include community in the co-production of knowledge
8. Adopt a cumulative impact approach as much as feasible
9. Maintain participation over time
10. Evaluate participation using clear measures and markers
11. Take action to make change based on the feedback received in the participation processes





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Thank you