



**EFFECTIVENESS OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION  
PROGRAMME:  
A FEEDBACK FROM PARTICIPANTS  
(SABAK BERNAM DISTRICT LOCAL PLAN AND  
KUALA LUMPUR STRUCTURE PLAN)**

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**Abstract**

Nowadays, public awareness on the potential dangers of environmental problems and the negative impact from the development has been increasing. Public has the right to know and participate in making decisions, particularly in those have potentially affect on the communities in which they live and work. Furthermore, Malaysia is adopting the Rio Declaration – Sustainable Development and Agenda 21. One of the fundamental prerequisites for the achievement of sustainable development is broad public participation in decision-making. Research had been carried out to identify the effectiveness of the public participation programme for Sabak Bernam District Local Plan 2002-2015 and Kuala Lumpur Structure Plan 2020. The research was carried out by collecting feedback from the participants of public exhibitions and workshops for both of the plans. Through the research, it was found that series of workshops are the effective method of public participation for development plan as compared to public exhibition after draft proposal of the plan has been completed. An effective and successful public participation programme should allow members of the community to have an active voice in the process and to have a free access to important information

**Keywords:** Public Participation, District Local Plan, Structure Plan, Effectiveness

**INTRODUCTION**

Some major ecological disasters which caused heavy losses had a great impact on the development of public participation. These disasters have made the

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public increasingly aware of the potential dangers of environmental problem, and therefore insisted on better and safer regulations and more openness in matters of ecological importance. Authorities were forced to involve citizens in the decision making process and to provide more access to information. In many countries, this led to special legislation in this field. In the United States, the Right-to-Know Acts were expanded after the Bhopal disaster, which included the obligation to provide information for the people living in the neighbourhood of chemical and other heavy industrial plants regarding the dangers threatening them. In this way an effective emergency plan and management system could be designed.

The public have the right to know and participate in decision making. One of the fundamental prerequisites for the achievement of sustainable development is broad public participation in decision-making. "Environmental issues are best handled with the participation of all concerned citizens, at the relevant level" (Principle 10, the Rio Declaration). It was in line with our survey that was carried out in year 2003 and 2004. We found that most of the respondents believed that effective public participation programme would increase environmental quality.

Generally, public participation has many advantages to both citizens and planning authorities (and decision makers). Some of the advantages are:

*1. For Citizens / Public:*

- The opportunity to share their opinions, criticise and influence public decisions in relation to the future planning.
- The opportunity to learn other citizens' perspectives that take into account environmental, social and economic considerations.
- The freedom of speech and to be heard.
- The opportunity to reach consensus.
- The opportunity to collect background information of their areas and information on the future planning of their areas.
- The opportunity to contribute towards better environment for their living and working area.
- Increase the public ability to understand the planning process.

*2. For Decision-Makers and Planning Authorities:*

- The opportunity to communicate with a variety of people especially at the grass-root level.
- The opportunity to strengthen the quality of decisions and final plan.
- The opportunity to access more information.

- The opportunity to achieve and demonstrate more transparency in the planning decision-making process.
- The increase in the level of public acceptance on government's plan and decision.

As mentioned by Ortolano (1984), the public hearing is the most rigid. A hearing officer generally governs the proceedings and a stenographer makes a verbatim transcript. Presentations are formal and there is little interaction among participants. Large group meetings can be much less formal than hearing. However, it is difficult for many citizens to contribute directly in large assemblies unless provisions are made to break them up into small discussion groups.

In order to move towards more sustainable development, there is a need to identify and increase the effectiveness of public participation programme. The effective public participation programme will increase the level of cooperation between planning authorities and public to achieve their similar planning goal, which will benefit all people.

A research had been carried out to identify the effectiveness of the public participation programme for Sabak Bernam District Local Plan 2002-2015 (SBDLP) and Kuala Lumpur Structure Plan 2020 (KLSP). The research was carried out by collecting feedback from the participants of public exhibitions and workshops for both of the plans.

## **OBJECTIVES**

There are three main objectives of this study:

- i. To identify the basic principles and requirements for effective public participation programme.
- ii. To analyse the effectiveness of the public participation methods currently practiced in the development plan preparation process.
- iii. To identify the appropriate methods, approaches and principles for more effective public participation for the study area.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This research involved the collection of primary and secondary data. SPSS software was used for data analysis. The research was based on a set of questionnaire. A total of 51 respondents were interviewed for the SBDLP and

another 31 respondents for KLSP through a return mailed questionnaire. Secondary information was collected from the related agencies through interviewing the officers.

## **REQUIREMENTS UNDER THE ACTS**

### ***Public Participation in the Preparation of Local Plan under Act 172***

The new provision of Town and Country Planning Act 1976 (Act 172), under Section 12A, stated that before commencing the preparation of a local plan, the local planning authority shall take such steps as will in its opinion secure:

- (a) that publicity is given in its area to the draft local plan that will be prepared, its objection and the purpose for its preparation, and matters that the local planning authority proposes to include in the plan;
- (b) that persons who may be expected to desire an opportunity of making representations to the local planning authority in respect of those matters are made aware that they are entitled to, and are given, an opportunity of doing so.

Section 12A does not limit the period for public to make representations. However, Sabak Bernam District Council has organised few workshops and exhibitions for public to participate in the Sabak Bernam District Local Plan making process; starting from early stage until end of the plan preparation.

Under the Section 13 of the Act, when the local planning authority has prepared a draft local plan, it shall, before adopting a draft local plan, but not before the structure plan, make copies of the draft local plan available for inspection at its office and at such other places as it may determine for not less than 4 weeks. Beside, objections to or representations in respect of the draft local plan may be made to the local planning authority.

Under the Section 14, Act 172, for the purpose of considering objections to and representations in respect of a draft local plan, the local planning authority may cause a local inquiry or other hearing to be held by a committee of 3 persons appointed by the State Planning Committee (SPC).

According to Section 15, Act 172, after considering the objections or representations, the local planning authority shall submit the draft local plan or the draft local plan as modified so as to take account of the objections or representations or of any matters arising therefrom, to the State Planning

Committee for its approval. Therefore, local planning authority is not required under the Act 172 to follow strictly the public objections or representations, local planning authority is required to consider or 'take account' of the objections or representations.

### ***The Sabak Bernam District Local Plan 2002-2015 (SBDLP)***

SBDLP is the first Local Plan prepared under the provision of Section 12a, Town and Country Planning (Amendment) Act 2001. The public participation programmes were held at every stage of SBDLP preparation process, which started with:

- a. A workshop and exhibition at the early stage of study (*Seranta Awal*); followed by
- b. A workshop after the technical report was prepared;
- c. A workshop after draft proposal was prepared; and
- d. An exhibition after the draft proposal had been amended.

Additional to this, the method of public participation has been modified from 'public exhibition' and 'public hearing' to 'workshops', 'public exhibition' and 'public hearing' (see Photo A, B, C, D, and E).

### ***Public Participation in the Preparation of Kuala Lumpur Structure Plan under Act 267***

Kuala Lumpur Structure Plan 2020 had been prepared under the provision of Federal Territory (Planning) Act 1982 (Act 267). Under the provision in Section 7, Act 267, after the draft structure plan has been prepared, public can inspect and purchase copy of draft structure plan, and able to make objections in writing within the period not less than one month as per mentioned in gazette and local newspapers. For the purpose of considering and reporting any objection, Minister shall appoint a Committee. In considering any objection, the Committee shall as soon as practicable hear any person including representatives of Government Department or statutory bodies who in filing the objection has made a request to be heard.

Under the same Section, sub-section 7, the Commissioner also didn't required to follow strictly the objections, but only "shall consider the report of the Committee and may make such amendments to the draft structure plan as he considers proper ...".

### ***The Kua'a Lumpur Structure Plan 2020 (KLSP)***

The KLSP still applies the methods of 'public exhibition' and 'public hearing' for the public to participate after the draft KLSP was prepared. Besides the public exhibition, Kuala Lumpur City Hall also had given special briefing to a number of organisations based on request. Kuala Lumpur City Hall had organised road shows at some strategic locations such as KLCC Suria shopping complex, Mid Valley shopping complex, Selayang and KL Central (see Photo F, G and H). Kuala Lumpur City Hall had also put the draft KLSP in the city hall's web site<sup>3</sup> for public viewing and reading. For the purpose of effective publicity, it was discovered that the City Hall had spent a lot of money for advertisement through television programmes, banners and newspapers, on-line reports and video presentations.

### ***ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS***

The analysis involved analysing of feedback from the respondents who were involved in public participation in the Kuala Lumpur Structure Plan 2020 and Sabak Bernam District Local Plan 2002-2015. Microsoft Excel and SPSS software were utilised in the analysis of primary data. In this study, the analysis was carried out by computing the feedbacks from respondents separately for these two development plans. Feedbacks of respondents have been studied to identify the effectiveness of the overall programmes and the effectiveness of each main aspect or element of public participation. The effectiveness of these two development plans' public participation programmes are discussed together but not for the purpose of direct comparing due to the different characteristics of both plans and programmes.

From the survey, it was found that, the highest aspects of concern for most of the respondents were infrastructure and public facilities development, future economic development, and environmental issues and quality. In general, all respondents for SBDLP felt that, the public participation programme was effective. However, for KLSP, there were 23.3% of the respondents who felt that the public participation programme was not effective.

For SBDLP, the effectiveness of the programme also includes the use of banners and effective presentations (only 6.0% of the respondents said that the banners and presentations were not effective) and the information was clearly understood by respondents. Besides that, the public participation programme

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<sup>3</sup> See <http://pskl2020.dbkl.gov.my>.

managed to deliver enough relevant information to participants, used effective methods of publicity and effective methods for participants to give ideas, opinions or comments. The methods used in the public participation programme included written comments and oral discussion during the workshop.

In addition, the programme had successfully made the participants believe that the government would consider their opinions seriously in the process of preparing the plan. Most of them felt that they have equal rights and chances of getting information.

Other factors contributed to the effectiveness of the public participation programme for SBDLP were:

- a. The limitation of the SBDLP was clearly explained by the study team during the workshop. As a result, the participants received better understanding regarding the scope of the discussion.
- b. Majority of the respondents received response from the government on their decision, as well as the reasons for accepting or rejecting the public opinions that was done through the two-way communication during the workshop.
- c. Participants were guided by the study consultants or professional planners effectively during the workshop.

Nevertheless, the public participation programmes had faced few weaknesses as described here:

- a. The programme failed to deliver enough information on the future development of the area to the participants. The public were expecting more details or comprehensive information on the future development for their areas.
- b. The development constraints were not presented clearly, lack of detailed information and not specific for the public to understand.

For KLSP, the public participation programme was less effective. This was shown in the survey data where 23.3% of the respondents felt the programme was not effective. These included the use of banners and presentations. There were 26.7% of the respondents mentioned the banners and presentations were not really effective and another 33.3% of the respondents could not understand the information provided in exhibition or report. Here, the public participation programmes had failed to deliver enough relevant information to the majority of the participants in the campaign.

Besides that, the method used in giving ideas, opinions or comments by participants also was less effective. The programme was not successful in delivering enough information on the future development of the area during the public exhibition. One third (33.3%) of the respondents felt that the written form method used was not effective. The study shows 61.3% of the respondents from KLSP believed the government would not consider their opinions or comments seriously, and 50% of the respondents felt that they did not have equal rights and chances on planning and development of Kuala Lumpur. However, the publicity of the programme was carried out effectively.

Other factors contributing to the ineffectiveness of the public participation programme for KLSP were:

- a. The information on the environmental quality was not presented/delivered clearly, lack of detailed information and not specific for the participants.
- b. The limitation of the KLSP and the development constraints were also not presented clearly, lack of detailed information and not specific enough for the participants.
- c. Majority of the respondents stated that they did not receive response from the City Hall on final decision as well as on reasons for accepting or rejecting their opinions. As a result, the respondents' belief the government would not consider their opinions seriously.
- d. Technical advice given by the Kuala Lumpur City Hall personnel (i.e. the town planners) was not comprehensive enough. Some of the participants did not get the technical advice. This might affect their understanding on the information or plans presented.

## RECOMMENDATION AND CONCLUSION

### *a) Effective methods through series of workshop and public exhibitions*

From this study, it was found that organizing series of workshops was a more effective method of public participation as compared to having one public exhibition after the draft proposal or plan has been completed. This is because an effective and successful public participation programme should allow members of the community to have an active voice in the process and to have free access to important information. Besides that, through the workshop (the two-way communication) it could:



- a. Create a dialogue session that provides feedback;
- b. Easily establish trust and credibility in the community;
- c. Give input and discuss issues with stakeholders and related groups or people;
- d. Ensure the planning authority to fulfill their obligations on the needs of the public, in particular the participants;
- e. Let the public be involved in the early process, receive feedback and address them before making decisions;
- f. Give opportunities to participants to understand the preparation of plan and to give input directly to the study team starting from the beginning of the plan preparation process;
- g. Let the planners and the public understand and respect each others' values and limitations through direct two-way communication;
- h. Make all segments of the interested community to have an equal opportunity to receive information and participate in the process through open discussion and written form;
- i. Let the planning authority and planners evaluate the effectiveness of the programme after every workshop or discussion session;
- j. Allow the planning consultants/authority to give direct response to the public or participants on the issues or views highlighted; and
- k. Give opportunities to participants to ask and to get more information from planners.

The series of workshops and public exhibitions should be organised from the beginning of the plan preparation to the final stage of the process, which include:

- a. Workshop at the early stage (before the start of the plan preparation);
- b. Workshop and public exhibition after the technical report has been prepared; and
- c. Workshop and public exhibition after the draft proposal has been prepared.

These workshops should be participated by the planning authority, planners, all the stakeholders and general public. Workshop at the early stage should aim at getting the public informed about the purpose, scope and the importance of the plan making. Besides that, the workshop should give opportunity to the public and stakeholders to give their opinions and views before the preparation of the plan by the planning authority and consultants.

The workshops and public exhibitions should be held at strategic locations, such as public hall, town square and public transport terminal. The criteria of good location are:

- a. High accessibility via public transport system and roads,
- b. Public focus area or community centre, and
- c. Ample and suitable space for various activities/purposes.

***b) Establish public trust***

According to the feedback from respondents, the government (planning authority) is the proper agency to act as an organiser for the public participation programme. However, the organiser of the public participation programme should consider the following actions to increase the public trust upon the organiser:

- a. Establishing trust and credibility in the community through honesty and openness;
- b. Involving the public early in the process, receiving feedback, and addressing public concerns before making decisions;
- c. Understanding and respecting the values and limitations of participants;
- d. Providing sufficient information on the development objectives, issues, challenges and potentials, existing environmental quality, positive and negative impacts of the proposed plan, and the limitations of the development plan for public / participants;
- e. Inviting everyone to participate and giving equal opportunity to all participants;
- f. Showing high appreciation to the participants using appropriate approach, such as a letter of appreciation informing them the actions taken by the planning authority on their opinions, comments or views.

***c) Improve the effectiveness of the public participation programme***

There are other proper actions that could be taken by the organiser to improve the effectiveness of the public participation programme. These include:

- a. Evaluating the best types of activities for the community to participate;
- b. Planning the public participation activities ahead of time, allowing flexibility for changing interest levels in the community;

- c. Taking steps, such as issuing multilingual fact sheets or encouraging the formation of citizen advisory groups, to ensure that all segments of the interested community have an equal opportunity in receiving information and participating in the process;
- d. Using simple and suitable language and also appropriate format of presentation (report, banner and multimedia presentation);
- e. Educating the public regarding the purpose, importance and scope of the development plan, as well as the right, obligation and the proper ways for public to participate;
- f. Giving detail explanation to the public / participants before they are divided into smaller groups for effective discussion;
- g. Providing sufficient number of planning advisors during the workshop and public exhibitions;
- h. Allowing participants to give their comments, opinions or views in both oral and written form;
- i. Setting up more places for exhibition, including the access to on-line exhibition;
- j. Evaluating periodically on the effectiveness of the public participation programme;
- k. Using video recording to record the public views and comments;
- l. Providing mobile exhibition room and more venues for public exhibition, such as in housing areas, shopping centres, hospitals, public transport terminals / stations, public halls and high learning institutions;
- m. Providing on-line public participation;
- n. Providing free parking fee and special discounted public transport fare for participants;
- o. Educating public on the importance of public participation in planning process; and
- p. Providing longer period (more than one month) for public exhibition and it should include public holidays.

“If you want to know how shoe fits, ask the person who is wearing it, not the one who made it”. Planners or planning authority should not always think they are providing the best for the public without effective public participation in the planning process.

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APPENDIX:



Photo A: Workshop for Draft Sabak Bernam District Local Plan (SBDLP) held on 10 July, 2003.

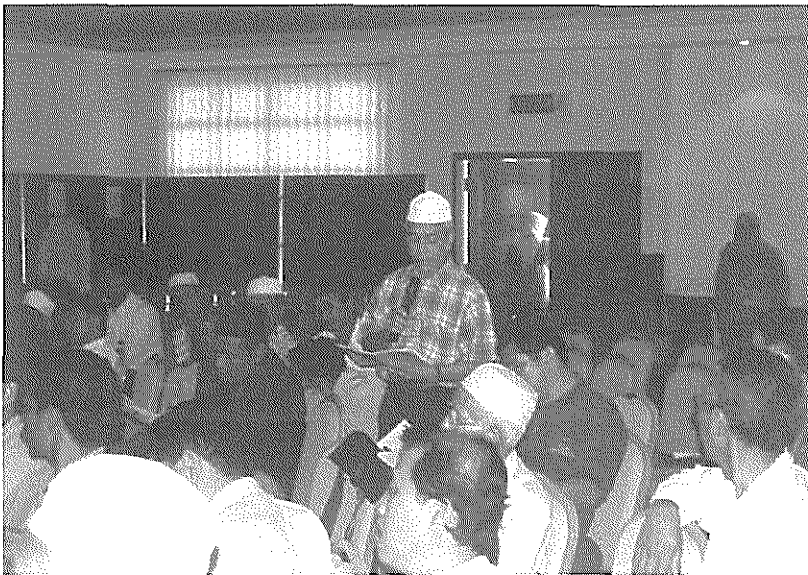


Photo B: Participants are giving their opinions, comments and views in the SBDLP workshop.

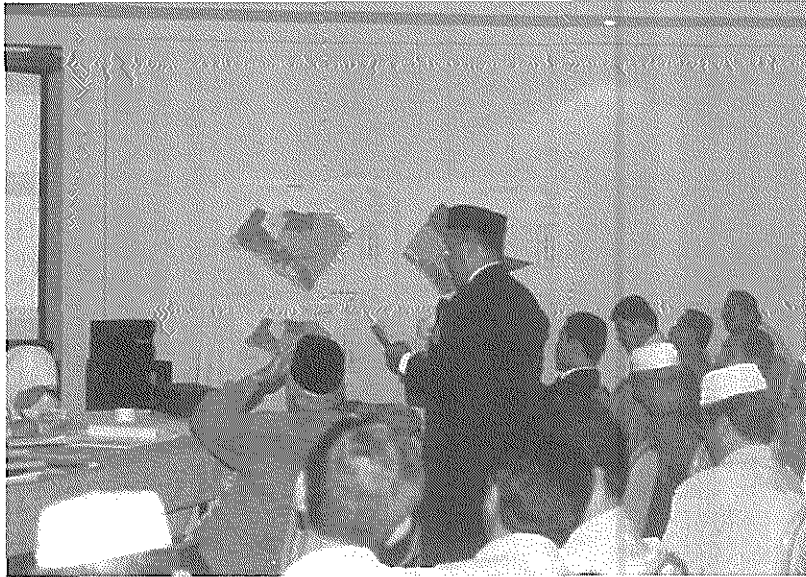


Photo C: Participants are giving their opinions, comments and views in the SBDLP workshop.



Photo D: Small group discussion in one of the sessions during the workshop (SBDLP).



Photo E: 'Lucky draw' event to attract public to participate in the workshop (SBDLP).

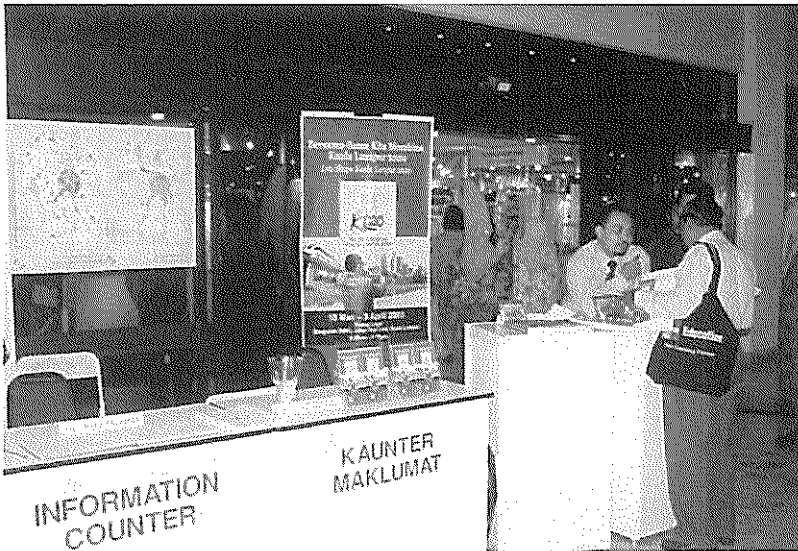


Photo F: Information counter and counter for selling draft KLSP report.





Photo G: Public exhibition of Draft Kuala Lumpur Structure Plan.

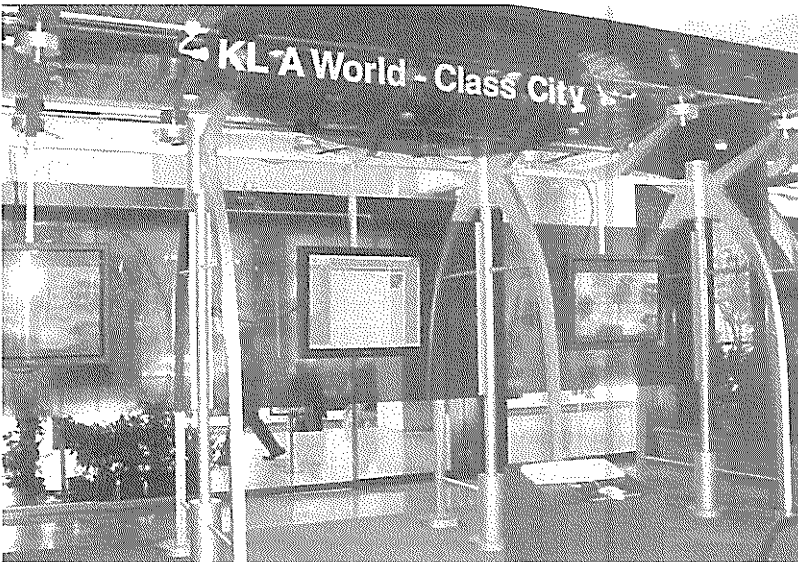


Photo H: The use of multimedia in the Draft Kuala Lumpur Structure Plan exhibition.