

Summits: Best Practices for Canada

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Summary:

DFAIT's public consultation efforts demonstrate that some aspects have worked well while others remain wanting. In particular, DFAIT's commitment to the consultation process is viewed as inconsistent and superficial while NGO contributions are considered impractical and ill-informed. At the same time, DFAIT and NGOs were not entirely discouraged by the experience thus far of public consultations, noting as some positive developments the establishment of contacts and the desire to expand on these new relationships. Special reference is made to the discontent with the public consultations for the Santiago and Vancouver summits among everyone involved (policymakers, NGOs) and the view that the corresponding people's summits did not influence Canadian policy or outcomes of the summits. One explanation of the weak public consultation process could be relation to the lack of resources and personnel in DFAIT to properly conduct and engage in public consultations, and to subsidise NGOs and others who are part of the public consultation process. Special mention is made of the CCFPD as facilitating consultations that are policy-relevant and independently organised.

Policy recommendations:

- to ensure clarity about the priority of public consultations, the principle of public participation should be affirmed in DFAIT and operationalised in the routines of the department;
- effort should be made to reach agreement among policy-makers and NGOs about the objectives of public consultation;
- DFAIT should make timely and adequate information available to the NGOs about government policy and positions on, for example, decisions to be taken and international negotiations;
- improved feedback and follow-up by DFAIT which thus far has been scant and unsatisfactory, especially regarding specific exercises in the consultation process;
- development of continuous, regular, and close relations with NGOs and other groups willing to form long-term relationships in the policy process;
- integrate financial and personnel requirements of public consultation into DFAIT budget planning
- NGOs to identify among themselves participants in consultation exercises to manage the participation at efficient levels