

## **Public communication and the complexity of environmental concerns in Algeria: acts and strategies**

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### **Abstract:**

The present research work focuses on the communication dimension of public action in terms of protection and promotion of the environment in Algeria.

Nonetheless, it is worth pointing out that this public communication is the responsibility of the Ministry in charge of the Environment as part of its assignment of education, awareness and partnership for the protection of the environment, and the promotion of sustainable development.

In the actual research, a sample of these actions is studied in order to better understand the modes of communication used by this public institution and the resulting strategies bearing in mind that the greatest attention is to be given to children's communication (especially those in school), to event-related communication, to associative communication and to public (inter-ministerial) communication.

**key words:** Public Communication; Environment; Actions; Strategies.

### ***Introduction***

Currently, the environmental issues affect all aspects of daily life. Citizens around the world are suffering. The manifestations of this chaotic situation are innumerable: pollutions (air, water, soil), natural disasters (drought, flooding, forest fires, melting glaciers, advances in the desert), diseases (cancer, asthma, congenital malformations); and the consequences of this climate change spare no territory and no population.

Although the population is responsible for only a tiny proportion; nevertheless, it remains the first victim of the climatic hazards because "the impact of climate change exacerbates other stress factors and often has repercussions on the well-being of the most vulnerable people. The risks of food insecurity and disruption of food systems are very real (...)"(TORQUEBIAU, 2015, P17).

These disastrous manifestations are sometimes provoked by behaviors favoring "individual self-attainment at the expense of consideration of the common good"

(BAKER, 2016, P4), such as anarchic dumps, deforestation, illegal constructions, the overexploitation of natural resources or even the discharge of waste water.

These acts related to human activity can be corrected through environmental education supported by public action that favors communication as a focal tool capable of ensuring the effective inclusion of the eco-responsible dimension in an educational process intended for all fringes of society.

In Algeria, for instance, this environmental, educational and communication ambition is displayed by several parties such as the public authorities (ministries, specialized institutions, public bodies) as well as civil society. In this respect, it should be emphasized that the aim of this project is to demonstrate one of these actors, namely the Ministry of the Environment.

Nonetheless, the chief purpose is to identify the main actions that materialize the commitment of this government institution in the establishment of an environmental culture in the country.

However, the particularity of this research seeks for knowing the main communication techniques used by the ministry for environmental purposes of an educational and innovative nature.

In order to achieve the main purpose of this analysis, the main question that has to be highlighted is:

What is the contribution of communication in the actions undertaken by the Algerian Ministry of the Environment for the promotion of environmental education in the perspective of sustainable development?

### ***Ministry of the Environment: The Statutory Contours of a Multidimensional Mission***

The Algerian Ministry of the Environment has the mission, notably through its direction of awareness, education and partnership for the protection of the environment, to develop and update the national strategy of awareness, education and environmental communication. This department is also responsible for promoting, in conjunction with the sectors concerned, any action and any education and awareness program in the field of the environment.

The application of the action plans of the Ministry of the Environment is assigned to the central administration and the wilaya directorates. To be more operational, the ministry delegates programs to administrations placed under its supervision such as

the National Climate Change Agency, the National Waste Agency, the National Conservatory of Environmental Training, the National Center for Cleaner Production Technologies, the National Observatory for the Environment and Sustainable Development.

In terms of communication, the ministry has a graphic charter, a constantly updated website and a facebook page. The supervisory institutions also enjoy a good visual identity and are present on the web. Dynamic websites with portable versions are made available to the general public. Alongside this e-presence, the administrations attached to the ministry provide communication media of all types (Flyers, leaflets, manuals, posters, banners, etc.).

The follow-up and validation of these awareness-raising and communication media are provided by the central administration and enjoy a huge place because they represent a guarantee of success of the actions carried out on field. In this context, communication becomes a key element in aspiring to sustainable development, as defined in a famous report published in 1987 by the World Commission on Environment and Development within the United Nations World Organization (the Brundtland report), "the needs of present generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own need".

Through this definition, two ideas hold a central place: "-the concept of needs, more particularly the essential needs of the poorest people to whom the highest priority should be given. -the idea of the limitations that the state of our techniques and our social organization imposes on the capacity of the environment to meet current and future needs", (BARRETT, 2017, P243).

Achieving this objective inevitably involves the propagation and promotion of new behaviors, and making them models that can achieve notoriety that will be able to "lower the degree of environmental degradation in the absence of a reverse.

Consequently, the environmental issue is the subject of a significant communication investment made by organizations and individuals involved in society. These strategies are mobilized by the different categories of actors in the public space in order to promote their opinions and strengthen their legitimacy through the support of public opinion", (KANE, 2016, P16).

***Environmental Education: The Importance of Communication for Children***

The inclusion of environmental education in national education programs has been the subject of a memorandum of understanding between the ministry which is responsible for the environment and the ministry that is responsible for national education. The first such document was concluded in 2002.

Concretely, the wish of the national public administrations is to educate and sensitize the citizens of tomorrow to an ecological conscience from an early age, considering this individual from the outset as an active being who "interacts with his environment in a selective way. His behavioral repertoire allows certain environmental influences to operate, and not others. The dynamism of the changes takes place, however, thanks to the necessary interaction with the environment (...)", (POMERLEAU & MALCUI, 1983, P305).

As an indication, in 2015, a budget of 1.6 billion DA was allocated to equip 2,500 environmental clubs with computer and audiovisual equipment (1st part), and according to official statistics from the Ministry of the Environment.

Referring to specifications, these clubs tendered to a sectoral public procurement commission to benefit from the payment of a second installment. This funding relates to the acquisition of equipment intended to promote selective sorting, the circular economy, and raising awareness of climate change in schools.

The National Conservatory of Environmental Training supervised the operation as delegated contracting authority on behalf of the supervisory ministry. Almost two decades later, this memorandum of understanding on strengthening environmental and sustainable development education in schools was updated before being ratified in March 2019.

**Fig.1. Sample environmental club activities**



**Source: Image bank of the Algerian Ministry of the Environment.**

The communication programs undertaken or supervised by the Ministry of the Environment with school children has the aim to create new knowledge in relation to ecology and to disseminate it for the benefit of a young audience through a participatory and inclusive approach. Systematically, this program, initiated mainly in green clubs, encourage learning through action. This educational, playful and academic approach confirms the respect of the Ministry of the Environment for the triple dimension of environmental education.

This indeed includes: "a cognitive dimension, involving the construction of knowledge about the environment as well as skills and competences to understand and protect it an ethical dimension, assuming the thoughtful integration of a certain number of fundamental values;-and finally a dimension of action, based on a certain way of behaving to protect and rationally manage the environment (development of attitudes and behaviors favorable to the environment (LAZZERI & MOUSTIER, 2008, P12).

These three dimensions are present in actions for children. Children are generally considered to be one of the main target audiences for events organized by the Ministry of the Environment, especially when we know that "For more than half the world's children, their health and often their lives are constantly threatened by environmental hazards - in their home and its surrounds, in the places where they play and socialize"

This is the case for the celebration of world and national days dedicated to the Environment such as the International Day of Wetlands, the World Day of Forests, the World Water Day and the International Day of biodiversity.

In 2018, the Ministry of the Environment organized the "green city caravan" under the slogan "Cultivating Life", which crisscrossed several wilayas. Simultaneously, the event was marked by the launch of the 2018 Best Green City Award competition, with the aim of bringing citizens into symbiosis with nature, for a change in behavior towards their environment, the event continues until March 2019.

In May 2021, the Ministry of the Environment organized, on the occasion of the celebration of the International Day for Biological Diversity, awareness-raising and information actions across the national territory, by mobilizing its departments of wilayas and Environment houses as well as all of its administrations under supervision.

All these efforts have been directed towards strengthening the awareness of the various actors in relation to the importance of the preservation of the ecological and biological heritage.

***The Involvement of the Civil Society : To Bring in Harmony Public Communication and Non-Profit Group Communication Acts***

For the Algerian Ministry of the Environment, the involvement of civil society in ministerial actions is not a hollow slogan because this department considers the non-governmental organizations like key partners. To visualize the contribution of non-governmental organizations and their effective work, the Ministry of the Environment updates the national file of NGOs active in the field of the environment. The latest census counts 800 NGOs, 500 of which comply with Law 06-12 relating to NGOs.

The development and implementation of one of this digital platform is a project included in the framework of an Algerian-Belgian cooperation program (PRCDE), building capacity in the field of the environment, in order to allow the rapprochement of the administration and more efficient communication with civil society.

This census work allows the ministry to select the NGOs eligible for the various partnership programs such as the program of small initiatives of civil society organizations in North Africa (PPI-OSCAN) which allows NGOs, activating in the field the preservation and protection of biodiversity, to benefit from a grant from the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), once selected.

In March 2021, in preparation for the second edition of PPI-OSCAN program, two training workshops were launched for the benefit of the 11 beneficiary NGOs. As part of the capacity building program for NGOs, these same workshops focused on two themes: environmental communication by NGOs and monitoring of NGO projects.

**Fig.2. Training workshop for the implementation of the small initiatives program for civil society organizations in North Africa**



**Source: Image bank of the Algerian Ministry of the Environment.**



The aims of this workshops was to prepare the NGOs to become aware of the role of communication actions in achieving their strategic objectives; improve the quality of their communications on the actions of their projects; to better disseminate their work through different communication platforms and tools, emphasizing the scientific and specialized aspects of their work.

In other terms, the training aims to make participants able to put in place the main axes of their communication plans and to master the process of selection and production of messages, slogans and themes for better communication, especially external communication. through the adaptation of messages to different target groups (general public, media, different administrations, donors, etc.)

As far as the second workshop is concerned, it is planned to consolidate the capacities of beneficiary NGOs in terms of designing and implementing a project Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) protocol. At the end of this training, each NGO should be able to ensure the proper application of the M&E protocol by its staff and the various project partners.

At the end of their projects, the representatives of the associations concerned by the training were initiated to draw up and initiate an action plan for a complete M&E protocol and to involve, during its implementation, the partners to assume their responsibilities towards him.

The results of such a program, combining theoretical knowledge and practical exercises, contribute to improving the mastery of collective work in the field.

Among these projects, there is this project to create the first private women's cooperatives created in Algeria and more particularly national park level of El Kala (wilaya of Etarf). This one-of-a-kind natural space conceals several plant treasures such as cork, eucalyptus, aromatic and medicinal plants including mastic tree, laurel, myrtle, wild mint and wild lavender.

The Arom Mex cooperative, whose genesis is told in this document, has benefited form the PEBLA's project. It was created with the support of the project "Environmental Governance and Biodiversity (GENBI) predecessor of PEBLA, between the year 2014 and 2019 and whose PEBLA aims to strengthen the flagship results, in particular that of the creation of cooperatives for the development of terrestrial and marine biological resources.

**Figure N03: Female Members of the Arom Mex Cooperative**

**Source: Image bank of the Algerian Ministry of the Environment.**

The partnership of the Ministry of the Environment with non-governmental actors is not limited to the national territory.

For example, the National Waste Agency, an administration placed under the authority of the ministry, initiated in August 2021, an information and awareness program on the dangers of plastic pollution in collaboration with the Probiom foundation. for the protection of marine biodiversity in Algeria and the association Expedition MED France. The program includes also awareness, raising actions aimed at public, through an itinerant educational and scientific caravan on the issues of pollution by plastic waste. In this context, it is noticeable that GNOs communication meaning is put at the service of public communication rallied to the ecological cause.

Therefore, NGOs need to monitor the performance of their communication strategies by adopting the concept of 'marketing'. The usefulness of mastering marketing techniques and its relationship with the communication efforts of NGOs is very visible, especially when it comes to targeting audiences. Because the target audience is a major issue for the NGO when it develops communication actions aimed at a general public. In this case, a work of adaptation of the principles of marketing must be done to respond to the nature of the work of NGOs. In other words, if certain initial objectives appear similar for companies and NGOs, there is no doubt that the challenges of the NGO are "embodied in communication strategies of a different order than those of the company", (CARION, 2010).

### ***The Intersectoral Nature of Environmental Education and the Importance of Interministerial Action and Communication***

The collaboration of the Ministry of the Environment extends to institutional partners. This Ministerial Department draws up partnership agreements with its



counterparts, whose challenge is the same: "to make itself known (identification) and to be recognized (legitimation)" (Bessières, 2017), among citizens through public communication of an interministerial nature.

In addition, there is a collaboration between the Ministry of the Environment and that of Justice. This agreement concerns the introduction of the environmental dimension into the social reintegration process by setting up an environmental awareness and education program, by directing prisoners towards green jobs.

This training program, accomplished in 2018, was implemented by the National Conservatory of Environmental Training, through three (03) training sessions for the benefit of 35 prison establishments in 13 wilayas. These three (03) training sessions were evaluated and 09 winning establishments were selected for the competition for the best ecological prison establishment. In addition, knowing that "environmental communication is particularly suitable for thinking about the creation and maintenance of links between activists and researchers" (KANE, 2016, P22), thus placing this field of research in a problem solving type approach, the Ministry of the Environment aims to involve the university community in its efforts to promote environmental education.

In February 2021, an agreement was signed between the Ministry of the Environment and that of Higher Education and Scientific Research, for the creation of a space for exchange between the two sectors and the consolidation of university training. in the field of environmental protection and sustainable development. The agreement aims to create a space for exchange between these two sectors and to implement the skills, expertise and appropriate research programs in the aforementioned fields.

The development of new research fields in the field of the environment and sustainable development, the creation of research teams common to both sectors as well as the support of students and graduates with ideas and innovative and generative projects of environmental wealth.

In October 2021, in partnership a communication around an event resulting from a partnership between the Ministry of the Environment and that of Tourism and Crafts. This is the first edition of the Algerian Virtual Festival of Ecotourism Awareness Videos (FAVVS), at the Tonga Nature Reserve (east of El Tarf). The first of its kind in Algeria, this event is an initiative of young heads of micro-enterprises and aims to choose the best videos to raise awareness of ecotourism via a digital platform.

Faced with this multitude of actions, we note that the Ministry of the Environment makes communication the level of its strategy. Our study therefore confirms the postulate defended by the famous American researcher Robert Cox who believes that " Environmental communication is pragmatic. It educates, alerts, persuades, mobilizes, and helps us to solve environmental problems", (COX, 2010, P20).

### ***CONCLUSION***

In order to ensure the best development, execution and monitoring of its environmental awareness, education and communication actions, Algerian Ministry of the Environment uses different forms of communication and tries to adapt each form to the appropriate content and target audience. It is worth evoking that at the heart of this communication process, communication with young audiences is crucial because the ecological question has a strong cultural dimension that requires anchoring from an early age.

This approach is part of all the events celebrating world and national days organized by the ministry in which children are targeted by multiple actions whether they are organized in a school or non-profit context. In addition, the ministry has a real desire to involve civil society as a privileged partner. Indeed, the ministry and the administrations placed under its authority rely on the training of civil society, the harmonization of joint initiatives and the search for financial arrangements for the implementation of the various programs that try to preserve the environment, take advantage of the benefits of nature, and above all to maintain the chance of future generations to have access to the necessary natural resources.

This openness, nevertheless, requires better interministerial coordination, because the establishment of an ecological culture requires the involvement of all sectors such as national education, youth and sport, scientific research, new technologies, agriculture, transport, renewable energies.

Bringing this research to a close, it is contested that everything must be defended by political will and citizen awareness through good decision-making and communication choices.

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