

Chapter 3

Practices of Environmental Roundtable Meetings in Jiangsu Province

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1. Background

1.1 Changes in political and social circumstance

China's political reform is ongoing while economy growth had achieved lots of dazzling outcome. This trend is initiated by the governors and the government because of its subjective requirement. One of the most extraordinary changes is democracy growth. In this change, law system meliorating is the first and foremost important part. Take environmental law system for example, China has built an overall system with about 30 pieces of laws or regulations. It is an important basement for democracy growth.

While the law system is under consummating, the governor has the desire of improving its management effect. Good governance was and is under research as well as applying all over the country. All the government wants to stabilized their governing, China has no exception. So how to learn from the developed country about good governance is the most extraordinary problem China's government emphasize more and more recent years.

Besides the subjective aspect, social circumstances contribute to the reform from the external aspect. Globalization is an inevitability tendency when information technical grows more rapidly. There is a saying "The World is Flat", which means it's not difficult any more to achieve information from any corner of the world. People can easily get what they want, what they need to know and whatever helpful to them. Sufficient information awakens them to the necessary of participation on social governance, makes the people more capable to participate, and helps them exchanging their attitudes and opinions.

1.2 Harmonious society building

Harmonious society building is the key word of China's society meliorating.

Harmonious society is an integrated conception, which means better social structure with less conflict on every aspects of society. Environment problem is one of the key elements because in the past two decades insufficient management had accumulated enough potential inducement of conflicts. In recent years, environment lawsuits and appeals increased rapidly with an average growth rate of 29% in China. In 2005, dissensions, appeals and conflicts caused by environmental pollution were more the 51,000. This number was much larger than dissensions by other social problems¹. In this case, China's government is facing a difficult situation that before the technical way of pollution treatment take effect, how to alleviate environment conflicts, how to create a negotiation platform for different stakeholders and how to amend the environmental management.

No wonder the current management structure need to be amended for a more harmonious society. Nowadays, the environment protection department dominates the governance. The government department has lots of power and duties, which caused many problems such as corruption, low efficiency, insufficient staff of local EPB, etc. The corporations and factories contributed to the pollution as well as the tax, which makes the local government and some officials have a strong desire to protect them. An alliance between government and corporations formed because of opaque decision process and unscientific judgment measure for local governors. The nature environment and residents suffer from the pollution with no compensation. Conflicts are easily formed due to the previous structure. This kind of structure needs to be changed with some transparent decision-making process.

1.3 Increase of public awareness

Public awareness of Chinese people are arose by several factors. First of all, technical reform brings the public more information and teaches the people how to deal with such things like suffering from environmental pollution. Secondly, economy growth provides the people private wealth including larger habitation, better food and traffic vehicles. Naturally, people need a corresponding living environment for a high quality of life. Thirdly, higher education popularization rate helps people built the capability of public participation. People can manage lawsuits, appeals and many other tools for protecting the rights of themselves.

¹ An speech of Minister of MOEP.

NGOs and NPOs' development is also very important for public awareness. According to the latest investigation, until Oct. 2008, there are more than 3,500 environmental protection NGOs in China, and the number is increasing more than 25% than that of 2005². NGOs connect people together, provide more professional service to people who need it in low cost, rise environmental issues and observed the whole society about environmental affairs. Just like Yuanming Garden Incident in 2005 or Nujiang River Affairs in 2003, they have played an important role in China's environment protection especially in supporting public participation.

2. Introduction to Environmental Roundtable Meeting

2.1 What is Environmental Roundtable Meeting?

Roundtable meeting called together different stakeholders (mainly government, corporations and the public) for negotiating a specific environment problem. This kind of negotiating way was introduced by World Bank. In 2001, this meeting initially held in Danyang, Jiangsu Province. In 2006, Jiangsu EPD decided to apply 9 trial meetings in several cities. And they planned to make a rule for this meeting if the trial work is success.

This kind of meeting should be held on the communities. The topic of this meeting would be raised by the residents and should be concentrated on local environmental problem. There is an organizer, who is local EPB usually. The organizer call together different stakeholders, invite individual residents as well as other government officials and corporation managers, and choose a right presider for each meeting. In this meeting, each participator represents their position, states their attitudes and maintains their own profits. Of course, each participator should listen to other groups' voice and make some negotiation according the facts. In the meeting, participators would make some privities about how to solve the problem. These privities are not administration rules or commands, but they are under supervision of the public, officials and even the media. This is one kind of social contract. With this kind of contract, closer relationship between the public, the corporations and the government would be built up.

However, this meeting was considered to be a supplementary tool for environmental

² <2008 China Environmental NGOs Investigation>, by China Environment Protection Union, 2008.

management. The designer figured this position because this kind of meeting is out of formal law system. And the meeting can only be used for some detail problems with low solving cost.

2.2 Why Roundtable Meeting?

Jiangsu EPD developed this mechanism with the hope of broaden management tools. With this managing tool, there are three main estimated positive influences.

For the first, build up an intimate relationship between community, corporation and government. Under this intimate relationship, mutual trust was built, communication channel was constructed and social cost would decrease much when solving some environment problem.

Secondly, under this mechanism, the capability of public participation in environmental management could be enforced. This capability is integrated by the awareness, consciousness and willingness to participate, and the participator constituted by not only the public but also the corporations and government officials.

Thirdly, it could advance environmental performance of government as well as corporations. This meeting is transparent to the public, and the negotiating result is under supervision of all the society. Social pressure is the ultimate drive of improving each participator's performance. This is also one meaning of social contract.

2.3 Who Participate?

There are three main roles of participators in the meeting: the public, who is related to the topic, have the capability to negotiate and can be the representation for the others; the government department, which is responsible for the problem and have the authorization to supervision; and the corporations, which may be the source of the pollution.

And also, there are some other participators. They are not necessary, but if they join in, it would be quite helpful to the effect of meeting. They are the media, who can enforce the supervision; NGO or NPO, which should be local organization; and experts, who can give the participators as well as the meeting itself professional consulting.

2.4 How to organize?

Each meeting has its own topic. The topic should be for local problems because of the problem solving rely on the local people and local corporations. And this topic should be on specific environmental problem which not fierce enough for the court. The roundtable meeting designed as a supplementary tool for environmental management, it cannot be used for overall managing environmental issues but for some ordinary conflicts and preventing conflicts' accumulating.

The participators should be controlled within 30 peoples. In this meeting, we hope everyone has its opportunity to present his opinions and to do the Q&As. So controlling the number of participator is an essentially way to protect the effect.

The organizer is a key element for this kind of meeting. The organizer should have enough social resources. It has to communicate all the other departments; it has to organize the residents; it has to take on the task of training if needs; and it has to be on charge of many logistics affairs. Until now, not too many organizations are competent for this role. The government and its department especially environmental protection department are the most suitable by now.

One compere is needed in this meeting and this is also indispensable because an employable compere can manage the condition of the meeting well. Professional knowledge is needed as well as some analogous experience.

Before the meeting, there should be some topic initiators. Usually, the residents raise the topic according to the environmental problem faced by himself. The application was submitted to the organizer or local environmental department. After evaluation by the official department, the public and the corporations potentially involved the necessary of roundtable meeting is decided. If it goes on to the preparation step, proclaim of the meeting should be released on the community. The organizer and other stakeholders should negotiate on the participator filtration. Necessary training is also one part of work for the organizer. Information communication is very important before the meeting. There are several kinds of information which should be exchanged and transformed during the participators. First of all, the situation of local environment quality, the efforts that local EPB paid out, and the measures that local EPB applied for the problem should be disclosure to all the participators. Basic opinions, questions and explanations by different stakeholders should be collected and distributed too. These information distributions are essential for their communication on the meeting.

After the meeting, assessment from different sides would be brought in.

Questionnaires are used for the immediate analysis. Interviews from telephone and face-to-face ways are also needed to apply. Meanwhile, this roundtable meeting should be propagandized as soon as possible because with a broader influence, social contract combined by roundtable meeting would be tighter. With supervision of the media and the public, the agreement of the meeting would be implemented better. In this meeting, opinions from different sides would be respected at every step. Information disclosure, impartiality and negotiation are three main constitutions of this meeting.

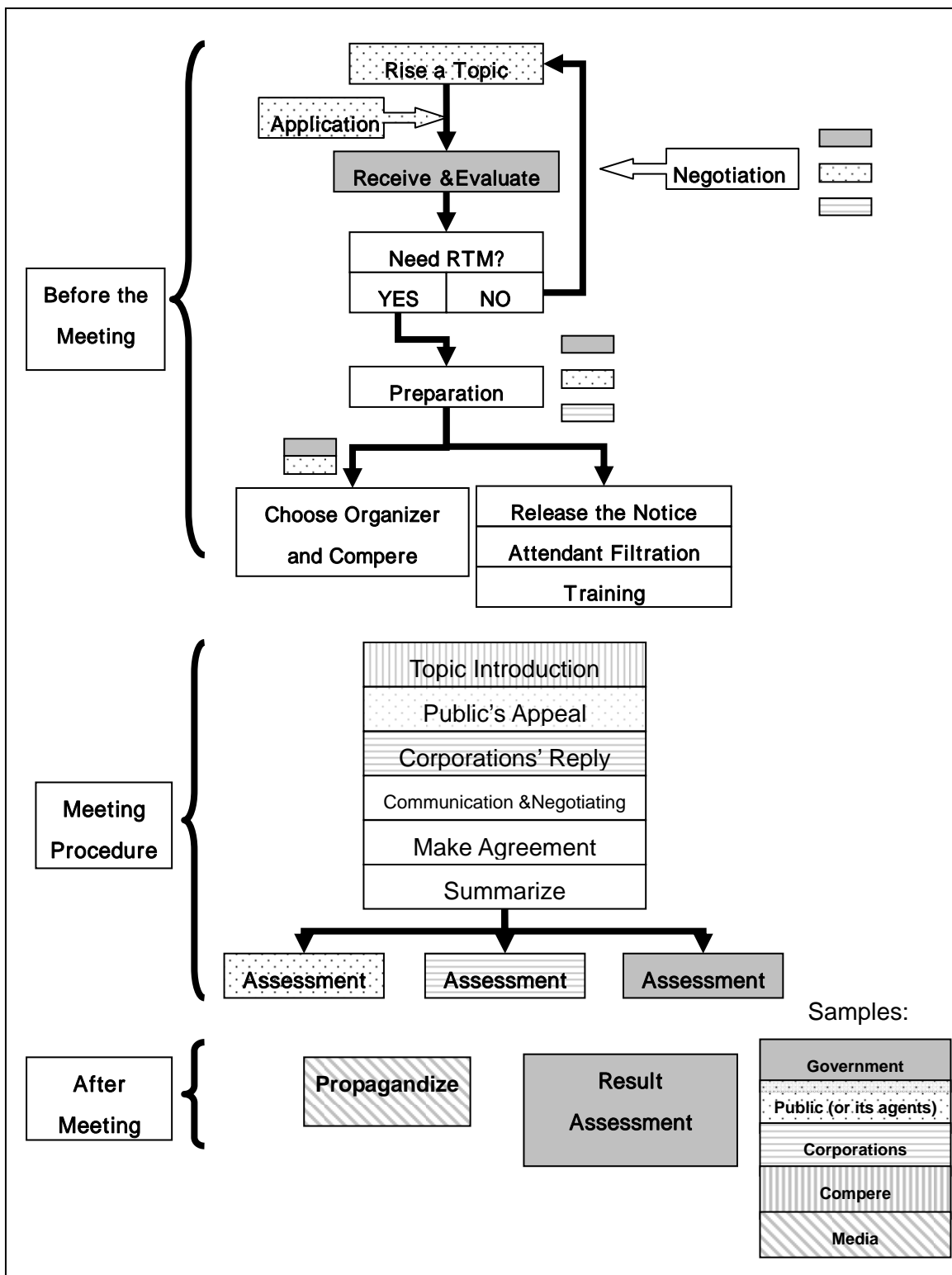


Fig. 1. Flow Chart for Organizing an Environmental Roundtable Meeting

3. Roundtable Meeting Practices

3.1 Practice in Jiangsu Province as Trial Program

Since 2001, there are such meetings in Jiangsu Province. At that time, it was called “pollution report meeting in the community”. However, without a mutual social background, this meeting didn’t continue. By the development of social-economy, people had paid more attention to their living environment. Under this situation, roundtable meeting for environmental issues became possible.

In 2006, the World Bank sponsored for a new program. The trial is still in Jiangsu Province. Jiangsu EPD intended to take 9 meetings in three different places located separately at the south, middle and north of Jiangsu which represent three different economic development statuses in China. An official regulation for environment roundtable meeting was expected to promulgate based on those trial meetings and their assessments. The designer authorized by WB and Jiangsu EPD is Center for Environment Management and Policy, built combined by NJU&Jiangsu EPD. Most of the meetings organized by local governments, and they were all on the township or Economic Development Zone level.

There were 9 meetings held during the trial period, and most of the meetings were quite success (see appendix I). Many organizers developed some new disciplines of the meeting. The meeting held on Xintai Town invited all the factory owners of the main industry in that town as observers. It broadened the influence of roundtable meeting effectively. And the meeting held on Gangyang Town was organized by an unofficial organization. This is the only meeting which was not organized by the government. The members of the organization are local retired officials, so they have enough reputation and power to communicate the government departments, corporations and residents. Also in this meeting, a volunteer as compere was brought in. In some other towns, the government led to organize a special NPO for roundtable meeting which means they have institutionalized the roundtable meeting by themselves. Nearly 150 participators and several Medias attend the 9 trial meetings.

3.2 Meeting in Yixing

The meeting in Yixing is one important part of cooperation research by CEMP and IDE. CEMP had prepared for the first roundtable meeting in Yixing from Oct. and held at last

on 3rd, Dec. The topic of this meeting was about water pollution on Shezhugang River, of which most of part located on the Yixing Economic Development Zone. Yixing Economic Development Zone is an important industry cluster in Yixing city. Chemical industry and bio-chemistry industry are two of the main industries in this zone. So the environment pressure is quite high along the river. Shezhugang River is essential and sensitive for the environment protection of Tai Lake because it located on the upstream of it.

Under the preparation period, CEMP communicated with the administrative committee. The officials of committee introduce a research group which was making treatment plan for the river into the preparation group. After detailed negotiating, the economic zone became the organizer and Yixing EPB co-organized.

The organizers were in charge of calling together the public and helping them to select the delegates. There are some requirements for the delegates' selection: the delegates should be the residents in the economic zone; they should be educated and capable for attending such meeting. Also, different official departments and corporations were contacted by the organizers. Rules and tips for attending the meeting were distributed to the participators before the meeting.

The meeting was held on an office of administrative committee of Yixing Economic Development Zone. 16 participators were involved, within which 4 were from the public, 4 from the corporations, 2 from CEMP and the others from Yixing EPB and EDZ including one host. The host is an employee working in the EDZ, who used to be the director of planning department and now is in the safety production supervision and environment protection department. So he is very familiar with both the community and the corporations.

The topic is about water pollution along Shezhugang River. Several old fertilizer factories with high concentration of COD wastewater discharged their pollutant into the river from time to time. The public delegates accused about their action and called for improvement. The delegates from those factories gave some explanation and agreed to take more action after hearing the residents' requirements. Also in the meeting, the residents accused some factories which pumped oil from the ships leaked some oil when pumping oil.

The meeting in Yixing was held basically successful considering it's the first time for them. The organizers paid sufficient efforts for it. No official regulation and command from upper side was involved in, and no foundation supports this meeting. According to the guide by CEMP, they finished this task and achieved some satisfied agreements for

each side.

However, the meeting is still not perfect because of many reasons. It's the first meeting in Yixing, so the experience is quite insufficient. The participators were conservative for both lack of experience and afraid to speak too much when talking face to face. This meeting style is totally new so the procedure is quite raw to all the participators. And because of these reasons, the meeting continued not very long and the effect was not as well as other trial meeting on other places. However, an interesting phenomenon appeared that when the meeting finished, the participators talked freely and deeper than in the meeting, which means they did have things to discuss.

According to the result of meeting, two main questions for assessing the meeting as well as improving the next one floated out. Firstly, what is the drive for an environmental roundtable meeting? Secondly, what shall we do to improving the meeting?

3.3 Review Meeting

On 8th, January, 2009, a review meeting was held on Yixing EDZ. In this meeting, participators of roundtable meeting were called together again for discussing the experience, feelings and suggestions. Also, negotiation agreements of last meeting were discussed in this meeting too. In this meeting, Mr Ge from Nanjing University was given the charge of compere. The participators from every aspect talked with each other freely.

The delegates from corporations suggested the organizer to invite the corporation owners themselves to participate the meeting. It would increase the direct impression to the decision-makers of the corporations and of course would enhance the effective.

The residents agreed the suggestion from corporations and also express their similar opinion. What's more, the residents expressed their satisfactions to the roundtable meeting because they have had so little opportunities to meet with the corporations and officials directly. What they emphasized most were how to help them to achieve more information, how to help them about building capability for participating and how to make the meeting transparent, disclosure and effective.

The officials expressed their interesting about this meeting. On the preparing phase, the government didn't have too much enthusiasm about the meeting. Before the meeting, officials doubted whether the meeting can achieve the expected purpose. However, after

the first meeting on Dec. 2008, they felt this kind of meeting could probably solve lots of conflicts they were facing. They have noticed the effect and reflection from each aspect, and the excess result inspiring them much.

On this review meeting, affirmation from different participators was congregated. It is an important symbol that the meeting was helpful and acceptable. However, it did not mean the meeting was totally successful. Many problems were found out during and after the roundtable meeting because of lack of experience, insufficient resource and some distrust between different aspects. Also in this review meeting, a higher expectation to next roundtable meeting was brought forward. So the coming work is how to organize a better meeting for the problem solving.

Here we suggest four main problems to solving for the next roundtable meeting in Yixing EDZ:

- How to train the public participator about the meeting as well as topic better?
- Is there any possibility to invite an organization as organizer of this meeting?
- Who will represent the corporations?
- If the agreement was failed to achieve, what would the meeting do?

4. Discussion

4.1 Who leads the meeting?

In China, there is a strong government. Under the present social system, the government and its executive departments are the most capable organizer considering the power and effect. Some organization with official background would possibly take this responsibility.

However, the EPB has lots of management work to do. Insufficient staff and lack of financial support especially in local area are two main embarrassments for China environment governance. In this case, organizing roundtable meeting would bring more pressure for them especially when roundtable meeting didn't come into the formal management scale.

Researching how to emphasis the compulsion of environment roundtable meeting is the most fundamental element when applying and extending in different places.

4.2 How to extend this kind of equivalent solving way for environment problem?

(1) Does the government have enough courage and motivation to broaden democracy?

In China, the culture and long history decide a strong government mode. Democracy reform which is brought in from western countries went on slowly and carefully. Though environment roundtable meeting is used for solving environment problem and lightening conflicts, the concept reflected by roundtable meeting is much more than meeting itself. Negotiation for agreement between corporations and the public was almost impossible before the roundtable meeting was brought in. The social members separated from each other and all controlled by the government. With this kind of negotiation way, different members of society become more active in society problem solving. Society contract is built while democracy grows in society management.

(2) Do the public have enough capability for self-management?

The roundtable meeting is designed for problem solving, and the public benefit from this meeting ultimately. Also, the public is an important role in this meeting. When the public involved, there are three vital issues deciding whether they can promote the meeting. First of all, are there enough educated people for participating as well as clearly understanding the puzzle they are facing? Secondly, is the social contract which combined by different stakeholders agreed or certified by the public? Thirdly, do the public have enough patient and capability for self-management?

For long periods, the public didn't trust government and corporations because they suffered too much from them. Now we bring in this negotiation way for problem solving, and it's indeed hard for them to accept and adapt.

(3) Do the society have corresponding social environment for it?

Social environment for roundtable meeting is the basic for this meeting. It means the public, corporations and government should act together. They should abide the agreement, protect the trust and cherish the credit of everyone. A good social environment not only means a well organized social order, but also means a trend to civil society. It needs more than research on roundtable meeting itself for a good social environment.

5. Conclusion

Environment roundtable meeting in Jiangsu Province is a progress in environment management. Fortunately, the result is optimistic and it looks like most of places accept this way of solving problem. Jiangsu EPD had promoted this way to the whole province and made a basic rule for it on April 2008. After the promotion, some places especially where the meeting had been held during the trial period, Taizhou for example, continued some voluntarily ones. There is a reason to be optimistic for this kind of meeting's promotion as experience accumulated in more places.

However, there is a fact should be clearly recognized. Environment roundtable meeting is designed as a supplementary way in environment management. The roundtable meeting based on social contract and this is an informal way of governance. It would help proving the governance effect, but it cannot replace the formal ways like laws, regulations.

Appendix I:
Nine Trial Roundtable Meetings in Jiangsu Province

City	Date	Topic	Content
Changzhou	2006.6	Water conservation problem within eco-city building.	The first one, large scale, many participators; Large topic;
Xinbei District, Changzhou	2006.11	Conflicts between economic development and pressure to ecology environment in Chemistry Park	Small scale, talking about a fierce conflict; Not open to the public and media;
Anfeng Town, Yancheng	2006.8	Corresponding development of corporations and environment	Seated free; the topic is pertinence; the host is skillful and familiar with environment;
Binghai Chemistry Park, Yancheng	2006.10	Conflicts negotiation talk between corporations and residents	Focus on the industry park;
Jiangyan City, Taizhou	2006.7	Roundtable meeting about noise pollution of Suchen rice plant	The topic is detail; No media; no assessment;
Yaowang Town, Taizhou	2007.1	Roundtable meeting about local environmental pressure from medication industry	Good public awareness; The participator had high capability to participate;
Xintai Town, Taizhou	2007.1	Steel wire industry development with local environment protection	The topic is about its main industry; invite all the factory owners auditing; Well prepared before the meeting; Found an organization involving all the participators for aperiodic meetings;
Gangyang Town, Taizhou	2007.5	Air pollution and sanitation conservation in the community	The organizer is a unofficial association; The members of this association retired from different government departments with high capability to participation; The host is a volunteer with similar experience;
Liuhe District, Nanjing	2007.6	Green community building and local air quality	Close connect to the community construction; Arrange a short visit to the community before the meeting; Special relationship: Most of the resident from this town used to work on the industry park nearby; The topic makes the representative of the factory be the resident as well;

Appendix II:

The preparing steps for Roundtable Meeting on December 3, 2008 in Yixing

<p>Two teams were involved in the preparing step;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The planning group: the river about which the roundtable meeting talked was under planning, so the planners were invited to join in the preparing team. ■ Committee of Yixing Economy Development Zone: it is the governance department for Yixing EDZ. 	<p>STEP 1</p>
<p>The organizer was settled down;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Committee of Yixing EDZ became the organizer <p>Yixing EPB gave the assistants to organizer;</p>	<p>STEP 2</p>
<p>Invite the participators from community, corporations and government departments;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Requirements of public participators: residents in the economic zone; educated; experienced with participation meetings (like hearings); ■ Requirements of corporations: located in the economic zone; discharge 	<p>STEP 3</p>
<p>Apprize the participators about the rules, rights, what the meeting about and what the purpose of this meeting;</p> <p>Done by EPB which help us to connect the local residents and corporations;</p>	<p>STEP 4</p>
<p>Held on 3rd, Dec, 2008.</p> <p>Location: on the office of committee of EDZ;</p> <p>16 participators involved;</p>	<p>Comperere: An employee working in the EDZ, used to be in the planning department (familiar with the community), now is in the safety-production supervising</p>