

CREATING A SEAT AT THE TABLE

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

FOR THE 2030 AGENDA

Stakeholder engagement is central to the effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Connecting and integrating diverse perspectives through effective engagement is the foundation of inclusive and sustainable policies and plans.

Structured, well-planned and meaningful engagement creates opportunities for social transformation – it promotes understanding, creates a sense of ownership and facilitates the emergence of well-aligned partnerships and co-creation. Effectively engaging those who are affected by a decision is a cornerstone of accountable governance that supports favorable development outcomes. It minimizes the risk of failure that can result from strategies crafted in isolation.

The challenges

Although stakeholder engagement is being viewed with renewed interest since the inception of the global goals, both systemic¹ and capacity-related² challenges slow the development of quality engagement in many countries. Despite some good practices, engagement processes can often be rushed, under-resourced and under-planned, leading to frustration on all sides. Basic questions such as “how do you choose the ‘right’ NGO to work with?” or “how do we reach out to the public?” are frequently raised, and there is a lack of an overview of the sheer diversity of stakeholder groups and constituencies who wish to be involved. Often the responsibility for stakeholder engagement is not properly defined or resourced, or low levels of trust reduce the space for constructive dialogue.

Systematic, quality engagement is needed to respond to the fundamental objective of the the 2030 Agenda - that no one should be left behind. There is also need for innovation to deepen the levels of engagement, going beyond consultations to build trust, create a sense of ownership of the Agenda and develop coherent policies, integrating the perspectives of different stakeholders and information. It is equally important to heighten the degree of inclusion and outreach and support social transformation. The understanding, appreciation and proactive implementation of the human rights frameworks underpinning the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs is also critical. The “Spectrum of Public Participation” tool of the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) provides a way to explore different engagement levels, from “informing” to “empowering” (see back page).

1. Related to low levels of trust, legislative mandates, civic education, a free and effective media, among other factors

2. Technical knowledge of facilitation and engagement design, planning and delivery

Developing a common understanding of what quality engagement looks like – a planning and assessment tool

One part of the solution is a comprehensive (and participatory) stakeholder mapping exercise, and a well-defined (and ideally participatory) engagement planning process. But beyond this, a shared understanding of what quality engagement for the 2030 Agenda looks like is also needed.

ESCAP and IAP2 are working together to promote systematic, quality engagement for the 2030 Agenda, including the use of methods that strongly support the objectives of inclusion (“leave no one behind”) and integrated delivery on the Agenda, to:

- help governments and others who lead and design engagement processes to develop planned and institutionalized engagement processes
- to assess current practice and identify opportunities to strengthen engagement

Based on the work done at a workshop held in August 2017,³ a preliminary framework for planning and assessment has been developed. Participants from civil society, governments and experts from other organizations worked towards defining minimum acceptable standards of engagement, as well as what could be considered “best practice” for each of the quality dimensions discussed.

The framework comprises of four ‘dimensions’ of engagement and a set of indicators for assessment.

The framework proposes that – particularly in the context of the sustainable development goals – engagement must be **purposeful**, with clearly articulated objectives, methodologies, dedicated resources and feedback mechanisms for refinement. Second, it highlights the importance of ensuring **inclusive** processes by promoting stakeholder mapping, analysis and the use of methods that enable the integration of multiple perspectives including those often left behind. It calls for the reduction of systemic and behavioral barriers to engagement and the management of power imbalances to create safe spaces for public participation.

Third, the framework points to ways in which engagement can be **transformative**: using methodologies that enable collaboration across different groups with diverse perspectives, by integrating the three dimensions of sustainable development (economic, social and environmental) and by motivating participation through the ‘whole of society’ approach. Fourth, it encourages engagement to be **proactive** by assimilating engagement planning into processes of implementation and delivery, by making timely and accessible information available to stakeholders and by prioritising stakeholder preferences with respect to mediums of participation.

3. <http://www.unescap.org/events/creating-seat-table>

A framework for planning and assessing quality engagement

PURPOSEFUL

Engagement is **PURPOSEFUL** when we:

- Know why we are engaging – clearly define what we want to get out of the engagement
- Develop an engagement plan and allocate resources and responsibilities
- Build engagement into every phase – planning, delivery and follow-up and review
- Evaluate to improve engagement

INCLUSIVE

Engagement is **INCLUSIVE** when we:

- Map and analyse our stakeholders
- Recognize their views – even if we don't agree with them
- Have special mechanisms for those normally "left behind"
- Put in place ways to remove/reduce barriers that make participation difficult– language, geographic location or distance, abilities, age, income, connectivity, culture bias, discrimination
- Manage power imbalances and find ways to ensure that people feel safe to contribute (e.g. anonymity)
- Recognize and utilize traditional channels of engaging

TRANSFORMATIVE

Engagement is **TRANSFORMATIVE** when we:

- Choose methods that build understanding and collaboration across different groups in society, sharing information from diverse perspectives
- Encourage and recognize contribution - motivate stakeholder action through a "whole of society" approach
- Choose methods that integrate social, economic and environmental perspectives
- Choose methods that encourage dialogue and shared action across the SDG framework
- Are willing to take a participatory approach to addressing important societal challenges

PROACTIVE

Engagement is **PROACTIVE** when we:

- Build engagement planning into implementation
- Communicate the scope of engagement to stakeholders
- Provide the information they need in an accessible and timely way
- Consult stakeholders on the way they would like to participate
- Respond to questions and concerns promptly

Who is the framework useful for?

The primary audience for the framework is member states planning, designing and delivering stakeholder engagement processes for the fulfillment of their sustainable development goals and targets. It is particularly relevant to government officials responsible for ensuring stakeholder engagement in the context of the 2030 Agenda at sub-national and national levels, including facilitators of Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs)⁴. Other institutions that lead engagement processes will also find it useful.

What are the other activities under the partnership of ESCAP and IAP2?


The partnership of ESCAP and IAP2 is working with other parts of the UN system, and with civil society to promote awareness, to adapt existing training material on stakeholder engagement to the 2030 Agenda context, to build capacity for stakeholder engagement, and to provide technical assistance for engagement planning as a means of building regional knowledge and peer learning among ESCAP member countries.

ESCAP places this partnership and stakeholder engagement in the context of other work to strengthen the "infrastructure" for effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda, including promoting integrated delivery and strengthening follow-up and review.

4. <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/vnrs/>

IAP2'S PUBLIC PARTICIPATION SPECTRUM

The IAP2 Federation has developed the Spectrum to help groups define the public's role in any public participation process. The IAP2 Spectrum is quickly becoming an international standard.

INCREASING IMPACT ON THE DECISION 					
	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision making in the hands of the public.
PROMISE TO THE PUBLIC	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.
EXAMPLE TOOLS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fact sheets • Web sites • Open houses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public comment • Focus groups • Surveys • Public meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshops • Deliberate polling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citizen advisory committees • Consensus-building • Participatory decision-making 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citizen juries • Ballots • Delegate decisions

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About the partners



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The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) serves as the United Nations' regional hub promoting cooperation among countries to achieve inclusive and sustainable development. The largest regional intergovernmental platform with 53 Member States and 9 Associate Members, ESCAP has emerged as a strong regional think-tank offering countries sound analytical products that shed insight into the evolving economic, social and environmental dynamics of the region. The Commission's strategic focus is to deliver on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which it does by reinforcing and deepening regional cooperation and integration to advance connectivity, financial cooperation and market integration. ESCAP's research and analysis coupled with its policy advisory services, capacity building and technical assistance to governments aims to support countries' sustainable and inclusive development ambitions.



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The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) is a global not-for-profit organisation with membership across civil society, government and non-government organisations. IAP2 has the aim to advance the practice of community and stakeholder engagement through awareness, education and capacity building. IAP2 affiliate associations are found in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Indonesia, Italy, Southern Africa, and USA, with emerging affiliates in other countries.