



SDG 6 IWRM Support Programme

IWRM Acceleration Package

2.C Guidelines for effective multi-stakeholder participation and inclusion

October 2021

Why Engage Multiple Stakeholders in IWRM

Multi-stakeholder participation and dialogue are embedded within the basic definitions of Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM). To “promote the coordinated development and management of water, land and related resources in order to maximise economic and social welfare in an equitable manner without compromising the sustainability of vital ecosystems and the environment”¹, it is imperative that stakeholders whose decisions affect and those who are affected by those resources be brought together in an open and constructive dialogue.

Participants in multi-stakeholder consultations on SDG 6.5.1

To contribute to the drafting and formalisation of the national IWRM Action Plan during Stage 2, stakeholders relevant to the national context should be invited to take part in the consultation process, including one or more in-person or virtual multi-stakeholder workshops or consultations. This helps to increase collective ownership of decision-making processes, resulting in a robust and inclusive Action Plan. To ensure a broad, balanced and consensual set of water-related actions, it is suggested that the following stakeholders, from different sectors and levels, be considered as potential participants in this process:

- **Central government authorities:** representatives from the main ministry/ministries responsible for water resources, as well as those from other government authorities involved in or with an impact on water issues (e.g. agriculture/livestock, forestry, energy, environment, tourism, urban planning, sanitation, finance, climate change, risk management, health, etc.). Potentially also relevant parliamentarians with an interest in environmental/ water issues.
- **Basin, aquifer, protected area, and city-level authorities:** local governments, protected area representatives and organisations with responsibility for water resources management or oversight at the river basin, lake basin, or aquifer level. This should also include representatives of relevant IWRM-related projects. The Stage 2 process should engage broad geographical perspectives within the country. Good communication with users at all levels is key to the success of the process.
- **Academic and scientific community:** academic institutions, universities, research institutions, think tanks, and other bodies with relevant information, studies, data and analyses on different aspects of water resources.
- **Civil society:** non-governmental organisations, community groups, water user associations, environmental organisations, citizen science initiatives, and/or farmer organisations focusing on water resources.
- **United Nations Country Teams and entities in the country:** UN entities most relevant for sustainable development, the environment, social considerations and economic development: <https://unsdg.un.org/un-in-action/country-level>.
- **Those in charge of transboundary water issues:** including representatives of official government bodies and/or coordination mechanisms that deal with transboundary aquifers or river basins.
- **GWP partners in your country:** GWP’s partners represent a range of different stakeholders concerned with IWRM, from different sectors: <https://www.gwp.org/en/partner/existing-partners/Partner-Search/>

¹ Definition of Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) used by GWP, see: <https://www.gwp.org/en/gwp-SAS/ABOUT-GWP-SAS/WHY/About-IWRM/v>

- **Cap-Net partners in your country:** water-focused capacity development networks and organisations: <http://www.cap-net.org/networks-partnerships/>
- **Financial/Donor community:** foundations, bilateral and multilateral cooperation bodies, regional and/or global development banks and other financiers with whom opportunities identified in this process for strengthening IWRM implementation may be aligned. It is important to include these stakeholders from the outset because of the need for financing to implement the Action Plan.
- **Business and industry:** Companies with a significant environmental, social and economic footprint, which provide innovative water solutions and/or have a stated interest in water issues, be they from the beverage, food, mining, energy, paper, consumer products, tourism or other related sectors.
- **National focal points for other water-related SDG targets and indicators:** government officials named focal points for each SDG target and indicator related to water (not just under SDG 6). Contact details for SDG 6 focal points should be available through official government channels, may be obtained from the UN-Water International Monitoring Initiative website, or can be provided by GWPO upon request.
- **Gender advocacy groups:** Dublin Principle 3² highlights that “Women play a central part in the provision, management and safeguarding of water.” Gender discrimination can limit women’s chances of accessing vital water resources. Limiting participation in water resources management based on gender can often result in unfair and self-perpetuating impacts on the lives of women and men. Limited participation may, in turn, lead to further forms of marginalisation and reduce access to productive resources. Identifying and engaging gender-based organisations in IWRM can mean that opportunities and benefits of water-related interventions are equally available to both men and women. The Support Programme recently concluded a study on key bottlenecks and enablers to mainstreaming gender in WRM. The full report and a policy brief are available [here](#). Furthermore, GWP’s [Gender Action Piece](#) provides actionable recommendations on how to enhance gender mainstreaming. Action Area 3 on *meaningful and inclusive participation in decision-making and partnerships* of the Gender Action Piece provides particularly useful information and recommendations applicable to the design of the multi-stakeholder processes for IWRM action planning.
- **Vulnerable groups, including indigenous peoples:** Institutions and organised groups representing the rights, interests and perspectives of vulnerable groups, as defined in the SDG 6.5.1 survey. It is particularly important to hear the voice of indigenous peoples, given that the land they traditionally occupy is estimated to contain most of the world’s remaining biodiversity. It is important to note that workshop(s) may need to accommodate languages other than the predominant national language.
- **Young people:** Engaging both youth³ and young professionals⁴ can increase the quality and relevance of water-related initiatives, policies and programmes, as they can provide innovative information, ideas and solutions. Youth organisations engaged in water or sustainable development can be a good starting point for identifying the best participants. Young people are not a homogenous group and can include a range of backgrounds such as

² See <https://www.gwp.org/contentassets/05190d0c938f47d1b254d6606ec6bb04/dublin-rio-principles.pdf>

³ Different organisations have differing definitions of youth. GWP recognizes youth as young people aged 15-35, whereas the UN typically considers youth as being between the ages of 15 and 24.

⁴ “Young professionals” refers to recent graduates under the age of 35 who have some work experience, according to the [GWP Youth Strategy](#).

researchers, civil society, indigenous tribes, entrepreneurs, and young water professionals. Please have a look at [GWP's Youth Engagement Strategy](#) for more information.

Use of virtual tools for inclusive and participatory multi-stakeholder processes

Consultations may take place through several in-person and or virtual means. Technological advances have made it possible for people to collaborate on the same documents in real-time. You may use what follows as a source of ideas to guide you in designing online stakeholder engagement processes.

Options for online interaction

The following online alternatives may be combined in the most appropriate way for your country.

- **Written inputs:** this may involve asking stakeholders to provide written contributions in addition to formal consultations. An email address or simple online form may be used to collect ideas from a more significant number of participants.
- **Focus groups:** Smaller online stakeholder group workshops could be organised to discuss aspects of the process. This might be a short, focused session or a series of sessions to consolidate shared understandings and move towards consensus, ideally using video software.
- **Semi-structured interpersonal consultations:** For more direct contact, interviews with a handful of key individuals may be facilitated to get a broader understanding of a country's opportunities and challenges.
- **Discussion fora:** Key matters may be put to consultation by a broader public, perhaps through a pre-registration process. This can allow a much deeper dive into key aspects that can foster a shared understanding between a larger number of participants.
- **Online polling:** As a possible complement to a deeper analysis by a smaller group of participants, quantitative and qualitative feedback from a larger group may be possible through online polling. This may be particularly useful for the prioritisation process.
- **Online consultation(s):** Online workshops or consultations can be organised to build on inputs provided through various mechanisms listed above. Online workshops or consultations may be divided up over consecutive days, if required, and should be shorter in duration than in-person workshops. If circumstances and national/local health guidelines permit, it may be possible for some individuals to participate in person, while others may participate online, in a hybrid scheme.

Possible online meeting platforms and tools

A brief list of some possible communication platforms and tools is provided below. Government departments and individuals may have their preferred platforms, and there is no need to adopt new platforms if effective or known systems are already in place. For larger consultations, the involvement of facilitators specialising in the use of such tools might be beneficial.

- Two people or small groups: e.g. telephone, Skype, WhatsApp, Telegram, Zoom, Facetime, etc.

- Online meetings/workshops (with or without video): e.g. MS Teams, WebEx, GoToMeeting, Skype for Business, Zoom, Google Meet or social media live streaming (e.g. Facebook, LinkedIn, or YouTube).
- Online polling: e.g. Survey Monkey, Google Forms, Kahoot, Pollev, Slido, or FormStack.
- Discussion fora: e.g. Facebook, LinkedIn.
- Shared brainstorming: Miro, Google docs.

How to design an effective multi-stakeholder process

The SDG 6.5.1 IWRM Support Programme reviewed and analysed the documentation on the multi-stakeholder processes (MSPs) for SDG 6.5.1 monitoring in the 61 countries supported through the SDG 6 IWRM Support Programme. Consultation modalities included in-person, online and hybrid forms. The in-depth analysis is available [here](#). A [policy brief](#) highlights the main factors to increase the legitimacy of MSPs and includes some considerations to take into account for all consultation modalities.

Some summary recommendations from the brief are provided below:

Criterion	Recommendations and good practices
Stakeholder inclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure sectoral diversity by including representatives from different sectors and ministries and take into account different sub-sectors that are included within the IWRM survey (e.g. gender, transboundary water issues, the private sector, vulnerable groups). • Ensure geographic diversity to reflect that decisions are made at various levels (local, basin, regional, national, and international). • Ideally participants should include representatives from public bodies (such as state ministries and regional water authorities), civil society, the private sector, and non-governmental organisations engaged in water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) activities. • Participants should also be diverse in terms of gender, age groups, ethnic groups, and traditionally marginalised groups
Procedural fairness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that every participant has relevant information before engaging in the consultation process. Send information in advance and be available prior to and after meetings for questions and clarifications. • Strengthen the capacity of traditionally marginalised groups to empower them to participate effectively. For example, pre-workshop meetings can be organised for ‘non-experts’ to become familiar with technical terms and jargon. • Consider longer workshop events and/or engagement periods, as this may provide more opportunities for stakeholders to raise their issues and priorities during discussions. However, understand that that this could have detrimental effects on inclusion, since some stakeholders may not be able to commit to the amount of time requested.

Consensual orientation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Create an environment geared towards consensual orientation by using various methods to increase group cohesion, e.g. trust-building exercises, focus group discussions followed by feedback sessions, or creative problem structuring methods such as abstraction and visioning exercises or those based on Liberating Structures.• Consider holding workshops over several days rather than a few hours or longer consultation engagement periods to give stakeholders more time to share their views and build a sense of mutual understanding and trust.
Transparency	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Make available the data and documents that express, in sufficient detail, the different stages of the consultation, highlighting debates and scoring in a fair manner.• Share the agenda in advance, take minutes of the meetings, note who took part, communicate the meeting outputs and share summaries of the discussions, including what was said, by whom, and how the scores were compiled.• Use tools such as satisfaction surveys, in addition to general feedback sessions, to understand the strengths and weaknesses of the consultation process and how they can be made more effective.