Sustainable Development Guidance

Guidance for assessing the environmental, social and economic impacts of policies and actions

May 2018

Appendix B: Stakeholder Participation During the Assessment Process

This appendix provides an overview of the ways that stakeholder participation can enhance the sustainable development impact assessment process and the contribution of policies and actions to sustainable development. Table B.1 provides a summary of the steps in the assessment process where stakeholder participation is recommended and why it is important, explaining where relevant guidance can be found in the ICAT Stakeholder Participation Guidance.

Table B.1: List of steps where stakeholder participation is recommended in the impact assessment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step of sustainable development impact assessment</th>
<th>Why stakeholder participation is important at this step</th>
<th>Relevant chapters in Stakeholder Participation Guidance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 2 – Objectives of assessing sustainable development impacts</td>
<td>Ensure that the objectives of the assessment respond to the needs and interests of the stakeholders</td>
<td>Chapter 5 – Identifying and analysing stakeholders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3 – Key concepts, steps and planning the assessment</td>
<td>Build understanding, participation and support for the policy or action among stakeholders. Ensure conformity with national and international laws and norms, as well as donor requirements related to stakeholder participation. Identify and plan how to engage stakeholder groups who may be affected or may influence the policy or action. Coordinate participation at multiple steps for this assessment with participation in other stages of the policy design and implementation cycle and other assessments.</td>
<td>Chapter 4 – Planning effective stakeholder participation. Chapter 5 – Identifying and analysing stakeholders. Chapter 6 – Establishing multi-stakeholder bodies/structures. Chapter 9 – Establishing grievance redress mechanisms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 5 - Choosing which impact categories and indicators to assess</td>
<td>Enhance completeness by including impact categories that are relevant and significant for</td>
<td>Chapter 5 – Identifying and analysing stakeholders</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Chapter 6 – Identifying specific impacts within each impact category | Strengthen identification and assessment of sustainable development impacts  
Enhance completeness by identifying impacts for different stakeholder groups  
Integrate stakeholder insights about cause-effect relationships between the policy or action and impacts  
Identify and address possible unintended or negative impacts | Chapter 8 – Designing and conducting consultations |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Chapter 7 – Qualitatively assessing impacts | Ensure the assessment period responds to stakeholders’ needs  
Gain insights into a policy’s specific local context and impacts  
Strengthen evidence-base of the assessment  
Integrate stakeholder insights on likelihood and magnitude of impacts, and their nature of change | Chapter 8 – Designing and conducting consultations |
| Chapter 12 – Monitoring performance over time | Ensure relevance and completeness of indicators to be monitored  
Ensure monitoring frequency addresses the needs of decision makers and other stakeholders  
Assess impacts on different stakeholder groups to identify and manage tradeoffs | Chapter 8 – Designing and conducting consultations |
| Chapter 13 – Reporting | Raise awareness of benefits and other impacts to build support for the policy or action  
Ensure reports and summaries properly characterises the impacts for each category  
Inform decision makers and other stakeholders about impacts, including differentiated impacts on different stakeholder groups to allow adaptive management to reduce negative and enhance positive impacts  
Increase accountability and transparency and thereby credibility and acceptance of the assessment | Chapter 7 – Providing information |
| Chapter 14 – Evaluating tradeoffs and using results | Ensure diverse perspectives are considered when doing a cost effectiveness analysis, cost-benefit analysis, or multi-criteria analysis, especially regarding subjective elements such as valuation of social and environmental benefits and weighting the importance of different impacts  
Ensure diverse perspectives are considered, especially those of affected communities, when making decision about whether to continue or discontinue policies, make changes to policies, or implement new policies | Chapter 8 – Designing and conducting consultations |
APPENDIX C: QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHODS

Qualitative methods can be flexible and may involve several methods and approaches such as stakeholder interviews, surveys, focus groups, case studies, literature review and direct observations, using narrative descriptions.

Interviews and case studies are useful to gain insights into a policy’s specific local context and impacts as well as the attitudes, experiences, and perspectives of affected stakeholders and participants. On the other hand, they tend to be limited in coverage therefore non-representative of broader conditions or impacts, which can produce less reliable results with less ability to generalise and quantify impacts. Therefore, it can be helpful to use a combination of qualitative and quantitative data and approaches.

Quantitative approaches should be used if a user wants to conduct numerical or statistical analysis, wants to be precise, knows what can be measured, or wants to cover a large group. On the other hand, qualitative approaches should be used if a user wants narrative or in-depth information, is not sure what can be measured, or does not need to quantify the results.¹

Qualitative methods are used specifically to consider the “why” questions that quantitative methods typically cannot answer:

- Why does the policy or action work (or not work)?
- How does the policy or action achieve its goals?
- Why does it work for some policies or actions (or in some situations) and not others?
- What are/were the needs of the population that were not anticipated?
- What were the additional unintended and/or unexpected positive or negative consequences?

Qualitative methods (especially story-based approaches) can yield powerful stories which can be useful for media reports and are often preferred by policymakers and politicians. Hard data is not always the most convincing evidence for all audiences.

The approach used will depend on the goals of the assessments. To determine which type of data to collect, users need to determine what is most important to the policy or action under assessment. Is the goal to collect numerical data on the use of solar PV or provide a more in-depth understanding of the situation in the poorest urban areas? Sometimes both approaches are important, but resource availability requires that one must be given priority.

Forms of data collection

Data collection approaches can be considered structured or semi-structured. A structured data collection approach requires that all data be collected in exactly the same way. Structured data collection allows users to compare findings at different sites in order to draw conclusions about what is working where. A structured approach is also important when comparing alternative interventions to determine which is most cost-effective. Structured data collection approach is mostly used to collect quantitative data when

¹ Imas and Rist 2009.
the user has a large sample or population, knows what needs to be measured, needs to show results numerically, or needs to make comparisons across different sites or interventions.

A semi-structured data collection approach may be systematic and follow general procedures, but data are not collected in the same way every time. Semi-structured interviews, for example, are often based on a predetermined set of broad questions, but the order of presenting them may depend on circumstances. Moreover, some responses provided can be probed with additional questions developed during the interview. This approach is more open and fluid than the structured approach. The semi-structured approach allows respondents to tell users what they want to know in their own way.

Semi-structured data collection methods are generally qualitative. They are used when a user is conducting exploratory work in a new development area, seeks to understand themes or issues, or wants participant narratives or in-depth information. They can also be used to understand results of structured data collection that are unexpected and not well understood or to give nuanced examples to supplement the findings from a structured data collection effort.

For example, in an evaluation of a community-driven development project, evaluators might choose a semi-structured approach to data collection. Because such programmes give control of planning decisions to local groups, it is appropriate for the evaluator to use a semi-structured approach to learn more about how decisions are made as well as to solicit community members’ views of the process and project outcomes.

Data can also be collected obtrusively or unobtrusively. Obtrusive methods are observations made with the participants’ knowledge. Such methods are used to measure perceptions, opinions, and attitudes through interviews, surveys and focus groups. Observations made with the knowledge of those being observed are also obtrusive. Unobtrusive methods are observations made without the knowledge of the participant. Examples of unobtrusive methods include using data from documents or archives and observing participants without their knowledge.

Data collection usually includes both quantitative and qualitative data, but one approach may be dominant. The two approaches can be characterised in the following ways.

Table C.1: Summary of quantitative and qualitative approaches

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A quantitative approach</th>
<th>A qualitative approach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>is more structured</td>
<td>is less structured</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>emphasises reliability</td>
<td>is easier to develop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>is harder to develop</td>
<td>can provide nuanced data (idiosyncratic data on each unit being studied)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>is easier to analyse</td>
<td>more labour intensive to collect and analyse data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>emphasises validity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Imas and Rist (2009)*

Box C.1 provides a checklist to help decide which data collection approaches are most appropriate.

Box C.1: 20-question qualitative checklist

1. Does the programme emphasise individual outcomes—that is, are different participants expected to be affected in qualitatively different ways? Is there a need or desire to describe and evaluate these individualised client outcomes?
2. Are decision makers interested in elucidating and understanding the internal dynamics of programmes—programme strengths, programme weaknesses and overall programme processes?
3. Is detailed, in-depth information needed about certain client cases or programme sites (e.g., particularly successful cases, unusual failures or critically important cases) for programmatic, financial or political reasons?

4. Is there interest in focusing on the diversity among, idiosyncrasies of, and unique qualities exhibited by individual clients and programmes (as opposed to comparing all clients or programmes on standardised, uniform measures)?

5. Is information needed about the details of programme implementation: What do clients in the programme experience? What services are provided to clients? How is the programme organised? What do staff members do? Do decision makers need to know what is going on in the programme and how it has developed?

6. Are the programme staff and other stakeholders interested in collection of detailed, descriptive information about the programme for the purpose of improving the programme (i.e., is there interest in formative evaluation)?

7. Is there a need for information about the nuances of programme quality—descriptive information about the quality of programme activities and outcomes, not just levels, amounts or quantities of programme activity and outcomes?

8. Does the programme need a case-specific quality assurance system?

9. Are legislators or other decision makers or funders interested in having evaluators conduct programme site visits so that the evaluations can be the surrogate eyes and ears for decision makers who are too busy to make such site visits themselves and who lack the observing and listening skills of trained evaluators? Is legislative monitoring needed on a case-by-case basis?

10. Is the obtrusiveness of evaluation a concern? Will the administration of standardised measuring instruments (questionnaires and tests) be overly obtrusive in contrast to data-gathering through natural observations and open-ended interviews? Will the collection of qualitative data generate less reactivity among participants than the collection of quantitative data? Is there a need for unobtrusive observations?

11. Is there a need and desire to personalise the evaluation process by using research methods that emphasise personal, face-to-face contact with the programme—methods that may be perceived as “humanistic” and personal because they do not label and number the participants, and they feel natural, informal and understandable to participants?

12. Is a responsive evaluation approach appropriate—that is, an approach that is especially sensitive to collecting descriptive data and reporting information in terms of differing stakeholder perspectives based on direct, personal contact with those different stakeholders?

13. Are the goals of the programme vague, general and nonspecific, indicating the possible advantage of a goal-free evaluation approach that would gather information about what effects the programme is actually having rather than measure goal attainment?

14. Is there a possibility that the programme may be affecting clients or participants in unanticipated ways and/or having unexpected side effects, indicating the need for a method of inquiry that can discover effects beyond those formally stated as desirable by programme staff (again, an indication of the need for some form of goal-free evaluation)?

15. Is there a lack of proven quantitative instrumentation for important programme outcomes? Is the state of measurement science such that no valid, reliable, and believable standardised instrument is available or readily capable of being developed to measure quantitatively the particular programme outcomes for which data are needed?

16. Is the evaluation exploratory? Is the programme at a pre-evaluation stage, where goals and programme content are still being developed?

17. Is an evaluability assessment needed to determine a summative evaluation design?

18. Is there a need to add depth, detail, and meaning to statistical findings or survey generalisations?

19. Has the collection of quantitative evaluation data become so routine that no one pays much attention to the results anymore, suggesting a possible need to break the old routine and use new methods to generate new insights about the programme?

20. Is there a need to develop a programme theory grounded in observations of programme activities and impacts, and the relationship between treatment and outcomes?
In order to collect data on a policy or action, it is important to apply rules in the data collection process. Some of the data collection rules are in Box C.2.

**Box C.2: Rules for collecting data**

- Use multiple data collection methods when possible.
- Use available data if possible (doing so is faster, less expensive, and easier than generating new data).
- If using available data, find out how earlier evaluators collected the data, defined the variables, and ensured accuracy of the data. Check the extent of missing data.
- If original data must be collected, establish procedures and follow them (protocol); maintain accurate records of definitions and coding; pretest; and verify the accuracy of coding and data input.
- Collect data in a disaggregated manner, to understand if there are differences in views, impacts, and economic opportunities between women/men, ethnicities, and other groups.

**Source:** Adapted from Imas and Rist (2009)

**Sampling in qualitative impact assessment**

Qualitative impact assessment involves engaging with people and talking to them. This can be time consuming and generate a large amount of data to analyse. For example, policies and actions are likely to affect thousands of people and setting up interviews and analysing transcripts for each of them will be expensive and may divert user from other tasks. Sampling systematically enables the user to select a representative smaller group of participants from the overall population who can give a reliable account of the bigger picture.

The way users select the sample has implications for the conclusions users can draw. Sampling for qualitative impact assessment has a slightly different aim to sampling in quantitative impact assessment. In quantitative impact assessment, the goal is to draw a sample which is mathematically representative of the whole, so can be used to draw firm conclusions about the population. In qualitative impact assessment, precise or definitive conclusions are less important so sample sizes can be smaller—the goal is to learn about the range of experiences.

Although samples can be smaller, it is still vital to ensure the sample resembles the whole group as closely as possible. Therefore, users should:

- Have a clear idea of the characteristics of the group they are assessing.
- Create a sample that attempts to reflect the range of different people in the group— for example if the policy or action impacts equal numbers of women and men, the qualitative sample should contain equal numbers of women and men.

A particularly important goal of sampling in qualitative impact assessment is involving people who have been less engaged in the policy or action and those who do not volunteer themselves to be consulted. This is important because if the user only collects information from those who have been affected by the policy or action or are the first to volunteer, then the sampling will not be representative of the population as a whole and the assessment will not be credible.
Longitudinal impact assessment

To show change over time, it is useful to speak to the same people at multiple points in time to see how their experiences have changed, rather than collecting information only once. Longitudinal qualitative impact assessment provides nuanced information on people’s perspectives and how and why they have changed over time, which can give a fuller assessment of policy impact.

Avoiding bias

The data collection technique chosen will depend on the situation. No matter which method is chosen to gather data from people, all the information gathered is potentially subject to bias. Bias means that when asked to provide information about themselves or others, respondents may or may not tell the whole truth, unintentionally or intentionally. They may distort the truth because they do not remember accurately or fear the consequences of providing a truthful answer. They may also be embarrassed or uncomfortable about admitting things they feel will not be socially acceptable. All self-reported data are vulnerable to this problem.

Selection bias—the fact that the people who choose to participate in the survey may be different from those who choose not to participate—may also exist. This is often a challenge in surveys, interviews and focus groups. Those who volunteer to participate may be systematically different from those who do not.

Tools for collecting data

Typically, more than one data collection approach is used to answer different impact assessment questions or provide multiple sources of data in response to a single impact assessment question. Users may, for example, collect available data for solar PV installation records, interview buyers on the use of solar PV, and survey users. Sometimes investigators use focus groups or conduct case studies to help develop themes for a questionnaire or to make sense of survey results.

Collecting the same information using different methods in order to increase the accuracy of the data is called a triangulation of methods. Evaluators use triangulation to strengthen findings. The more information gathered using different methods that support a finding, the stronger the evidence is.

The following data collection tools can be used depending on which are most appropriate for a given situation:

- Tool 1: Surveys
- Tool 2: Interviews
- Tool 3: Focus groups
- Tool 4: Participatory methods
- Tool 5: Ethnography
- Tool 6: Documents and other sources
- Tool 7: Case study approaches

Each is described further below.
1. Surveys

Surveys can be excellent tools for collecting data about people’s perceptions, opinions and ideas. They are less useful in measuring behaviour, because what people say they do may not reflect what they actually do. Surveys can be structured or semi-structured, administered in person or by telephone, or self-administered by having people respond to a mailed or web form. Surveys can poll a sample of the population or all of the population. There are two types of surveys: structured and semi-structured surveys.

- **Structured surveys** are surveys that include a range of response choices, one or more of which respondents select. All respondents are asked exactly the same questions in exactly the same way and given exactly the same choices to answer the questions.

- **Semi-structured surveys** are surveys that ask predominantly open-ended questions. They are especially useful when the user wants to gain a deeper understanding of reactions to experiences or to understand the reasons why respondents hold particular attitudes. Semi-structured surveys should have a clearly defined purpose. It is often more practical to interview people about the steps in a process, the roles and responsibilities of various members of a community or team, or a description of how a programme works than to attempt to develop a written survey that captures all possible variations.

Box C.3 highlights the advantages of structured and semi-structured surveys.

**Box C.3: Structured and semi-structured survey questions**

Examples of structured questions include the following:

1. Has this workshop been useful in helping you to learn how to evaluate your programme?
   - Little or no extent
   - Some extent
   - Moderate extent
   - Great extent
   - Very great extent
   - No opinion
   - Not applicable

2. Do all people in the village have a source of clean water within 500 metres of their homes?
   - Yes
   - No

Examples of semi-structured questions include the following:

- What have you learned from the programme evaluation workshop that you have used on the job?
- Where are the sources for clean water for the villagers?

Source: Imas and Rist 2009

When conducting surveys, it is important to ensure representative samples to draw meaningful conclusions about the broader population of interest and avoid selection bias. Obtaining a credible and representative response from the population of interest can sometimes be time consuming and expensive.
2. Interviews

One of the most common methods of collecting qualitative data is interviewing people—that is, talking to them one-to-one. Interviews can undertake in person, by phone or over the internet, for example through Skype. Table C.2 describes three different approaches to interviewing.

**Table C.2: Interview approaches**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Structured</th>
<th>Semi-structured</th>
<th>Unstructured</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Description</strong></td>
<td>Questions are agreed in advance; interviewers stick rigidly to a script.</td>
<td>The main questions are fixed, but follow-up questions can be improvised.</td>
<td>Interviewer may have a list of broad topics, but no set questions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>When to Use</strong></td>
<td>Useful for collecting standardised, survey-style information.</td>
<td>Most common in qualitative work; allows expanded opinions on the topics of the interview.</td>
<td>More appropriate for very exploratory research questions or academic research; direction is set by the interviewee, rather than the interviewer, so topics vary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sampling</strong></td>
<td>Sample sizes can be large and commitment/time is minimal. Random sampling is recommended for maximum rigour.</td>
<td>Longer interviews require greater commitment/time, so more it is suited to smaller samples targeting particular participants.</td>
<td>Longer interviews require greater commitment, so it is more suited to smaller samples targeting particular participants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Transcribing</strong></td>
<td>Easy because all responses are on the same template.</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>Time consuming, full transcription or detailed notes and recording may be needed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Data analysis</strong></td>
<td>Easy to compare and analyse, but detail and nuance limited.</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>Difficult to analyse, but detailed and nuanced data.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Adapted from Arksey and Knight (1999)*

Of the options in Table C.2, semi-structured interviewing is often the most promising approach for carrying out qualitative impact assessment. The approach allows the user to guide the direction and themes of the interview, while still allowing the respondent to articulate their experiences in detail.

Another valuable approach is to combine structured ‘tick box’ type questions with more open-ended questions within the same interview. This will provide both numerical impact results alongside more nuanced qualitative information.

In qualitative assessment impact, interview questions should be:

- **Open ended** to encourage full responses. Minimise yes/no questions and instead try to start questions beginning with how, what, why and where to encourage interviewees to explore their answers.

- **Clear and in plain English.** Avoid long or complex questions. Instead of asking ‘What was the impact of…’ try ‘Did anything change after…’.

- **Framing rather than leading.** Do not point interviewees towards a particular response. Instead of ‘Did you feel better after…’, ask ‘How did you feel after…’

- **Neutral.** Using emotive language or asking in a way that sounds accusatory may close down people’s responses. Instead of ‘Did you do…’, ask ‘How many times have you done…’ to imply that others also do so.

*Source: Imas and Rist 2009*
3. Focus groups

Focus groups are interviews with small groups of people. Numbers should be restricted to around six to eight participants in order to prevent sub-groups emerging and to make transcribing easier. In some cases, mini-groups of three or four may be most suitable.

Focus groups may be useful:

- Where time is too limited to conduct individual interviews
- For a collective discussion amongst a similar or differing group, since the group dynamics can encourage more lively and interesting discussions
- Where participants do not feel confident about taking part in individual interviews

Group interviews provide group data, since participants play off against each other. This can be positive, allowing ideas to develop and be discussed in detail. However, it is important for the user to note that an individual’s response in a focus group cannot be considered in the same way as an individual interview. Participants influence each other, and responses should be seen in that context. When analysing focus group data, avoid talking about magnitude. For example, three out of six participants making a statement does not necessarily mean that 50% of participants agree with it, particularly as they can be influenced by each other.

Focus groups can have disadvantages, however. They can be hard to set-up and organise and difficult to moderate. They are not good for discussing sensitive or personal topics. Unless the user has the skills at drawing out quieter members of the group, the views can be strongly influenced by the most vocal or dominant participants of the group.

4. Participatory methods

Impact assessment is participatory when the population under study is actively involved in designing the assessment or collecting data. For example, participatory methods have been used in international development projects to give local people a say in how projects are run, and to use local knowledge to better tailor the project and its measurement to specific contexts.

Participatory methods can be used to collect qualitative evidence of impact. Project participants gather data using methods like photography or video, giving a highly personal account of their own lives and experiences. Other participatory methods include creating diaries or “route-maps” with users, in which they plot events on a timeline. These methods can help to highlight the link between certain life events and levels of engagement with a project, giving a sense of external influences.

Participatory methods can give nuanced information on the effects of the policy or action, but are resource intensive and lack objectivity or any method of comparing impacts on different individuals.

5. Ethnography

Ethnography involves observing things from the point of view of those being studied. Rather than talking to people about their experiences, the ethnographer joins in and sees it first-hand. For example, it may apply to understand community services to help understand how people are engaging with staff.
6. Documents and other sources

Though qualitative data collected face-to-face is ideal, in some cases users may not need to collect data directly. Instead, the required information may be found in existing documents. For example, some qualitative data may be available from open-ended questions within a quantitative survey or from key workers’ case notes. Similarly, media articles about a particular topic can be useful, or users may want to analyse local strategy documents to show variation in attitudes or services.

Although this data is already available, collecting and analysing it systematically is still important. It will help to show that users have included data from all participants or a systematically selected sample or that users have completed a thorough search for publicly available material.

7. Case study approaches

Case studies are widely used in impact assessment. They are not a method of data collection in themselves, but rather an approach that focusses on gathering a range of evidence about a small number of cases. It shows the policy or action impact in a balanced way through case studies. Case studies should be chosen systematically, as would be done for a sample for interviews or surveys. In particular, it is important to capture a wide spectrum of experiences of the policy or action, not just the cases in which the project worked best.

To create credible case studies, users should choose a small sample of cases randomly or based on certain criteria. Users can use the methods described above to gather more information about each selected case (e.g., interviews, focus groups, observation and quantitative data alongside any documents relating to the case). The aim is to create a nuanced description of how a policy or action has (or has not) affected the individuals and the reasons for change, as well as any other factors that are important.

Using multiple methods

In general, many of the above techniques for collecting data can be utilised. In qualitative assessments, partly as a quality-control mechanism, the use of multiple methods (also called “mixed methods” especially when in conjunction with quantitative methods) is common. It also yields more robust results on the basis of “triangulation”—that different methods should be used, with different sources of data, and from different perspectives to gain the best understanding and produce the most credible results.