Stakeholder Participation Guidance

Guidance to support stakeholder participation in design, implementation and assessment of policies and actions

May 2018

How to establish multi-stakeholder bodies

6. Establishing Multi-Stakeholder Bodies

A multi-stakeholder body or structure is a formal or informal regular gathering of people representing various constituencies, interests and stakes for the purpose of ensuring and enabling their participation, contribution and influence towards a goal or strategy. Multi-stakeholder bodies provide a forum for dialogue and mutual learning to inform decision-making.

Multi-stakeholder bodies are an important element of effective stakeholder participation in the design, implementation and assessment of policies and contribute to successful implementation of the stakeholder participation plan (see Chapter 4 for guidance on stakeholder participation plans). They are an important means for addressing ‘the how’ of stakeholder participation.

Checklist of key recommendations

- Clearly define the mandate, objectives, role and scope of multi-stakeholder bodies
- Identify and strengthen existing multi-stakeholder bodies, or establish new ones where needed, that meet the needs and criteria to support effective stakeholder participation in the design, implementation and/or assessment of the policy
- Clearly define the composition of multi-stakeholder bodies to enable equitable and balanced representation and participation of all stakeholder groups, with special attention to those that may be marginalised and those that may be directly affected
- Clearly define the procedures and decision-making process of multi-stakeholder bodies

6.1 Importance of multi-stakeholder bodies

Multi-stakeholder bodies are important to:

- Enable the organised and coordinated participation of various stakeholder groups in the design, implementation and assessment of policies
• Leverage the expertise and perspectives of different stakeholders

• Enable joint and collaborative efforts to address an issue of common or divergent interests and stakes, or an issue that crosses boundaries of expertise or sectors

• Provide a mechanism for iterative exchange between and input from stakeholders over time, facilitating reciprocal learning and feedback, communication and information sharing

• Contribute to decision-making, either through an advisory or decision-making role, promoting broader understanding and ownership of decision-making and enhancing the credibility and legitimacy of decision-making

6.2 Characteristics of multi-stakeholder bodies

Multi-stakeholder bodies can be formal or informal and can be institutionalised or ad hoc, as in the following examples:

• **Formal and institutionalised:** A structured platform or working group, or commission that meets virtually and/or physically. For example, a government may establish a commission, a working group or a consultative group as a permanent body to address a critical public policy issue that formulates recommendations or provides guidance for informed and evidence-based decision-making. Examples include the Civil Society Platforms established in many countries where REDD+ activities are being implemented (e.g., Cameroon, Mexico, Nepal, Ghana and Guatemala), and Civil Society Networks on Adaptation which are being helpful to shape the climate policy on adaptation in developing countries.

• **Informal and institutionalised:** A loose yet coordinated network of actors who have agreed to work together to exert influence or contribute to a collective agenda they have interest in. For example, during the early stage of the REDD+ readiness process, the government of Cameroon organised a series of multi-stakeholder meetings of the government, NGOs, research organisations, international organisations, donors and private sector organisations to reflect on and generate a common understanding to shape the direction of REDD+ in the country. Participation in this meeting was voluntary.

• **Formal and ad-hoc:** A body established to fulfil an objective for a limited period. For example, a government may establish a multi-stakeholder commission, a working group or a consultative group with a time-bound mandate to address a clearly identified set of issues that contributes to a broader public policy or climate agenda. Examples include ad hoc groups in charge of the elaboration of measurement, reporting and verification (MRV) methodology formulation of national REDD+ strategy or to formulate a proposal for legal and institutional frameworks for climate action.

• **Informal and ad-hoc:** A group that emerges to discuss and influence a particular issue. For example, in advance of the UNFCCC Conference of Parties hosted by the Peruvian Government in 2014, national civil society actors came together to form a united platform - Grupo Peru COP20 – in order to develop common positions and coordinate collective advocacy around the negotiations. This loose civil society platform continues to collaborate and inform national climate policy today.

Multi-stakeholder bodies can have different advisory and/or decision-making roles, such as:
- Providing expert advisory inputs
- Making informed recommendations integrating diverse stakeholder perspectives
- Making decisions on behalf of or in collaboration with government

Multi-stakeholder bodies can be structured in different ways to address multiple issues, including:

- A single multi-stakeholder body to cover the range of issues agreed, within which sub-working groups or sub-committees are created to handle thematic issues in contribution to the overall agenda of the multi-stakeholder body
- Different multi-stakeholder groups to handle specific thematic issues separately

Multi-stakeholder bodies can be established at different levels, including:

- Multi-stakeholder bodies established at national, subnational and local level considering the scope of the policy
- Multi-stakeholder bodies established in a project or program specific area

In terms of composition, multi-stakeholder bodies can aim to include:

- A balanced representation of all stakeholder groups
- Only members from specific groups, such as constituency-based stakeholder bodies in which the range of stakeholders whose interests or actions overlap with or impact the said constituency are represented (e.g., a civil society platform)

### 6.3 Defining the mandate, objectives, role and scope for multi-stakeholder bodies

It is a *key recommendation* to clearly define the mandate, objectives, role and scope of multi-stakeholder bodies. These should be established by the user and agreed among stakeholder representatives. This involves determining:

- The need for a multi-stakeholder body and its mandate or authority to carry out its role
- Whether the multi-stakeholder body will function as a technical or advisory, or a decision-making, body
- The level of authority, autonomy and independence of the multi-stakeholder body from political and other influential parties. This involves determining the entity which creates the body and to which it reports – whether the body will be attached to established institutional arrangements within the government or an agency created by the government, or will be created as a parallel independent structure or body that brings independent contributions.
- Whether there will be one or several multi-stakeholder bodies
- Whether it is an ad hoc body created circumstantially to achieve some specific time-bound objective, or a body to function in longer term
- The mechanisms through which the body will influence the policy
Agreement among stakeholders on these key aspects could be sought through an existing appropriate multi-stakeholder body, through consultations with stakeholders and/or through establishment of a temporary advisory body (see Chapter 4 for guidance on planning), depending on the context.

It is a key recommendation to identify and strengthen existing multi-stakeholder bodies, or establish new ones where needed, that meet the needs and criteria to support effective stakeholder participation in the design, implementation and/or assessment of the policy. Creation of new multi-stakeholder bodies can lead to confusion and conflicts, in addition to needing time commitment from members and ongoing resources for their functioning, so it may be preferable to adapt existing bodies if they can adequately meet the identified needs and criteria.

6.4 Defining the composition and ensuring balanced representation and participation

It is a key recommendation to clearly define the composition of multi-stakeholder bodies to enable equitable and balanced representation and participation of all stakeholder groups, with special attention to those that may be marginalised and those that may be directly affected. Once the objectives, role and scope of the multi-stakeholder body are defined, the relevant stakeholders should be identified and the appropriate size of the group should be determined. For decision-making groups, a maximum of 15-25 people is recommended, but platforms and networks established to share information may be much larger, depending on logistics and available resources.

Identify criteria for mapping and selecting stakeholder groups that will be represented on the multi-stakeholder body and the specific skill sets, attributes and qualifications to be demonstrated by those who will participate in the multi-stakeholder body on behalf of their constituencies. This should be done in agreement with an existing appropriate multi-stakeholder body or through consultations with stakeholders. The method adopted for identifying the representatives is important as it affects their legitimacy, and the legitimacy of the multi-stakeholder body (see Chapter Error! Reference source not found. for guidance on identifying legitimate representatives).

It is important to define the balance of the group including the number of participants that will come from different stakeholder groups and geographical regions in agreement with an existing appropriate multi-stakeholder body or through consultations with stakeholders. When seeking balanced and equitable representation on a multi-stakeholder body, ensure that all stakeholder groups that have been identified are represented (see Chapter Error! Reference source not found. for guidance on identifying stakeholders), with special attention to ensuring equitable participation of groups that may be marginalised and those that may be directly affected.

Another measure to promote balanced and equitable representation and participation is to establish, as part of the overall stakeholder participation strategy, specific bodies to enable the engagement, participation and contribution of marginalised groups. Specific bodies may be established for women, indigenous peoples or local communities who might need to caucus separately in order to reflect and contribute on their own terms without being influenced by dominant stakeholders. While these specific bodies could channel their contributions through a broader multi-stakeholder body, space and mechanisms should be secured for them to directly interact and dialogue with key decision-making structures to ensure that their concerns and contributions are delivered without filtration.
6.5 Defining procedures and decision-making processes

It is a key recommendation to clearly define the procedures and decision-making process of multi-stakeholder bodies. Noting that systematic disempowerment has often led to elites controlling multi-stakeholder bodies, it is important that the procedures and rules for participating in discussions and decision making ensure that people from marginalised groups have equivalent voice to people from more powerful groups.

Procedures, including housekeeping rules, for the functioning of the multi-stakeholder body should be designed and agreed by the members, including the following topics if relevant:

- Virtual or physical meetings, or both
- Venues, frequency and timing of meetings
- Procedures through which notes and outcomes of meetings will be captured, consolidated, stored and communicated through appropriate channels
- Procedures to ensure that every member speaks and that the contribution of everyone is registered and considered
- The governance structure of the multi-stakeholder body and appointment of key positions such as chairperson and secretariat, preferably through elections or self-selection
- A procedure for decision-making for the objectives and mandate of the multi-stakeholder body
- Conflict management mechanisms to handle disputes, conflict of interest and conflicts related to the body

Rules and procedures should take into account budgetary constraints and the policies and procedures of the entity responsible for the policy. They should be made available to the public.

The decision-making mechanism should be fair, so that no single stakeholder group can dominate and no stakeholder group can be marginalised. Options include:

- **Consensus**: a decision is reached when no member has a sustained objection (i.e., all members are willing to ‘live with’ the decision) provided the right conditions have been created for people to express themselves without fear and to register their objections. This approach takes into account the views of all members but may lead to less ambitious solution. It may also take time or may even be impossible to achieve. Where bodies aim to make decisions based on consensus, they should define and agree on an alternative decision-making mechanism at the start of the process, in case consensus cannot be achieved.

- **Majority voting**: a decision is reached when a pre-defined proportion (e.g., 50% or 70%) of the members are in favour. This approach may ignore the views of minority and marginalised groups and lead their frustration.

- **Voting by sectors or constituencies**: the members are organised by sector or constituency into chambers, or other groupings. For a decision to be approved, a defined proportion of all chambers must be in favour (e.g., 60% or 75%) plus a defined threshold (e.g., 51%) of the members within each chamber. This approach ensures that decisions cannot be made unless a majority in each sector agrees. It can be effective in building trust by reassuring stakeholder
groups that their voice will be heard or, in the case of government, that they will not lose complete control.

6.6 Setting a plan and agenda for the multi-stakeholder body

The multi-stakeholder body should agree on the expected results, outputs or deliverables, and the plans for achieving them with clearly agreed milestones. The plan should clarify roles and responsibilities, the frequency and purpose of meetings, and any preparatory work. Without a clear plan and agendas for each meeting, the multi-stakeholder body may be prone to free riding, power games, and manipulation by more powerful members.

6.7 Supporting the function of the multi-stakeholder body

Procedures need to be established and followed to ensure that the body functions effectively. These include:

- **Transparency measures:** ensuring that plans for and reports of meetings and other activities of the body are disclosed publicly
- **Communication mechanisms:** ensuring effective and timely communication with and among members, and between members and their constituents, using appropriate channels and forms
- **Facilitation:** ensuring balanced and inclusive participation, focus on meeting objectives and good time management
- **Documenting and reporting:** ensuring that key points, recommendations and decisions are accurately and impartially captured

Depending on the defined mandate of the multi-stakeholder body which may be advisory or deliberative, it is essential to clearly establish and agree on mechanisms through which the outputs and decisions of the multi-stakeholder body will be extended to other authorities and venues of decision making related to the policy. Failure to have a well-established and functioning outreach and communications pathways may result in the multi-stakeholder body not achieving its intended role and influence on the design, implementation and/or assessment of the policy.

It is critical to identify and ensure availability of ongoing resources, financial and otherwise, that are needed for the functioning of the various multi-stakeholder bodies being established and for effective delivery of their contribution and participation. This may include support to members with financial or logistical difficulties to participate (e.g., transportation from and back to remote areas, translation to languages that are the most understood by different stakeholder groups, and accommodation support during meeting periods for participants coming from distant areas).
Further references

For guidance on creating an effective multi-stakeholder body, see the following reference:

- AccountAbility and Utopies’ Critical Friends: *The Emerging Role of Stakeholder Panels in Corporate Governance, Reporting and Assurance*

1 Available at: [http://www.stakeholderpanels.net/StakeholderPanels_report.pdf](http://www.stakeholderpanels.net/StakeholderPanels_report.pdf)