7 Providing information to stakeholders

Providing information involves active dissemination of information to stakeholders and public disclosure of information. Stakeholders need information to be able to participate effectively to support policy design, implementation and assessment. Effective participation requires an understanding of the issues, based on good information. Informed stakeholders provide richer and more effective input. The objectives and benefits of stakeholder participation cannot be achieved unless stakeholders have sufficient relevant information.

Checklist of key recommendations

- Disseminate information to stakeholders, and ensure that the information is timely, relevant and comprehensive, including information about potential and actual impacts, as well as opportunities to participate
- Tailor the content and format of information, and how it is provided, to ensure that it is understandable and accessible for each stakeholder group, based on consultations with them
- Publicly disclose information about policies, unless there is a legitimate reason to keep some information confidential, following an established policy on disclosure of information

7.1 Importance of providing information to stakeholders

Stakeholders need information about how they may be affected by a policy, especially where the policy may affect their rights – for example, with respect to their security or livelihood. Providing information to stakeholders about how they may be affected is often required by national law (e.g. regulations on social impact assessment); by donor policies; and by international treaties, conventions and agreements that the country is party to. Stakeholders also need other kinds of information if they are to participate effectively, including clarification about their expected role in designing, implementing and assessing policies, and about the options and mechanisms for influencing policies.

In the case of government policies, all members of the public are stakeholders, so information about the policies and their impacts should be publicly disclosed. National laws and donor policies often require public disclosure of many types of information. In addition, public reporting on stakeholder participation, showing the scope and breadth of outreach, demonstrates transparency and helps to build public support for policies.

7.2 Providing information to stakeholders

It is a *key recommendation* to disseminate information to stakeholders, and ensure that the information is timely, relevant and comprehensive, including information about potential and actual impacts, as well as opportunities to participate.

7.2.1 Timely

Stakeholders need information in advance to participate effectively. Sufficient time is needed between the provision of information and the occasion of participation (such as a public consultation or a meeting of a multi-stakeholder body) to give participants time to think about the issues, consider the options and trade-offs, and discuss these with others. In addition, stakeholders need information in advance about how they can participate so that they can plan their participation and contribution. Optimal timing varies with the specific circumstances.

In addition to information provided in advance of a specific opportunity to participate, it is important to provide information to stakeholders consistently throughout the policy design and implementation cycle – for example, providing feedback to stakeholders after consultations, and updates on progress or changes in plans and processes. To this end, it is important to establish mechanisms for ongoing communication with stakeholders.

7.2.2 Relevant

The information provided needs to prepare stakeholders for participating effectively. It is important that information provided is objective, unbiased and impartial, with an explanation of any uncertainties and different views. Stakeholders are likely to appreciate information that is linked to concerns they have voiced – for example, on how the policy might affect air quality, public health, jobs and other relevant sustainable development impact categories (see the ICAT *Sustainable Development Methodology* for further information about impact categories).

7.2.3 Comprehensive

It is important that information provided covers all relevant topics, including:

- processes for design, implementation and assessment of the policy

- description of the policy, including[38]

  » title of the policy
  » type of policy
  » description of specific interventions
  » status of the policy
  » date of implementation
  » date of completion (if relevant)
  » implementing entity or entities
  » objectives and intended impacts or benefits of the policy
  » level of the policy
  » geographic coverage
  » sectors targeted
  » related policies
  » additional information that may be relevant to describe the policy, such as activities, timeline and budget

- key questions or issues to be addressed by the policy, including studies undertaken to inform the design, implementation and assessment of the policy

- GHG, sustainable development and transformational impacts that are expected to be (1) relevant and (2) significantly affected by the policy (either positively or negatively),

if known, including impacts for different stakeholder groups

- changes or adaptations to plans, processes and impacts throughout the policy design and implementation cycle

- governance structures and procedures for decision-making and oversight relating to the policy, and reports on implementation of these procedures

- mechanisms to participate in policy design, implementation or assessment

- mechanisms to ask questions and request information, and how to access them

- grievance and redress mechanisms, and how to access and use them

- plans for stakeholder participation and opportunities to participate

- how stakeholder input will be used, and later how it was used

- relationship of the policy to other existing or planned policies.

7.3 Providing information that is accessible and tailored for each stakeholder group

It is a *key recommendation* to tailor the content and format of information, and how it is provided, to ensure that it is understandable and accessible for each stakeholder group, based on consultations with them. Stakeholders need to understand the information that is provided. Information should be provided in a form that is appropriate to each stakeholder group, using concepts, language and terminology that they understand, and using communication media already known and used by them. It may be necessary to provide information in different formats tailored for different stakeholder groups, making sure that translations and other adaptations are available, accurate and not misleading. For example, a less technical summary can be prepared for stakeholders who do not have sufficient technical knowledge and information, taking into account sociocultural (including gender) sensitivities.

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[38]   Refer to the ICAT impact assessment guides for the complete checklist of recommended information to understand and describe the policy.

Information has not been provided effectively if it is not reaching the stakeholders. This means that information should be actively disseminated to ensure that stakeholders receive it. Information can be made accessible to stakeholders through mechanisms such as the Internet, radio and posting in public places. More active forms of sharing information can also be considered, including email, direct mail, newsprint and broadcast media, public meetings, songs and theatre performances, social media, gatherings of specific stakeholder subgroups, and communication from leaders.

It is important that relevant information is made accessible to members of all stakeholder groups using tailored dissemination strategies, including strategies tailored for women, local communities and people who may have less access to information. It is helpful to consult stakeholders to identify what information they need and when, and how to enable their effective participation. Communication mechanisms can use and build on existing communication channels that have proved effective in the past.

Information should be provided and accessible to all stakeholders, not just those who participated in the past (which might occur, for example, if information is distributed by email only to the participants in previous meetings).

Information on policies may be sensitive and have the potential to cause conflicts (e.g. information relating to land acquisition or significant impacts on resource tenure, environment and health). Users should identify potentially sensitive information and consider an appropriate strategy for dissemination, such as through meetings where clarification can be provided immediately. Restrictions may be placed on how information can be further disclosed by stakeholders – for example, through a confidentiality agreement. However, consider any potential tensions and conflicts that such restrictions might cause, and any legal implications, before imposing restrictions on sharing of information.

7.4 Responding to questions and requests for information

It is important to ensure that there is an accessible and effective mechanism to receive questions and provide responses, including requests for further information. Procedures need to be established and published about how to ask questions and request information, how requests will be responded to

and within what time frame, and what information can be requested. These procedures should be based on existing practices and laws on rights to information at national and international levels. Ensure that stakeholders are made aware of, and know how to use, information request mechanisms. (See Chapter 8 for guidance on mechanisms for ongoing consultations, and Chapter 9 for guidance on grievance and redress mechanisms.)

7.5 Disclosure of information

It is a *key recommendation* to publicly disclose information about policies, unless there is a legitimate reason to keep some information confidential, following an established policy on disclosure of information. In addition to active dissemination of information to stakeholders, it is important to establish a policy and strategy for passive disclosure of information. The policy and strategy should at least meet any national, international, donor or other legal requirements, noting that laws on rights to information exist in many countries. In general, information should be disclosed unless there is a legitimate reason not to do so. Information can be disclosed on a government website with dedicated space for information on the policy. Other forms of disclosure may be appropriate or required, depending on the context.

7.5.1 Further references

For guidance on providing information to stakeholders, see the following references:

- World Bank's *Environmental and Social Framework* (ESS10)[39]

- UNECE's *Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters*[40]

- UNEP's *Putting Rio Principle 10 into Action: an Implementation Guide for the UNEP Bali Guidelines*.[41]

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[39]   Available at: http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/383011492423734099/pdf/114278-WP-REVISED-PUBLIC-Environmental-and-Social-Framework.pdf.

[40]   Available at: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/aarhus.

[41]   Available at: https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/11201/UNEP%20MGSB-SGBS%20BALI%20GUIDELINES-Interactive.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y.