
3 Key concepts, elements and principles

This chapter introduces key concepts in this guide, provides an overview of the key elements involved in stakeholder participation and outlines the principles of effective stakeholder participation.

Checklist of key recommendations

- Base stakeholder participation on the principles of inclusiveness, transparency, responsiveness, accountability and respect for rights

3.1 Key concepts

3.1.1 Stakeholders and marginalized people or groups

Stakeholders are individuals, organizations or communities that are directly or indirectly affected by, and/or have influence or power over, a policy. They can include different agencies and levels of government, civil society and private sector organizations, and members of the public.

Marginalized people or groups are those that have little or no influence over decision-making processes. They tend to be ignored, misrepresented or underrepresented. Examples are women, indigenous peoples and local communities. Marginalization may be related to a range of factors, including gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, remoteness, inaccessibility, political connections, culture and religion.

3.1.2 Participation and effective stakeholder participation

Participation entails processes that enable stakeholders to understand and influence decisions and processes that may interest or affect them. Other terms for participation include involvement and engagement. Participation involves a spectrum of possible levels of stakeholder involvement and influence. [Table 3.1](#) describes stakeholder

participation goals and associated user promises based on the level of stakeholder involvement.

When stakeholder participation is effective, stakeholders have meaningful influence over decisions; this includes stakeholders who are potentially affected by, or interested in, a decision, and who have a right to be involved in the decision-making process, with special attention to marginalized stakeholders and those who are directly affected by the policy. The processes recognize and communicate the needs and interests of all stakeholders, involve stakeholders in defining how they participate, provide stakeholders with the information and capacity to participate, and communicate to stakeholders how their input affected the decisions.

3.2 Overview of elements

This guide is organized around the elements a user should consider in conducting effective stakeholder participation (see [Figure 1.1](#)). The guide is relevant throughout the policy design and implementation cycle, and for any objective for stakeholder participation identified by the user. [Part II](#) provides guidance on each of the key elements. Each relevant step of the *ICAT Renewable Energy Methodology*, *Buildings Efficiency Methodology*, *Transport Pricing Methodology*, *Agriculture Methodology*, *Forest Methodology*, *Sustainable Development Methodology*, *Transformational Change Methodology*, *Non-State and Subnational Action Assessment Guide* and *Technical Review Guide* highlights the elements that are most relevant to achieve the user's objectives. The relevant steps and the corresponding elements of stakeholder participation are summarized in an appendix to each document.

The elements described in [Chapters 4–8](#) are not presented as sequential steps because each element needs to be considered for effective stakeholder participation. As well, the elements will benefit from ongoing improvements following an iterative approach for adaptive management.

TABLE 3.1

Stakeholder participation spectrum

Low level of stakeholder participation		Mid level of stakeholder participation	High level of stakeholder participation	
Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Provide stakeholders with balanced and objective information to help them understand the problem, alternatives and solutions	Obtain stakeholder input on analysis, alternatives or decisions	Work directly with stakeholders throughout the process to ensure that their concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered	Partner with stakeholders in each aspect of decision-making, including developing alternatives and identifying preferred solutions	Place decision-making in the hands of stakeholders
"We will keep you informed."	"We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how stakeholder input influences 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 stakeholder 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."

Source: Adapted from IAP2 (2014).

3.3 Principles of effective stakeholder participation

The following five principles underpin and guide the implementation of stakeholder participation, especially where the guidance provides flexibility. It is a *key recommendation* to base stakeholder participation on the principles of inclusiveness, transparency, responsiveness, accountability and respect for rights:

- **Inclusiveness.** All stakeholders have opportunities and the capacity to participate effectively and equitably, including both men and women, with special attention to stakeholder groups that may be marginalized and that may be directly affected by the policy.
- **Transparency.** Information relevant to making an informed decision is disseminated to all stakeholders and publicly accessible, in a format that can be understood, and provided in advance to enable effective participation.
- **Responsiveness.** Changes are made in response to stakeholders' input, as appropriate; stakeholders are informed how their input has been addressed; and stakeholder requests for information and for resolution of grievances are resolved impartially and promptly.
- **Accountability.** Clear governance structures and processes are established, including for decision-making and oversight, and for resolution of grievances with appropriate redress.

- **Respect for rights.** Stakeholders' rights relating to policies and their impacts are recognized and respected, with special attention to stakeholder groups that may be marginalized and directly affected. Rights include procedural rights, such as the right to information, participation and access to justice; and substantive rights, including both customary rights and statutory rights.

In many cases, legal frameworks at local, national and international levels – including customary practices and non-binding agreements that establish norms – define rights relating to each of these principles.

Relevant international legal frameworks include United Nations principles and corresponding agreements relating to rights – for example, on human rights, indigenous peoples and women's rights – and any treaties, conventions and other agreements that the country is party to. [Box 3.1](#) provides examples of relevant international agreements.

Users should note that existing frameworks can be contradictory. In such cases, participatory processes need to be set in place to address contradictions when designing, implementing or evaluating policies.

BOX 3.1

Examples of relevant international treaties, conventions and agreements

- **United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights.** This declaration, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly, sets out fundamental human rights to be universally protected. Although the declaration is not legally binding, it is the foundation for a number of national and international laws and treaties.
- **United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.**⁷ This international treaty, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly, legally binds all parties to fulfil, protect and respect women's human rights. It defines what constitutes discrimination against women and sets up an agenda for national action to end such discrimination.
- **United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.**⁸ This declaration establishes a universal framework of minimum standards for the survival, dignity and well-being of the indigenous peoples of the world. Although not legally binding, it elaborates on existing human rights standards and fundamental freedoms as they apply specifically to indigenous peoples.
- **International Labour Organization Convention 169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples.**⁹ This convention, which is legally binding for member states, is the only international law guaranteeing the rights of indigenous and tribal peoples. It recognizes and protects land ownership rights, and sets a series of minimum standards regarding consultation and consent.
- **UNECE Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention).** This convention is legally binding for parties and establishes a number of rights of the public (individuals and their associations) with regard to the environment.

¹⁰ Available at: www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cedaw.aspx.

¹¹ Available at: www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS_en.pdf.

¹² Available at: www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C169.