Guideline: Stakeholder Analysis and Involvement

Hand-out for Projects within the BMBF Programme
"Sustainable Land Management" (SLM)
Module A

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Introduction

Stakeholder processes are often planned while focusing on methods and tools. But experienced stakeholder managers agree, that choosing the method is a task somewhere down the line when other questions have been answered. This guideline distinguishes four steps of stakeholder analysis and involvement. It is oriented at the concrete process of involving stakeholders in a research project. It lists a series of questions which, when answered step by step help to build up a promising starting-point for stakeholder involvements.

The guideline makes use of existing guides, toolboxes, methods, and of concrete experiences of stakeholder involvements in R&D. Most importantly, it is based on the assumption, that the goals of the respective research projects are implementation-oriented in the sense of initiating and/or contributing to (political, economic, societal, cultural, technological…) processes for adapting to global change and towards a more sustainable development and land use; as is required from the projects in this SLM research programme. As every guideline also this one has to be adapted to the specific circumstances of each project.

Overview: The four steps

Step 1   Targets and scope of the project

What do we want to achieve with the project?
Why and where do we need stakeholder involvement in the project?
What can we achieve under the given circumstances / what could be the impact of the project?

Step 2   Target groups and topics

Who has to be involved? What are their interests?
Which communication and decision structures are important to observe?
Who are the key players?
What are the relevant topics for the project as well as for different stakeholder groups?

Step 3   Strategy development and selection of tools and methods

Risk assessment, identification of synergies between different groups and targets
Clarification of roles and responsibilities
Selection of methods and tools
Developing an overall concept

Step 4   Implementation and adaptation

Transparency, feedback, adjustment of the concept

Step 1: Targets and scope of the project

The starting-points for successful stakeholder involvement in research projects are the goals and objectives of the projects themselves. Clarifying these objectives and targets is a first and fundamental step that is often overlooked. The following questions need to be answered and agreed upon:

- **What do we want to achieve** with the project: in science and - as a possible further result of implementation-oriented projects - in the worlds of practice?

- **What are the implementation-oriented targets of the project**? Is there an overall implementation-oriented target that can serve as an umbrella for the more detailed objectives? (For example: Substantive change of regional water management in a specific region - via science based models and scenarios, and through involvement of the respective regional water authorities)

To achieve these goals:

- **When and in which work packages need stakeholder groups and possible users of results to be involved and for what concrete purpose**?

- **What roles can these stakeholders play in the project**, what concrete tasks can they take over? (possible tasks: share information a/o data, agree on procedures, decide on use of results, jointly develop solutions with the researchers ...)

- **What effects may inputs of stakeholders have on the course of the project and its results?** -> Are the involved stakeholders (co-)agenda setters for the project and co-producers of knowledge or are they mainly / solely target groups for the results of the scientific research?

Parallel to clarifying the targets it is important to clarify the scope and the limits of the project. A research project can support change processes a/o decisions but it is not in the position to make the relevant decisions itself. Therefore:

- What role can the project play in the targeted societal (change) process? **What can it achieve**? **What is** or could become **the mandate of the project**? How and to what extent could the (political, economic, societal…) process the project is possibly kicking off impact decision-making?

- **Who has the authority to make the expected / desired decisions**? What lies beyond the projects influence?

- **What will be done with the results**? Is there a choice of options for the stakeholders? Do the (political, economic, social) circumstances in which the project operates allow for a substantial impact of the stakeholder process on decisions and developments in practice?

=> The results of this reflection should be made transparent to all involved - stakeholders <u>and</u> scientists - to avoid disappointments and unrealistic expectations.

Step 2: Target groups and topics

Based on this clarification of targets and objectives for the overall project (Step 1) stakeholder and target groups can now be concretely identified. Generally speaking stakeholder groups include multipliers, intermediaries, users or implementers of project results, cooperating organisations, and institutions or decision-makers with authority (and mandates) for the projects' implementation-oriented targets. To support this step the following questions need to be answered:

⇨ **Who do we need to inform, address, or involve?**

- Who is relevant for the objectives of the project? Who has essential information for the overall progress of the project?

- Who is in influential position and could support the implementation of project results? Who could delay or obstruct the stakeholder relevant work of the project?

- Who is impacted by the results of the project? Who could use and implement them?

This analysis usually also results in an address database to support project communication. But for successful stakeholder integration there should be more information about them:

⇨ **Analysis of interests**

- What types of stakeholders are going to be involved? (private persons, locals, institutions on different levels, companies, NGOs, CSOs, …)

- What interests are represented among them? Are there fundamental disagreements, vested interests, entrenched positions, coalitions… ?

- Who gets along with whom, and who doesn't? Are there long-established conflicts among the various groups and what is their history?

- What do those groups concretely gain from the projects targets and are there great differences among the various target groups in this respect? Are there possible synergies between the projects and the stakeholders interests or between different stakeholder groups?

⇨ **Analysis of decision-making structures (formal and informal)**

- Which roles, assignments and competencies are represented among the stakeholders?

- What decision-making processes have to be considered with regard to the particular topics? (Access to information, standards, administrative procedures…) Which informal structures of information exchange and decision-making exist among the stakeholders?

⇨ **Identification of key players**

- Who holds a key position concerning access to information and decision-making? Which individuals a/o institutions are most influential concerning the implementation-oriented targets?

- Who are important multipliers or key opinion makers among the stakeholders and who will be useful in reaching out to certain target groups?

- Can concrete users or user group for the projects results be identified?

- Is there an existing organization that can take over the role of an intermediary between the research project and the implementation of its results? (Also in terms of supporting the translation of the research into the given cultural context). If not: Can the project help to build up such an organisation within the projects time?

- Who should be approached first in terms of hierarchy, responsibility (also vanity?), and decision-making power …? Who has to be notified so that a specific person can take part in the project?
- On what other person is the particular individual or the particular target group dependent?

Experiences from other research projects in the same region can be useful and can provide vital information as well as functioning communication lines. Such existing experiences can help to build up trust and personal relationships.

Topics

Parallel to these analyses the specific topics for communication and interaction have to be identified. This especially concerns the perspective of the stakeholders and target groups:

- What topics are being dealt with when the dialogue with stakeholders is initiated?
- What information does the project require from the stakeholders, and in what form?
- What information do stakeholders / 'experts of practice' (e. g. regional water authorities) require from the research project, and in what form? Which expectations have individual stakeholders concerning the research project?
- Are the projects objectives relevant for the activities of the stakeholders? What are the potential benefits from them? Can concrete references be made to day-to-day activities of the persons to be approached? Can the project possibly offer concrete solutions to their problems?
- What might prevent participation from individual stakeholders and how to overcome this?

Answers to this set of questions give hints to where to start communication, how to make contact and how to phrase the topics of the research project.

Particular care should be taken not to overload the time budget of the same target groups with similar concerns. Here identification and early communication of the possible concrete use and impact of project results for those target groups is of vital importance.

Step 3: Strategy development, selection of tools and methods

In an ideal world a project team would carry out a complete analysis as described above, and then develop a strategy and implement it. In reality these steps overlap considerably. One develops a basic understanding of the situation, starts with a first draft strategy, finds out more while going along and then adapts the strategy accordingly and continuously. This strategy development includes identification of risks, of roles and responsibilities, of synergies and the selection of methods and tools.

Risks

The identification of risks follows up on the results of the stakeholder analysis about possible conflicts. These can be based on scientific findings (trade-offs) but could also be basic conflicts of interest.

Usually this step is not an extensive scenario development but a brief brainstorming and assessment of worst-, middle- and best-case options from two perspectives: From the perspective of the project and its objectives and from the perspective of the stakeholders and their targets.

Examples of a worst-case scenario:

- A key stakeholder does not get involved or terminates participation in early phases of the project.

- One controversial target group has been approached prematurely, with the result that established stakeholder groups leave the project under protest.

- Confidential information leaks out to the public.

- A stakeholder group works extensively on volunteer basis to develop concrete models, visions or strategies but ultimately the addressee (a public agency, for instance) does exactly what it had been planning to do long before, without paying any attention to the results this work.

Stakeholder managers need to be aware of these risks and should develop a strategy for avoiding them or, at least, for how to deal with them if they become reality.

Roles and responsibilities

This step includes a reflection and refinement of roles and responsibilities of team partners as well as external stakeholders. This is especially important if NGOs or 'experts from practice' become actively involved in the research project team level. Those groups naturally have interests beyond the scientific analyses. These interests and the suitable roles and responsibilities should be made transparent as a basis for the joint work:

- What are the roles and responsibilities of the members of the research project team? Which concrete roles and responsibilities could be allocated to the respective stakeholder group(s)?

- How can the project avoid getting involved in ongoing controversies and how can it maintain a non-aligned / 'neutral' position?

- Or is there a necessity to take on an internationally agreed political perspective based on scientific findings; e.g. in pursuit of the policy objectives of international conventions like UNFCCC, UNCBD, UNCCD, MDGs…?
  -> How should the project communicate this perspective to stakeholder groups?

Synergies

Looking for synergies can be a strategy to solve conflicts and to motivate key stakeholders to take part. The driving logic is that a win-win (or triple win) solution will last longer and has a higher chance of becoming implemented than solutions where some win and others loose.

- Can different interests or objectives of stakeholders be combined in a positive way?

- Are there synergies with other ongoing (political, societal, economic…) processes and what form of cooperation might be useful?

- Are there windows of opportunity for certain aspects of the project (for example: planning processes of local or regional authorities, suitable public events…)

- What other societal groups outside the project could also make use of the results of work with the stakeholders involved in the project?

Selecting methods and tools

The stakeholder management strategy includes the mix of methods and tools and how they should be combined to support the interaction with stakeholders at different points of the project and for different purposes. Guiding questions are:

- What is the concrete purpose of the specific communication or interaction?

- How can the concrete target groups actually be reached and appropriately addressed, i.e. via which media a/o contact persons?

- Do training programmes and capacity building make sense as an integrated component in the communications strategy a/o stakeholder management? Can multiplier systems be utilised or established?

- How can the amount of effort and utility be kept in a reasonable balance for both the stakeholders and the project?

If the project has to run an extensive and complex stakeholder involvement process, it is useful to bring the results of the analyses, scenarios and selected methods into a general concept which puts the individual steps in sequence and establishes a framework for communications during the course of the project. This includes developing a strategy to prevent or alleviate foreseeable risks and to ensure that deadlines will be met.

Working out this concept in more detail can also reveal additional need for know-how or competencies at certain points of the project. This can be the facilitation of a stakeholder workshop, intermediation, training and communication (web design, publishing and printing), or the capacity, knowledge and mandate to implement results in the specific village, landscape or region. Such concept development helps to plan the necessary steps for successful stakeholder integration.

Step 4: Implementation and adaptation

However: Managing a stakeholder integration process usually has little to do with carrying out a fixed plan. It means to run a process that is itself continuously changing. This generally is a balance act between still targeting the fundamental targets while adapting to current developments. It often requires prompt reaction on events that could not be foreseen or to make use of opportunities that open up along the way. Some basic principles are helpful here:

Transparency

Regular contact with the participating groups, both internal and external, needs to be kept up during the whole project. Information about the course of the project should be provided regularly (e.g. via an e-mail newsletter), but above all whenever there is a certain period of time without personal meetings.

Feedback / adjustment

For the adaptation of the stakeholder concept and strategy it is helpful to regularly get feedback on the process both from the stakeholders and from project participants.

*   Are the targets (of the project and those which have been agreed upon with the stakeholders) being reached? What progress has been made?

*   Have new obstacles or conflicts turned up?

*   Have objectives, contents of communication or methods to be modified because they are ineffective? Are the methods still appropriate?

*   Are time schedules still realistic?

Organisation and framework

Communication and the integration of all stakeholders concerned require forward-looking planning and a great deal of time. Similarly, sufficient time will have to be allocated to preparing and following up on meetings, workshops etc. Documentation and minutes should be circulated as quickly as possible after the event. The setting for stakeholder workshops and other face-to-face meetings should be selected and arranged so as to be both pleasant and practical (accessibility, times, meals etc.).

Stakeholders, especially from the private sector, often have (much) less disposable time for meetings and other forms of transactions than a scientific project team. It is therefore essential to keep those meetings short and to the point.

For establishing 'working relationships' it is essential to have enough time to get to know each other and to build trust among all involved. Helpful in this regard is a clear distinction between meetings (workshops, conferences…) for different purposes: (1) Meetings of solely scientific interest, (2) meetings that focus mainly on stakeholder input and information exchange and (3) meetings in which stakeholders and scientists jointly have to work out solutions. If this basic character of meetings is transparent to all participants they can more easily know why and to what exactly they are committing themselves. This can avoid much frustration in research projects with stakeholder participation.

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Tools and References (Downloads)

These documents (and more) will also be available and continuously updated on the internal part of the Land Management Programme.

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