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Stakeholder Engagement for Inclusive Water Governance: “Practicing What We Preach” with the OECD Water Governance Initiative

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Abstract: A cursory glance at the literature on water governance reveals that stakeholder engagement has long been considered an integral part of sound governance processes. However, a closer look at the literature reveals that, beyond this general assertion, there is a lack of evidence-based assessment on how engagement processes contribute to water governance objectives. This article addresses this research gap by presenting key findings and policy guidance from a study by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) on “Stakeholder Engagement for Inclusive Water Governance”. This study employed comprehensive methods, including a survey administered to 215 stakeholder groups worldwide and separately, 69 case studies of specific stakeholder engagement initiatives on water management. This article also shares the experiences and lessons that have emerged from engaging stakeholders in the OECD Water Governance Initiative—an international multi-stakeholder policy forum created in 2013 to share policy and practical experiences on water governance at different levels. We hope this research will be used to stimulate and enrich discussions about the necessary conditions for results-oriented stakeholder engagement, and to guide decision makers accordingly.

Keywords: water governance; stakeholder engagement; inclusiveness; OECD; Water Governance Initiative

1. Introduction

There is much talk these days about involving citizens, and a broad range of actors from the private and non-profit sectors, more regularly and directly, in policy and decision-making processes. Traditional top-down approaches to policy design and implementation have increasingly lost political legitimacy and been replaced with more deliberative, inclusive and bottom-up processes. Town hall meetings are now commonplace during electoral campaigns. Citizen conferences have been used to elicit informed opinion and to probe for shared public interest in conjunction with major policy reform.

Water management has undergone this change as well: the traditional role of “governments” as the single decision-making authority has in many instances been replaced by multi-level, poly-centric governance. This transition acknowledges the important roles that stakeholders from different institutional settings can contribute to effective, efficient and inclusive water management. However, it would be naïve to think that stakeholder engagement has become globally institutionalized within water policy culture. Best practices from fully-fledged engagement initiatives can help demonstrate the effectiveness of stakeholder engagement and should be scaled-up. Notable examples in this regard include the Hurricane Sandy “Rebuild by Design” Initiative’s approach to community-based solutions for redeveloping cities in environmentally and economically healthier ways [1], and Brazil’s national Pact for Water Management which has rekindled federal and state visions for water resources [2].

Governments now acknowledge that water policies, however well-intentioned, need stakeholder engagement for their implementation on the ground. In any case, people demand it: social protests rise against major infrastructure projects, such as the Sivens dam in France; new water charges in Ireland; or, most recently, high toxicity levels in drinking water in Flint, Michigan (United States).

The origins of this trend have been discussed and include arguments of declining citizens' trust in institutions following the economic crisis [3]; the open government agenda that transforms how decision-makers conduct their affairs and how accountable they are [4]; and reasons more specific to water management such as the move from the prevailing "technical" supply-driven and infrastructure-led solutions in the 1980s towards integrated water resources management [5].

Whether or not stakeholder engagement has become an institutional feature of water-related policy processes, the degree of attention being given to expanding stakeholders' role in water management underscores the need to consider how effective engagement processes have proven to be in reaching intended water governance objectives. What do we know about the contribution of stakeholder engagement to effective water governance? How does stakeholder engagement work in practice? What are its related costs and benefits? We address these threshold questions in two parts. First, by sharing the key findings from a study by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) [6], which relies on empirical data from a 2014 survey carried out across 215 stakeholder groups worldwide, within and outside the water sector, and separately, 69 case studies of specific stakeholder engagement initiatives on water management across a range of countries. Through this work we identify six necessary conditions addressed to decision makers and practitioners on how to set up the enabling environment for inclusive water governance. Second, we share the experiences of the OECD Water Governance Initiative [7], a full-scale exercise of multi-stakeholder engagement started in 2013 in the form of an international network of public, private and non-profit actors supporting better governance of water management. In drawing out these experiences we look back at the first three years of operation in order to flesh out some lessons learned.

For the purpose of this work, we have adopted the following definition of stakeholder engagement: the process by which any person or group who has an interest or stake in a water-related topic is involved in the related activities and decision-making and implementation processes. The person or group may be directly or indirectly affected by water policy and/or have the ability to influence the outcome positively or negatively [6]. Additionally, we define water governance as: encompassing political, institutional and administrative rules, practices, and processes (formal and informal) through which decisions are taken and implemented, stakeholders can articulate their interests and have their concerns considered, and decision-makers are held accountable in the management of water resources and the delivery of water services [8]. We wish to be clear from the outset of the article that the first section draws heavily on the OECD report "Stakeholder Engagement for Inclusive Water Governance", of which we are the main authors.

2. Part I: OECD Findings and Necessary Conditions on Stakeholder Engagement in Water Management

2.1. Trends and Trajectories

Conflicting and often competing water needs have resulted in water governance challenges that are both spatial and institutional. Increasing water scarcity and a territorial mismatch between water supply and demand are central challenges to several water crises. The intensifying competition for water resources is well documented [9–11]. Both demand and supply side pressures are on the rise, driven by economic development, population growth, deteriorating water quality and climate change. The *OECD Environmental Outlook to 2050* [9] highlights that water resources are already over-used or over-allocated in many places and that this will generate fierce competition between uses and users. In response, trade-offs will need to be managed, at the least cost for society. Engaging the broad range of stakeholders in water-related decision-making holds the promise of raising awareness about risks

and related costs, building the social and political acceptability of related decisions, and reducing the potential for conflicts over water.

When tracing the history of public participation and stakeholder engagement, academic literature reveals a range of disciplines, fields of study and methodologies. Founding concepts have been forged by philosophers and socio-political theorists, such as Habermas [12], Mowday [13], and Ostrom, whose approaches to institutional analysis have demonstrated that solidarity-based economies are promising alternatives to traditional state-centred command-and-control economic solutions to pressing social and ecological problems [14]. More applied contributions have come from the fields of science, technology and environment policy. These contributions have investigated different typologies and processes of engagement [15–22]—moving from participation as an end in of itself, notably Arnstein’s “ladder on citizen participation” [15], to considering it as a *means* to an *end* as in the case of Fung’s “democracy cube” [21]. Structured around axes of authority and power, types of participants and communication and decision modes, the “democracy cube” aims to inform institutional design choices for public participation planning activities.

Three main distinguishing trends and trajectories of engagement processes have emerged over the past decades. First, there has been an evolution in water debates from the notion of “participation” to the concept of “engagement”. While “participation” typically refers to the involvement of individuals and groups in the design, implementation and evaluation of a project or plan [17–19], “engagement” embraces a broader range of inclusive processes, with different intentions and different inputs to the decision-making process. Stakeholder engagement has also trended away from the sole consideration of civil society and end users, to reach out to other groups of actors with an influence on water-related planning, decision-making, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation such as property developers and long-term institutional investors. The OECD has developed a typology that distinguishes six levels of stakeholder engagement depending on the processes and the intentions they pursue (Figure 1).

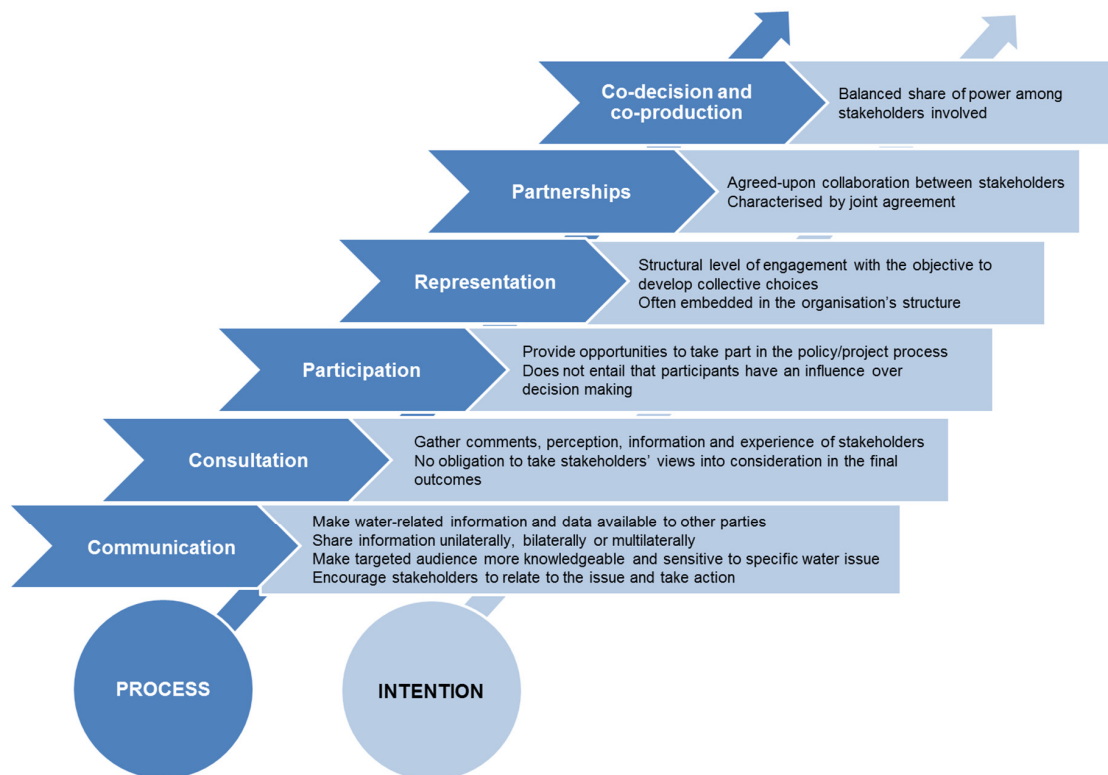


Figure 1. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) typology of levels of stakeholder engagement [23].

The second notable trend is that, until recently, stakeholder engagement had remained mostly a “one-off” exercise. This can be explained by the flexibility often associated with issue-based stakeholder engagement, which decision-makers have preferred over systematic and more committed approaches. However, water management is now experiencing a move toward more structural forms of stakeholder engagement. New legislation, guidelines and standards at various levels have spurred the emergence of more formal forms of stakeholder engagement. The European Water Framework Directive [24] and the Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters [25], or country-based initiatives such as the Dutch Delta Programme in The Netherlands [26] and the Chesapeake Bay Program in the United States [6] are noteworthy examples.

Lastly, stakeholder engagement has been more institutionalised for water *resources* management than water *service* delivery. This can be explained by the fact that legislation has primarily targeted integrated water resources management, such as the 1992 Dublin Principles [27], which has triggered important incentives and reforms of stakeholder engagement as a key pillar of water resources decision making and planning. Accompanying these changes, economic activities have grown increasingly dependent on water resources thus making stakeholder engagement all the more crucial. In comparison, engagement in water and sanitation services has been more heterogeneous and non-systematic, often consisting of handling customers’ complaints. However, more recently, partnerships with users and citizens have emerged as a positive trend towards inclusive and innovative service delivery [28]. Examples of the latter include the Customer Challenge Groups in England and Wales [29] and Grenoble’s Water Users’ Committee in France [30].

2.2. Approach to the OECD Study: Survey and Methodology

Many international organisations and research institutions have carried out work on inclusive approaches to water management. Some have focused on specific types of stakeholders (citizens, women) while others have tackled aspects of the engagement processes (design, mechanisms). As a result, a plethora of good practices have been showcased around the world. However, as concluded during the session on “Stakeholders’ engagement for effective water policy and management” at the 6th World Water Forum (Marseille, 2012), there has been a lack of evidenced-based analysis and policy tools to assess how these inclusive approaches ultimately contribute to the better performance of water policies and projects in terms of processes and outcomes.

Because more and more water players are seeking to influence certain trajectories, it is crucial to evaluate the actual weight of stakeholder engagement in water-related decision-making, and the extent to which this leads to greater effectiveness, efficiency and inclusiveness. In a high stakes context with political power plays and vested interests, an understanding of how common solutions are developed and hit the policy goals is crucial in order to ensure that no one is left behind. This was the purpose of the OECD study on “Stakeholder Engagement for Inclusive Water Governance”, carried out in 2014 [6]. It proposes an analytical framework to assess stakeholder engagement (Figure 2) and defines six necessary conditions, along with a Checklist for public action and select indicators, in order to get it right while scaling-up success stories for more effective bench-marking.

This analytical framework is organised around five components: the *drivers* of engagement in water management; the *types of stakeholders* to be engaged; the *obstacles* to overcome; the *mechanisms* for engaging stakeholders; and the assessment of engagement processes, looking at *costs* and *benefits*. To support this analysis, an extensive online survey undertaken in 2014 helped collect qualitative and quantitative data on stakeholder engagement across a range of stakeholders, with various levels of interests and types of experience. Details on the survey’s sample, methodology and results are provided in [6]. We wish to clarify that although the results of the survey provide valuable insights and feedback on the reality of stakeholder engagement practices, they do not intend to be statistically comprehensive or reflect the multitude of views, arrangements and players in the field. Drafts of the resulting report were discussed with multiple stakeholders and experts, notably as part

of a multi-stakeholder workshop in Paris (France, 19 September 2014), at the International Water Association World Water Congress in Lisbon (Portugal, 24 September 2014), and at the 4th meeting of the OECD Water Governance Initiative in Paris (France, 24 November 2014). The final report was launched at the 7th World Water Forum (Republic of Korea, 13 April 2015) [6].

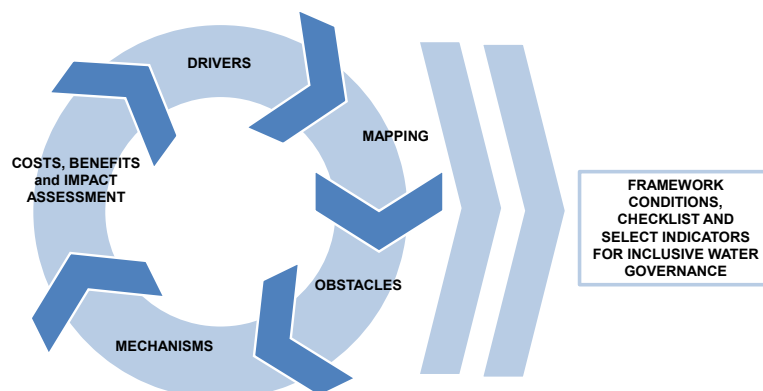


Figure 2. OECD Analytical framework of stakeholder engagement in water governance [23].

2.3. Main Findings

Taking a closer look at each of the five components of the analytical framework described in the previous paragraph, in this section we review the main findings from the OECD study before concluding with policy guidance in the form of six necessary conditions for successful stakeholder engagement.

To begin, we note that structural drivers—ranging from climate change; demographic trends of population and urbanisation growth; technological progress (e.g., rapid development of information and communication technologies); and socio-political changes such as the growing number and scale of citizen initiatives—have triggered a change in water governance paradigms to fit for the future. Simultaneously, conjunctural drivers, such as water-related disasters, policy reforms, large water-related projects such as dams, and democratic pressure have also pushed decision makers to explore new approaches that engage directly with stakeholders to solve water issues. Emergency-driven situations have an impact on stakeholder engagement as they shed light on the weaknesses of governments to properly address the risks, and are windows of opportunity for doing better through new innovative partnerships. Competition over water resources raises complex policy issues related to rivalry and excludability. Experiences in water allocation reforms in Canada, South Africa, the United States, as well as in England and Wales have shown that stakeholder engagement processes can be valuable to gain a deeper understanding of the preferences of different water users, reveal what a proposed allocation reform would mean for them and manage some trade-offs [31].

As policymakers seek to engage stakeholders, identifying *whom* to engage can be a daunting task. The OECD survey shed light on the categories of stakeholders involved in water governance. Evidence shows that beyond the “traditional” actors, newcomers are playing an increasing role in water management and need to be properly engaged. This is the case with property developers, who both generate future liabilities in terms of water management (and require proper coordination with flood protection, spatial planning and land use), but who also hold opportunities for innovative financing modes (e.g., property taxes). In addition, the corporate sector increasingly factors governance into their risk assessment frameworks and strategies. Long-term institutional investors, such as pension funds and insurance companies, are also now investing more in water infrastructure. Other players in the water landscape have yet to receive specific attention to ensure inclusiveness, particularly women, the youth, indigenous communities and the poor.

While stakeholder engagement processes vary greatly across places, common obstacles have been identified by the OECD survey, and the following barriers deserve particular attention:

- The lack of political will and leadership needed to shift the balance of power among stakeholders, including towards actors that may not share the same intentions, perspectives and interests;
- The lack of clarity on the use of stakeholder inputs (e.g., to build consensus, to take decisions, to share information, to raise awareness), which can result in mistrust and consultation “fatigue”;
- Institutional fragmentation with overlapping mandates and conflicting goals, possibly leading to inadequate co-operation across authorities, water-related sectors and scales;
- The lack of funding to sustain the engagement process, logistical expenses related to meeting venues or support material and the lack of competent and dedicated staff;
- Conflicts of interest and consultation “capture”, especially when certain groups of actors and lobbies are better organised to voice their concerns.

Results from the survey revealed a range of mechanisms to engage stakeholders, more or less formal, more or less costly, more or less timely and relevant. While stakeholders continue to use “tried-and-tested” instruments such as meetings, workshops and expert panels, innovative mechanisms are gaining traction because of technological advances and greater tools and openness. Information and communication technologies (ICTs), for instance, are a driving force of customised Internet applications [32], and the function of ICT platforms has taken new and varied dimensions as virtual meetings and vectors (e.g., social media, chat rooms, online forums) are used more frequently. For instance, the Water and Waste Services Regulation Authority of Portugal has developed a mobile application that provides relevant information to users in 278 municipalities on the quality of service provision.

Stakeholder engagement processes should be assessed. The OECD study finds that a compelling argument for evaluating stakeholder engagement is the need for accountability—to ensure the proper use of public or institutional resources, including stakeholders’ time and efforts. However, there are other reasons. As with any process, evaluation assists in determining whether stakeholder engagement was successful and in drawing up an inventory of lessons learned towards future improvements. Undeniably, involving stakeholders in water-related decision-making processes raises costs—be they monetary or otherwise, but it also generates benefits. The costs relate to different phases of the engagement process and concern the production and disclosure of needed information, operational expenses (facilities, travel, staff, overtime, *etc.*), opposition to final decisions, as well as delays in decision-making or implementation (Figure 3).

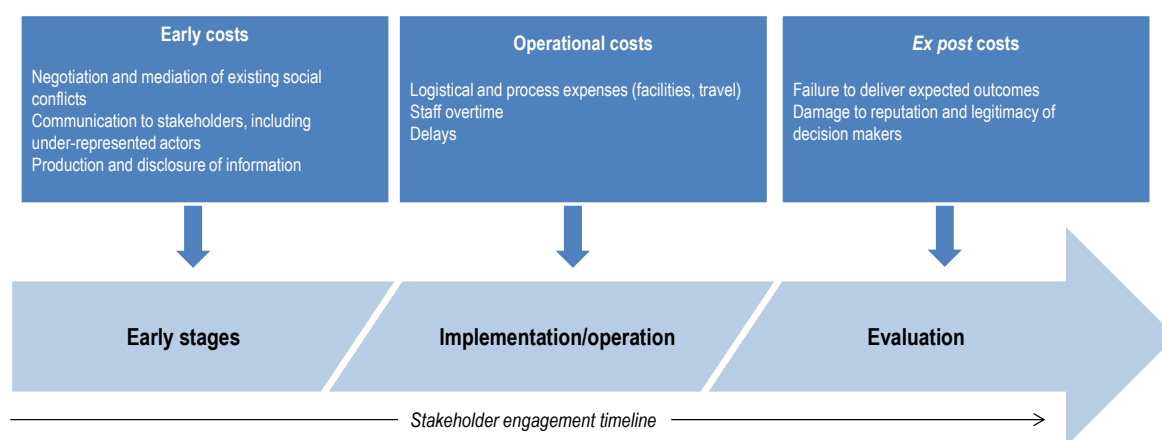


Figure 3. OECD typology of costs of stakeholder engagement in water governance [23].

The benefits were clustered into four categories (Figure 4): (i) acceptability and sustainability, in terms of effective implementation of water policy and projects, proper enforcement of regulation, political acceptability, and ownership of decisions and outcomes; (ii) social equity and cohesion, which is related to trust, confidence, customer satisfaction, as well as corporate social responsibility; (iii) capacity and knowledge development, which emanates from raising greater awareness, sharing information, and forming opinions; and (iv) economic efficiency, as it can assist in optimising cost-saving, value for money, time-saving, as well as broader economic benefits from policy coherence and synergies across sectors and projects. Costs and benefits accrue to different stakeholder groups at different times. Often, costs of stakeholder engagement are short term (e.g., operational costs), while benefits may arise during the engagement, immediately after on in the long run. Therefore, the sustainability of stakeholder engagement will not only depend on the net difference between aggregate costs and benefits, but also on how they are distributed between stakeholders, on stakeholders' willingness to bear them, and on adopting trade-offs to manage their dual temporality.

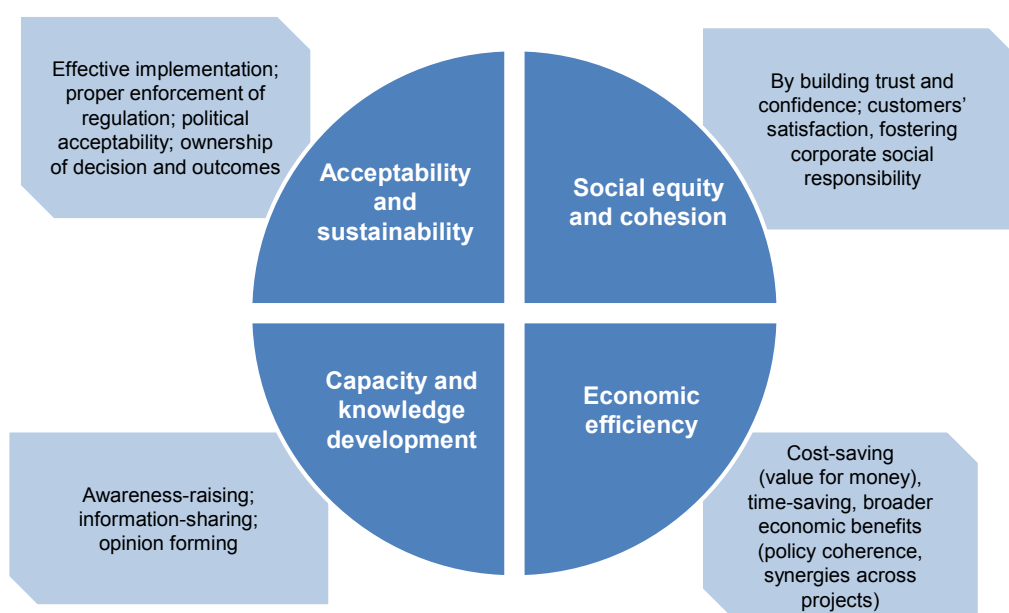


Figure 4. OECD typology of long-term benefits of stakeholder engagement in water governance [23].

2.4. Concluding Policy Guidance: Six Necessary Conditions for Inclusive Water Governance

The OECD study demonstrated that systemic, inclusive and foresighted approaches to water policy making are more likely to realise better outcomes, and returns on investment, in time and money. The case studies demonstrate how stakeholder engagement can lead to tangible outcomes. In France, a partnership between the energy supplier EDF and irrigators facilitates the optimisation of the water-energy nexus and led to the reduction of 90 million cubic meters in agricultural water consumption in the Durance Valley. In the Great Lakes region (Canada), multi-level engagement processes on water resources management between the province of Ontario, municipalities, local NGOs and First Nation communities have led to the formulation of common policy directions and long-term strategies for water protection.

For engagement processes to be relevant, a careful balance between what they try to achieve, the resources they require and whether they succeed in reaching the intended objectives is required. Although engagement processes cannot be easily replicated from one context to another, we conclude with the following proposed necessary conditions as policy guidance to decision-makers (Figure 5):

1. *Inclusiveness and equity*: Map all stakeholders who have a stake in the outcome or that are likely to be affected, as well as their responsibility, core motivations and interactions.
2. *Clarity of goals, transparency and accountability*: Define the ultimate line of decision making, the objectives of stakeholder engagement and the expected use of inputs.
3. *Capacity and information*: Allocate proper financial and human resources and share needed information for result-oriented stakeholder engagement.
4. *Efficiency and effectiveness*: Regularly assess the process and outcomes of stakeholder engagement to learn, adjust and improve accordingly.
5. *Institutionalisation, structuring and integration*: Embed engagement processes in clear legal and policy frameworks, organisational structures/principles and responsible authorities.
6. *Adaptiveness*: Customise the type and level of engagement as needed and keep the process flexible to changing circumstances.

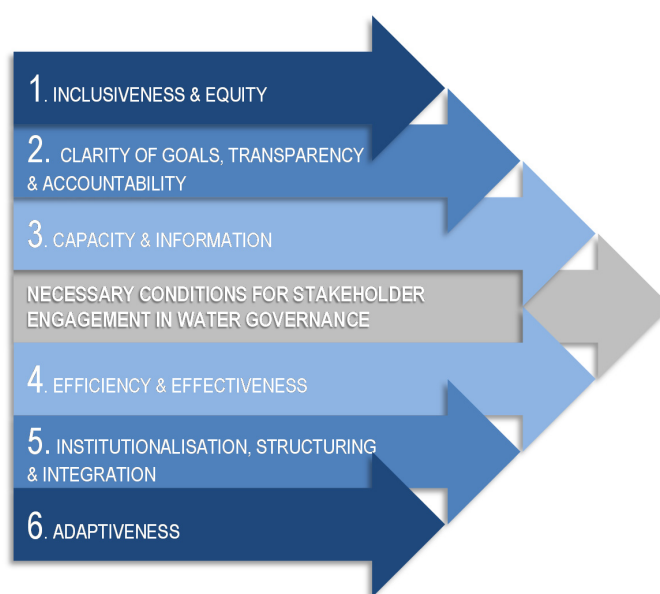


Figure 5. Necessary conditions for stakeholder engagement in water governance [23].

3. Part II: An Application of the OECD Necessary Conditions for Stakeholder Engagement to a Real-Life Experience: The Case of the OECD Water Governance Initiative

Part II presents the experience of the OECD Water Governance Initiative (WGI), a multi-stakeholder Policy Forum, and discusses its main characteristics through the lens of the six necessary conditions for inclusive water governance presented in Part I. This “6-condition prism” structures reflections on the first three years of operation of the Initiative that launched in 2013 [7] and provides a consultation platform to share knowledge and experience twice a year across over 100 stakeholders, within and outside the water community.

3.1. Why an OECD Initiative on Water Governance? Rationale and Inception

In 2011, the OECD was invited by the International Committee of the 6th World Water Forum to lead the governance discussions up to, and at the Forum, held on 12–17 March 2012 in Marseille (France). The responsibility entrusted to the OECD entailed bringing together a community of practitioners from around the world working on water governance to form a thematic taskforce, and devise the critical governance topics to be addressed at the forum [33]. At the time, this newly-created taskforce acknowledged that there had been no international platform or institution working solely and regularly on water governance issues. Rather, experts of water governance tended to gather on an ad hoc basis in the framework of major international rendezvous. A gap had to be filled to

maintain greater continuity of water governance discussions in between events, and to move from good intentions to concrete actions. The OECD-led taskforce served as a basis to spur such a collective action.

One year after the 6th World Water Forum, the OECD launched the Water Governance Initiative (WGI) in March 2013, under the patronage of the OECD Secretary General, Angel Gurría. The first meeting gathered 75 major stakeholders from the public, private and non-profit sectors [33]. In all, 25 countries were represented, including spearheads of regional water networks in Asia, North America, Latin America, Africa and Europe. During two days, participants discussed their expectations for such a multi-stakeholder network, underlining the need to bridge the information gap on relevant case studies, good practices and expertise. They shared the ambition to see the Water Governance Initiative play a role of consultation platform to help governments take the needed steps for effective water governance reforms, and to discuss ways forward in this field. From March 2013 to November 2015, the WGI had met on six occasions, on a biannual basis, on: 27–28 March 2013 (OECD Headquarters, Paris) [34], 7–8 November 2013 (OECD Headquarters, Paris) [35], 28–29 April 2014 (Madrid, Spain) [36], 24–25 November 2014 (OECD Headquarters, Paris) [37], 26 May 2015 (Edinburgh, United Kingdom) [38] and 2–3 November 2015 (OECD Headquarters, Paris) [39].

3.2. The OECD Water Governance Initiative through the 6-Condition Prism

To highlight the main features of the WGI, we drew on the six necessary conditions for inclusive water governance described in Part I and used them as a “reading grid” to shed light on the key, and at times quite unique, characteristics and activities of the network.

3.2.1. Inclusiveness and Equity

The WGI rests on a sound understanding that water policy involves a range of public stakeholders across ministries, departments and public agencies, and between various levels of governments. Further, private actors, end users, investment banks, infrastructure, service providers and environmentalists have an important role to play in water policy design and implementation, and have a stake in the outcome too. This is why the WGI adopted a multi-stakeholder membership, acknowledging that managing water is a shared responsibility across policymakers and stakeholders. Institutions and actors that have joined the WGI since 2013 are representatives of national governments, local, regional and basin institutions, private sector, NGOs, public and private service providers, regulators, international organisations, donor agencies, academia as well as independent experts. The 100+ delegates of the WGI come from 32 countries of which 24 are OECD countries [7].

The diverse membership of the WGI has enabled cross-fertilisation of knowledge and has provided multiple checks to gauge what works, what does not work and what could work better in terms of water governance. This has proven instrumental to enrich the WGI analysis and key messages, going beyond what a single stakeholder group could achieve. Such a contribution was particularly relevant during the peer-review of national policy dialogues carried out by the OECD in The Netherlands [26], Jordan [40], Tunisia [41], and Brazil [42], where the views and experience from the broad range of stakeholders represented in the WGI helped shape better guidance to governments. In addition, members share the latest developments on water governance during the meetings (*i.e.*, on-going research and projects, as well as recent or upcoming events), which helps co-ordinate on-going initiatives and finding synergies and complementarities across institutions represented in the network.

3.2.2. Clarity of Goals, Transparency and Accountability

Two ingredients are essential to make multi-stakeholder processes work: clear goals and an unambiguous line of decision making.

The WGI was founded on a clear set of strategic objectives [43]. It has had the ambition to: (i) advise governments in taking the needed steps for effective water reforms through policy dialogue across decision makers at different levels; (ii) provide a technical platform to discuss analytical work on water governance through peer-to-peer exchanges and knowledge sharing; (iii) provide a consultation

mechanisms to raise the profile of governance issues in the global water agenda; (iv) support the implementation of the governance targets designed for the 6th World Water Forum up to the 7th World Water Forum; and (v) contribute to the design of OECD Principles on Water Governance, and OECD Indicators on Water Governance to engage decision makers at all levels, within and outside the water community, to commit to action.

The WGI was also founded on a clear notion that it should not be considered as a formal body within the OECD structure, but rather as a technical network of experts, policymakers and practitioners gathering as part of the activities of the OECD Regional Development Policy Committee where the work on issues of multi-level governance, public investment, decentralisation, urban and rural policy, territorial indicators and spatial planning is carried out. This means, in practice, that no decisions are taken within the WGI, in which representatives have a consultative role.

3.2.3. Capacity and Information

The WGI has come at a cost, financially and in-kind. To sustain the network, financial and human resources have had to be deployed and have relied almost exclusively on voluntary contributions from the members.

The WGI did not establish a membership fee. Given the diversity of its membership, from large private companies to small NGOs, it would have been highly difficult to have a standard approach for all members. Therefore, costs related to running the Secretariat and organising the biannual meetings of the WGI were covered by select OECD countries and partner institutions that were convinced of the value added by the Initiative.

In addition, the functioning of the WGI has relied on the mobilisation of members' expertise on analytical content, the engagement of their respective networks, and the hosting of some meetings of the WGI in Madrid in 2014 [36] and Edinburgh in 2015 [38]. In addition, the Chair and members of the Steering Committee were actively engaged in the operation of the WGI (e.g., attending Steering Committee meetings and retreat, leading the thematic working groups, representing the WGI in international events, *etc.*) at their own costs.

Result-oriented engagement processes imply that stakeholders be aware and informed about the issues concerned. This is why the WGI has had steady and timely exchanges of information and iterations with its members. Regularly, members would be asked to comment on draft reports, papers, scoping notes, and meeting proceedings. They also contributed to the development of policy guidance and standards related to water governance in a bottom-up fashion through working groups' activities, which resulted in the adoption of the Principles on Water Governance [8] and their backing at Ministerial level in June 2015.

3.2.4. Efficiency and Effectiveness

How appropriate is an experimental platform such as the WGI for achieving better water governance? Clearly, some activities or approaches may not work or new needs may arise which deserve careful consideration. This is why timely evaluation and monitoring are needed to figure out whether stakeholder engagement processes are fit to deliver expected outcomes; the WGI was no exception to this principle.

Originally, the WGI was set-up for a trial period of two years after which its outcomes and value added would be assessed to determine whether its activities should continue and if adjustments were necessary. For this purpose, a satisfaction survey was conducted in May 2015 across the 115 members of the WGI [44]. The purpose was two-fold: to collect members' feedback on the first two years of activities, both in terms of process and outcomes; and to identify areas for improvement that would help shape the strategic orientations of the WGI for the next programme of work in 2016–2018. In all, 82 members of the WGI responded to the survey, a 71.3% response rate [44].

The main results of the satisfaction survey can be clustered in two sets: what has worked well and what could be improved upon (for detailed quantitative and qualitative results of the satisfaction

survey, see [7]). The first cluster of results showed a very high level of satisfaction for the WGI (above 90% of respondents). Survey respondents expressed a strong willingness to continue their involvement in the network, emphasising that the WGI is one of the few international forums that addresses water governance issues in a comprehensive and participative way, where mutual learning and experience-sharing can take place and international best practices can be identified and scaled up. The second cluster of results provided suggestions for improvement. Respondents called for refocusing the strategic objectives of the WGI onto new priority activities that include the collection of best practices and the development of indicators on water governance. This was recommended with a view to support the implementation of the OECD Principles on Water Governance in interested member and non-member countries; and the contribution to the global agenda, notably to raise the visibility of water governance in international processes such as the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, the preparation of the 8th World Water Forum, and climate change discussions. Survey respondents also suggested that the thematic scope of the WGI could be broadened to include new and rising water governance topics (e.g., drought and flood governance, the governance of the water-energy-food nexus, *etc.*). The conclusions drawn from the results of the satisfaction survey contributed to feed the second operating phase of the WGI over 2016–2018.

3.2.5. Institutionalisation, Structuring and Integration

There can be no stakeholder engagement without the proper incentives for bottom-up and inclusive decision-making. A clear set of rules and structure has been key to ensure the proactive engagement of members in the WGI.

The WGI was founded on a three-tier governance structure. First, a Secretariat, hosted by OECD's Public Governance and Territorial Development Directorate, is responsible for day-to-day activities. Second, a Steering Committee provides strategic guidance and ensures it is aligned with the OECD programme of work. It is composed of the co-founding institutions of the WGI who worked with OECD to organise the governance discussions at the 6th World Water Forum, *i.e.*, *Suez Environnement*, the *Association Scientifique et Technique pour l'Eau et l'Environnement*, the International Network of Basin Organisations, United Nations Organisation for Education, Science and Culture (UNESCO)'s International Hydrological Programme, the Water Integrity Network, Stockholm International Water Institute and Transparency International. A Chair, elected by the aforementioned institutions following a call for applications, presides over the Steering Committee. Third, members participate in the activities of the WGI and related working groups. The broader water community benefits from WGI's outputs and results, which are disseminated online to a larger audience.

The WGI was also founded on clear rules of operation. Terms of reference were prepared and adopted to define the roles and responsibilities of the Chair, the Steering Committee, and the Working Groups within which the activities of the WGI have taken place. In each case, deliverables and timetables were devised to guide the work. In addition, each member signed an endorsement letter to both formalise their adhesion to the WGI and to commit to specific contributions within the WGI's strategic objectives. Together, the terms of reference and endorsement letters have formed a strong accountability framework that has kept involvement levels high and allowed regular monitoring and reporting on progress achieved.

The WGI's terms of reference [43] also set out a bottom-up process by which four thematic working groups were created to formulate and discuss key policy messages on select areas of governance (stakeholder engagement, integrity and transparency, performance of utilities, basin governance), which contributed to the development of the OECD Principles on Water Governance. This approach allowed strong buy-in of stakeholders who produced the Daegu Multi-stakeholder Declaration on the OECD Principles on Water Governance gathering 65 signatures from the institutions actively engaged in the WGI, to mainstream the Principles into their activities and practices and to work further with the OECD to contribute to their implementation.

3.2.6. Adaptiveness

Open memberships coupled with an adaptive structure have been two key factors that have sustained the WGI.

New actors gain prominence in water management, and increasingly weight on water-related decision-making processes. The open and evolving membership of the WGI has made it possible to reflect this growing diversity. New members have joined the WGI on a regular basis since its creation, and the network has grown from 88 in 2013 to 115 in 2015. Newcomers have included energy companies as well as countries looking to improve their water policies (e.g., People's Republic of China, Colombia). Other actors, who are often under-represented in water-related stakeholder initiatives, have also joined the WGI, such as the Water Youth Network.

The organisation of WGI activities has relied on a "fit-for-purpose" logic. Initially, four separate and parallel working groups were tasked with formulating key thematic messages to contribute to the development of the OECD Principles on Water Governance. Their life expectancy was conditional on the adoption of the Principles. Today, the WGI is shifting its focus to new activities on the implementation of the Principles (as explained in the above section "efficiency and effectiveness"). These activities are no longer clear-cut from a thematic point of view, and require some adjustment of the underlying working groups that can support future work. This is why it has adjusted its governance structure to evolve towards two working groups dedicated to identifying and sharing best practices and supporting the development of water governance indicators.

3.3. Key Achievements and Lessons Learned

In the previous section, we looked at the key aspects that characterise the WGI, from how it was set up, to how it has carried out its activities to how it was assessed after its first period. The 6-condition prism used shows that the WGI has strived to meet, or "comply", with the six necessary conditions for effective stakeholder engagement in water governance presented in Part I. The prism shed light on the key achievements of the WGI during 2013–2015, most notably its contribution to the development of the OECD Principles on Water Governance. It highlights some factors, beyond the six necessary conditions, which have proven instrumental in ensuring the WGI remains relevant and resilient. In this section, we primarily focus on three of these success factors with the intention to provide inspiration to similar stakeholder engagement processes.

First, achieving a balanced representation of all stakeholders from the water sector requires constant efforts and is a long-term endeavour. One cannot always expect to reach an optimal degree of inclusiveness from the start. Some actors may have different levels of interest, or they may not have the necessary resources to be actively engaged. Certainly, the WGI has faced this challenge. Engaging with certain stakeholder groups has proven difficult as in the case of local governments, non-OECD Members, consumer associations, trade unions, and other sectors with an influence on water. While some institutions from these categories of stakeholders have joined the WGI (as pointed out in the previous section "institutionalisation, structuring and integration"), more could be done to broaden the scope of the WGI's membership, e.g., through proactive communication, including web-based, to better disseminate the results and achievements of the WGI to catalyse further interest. This is currently a cross-cutting responsibility of WGI's Steering Committee to, among other objectives, bridge membership gaps.

Second, "flexible rigidity" and regular communication are paramount for resilient stakeholder engagement. Finding the right balance between clear and collectively agreed-upon rules of operation, and adaptiveness is important to manage expectations, avoid disappointment and endure in the long term. A mutual understanding on what the WGI was aiming to achieve, and what it was not, contributed to that. Good preparation ahead of meetings is key for quality contributions to substantive discussions, in line with the expectations. In the case of the WGI, regular communication (e.g., emails, news items), and intermediary milestones events (e.g., webinars and workshops on specific topics

organised between the biannual plenary meetings) have proven instrumental to sustain the community of practice and ensure collective results.

Third, high-level support plays an important role to raise awareness and visibility. Leaders can set incentives and raise the profile of an engagement process. This has been the case for the WGI: the Secretary-General of the OECD, Angel Gurría, launched the network during the first WGI meeting through a video message and attended the 4th meeting. Four Ambassadors to the OECD from Korea, The Netherlands, Spain and France have also participated in WGI meetings. Moreover, the WGI welcomed high-level representatives from UNESCO, the World Water Council, the United Nations Secretary-General's Advisory Board on Water and Sanitation (UNSGAB), and the International Water Resources Association. The 3rd meeting of the WGI received the patronage of the Secretary General for International Co-operation and Development of Spain and Director of the Spanish Agency for International Co-operation for Development. Together, these leaders have reinforced the legitimacy of the WGI as a useful network for decision makers, and have helped to secure financial and in-kind support to sustain the WGI. Furthermore, they have contributed to raising the visibility of the network on the international stage. The WGI was at the forefront of major governance discussions in global events, including the Budapest Water Summit [45], the 2015 UN-Water Zaragoza conference [46] and the 7th World Water Forum [47]. The WGI also helped formulate key messages on governance that are featured in important international texts, such as the Ministerial Declaration of the 7th World Water Forum [48] and the Lisbon Charter on Guiding the Public Policy and Regulation of Drinking Water Supply, Sanitation and Wastewater Management Services [49].

4. Concluding Remarks: Capitalising on Promising Trends

Recent trends reflect the evolution of stakeholder engagement practices in water management. The 1992 Rio Declaration on Environment and Development introduced the emerging public involvement norms [50]. In the same year, the Dublin Statement on Water and Sustainable Development (adopted by the UN on 31 January 1992) included participation as one of its guiding principles [27], and the Agenda 21 envisaged public involvement in developing, implementing and enforcing environmental laws and policies, including management of freshwaters [51]. The Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters focused specifically on participation [25]. Similarly, all World Water Fora highlighted the critical role of multi-actor partnerships (Marrakech, 1997); participatory approaches (The Hague, 2000); alliances, networks and dialogues (Kyoto, 2003); co-ordination across levels of government (Mexico, 2006); the critical role of vulnerable and marginalised groups (Istanbul, 2009); the need for multi-stakeholder platforms (Marseille, 2012); and the necessity to put stakeholder engagement into practice and fit to local realities (Daegu, 2015) [47].

The newly adopted Sustainable Development Goals [52] include several references to water, governance and stakeholder engagement through not only a dedicated goal on water (No. 6) and a target on local participation, but also other governance-related goals referring to inclusiveness, gender equality, capacity building, policy coherence, multi-stakeholder partnerships, data, monitoring and accountability. In line with this context, the OECD Principles on Water Governance adopted by the 34 Member countries and endorsed at ministerial level, contain a dedicated block on trust and engagement [8], which calls for promoting stakeholder engagement for informed and outcome-oriented contribution to water policy design and implementation (Figure 6).

Unarguably, the increasing attention at the global level to stakeholder engagement demonstrates a shift in how decisions should be made in water management. "Top-down hierarchical models" are no longer prevalent and more transparent and holistic models that involve public and non-state actors, including the private sector and not-for-profit organisations, have made their way to the forefront of water policy making.

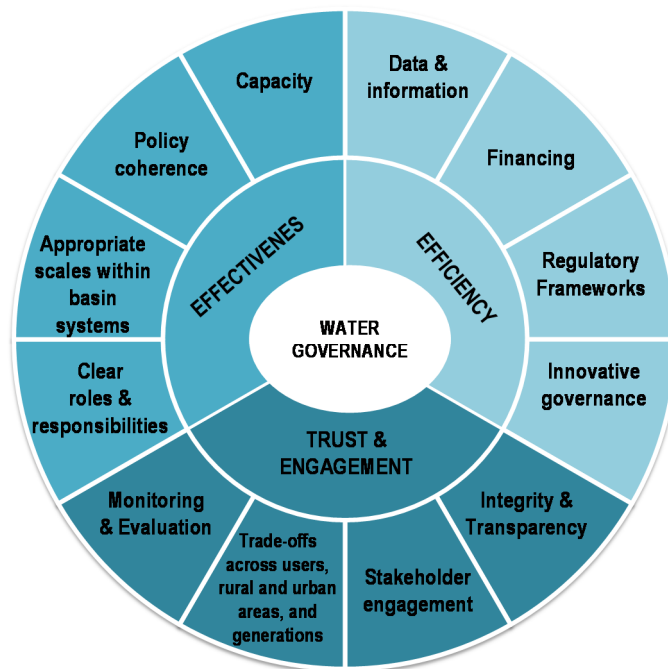


Figure 6. OECD Principles on Water Governance [8].

Looking forward, an apparent way to improve the implementation of engagement processes could be through greater knowledge on the distributional impacts of stakeholder engagement, particularly the danger of potentially inequitable distribution of benefits, and related policy guidance on whether, when and how to compensate the losers from a given water reform or project. Such knowledge could be derived from practical experiences within policy dialogues at different territorial (national, rural, urban, basin or cross border) levels. Public policies could, furthermore, benefit from improved tools for assessing the contribution of stakeholder engagement to better water quality and quantity management. The OECD is developing a set of water governance input, output and outcome indicators, including on stakeholder engagement, in the hope of providing a valuable contribution in this field.

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