

IWA World Water Congress

## Stakeholder Engagement for Effective Water Governance

Wednesday 24 September, 15h30-17h, Lisbon

### SUMMARY

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1. A session on Stakeholder Engagement for Effective Water Governance was jointly organised by OECD and Suez Environnement in the framework of the Working Group n°1 of the [OECD Water Governance Initiative](#). It took place as part of the [IWA World Water Congress](#) and gathered 70 participants with the objective to share and discuss the key messages from the project.

2. **Aziza Akhmouch**, OECD Water Governance Programme, opened the session with a presentation of the highlights from the draft report *Stakeholder Engagement for Effective Water Governance* and key results from the survey carried out across 215 stakeholders. Draft principles and indicators were also presented and will feed a broader set of OECD Principles and Indicators on water governance under development. The floor was then given to 4 panellists to share some reflections from the perspective of various categories of stakeholders.

3. From the point of view of civil society organisations, **Lesha Witmer**, Butterfly Effect, welcomed the development of principles on stakeholder engagement has a useful thinking process on why stakeholders want to be engaged. She stressed that stakeholder mapping exercises should give room for actors to self-declare whether they are stakeholders or not in the decision-making process, and the report should further investigate the reasons why they would not want to be engaged (e.g. lack of capacity, language barrier, etc.). She also noted that although the data gathered in the survey distinguishes promoters and targets of engagement processes, most answers are similar. A critical aspect of stakeholder engagement is also to adapt practices to the categories of actors targeted. In conclusion, she stressed that this work on stakeholder engagement is a stepping stone to start documenting and communicating on engagement practices.

4. Regarding the perspective of private water providers, **Joannie Leclerc**, Suez Environnement, explained that the interest of private utilities in the topic of stakeholder engagement grew following some negative experiences in the 1990s, characterised by poor due diligence and political bypass, which led to fragile contract. Lessons showed inclusive decision-making as a key factor for projects' sustainability. Progressing on stakeholder engagement has helped extending access to water for the poor, reshaping partnerships with clients and stakeholders to meeting technical, economic and social challenges (e.g. "Water for all" programme and Alliance contract in Australia in the case of Suez Environnement) and introducing corporate dialogue and performance reviews within companies. Stakeholder engagement is increasingly recognised by private operators as an effective way to manage services but further progress are needed, to move away from ad hoc engagement processes that do not deliver their full potential for meeting water challenges, and to build the business case for inclusive decision-making and for engaging further with partners. The draft report has shown there are some gaps in the levels of interests and practices regarding stakeholder engagement in the water sector (e.g. regulators, donor agencies). Also, beneficiaries

have little voice in the survey (e.g. agricultural actors, consumer associations, etc.). She pointed to the lack of evaluation of engagement processes as an obstacle to the development of a business case towards action-oriented stakeholder engagement and called for drivers of engagement to be further highlighted (e.g. market opportunities). The analytical framework suggested in the draft report can help to scale-up numerous initiatives. Future challenges will be to embed stakeholder dialogue and develop co-responsibility among stakeholders through mechanisms such as shareholding, innovative contracts, crowdsourcing, interest-pay-say. These instruments are likely to prevent engagement fatigue and provide concrete benefits while limiting the cost of engagement. In that regards, elected representatives have a critical role to play in supporting inclusive decision-making.

5. For the experience of public water utilities, **Karl Mot**, Vivaqua, spoke on behalf of Aqua Publica Europea and reflected on the long-term efforts of public water providers in stakeholder engagement. He welcomed the draft report's suggestions of tools to carry-out successful engagement processes. Aqua Publica Europea members have been actively involved in engagement activities with farmers, citizens and governments at various levels which has entailed adapting approaches to each types of actors targeted. He called for the implementation of institutional frameworks on stakeholder engagement to provide incentives and support for public utilities' efforts in setting-up multi-stakeholder dialogues on water.

6. On the perspective of academia, **Uta Wehn**, UNESCO-IHE, shared some comments on the methodology and content of the draft report. The survey collected an impressive amount of quantitative and qualitative data but should not be seen as representative and results should be carefully interpreted. As regards the different levels of engagement presented in the report, data production should be added as the first step, including information provided by civil society. She also highlighted that the report mostly reflects the view of promoters of engagement process and suggested to further explore how institutions and organisations are granted this role, and why.

7. A **lively discussion** took place among participants to share comments and experiences regarding:

- The different levels of progress between water projects and water policies: the latter often misses the appropriate framework. It was suggested that different platforms for stakeholder engagement could be designed for water policy; water planning and integrated management; and water and sanitation services;
- The link between the lack of access to water and stakeholder engagement;
- Defining and redefining the objectives of stakeholder engagement: it implies improving water governance and the capabilities of institutions to effectively manage water resources and services;
- The impact of cultural backgrounds on stakeholder engagement practices;
- The positive experience of the Northern Ireland regulator regarding customer involvement in defining service requirement;
- Recommendations to better manage cases of stakeholder engagement fatigue;

8. **Aziza Akhmouch** explained that the need to provide guidance for policymakers had triggered the work on stakeholder engagement and that they were the targeted audience for the principles. However, the Checklist for Actions to be developed could potentially be trickled down to also help stakeholder engagement for planning and service management. Also, stakeholder engagement should not be seen as an end in itself but as a governance instrument and an indicator of success regarding service performance in terms of equity.

9. **Uta Wehn** underlined that the rationale for setting-up stakeholder engagement was to improve governance. As such, the identification of obstacles to engagement processes, and the assessment of costs and benefits should be based on the perspective of the stakeholders targeted by the process.

10. **Lesha Witmer** explained that stakeholder engagement could have helped to improve access to water by encouraging the use of existing assets. For what concerns the Principles, she stressed that they apply to water policy-making and provision and can contribute to institutional strengthening for all engagement approaches. Finally, to avoid frustrations, there needs to be a clear understanding on the trade-offs in stakeholders' expectations which requires information-sharing.