A Guide to Multistakeholder Work
Lessons from The Water Dialogues
Hilary Coulby
Acknowledgements

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Introduction

What this guide is about

This guide summarises the tools and methods used and the lessons learned from The Water Dialogues – a project that brings together a wide range of stakeholders to address a highly controversial issue around the privatisation of water supply and sanitation services with the aim of improving policy and practice. Although its contents are rooted in the experience of The Water Dialogues project, the guide should be useful to anyone who is planning to develop their own form of multistakeholder work.

As well as providing tips on developing and maintaining multistakeholder processes, the guide also includes examples of potential difficulties and strategies for avoiding or resolving these.

The Water Dialogues: a brief introduction*

The Water Dialogues set out to examine the contentious issue of whether and how the private sector can contribute to the delivery of affordable and sustainable water supply and sanitation services, especially to poor communities. Along the way, some national Dialogues widened their objectives to explore best practice in the sector: what works, how it works and why it works.

The overall aim of the project is to contribute to meeting the Millennium Development Goals for water and sanitation by generating information that can contribute to the development of successful sector policies by governments, and garnering support for these policies from international donors. In addition, the project hopes to demonstrate how multistakeholder dialogues improve the basis for policy-making and the overall governance of the sector.

National dialogues were established in Brazil, South Africa, Uganda, Indonesia and the Philippines. These Dialogues differ from some other international multistakeholder processes in that most activities take place at the national and sub-national levels, that is, at the level of implementation, where findings can feed directly into existing national sector reform processes.


Multistakeholder processes create safe spaces for constructive dialogue between stakeholders with diverse views and competing interests. Where groups have previously been suspicious or hostile towards each other, they also build trust and mutual respect. In this way, they create an environment in which stakeholders are able to freely share experiences and knowledge and generate new ideas for resolving problems and reforming policies and practices. They also have the potential to improve governance and accountability systems by demonstrating that, if decision makers engage with all stakeholders when developing new policies, these are more likely to succeed and attract broad ownership.

Why this guide has been produced

“We have done something really quite unusual and it’s very important to record where we got to and how we got there because other people may want to start stakeholder initiatives in the future and we have learnt some valuable lessons.” (The Water Dialogues IWG member)

When the foundations for The Water Dialogues were being laid, there were very few sources of guidance for conceptualising and planning multistakeholder dialogues. Thus the methodologies used, the governance and executive structures built and the activities undertaken during the Dialogues evolved from a continuous process of experimentation and reflection.

The desire to fill the gap in user-friendly information prompted the project to document the processes involved in creating and sustaining The Water Dialogues - a crucial step toward developing this guide.

Participants in the project felt that the process itself had substance and value, and wanted to capture the essence of multistakeholder work, review the strategic challenges and dynamic social interactions involved and draw operational lessons. In addition, documenting the process would be a way to demonstrate to outsiders that the work was truly multistakeholder, inclusive and participative, transparent and accountable.
Recording the process also provided a vehicle for reflection by members of the Dialogues and for structuring their complex experiences and their changing attitudes and feelings in relation to each other and the project. And it enabled the different groups involved in The Water Dialogues to share information about how to do things and learn from each other’s experiences.

All those involved in The Water Dialogues have learned much from their experiences at international and national levels. Their aim is that anyone intending to launch similar initiatives will benefit from their reflections on the strengths and weaknesses of the options they pursued, the issues that arose at different stages of the project’s development and the tools they employed.

Who should use the guide?

This guide is aimed at individuals and organisations – including national and local governments, industry, NGOs and CSOs, trade unions, donors, multilateral organisations and others – who want to know more about multistakeholder processes and how to convene and maintain them. It is also for use by members of The Water Dialogues National Working Groups (NWGs) and International Working Group (IWG) as a tool for reflection on past work and an aid for future projects.

How to use the guide

The different sections of the guide allow readers to dip in and out of the text and go directly to the topics that interest them most. (The contents page provides a useful list of all the sub-headings within sections.)

Experience indicates that, by their very nature, no two multistakeholder processes will ever be the same. “MSPs will have to be unique to their issue, scope, objectives, participants, resources and so on. There is no ‘one-size-fits-all’ formula.”¹ For this reason, the experiences, lessons, tips and tools in the following pages are a guide to action, not a definitive instruction manual.

¹ Hemmati, M., 2001, Multi-Stakeholder Processes for Governance and Sustainability – Beyond Deadlock and Conflict.
Section One
An Introduction To Multistakeholder Processes

1.1 What is a multistakeholder process?

In this guide, a multistakeholder process describes an activity that brings together a very diverse range of organisations and individuals to address a specific issue. Participants would usually include representation from most of the following groups: national and/or local government; public sector; private sector; trade unions and/or workers’ associations; academia; and civil society groups including NGOs, women’s groups, consumer groups, environmental groups, faith groups.

The term “multistakeholder process” is used to describe a variety of different processes. These range from activities involving a number of governments, to ones where actors from two different perspectives get together (for example, businesses and governments), to initiatives involving a broad spectrum of actors and viewpoints. But some initiatives that would fall under the definition offered in the previous paragraph do not use the term multistakeholder, preferring for example, the label “global action networks” or “multi-sectoral partnerships”.

Moreover, multistakeholder processes can vary a great deal in terms of their “purpose, scope, complexity, level of engagement (local to global), size and diversity of partners.” They vary also from “single, one-off events to processes going on over several years.” They may deal with any issue and engage in anything from simple dialogue to agenda-setting and implementation activities.

Nevertheless, analysis of the literature on multistakeholder initiatives reveals that these share some common characteristics: the involvement of two or more different parties; a voluntary and collaborative nature; a common purpose; sharing risks and responsibilities; understanding that all participants will both contribute and gain something; and the conviction that working with diverse actors will achieve more than working alone.

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2 Waddell and Khagram use Global Action Networks to describe groups, “formed by diverse stakeholders who are interested in a common issue, and who agree to work together to achieve extraordinary results.” Waddell, S. and Khagram, S., 2007
3 Caplan et al describe the work of Building Partnerships for Development as bringing together multi-sectoral groups whose “perspectives and motivations vary widely however, and reaching consensus often proves difficult. Different work processes, methods of communication and approaches to decision-making are common obstacles.” Caplan, K., et al., 2001 and Building Partnerships for Development in Water and Sanitation website http://www.bpd-waterandsanitation.org/bpd/web/w/www_3_en.aspx
4 Malena, C., 2004
5 Hemmati, M., 2002
6 Mikheyev, Andrei, 2005, Multi-stakeholder partnerships: definition, principles, typology, and partnering process.
1.1.1 The Potential Value of Multistakeholder Processes

“The critical contribution that they can provide on global issues is their ability to create consensual knowledge and action among diverse stakeholders.”


Multistakeholder Processes: Some Definitions

“Multi-stakeholder partnerships involve two or more organisations from across the public, private and civil society spheres that enter into a collaborative arrangement. Multi-stakeholder partnerships move beyond unilateral actions and conventional contracts by pooling complementary resources and genuinely sharing the risks and benefits.” — The Partnership Declaration, undated

“In multi-stakeholder networks, actors from civil society, business and governmental institutions come together in order to find a common solution to a problem that affects all of them. Problems approached by such networks often affect people across national boundaries, tend to be very complex and are not sufficiently understood. In multi-stakeholder networks, information concerning a problem is gathered from different sources, learning takes place, conflicts between participants are addressed and cooperation is sought.” — Roloff, J., 2008

“alliances between parties drawn from government, business and civil society that strategically aggregate the resources and competencies of each to resolve the key challenges... and which are founded on principles of shared risk, cost and mutual benefit.” — Warned, M. and Greener, P., 2003

By utilising a greater variety of skills and resources than those available to an individual, multistakeholder work delivers the same benefits as working in teams, partnerships and alliances. But multistakeholder processes can deliver much more than this. Nelson lists the ways in which multistakeholder groups can increase effectiveness through:

- Accommodating broader perspectives and more creative approaches to problem solving
- Addressing complex and interdependent problems in a more integrated and comprehensive manner
- Shifting away from “command and control” to more informed joint goal-setting
- Obtaining the “buy-in” of beneficiaries and local “ownership” of proposed solutions, thereby ensuring greater sustainability of outcomes
- Offering more flexible and tailored solutions
- Speeding the development and implementation of innovative solutions
- Acting as a catalyst for policy innovation

Of course, it would be irresponsible to oversell multistakeholder processes as the universal solution to problems of policy-making, governance or development. They can be expensive and are time consuming. And, not all governments are enthusiastic about their potential, as evidenced in a UN meeting where some argued that multistakeholder initiatives are “neither a useful lens for looking at issues of governance nor an appropriate relational model of policy-making.”

But others, including The Water Dialogues, believe that such initiatives could be part of an improved and more effective form of governance in which governments, businesses and other institutions become more responsive to a wide range of stakeholders in the formation of their policies and practices.

Environmental issues have given impetus to the development of multistakeholder processes. According to the UN, “One of the fundamental prerequisites for the achievement of sustainable development is broad public participation in decision-making.” Indeed, it is almost impossible to address successful problems such as forest conservation, the reduction in carbon emissions, or the distribution of scarce water resources, without the involvement of multiple stakeholders.

Multistakeholder dialogues increase the level and quality of consultation between those involved in, or affected by, an issue. Multi-locational, multistakeholder dialogues can link local actors to national decision-makers, and consequently, both these parties to regional and multilateral institutions and major donors, thereby helping to fill the “local content” gap that is often missing in their policy development. To the extent that all participants...
are treated as equals, they can also empower previously ignored groups to take part in goal setting and problem solving. Where communities are involved and brought into direct contact with those that govern them, or provide them with goods and services, this can build new institutional structures that increase local democracy and accountability.

Multistakeholder work can also help to increase trust and respect between those participating, for example, between governments (central and local) and communities or between service providers and their customers. Hemmati\(^\text{14}\) reports that participants see this as very important. The transformation of relationships between individuals and groups whose dislike of one another’s views once left them unable to listen to each other is a key outcome of The Water Dialogues and in some countries has released a logjam in relation to policy-making.

Finally, multistakeholder processes produce information and an assessment from an independent source seen as unbiased. The very nature of genuine multistakeholder groups, in which participants have different perspectives, knowledge and understanding, means that all reviews will be subjected to rigorous debate. Consequently, the conclusions and recommendations these groups produce will be more balanced than those prepared by single interest groups.

1.2 The Example of The Water Dialogues

The Water Dialogues multistakeholder dialogues were founded in response to the controversy over private sector participation (PSP) in the water and sanitation sector.\(^\text{15}\) The controversy had been growing because the IMF, World Bank and many bilateral donors were seeking to reduce the role of the state in the developing world by promoting privatization or private sector participation (PSP) in public services, including water services. These institutions hoped that private sector involvement would provide the large injections of new money needed to increase quality and coverage in water services. They also believed that private companies would be less vulnerable than public utilities to political interference and corruption.

The promotion of PSP in water drew vigorous criticism from public sector bodies, NGOs, trade unions, political activists, people’s organisations and consumer groups. Often, their concerns were linked to broader issues: globalisation and its impact on national sovereignty; corporate responsibility and accountability; and global economic justice and environmental protection. Water aroused intense passions and many groups argued that it was wrong to make a profit from the provision of this basic right. Some groups felt that drinking water should be free, at least for the poorest people. Others believed that the private sector would not serve the needs of poor communities.

As the debate became increasingly polarized and heated, allegations regarding large price rises, the failure to improve or extend services, or the disconnection of consumers who failed to pay bills resulted in dramatic conflicts over private sector water services in Cochabamba, Bolivia; in Buenos Aires, Argentina; and in Manila, the Philippines. At international meetings on water, pro- and anti-PSP groups stopped speaking to each other and instead traded accusations. By the beginning of the new century, the result was a policy stalemate of sorts among governments, donors, private companies and public utilities on how best to move ahead with expanding water and sanitation services, and improving access.

“People were talking of the private sector being right or wrong rather than talking about what would work for the needs of the poor.” (IWG Founding Member)

“These controversies, which were largely ideological battles, were standing in the way of improved water supply and sanitation.” (Donor to The Water Dialogues)

Towards A New Understanding Of Governance

Multistakeholder processes have an impact on governance and accountability. Zadek\(^\text{2}\) believes that they are capable of improving the direct delivery of public services and infrastructure, as well as designing, promoting and monitoring new rules for market and non-market actors.

The Prince of Wales Business Leaders Forum has a similar view:

“There is a shift taking place in our understanding and practice of governance. Governance used to be principally about what governments do. Today, the concept is increasingly about balancing the roles, responsibilities, accountabilities and capabilities of:

- Different levels of government – local, national, regional and global; and
- Different actors or sectors in society – public, private and civil society organisations and individual citizens.”

Source: Creating the Enabling Environment, The Prince of Wales Business Leaders Forum

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\(^{13}\) See Box in Section 4.1.3 and Section 7.1 for further information on creating an environment where everyone can operate as equals

\(^{14}\) Hemmati, M., 2001, pp 114-116

The founders of The Water Dialogues recognized that the status quo was not a viable option and the paralysis in sector policy-making needed to end. Their aim was to establish constructive dialogues and move away from unproductive, confrontational and empty debates on the issue. They believed that without working together across the divide, there would be little chance of reaching any solutions to the question of private sector participation (PSP) in water and sanitation services.

To achieve their aims the founding members wanted to create safe spaces where people could come together for constructive discussions. The idea was that this would allow participants to increase their understanding of each other's perspectives and enable them to generate information to governments, donors and other decision-makers regarding appropriate policy responses.

The hope was that the outcome of dialogue and research processes would feed directly into existing national sector reform processes and eventually into the global policy arena. To make this more likely, governments were to be fully involved in the national dialogues. This would avoid the problems experienced by previous multistakeholder processes where responsible government agencies were only called on to adopt recommendations after the fact.

**Specific Characteristics of The Water Dialogues**

The Water Dialogues project:

- is focused on an extremely controversial issue - whether and how the private sector should be involved in water and sanitation services - that is the subject of fierce conflict
- involves a wide range of stakeholders - including those who disagree strongly with each other
- entails the long term engagement of a consistent group of stakeholders to enable trust and respect to be built between them
- engages all stakeholders as equal contributors in equal representation on a level playing field in terms of resources so that everyone can participate fully
- involves stakeholders who are all actively engaged in the water and sanitation sector, often in senior positions
- is founded on the voluntary, unremunerated participation of all stakeholders
- takes place in six locations – Brazil, Indonesia, Philippines, South Africa, Uganda and at international level
- gives primary emphasis to national level dialogues as these are closest to the site of implementation
- enables south-south exchanges of experiences and perspectives among participants
Why debates about water are so passionate

- Debates about water generate strong emotions in a way that discussions about electricity, for example, do not.
- The foundations for these strong feelings lie in both the knowledge of human dependency on water and its symbolic significance.
- Fresh water is essential for human life not only as a vital component of the human body or as a liquid for drinking but also as a basic resource required to grow food. This means by definition, that everyone alive has access to water, however poor its quality or difficult it is to reach.
- Human civilisation has always been heavily dependent on water and water systems, and continues to be so today. “In Farsi, the first word in the dictionary is ab, water. Abadan - derived from it - is the word for civilised.”
- Water is the subject of a rich array of myths, beliefs and symbols. “Few elements have influenced the symbolic, ritual and metaphysical values of mankind as much as water. It is deeply rooted, in a highly emblematic manner, in our cultural traditions.”
- In many cultures, water is seen as the source of life and has spiritually cleansing powers. For Hindus, all water is sacred, particularly rivers – sites of convergence between rivers carry a special significance and are especially sacred. In European cultures, water is one of the four classical elements: air, earth, fire and water. For African cultures, water is energy, vigour, strength and resilience. It is the “water of life” when it purifies, the “water of death” when it corrupts. Iba Ndiaye Diadji sums this up: “Water is always and everywhere full of the spiritual. It is the only being that can change its powers to suit circumstances.”
- Water plays an essential role in the religious observances of many faiths.
  - In Islam, water is important for cleansing and purifying before prayers.
  - Similar practices occur in both Hinduism and Judaism, where water is used to restore or maintain a state of ritual purity.
  - In Christianity, children and adults are baptised using water.
- It is no surprise that the underlying symbolic associations and associated religious, family and cultural values can lead to fervent, emotional and fiery debates over control and access to water and who should profit from, or pay for it.


**Bouguerra, M. L., ibid

***Iba Ndiaye Diadji, “From ‘water-life’ to ‘water-death’ or the foundations of African artistic creation, yesterday to tomorrow” quoted in Bouguerra, above
AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE WATER DIALOGUES

Inspired by the recommendations of the stakeholders who provided the mandate for the project at the Berlin multistakeholder meeting in 2004, The Water Dialogues International Working Group drew up an ambitious list of intended outcomes for the work:

- Increased learning, understanding and awareness about the impacts of private-sector-participation among stakeholders and decision-makers at all levels
- Reduction in conflict and more rational debate in the countries where the project operates between stakeholders with different perspectives on the issue arising from wider knowledge of the roles, responsibilities, risks, rewards and results of PSP, especially at local and national levels
- New or improved processes for water and sanitation sector (WSS) policy review and reform in the project countries through consultation with a wide range of stakeholders, including poor communities and their advocates
- Strengthened public sector and governments ready to take responsibility and be accountable for improved access to water and sanitation services
- Outputs that are of value to all stakeholders in the sector in increasing their understanding and awareness of the range of service provision options
- Guidance and recommendations for governments and donors, broadly endorsed by national and international stakeholders, on private sector involvement in WSS service provision
- Guidance and recommendations for improved policies for other key sector actors
- Accelerated action on WSS service delivery to poor communities resulting from broad-based agreements at national and local levels on appropriate roles for the private sector in WSS services
- Improved and strengthened governance over water supply and sanitation services at local levels through active participation of WSS stakeholders
- Global recognition and promotion of a range of options for WSS service delivery, financing, management and governance that are appropriate to national socio-economic conditions.
Section Two

Designing And Planning Multistakeholder Dialogues

This section outlines a series of steps to take in the early stages of developing a multistakeholder process. The first thing to do is to decide whether this type of process is the best way to deal with your issue. If so, is there sufficient interest from other stakeholders? The next step is to decide the type of multistakeholder process that would be most suitable. The final step is to answer these interrelated questions: what do you want to achieve; where are the major decision-makers; who are the key stakeholders; and where should your process be located?

2.1 Step One: Is a multistakeholder process the best way forward?

Any guide to multistakeholder work should probably begin with a health warning: these processes take time, energy and resources. They require commitment, patience and flexibility from all involved. It is much simpler and more comfortable to organise a traditional project or to dialogue only with others who share and reinforce your views.

So before getting started, it is worth stopping to think about whether a multistakeholder process is the best, or the only way to deal with the issues you face. The brief questionnaire below may help:

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<tr>
<th>QUESTION</th>
<th>YES</th>
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<tr>
<td>Is the issue or project highly visible and potentially controversial?</td>
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<td>Is the issue complex, affecting and affected by a number of different players?</td>
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<td>Does the issue affect ordinary people/ communities whose views should be heard?</td>
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<td>Is buy-in from different stakeholders necessary to resolve the issue?</td>
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<td>Is the stalemate between opposing sides crippling progress towards better policies?</td>
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<td>Have your efforts to improve policies and practices been disappointing?</td>
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<td>Are there major pieces of information missing from your analysis?</td>
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<td>Do you lack knowledge or understanding about the perspectives of other stakeholders, including ordinary people and communities?</td>
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<td>Do you need the credibility of working with a different set of actors to get your message across and help decision-makers to change their minds?</td>
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<td>Do you wish relationships between stakeholders in the issue could be different?</td>
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<td>Are you tired of shouting matches with the opposition?</td>
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<td>Are you worried about a group/actor that is speaking out against your organisation regarding the issue?</td>
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<td>Are you willing to listen thoughtfully to people with whom you disagree?</td>
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<td>Are you open to learning from people with whom you don't usually interact/agree?</td>
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<td>Could you adjust the way you think about the issue without fear that this will harm your value system?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do you have the patience and determination to see through a process that may take a long time?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Are you flexible; do you like new things and enjoy a challenge?</td>
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</table>

If you answered “no” to most of these questions, then it would be wise to think of another way to deal with your issue. For instance, would a more traditional format work instead? Would you miss anything significant if dialogue were only with allies, or with those who broadly share your views and would not be disruptive or challenging? On the other hand, if most of your answers were “yes” then a multistakeholder dialogue could be the answer.
Multistakeholder dialogues are about listening, learning, sharing and generating information and evidence to achieve specific objectives. They take time and can be frustrating and challenging but can build new and lasting relationships that generate better behaviours, policies and more democratic approaches to policy-making.

### 2.2 Step Two: Who else is interested in a multistakeholder process

Before attempting to launch a multistakeholder process, it is essential to find out if there is sufficient interest and support from other stakeholders.

One reasonably inexpensive way to explore the level of support is to invite stakeholders to a “First Meeting” to present the idea and ask for their views (see Section 3.1 and 3.2).

Alternatively, if you envisage a large multistakeholder process, especially a multi-locational or global process, it may be worth conducting a more systematic assessment that considers:

- how stakeholders see the issue
- the key questions they want to see answered
- which stakeholders are most interested in the process; and which are most opposed to it
- the type of process people think would be the most helpful
- which geographical areas are most enthusiastic about participating.

This type of assessment exercise, or scoping study, will require resources but may provide the basis for further fundraising, especially if part of the assessment is to research the views of potential donors.

### 2.3 Step Three: What is the best form for the process to take?

“It is crucial to invest sufficient time and resources in carefully designing MSPs (multistakeholder processes) in order to avoid failure. Failure can result in stakeholders walking away from dialogue, the inability of a group to make decisions or the lack of implementation of the decisions reached.”

There are many options available for convening multistakeholder processes. Those presented here are only as a starting point for further thinking and discussion among stakeholders; they do not represent a complete range of alternatives, nor attempt to outline the numerous hybrids and variations of the forms set out below.

Whichever option you choose, it is important to be aware that it may look more organised and straightforward on paper than it turns out to be in reality. A multistakeholder dialogue “... is never a neat, organised, tidy concerto. More often, the process becomes a messy, loose-knit, exasperating, sprawling cacophony. Like pluralist democracy, it is the absolute worst form of consensus building... except for all the others.”

#### 2.3.1 Option One: Use an existing process or organisation

Instead of taking an independent route, the multistakeholder process can integrate with an existing initiative that is adaptable to the issue. Existing initiatives will have their own specific remit, so it is important to assess the match between aims and approaches. The greater the level of correspondence between aims and approaches, the greater the chance of effective outcomes.

Alternatively, is there a local, national or international body with significant influence that could support the process, not just with resources but also by demonstrating their interest and confidence in the process? The backing of such an organisation could make the task easier and would help in getting key stakeholders together.

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16 Hemmati, M., 2001, p210
17 The options laid out include those that were presented to the Berlin Multistakeholder Meeting in 2004
18 Asmal, K., 2000 First World Chaos, Third World Calm, The Guardian, 26 September 2000, UK

http://www.dams.org/news_events/media253.htm

NOTE: Getting people to attend will probably involve one-to-one meetings to explain the project as well as personal phone calls. Clear proposals regarding the purpose and form of the process need to be prepared in advance for the meeting to yield positive results.
SCOPING INTEREST IN THE DIALOGUES: What The Water Dialogues Did

Working collaboratively, the founding members of the project (themselves a multistakeholder group), developed and guided a global scoping study.* Six months of research involving interviews with more than 300 stakeholders from 13 countries demonstrated a strong demand for multistakeholder dialogues that would address the conflicts and controversies linked to private sector participation (PSP). The scoping study noted that respondents felt that previous assessments of PSP had been insufficiently comprehensive and unsatisfactory in terms of participation. Interestingly, the research revealed that the closer people were to operational issues, the stronger the demand for a multistakeholder initiative.

“The scoping study certainly helped because what we got back from the study was that quite contrary to what the World Bank and others were saying, there was a real need for a review of this sort, and the closer you got to the people working on the ground - and in real situations - the more important they thought it was. Go to the WB and they would say this is yesterday’s argument and it is not relevant. And then you go and talk to people in Jakarta or Johannesburg and they would say we need this and we need this now.” (Founder member of The Water Dialogues)

Following the scoping study, a stakeholder workshop was held in Berlin in June 2004. This was attended by sixty participants representing a wide range of constituencies and viewpoints.* The workshop reviewed and debated the findings of the scoping study and agreed that further action on PSP was needed that would promote the achievement of international goals for water supply and sanitation. Presented with a range of options for taking the process forward, participants opted for an “iterative dialogue” through which national multistakeholder reviews, operating to an agreed methodology, would feed into a global discussion and review.**

After the Berlin Workshop, five countries – Brazil, Indonesia, the Philippines, South Africa and Uganda expressed an interest in participating in the multistakeholder initiative and established National Working Groups (NWGs). The NWGs then asked the founding members to continue their work at international level and oversee the process as an International Working Group (IWG).


** Participants included representatives from all regions, the domestic and international private sector, local and national government, regulators, public utilities, trade unions, NGOs, community groups, international associations and networks, research institutions and donors.
A modified approach would be to have an existing institution serve as host to undertake the multistakeholder process review as a new initiative. One example is the role of FORKAMI (Forum Komunikase Kualitas Air Minum Indonesia), an NGO seen as neutral, which supported and hosted the Indonesian Water Dialogues. The initiative could have its own mandate and terms of reference defined by stakeholders, which could follow other organisational models such as those described below. This option tends to be popular with donors who are resistant to the formation of new institutions.

**Pros**

- Where a host organisation or institution can provide accommodation, office services and coordination support, this can reduce significantly the need for independent funds.
- Housing a dialogue in an existing organisation with a genuine interest in a multistakeholder process and is willing to take a lead, at least in the early stages of project development, ensures the process is backed by a committed champion.

**Cons**

- It may be difficult to find an organisation that is acceptable to all stakeholders and is willing to play host to groups that may oppose its policies and practices.
- There is a danger of the host organisation driving or dominating the process.

### 2.3.2 Option Two: Multistakeholder panels

These come in a variety of shapes and sizes. They may consist of experts with different perspectives and experiences, or of representatives of all the key stakeholders, or consist of “eminent persons” who are not necessarily experts on the issue. Or the panel may comprise a mix of all three.

Such panels can undertake case studies, commission research, hold public hearings or other participatory processes, accept testimony and inputs from a variety of stakeholders, and produce recommendations for reforms of policies, practices and standards.

**Pros**

- A panel of *experts* on the issue is likely to work fast and, as a result, may be less expensive and/or take less time to reach conclusions than other options. Depending on the reputations of panelists, it also can have high-level influence with decision-makers and institutions.
- A panel of *stakeholders* could be expected to have a wider focus and be more likely to address broader social, cultural and political aspects of the issue. This could mean that a stakeholder panel would be better at resolving issues that are the source of conflict. While a stakeholder panel may require more time than an expert panel, it could still be cost-effective.
- A panel of *eminent persons* not involved in the issue can be a means of rising above issues that are polarizing stakeholders. Eminent persons might have minds that are more open, be more willing to consider evidence and perspectives of a variety of cases and stakeholders, and be able to move beyond fixed positions. The panel could invite testimony from diverse stakeholders including poor communities. This type of panel would be likely to reach conclusions and deliver a concrete “product”.

**EXAMPLE**

The World Commission on Dams (WCD) is a good example of a multistakeholder panel. Chaired by South Africa’s then water minister Kader Asmal, it consisted of 12 members from governments, industry, academia, and civil society. During its two-year lifetime, the WCD carried out the most comprehensive evaluation of large dams ever undertaken. It commissioned 130 technical papers, studied seven dams and three dam-building countries in depth, reviewed another 125 dams in less detail, carried out consultations in different parts of the world with 1,400 participants and accepted 950 submissions from experts and the public. Altogether, the WCD reviewed experiences from 1,000 dams in 79 countries.*

*This option was not taken up by The Water Dialogues.
Cons:

- Finding eminent people that are acceptable to all stakeholders, and knowledgeable enough to produce something useful to practitioners, could be difficult.
- An eminent persons panel might do little to create dialogues at different levels and, although it could address socio-political issues, efforts are more likely to focus on a product, such as findings or a “ruling”.
- The focus of an expert panel is unlikely to be broad enough to cover all the concerns related to an issue, nor inclusive and participatory enough to satisfy stakeholders that it involves more than “the usual suspects”.
- Expert panels are likely to be “product oriented” and less committed to engaging with a broad cross-section of interests, so are less likely to resolve conflicts.
- A panel of stakeholders could be expensive to establish – if many stakeholders are to be involved in selecting, electing or inviting its members – and would require additional time and cost.
- For all types of panel: Participatory activities might be relatively limited or not happen at all, unless these are written into the panel's terms of reference.
  - If formed at international level, are unlikely to engage significantly, or in any depth, with national stakeholders, including policymakers. For this reason, they are unlikely to impact on national efforts to foster broader consensus or to promote reforms.
  - There may be weak ownership of the final “product” by actors not involved in the panel. For example, civil groups in the sector disowned the Camdessus Commission on Financing Water and Sanitation, while many national governments still have not adopted the World Commission on Dams’ recommendations.

2.3.3 Option Three: National dialogues linked to an international process

This option, which was adopted by The Water Dialogues, aims to stimulate multistakeholder action at national and international levels through a series of linked and iterative dialogues. The structure has two levels: an international group comprised of respected individuals from key stakeholder groups plus a small secretariat; and multistakeholder teams in different countries.

Stakeholders at national level engage in dialogue, research and advocacy for changes in policies or implementation practices. Ideally, their work should complement or link with existing national policy or reform processes. Their multistakeholder research and case studies provide the basis for convening discussions with a larger group of stakeholders. Participatory research methods and public and community hearings enhance the inclusiveness of this work.

With input from the country teams, the international group and secretariat support and help to develop methods used at country-level. The results of national research and dialogue are fed back to both national processes in other countries and to the international level. Analysis and consolidation of findings takes place at international level and, following inputs and approval from national processes, the results and recommendations form papers targeted at international audiences. At the end of the process, there could be national or international conferences or speaking tours to amplify the lessons learned and the recommendations for change.

Pros:

- The option emphasizes both process and product.
- The scope, focus and form of each national process can be decided locally.
- If key decision-makers engage directly with the process, there is a greater likelihood that dialogue and research (evidence) will influence policies and practices.
- National groups have the opportunity to learn from experiences and research in other countries.
- The evidence produced will be available for use by other stakeholders or interested parties.
- Any final reports would not be the main “product”, rather new knowledge, lessons, and implementation would occur throughout because the review process is linked to live, ongoing national processes.
- Comparisons and syntheses of evidence and experiences made at international level can also be adapted and implemented at national levels.
- This option is likely to increase understanding between opponents, build new relationships and provide detailed solutions.
Cons:

- The iterative, process-oriented nature of this multi-level, multi-locational option means reaching results may take a long time and be relatively costly.
- Overseeing several national multistakeholder teams, integrating results to create international comparisons and feeding back iterative processes to reach unified recommendations may be cumbersome.
- National groups may follow their own priorities and timetables so that comparative assessments are not possible and outputs may be staggered.
- There are risks that the activities at national and international levels do not result in any concerted action to achieve changes in policy or practice.
- Without a strong international level process to advocate results to international decision-makers, national level processes may find it difficult to influence international policies, despite the powerful influence these have on national governments.

Option Four: Roundtables or structured dialogues

A small multistakeholder steering group is established. This group organises and convenes a series of roundtables or structured dialogues on components of the issue being addressed, to which key stakeholders, including decision-makers, are invited. Experts and stakeholders with different perspectives present evidence on specific topics to an invited multistakeholder audience.

The audience is encouraged to participate actively and steering group members may play a key role as critical questioners. An experienced independent facilitator, who is accustomed to managing controversial debates, moderates each structured dialogue. All events have a good chairperson.

Each roundtable records its content and sends a report capturing its substance (including any agreements and recommendations), to participants and stakeholders unable to attend. The steering group is responsible for following up on recommendations and advocating their adoption by decision-makers.

A variation on this option is for the steering group to deliberate on the evidence and information emerging from the roundtables. These deliberations could include commenting on the evidence presented, noting gaps in the evidence base, identifying areas of consensus and disagreement, and formulating any missing policy recommendations.

Pros:

- A wide range of diverse stakeholders can be involved and brought into direct contact with one another.
- The multistakeholder steering group will gain skills in managing dialogue processes during their discussions about the agenda and form for the roundtables.
- The overall process is less demanding on the time and resources of participating stakeholders than other multistakeholder processes.
- There is an opportunity for short-term gains, including impacts on policy and practice.

Cons:

- Unless the roundtables are well structured and notice of specific issues to be explored is given, the information and evidence generated by roundtables may be unacceptable as “research” by decision-makers.
- It may be difficult to engage with grassroots communities using this method.
- There is a danger that the energy and enthusiasm created during roundtables dissipates quickly resulting in a failure to follow up on recommendations.
- Given the high costs of bringing international stakeholders together, this option is more suited to national or sub national/local level work rather than international projects.

EXAMPLE The Water Dialogues in Indonesia and the Philippines used roundtables alongside a number of other activities. For further information on roundtables see Section Ten and The Philippines Water Dialogues Case Study.*

Option Five: Citizens Juries* and deliberative forums

Citizens Juries aim to involve ordinary citizens in debates regarding important issues and can be a useful gauge of public opinion. They may also demonstrate how views may change when individuals face a wide range of information and options. Usually a jury is made up of twelve or more people from a variety of backgrounds who are not experts on the issue, do not belong to issue-related interest groups and have no firm views on the subject.

A Citizens Jury usually lasts at least one day, often two or three days. The jury hears “evidence” from a range of stakeholders and experts and then discusses the issue among themselves before reaching a “judgement” or conclusion, often to a specific question or series of questions formulated by the organisers. To maximise the impact of a citizens’ jury or deliberative forum, public outreach including media work is undertaken.

For the process to be genuinely multistakeholder, a small organising group representing a wide range of perspectives on the issue should come together to develop the questions to be answered, draw up a list of experts and other “witnesses” who will present evidence, and oversee the event itself.

Deliberative Forums are similar to Citizens Juries and seek the views of a random sample of people who formulate opinions about policy options having heard presentations and arguments from a range of experts and key stakeholders.

Pros:

- These formats are useful for engaging with ordinary people and communities whose voices are seldom heard in debates on policy and practice.
- A jury or deliberative panel allows ordinary people to explore an issue in detail, deliberate together and come to informed and shared recommendations and solutions.
- Jury selection is representative of the public at large and provides the basis for broad-based recommendations to policy-makers.
- These processes can attract media attention to the issue.
- The process is relatively short. Planning and preparation for a Citizens Jury project typically takes three to four months by the multistakeholder group – more if the issue is very contentious, requiring the organising group itself to build trust before work can begin. A further three to four months will be required after the jury sits for reporting and advocacy.

Cons:

- Citizens Juries can become costly. In addition to hiring a suitable venue for the process, and paying jurors a stipend and expenses, it may be necessary to pay for the time or expenses of experts and other speakers.
- For a scientific gauge of public opinion, jury or panel must be randomly selected through rigorous polling techniques and a long list of potential jurors interviewed. This requires specific expertise and is expensive.
- Unless there is a well-balanced multistakeholder organising group asking the questions, and selecting people to give presentations, critics will argue that the process is biased and its recommendations may be ignored.
- As a one-off process with no inbuilt follow-up, it is unlikely to promote sustainable dialogue between stakeholders and decision-makers. Consequently, it may have little impact on the way future policies are developed.

EXAMPLE A Citizens Jury was not used by The Water Dialogues, but the Prajateerpu process in June 2001 in the state of Andhra Pradesh, India is a good example of how it works.* The Citizens Jury brought together 19 jurors, mostly small-scale farmers from across the state, to examine competing visions for the future of agriculture. The jurors’ deliberations were informed by their interrogation of a range of witnesses including those from the Government of Andhra Pradesh, a transnational agrochemical company (SYNGENTA), universities, local NGOs, government advisory panels and community NGOs. Facilitators used a range of methods to give jurors the opportunity to validate their knowledge and challenge the misunderstandings of decision-makers. The key conclusions reached by the jury — their vision — included a desire for food and farming for self-reliance and community control over resources.


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2.3.6 Option Six: International/national/local commission

Similar to a multistakeholder panel is an international, national or local commission. Typically, a commission would have a board comprising between 10 and 12 eminent persons and stakeholders, which would oversee the process. A secretariat would assist the board, for example, by organising and supporting board meetings, undertaking case studies and thematic reviews and arranging events where different groups of stakeholders could present their views.

To increase the level of stakeholder participation, case studies can be designed to include interaction with all types of stakeholders, including grassroots communities, if appropriate. Depending on the level at which the commission’s board operates, it may decide to create multistakeholder teams to undertake the case study research at other, more local, levels.

Pros:
- If the scope of the commission is broad, it will address big picture issues and be of greater interest to a wider group of stakeholders, as well as being more widely seen as a legitimate process.
- If the scope of the commission’s work is defined and feasible, the outputs should include new, independent evidence and analysis that can provide governments and decision-makers with information about the impacts of their policies.
- The evidence can dispel myths (from either end of the ideological spectrum).
- Lessons learned can be the basis for policy recommendations at national and international levels and for agreements among stakeholders on some contested issues.

Cons:
- Taking a narrow focus on the most contested issues will be more controversial and may alienate some stakeholders, thereby failing to resolve polarization, conflicts or policy stalemates.
- A broader scope will make the commission more expensive and more time consuming.
- This option does not address the need to provide stakeholders with the tools and skills necessary for dialogues with decision-makers on policy issues.
- Without the involvement of, or regular contact with, governments or other key decision-makers, the commission will be less likely to adopt its recommendations.

2.4 Step Four: Deciding the level(s) at which process(es) should happen

The decision whether to hold your multistakeholder processes at local, national, regional or international level, or a combination of these options, should be based on:

- what you want to achieve
- where the key stakeholders are located
- who has decision-making powers over the issue
- where these people are located geographically (often in multiple locations)
- which places have expressed an interest in starting multistakeholder work

2.4.1 Deciding what you want to achieve

While motivations for joining multistakeholder dialogues vary, it is important to identify a clear set of aims early on. A lack of shared aims will make the process frustrating for both participants and observers.

The challenge lies in deciding who should be involved in determining your aims, and at what point. Multistakeholder processes often seem to be in a chicken and egg situation: “Do you start the work and then expose the work to a wider group of people or do you start with a very open process and get pulled in 20 directions immediately?” Unless those seeking to create a multistakeholder process have a clear sense of direction, it will be difficult to persuade other stakeholders to join them. But if they try to force a fixed idea on other stakeholders, rejection is likely.

The Water Dialogues solution was for the founding members to generate alternative aims for debate and decision by a wider group of stakeholders. “The idea for The Water Dialogues was to produce options which could be embraced by all stakeholders rather than being imposed upon them by the most powerful.”

(The Water Dialogues founding member)
2.4.2  Identifying key stakeholders

Notwithstanding the need to have access to decision-makers, it is important to consider where other key stakeholders are located. If the stakeholder group is dispersed, but expects regular meetings, it is sensible to choose a place that they can all reach with relative ease.

2.4.3  Identifying key decision-makers

Strategic decisions about where to locate multistakeholder processes involve identifying the location of the decision-makers that have power over the issue.

For most issues, there are many levels at which policies are developed, decisions are taken, budgets allocated and implementation carried out. For example, regarding water policy, the financial power of the World Bank and bilateral donors gives them enormous influence over how water services are delivered, especially in developing countries. But national governments set national policy. And where decentralisation has taken place, it is the policies and practices of municipalities and local governments that have a direct impact on implementation.

Furthermore, it is important to remember that policy change is not always enough to achieve genuine changes on the ground. Change requires political will or sufficient public pressure to ensure that those bodies responsible for implementation or enforcement actually act. Although having decision-makers as part of the multistakeholder group may contribute to building political will, it may be necessary to reach out to those affected or other groups who can exert pressure from the bottom up.

2.4.4  Power mapping: identifying decision-makers and those that influence them

Many members of multistakeholder groups will be looking for changes in policies, practices and attitudes related to their issue. As noted in Section Ten below, some advocacy occurs within the boundaries of the multistakeholder group itself. But to address external actors successfully, it is necessary to identify who has decision-making power on the issue, and which institutions or individuals influence them.

Creating a Power Map

- Power mapping is a tool that helps identify decision-makers and influencers so that advocacy is targetable in an efficient and effective way.
- When creating a power map, it is important to remember that power not only lies with formal political structures. All sorts of other actors may have considerable power or influence ranging from faith leaders to military commanders, from heads of industry to peasants.
- Power maps are usually created on a large sheet of paper. If available, sticky notes/post-it notes are useful as they are easily movable; otherwise use a pencil and rubber in the early stages and only work in ink when the map is finalised.
- Start by identifying the most important decision-makers on the issue. These may be at local, national, regional or international level. Place the name of the individual and/or institution in the centre of the sheet of paper.
- Then start adding other decision-makers or organisations and people with influence.
- Be specific: name names where possible! Don't simply put “government” but put which ministry or department within a ministry, or the name of a person within a department. When looking at influencers, don't say “big business,” say which company. Instead of saying “the media” identify the TV programmes decision-makers watch or the papers they read.
- When all the key actors are in place, draw lines showing who influences whom.
- Note that as knowledge of the issue deepens the power map becomes more complex, specific and sophisticated.

An example of a power map is provided in the box overleaf.
NOTE: This is the first draft of a power map created in a 35-minute exercise by three members of the Uganda Working Group at the beginning of its work, hence the lack of specificity.
Section Three
Governing multistakeholder processes

3.1 Why have a governance structure?

A governance body makes crucial strategic and operational decisions on the long-term goals of the process, how to reach them, to safeguard the principles, values and ground rules established by the process.

During the early stages of a multistakeholder dialogue, having informal, flexible working practices may be appropriate and effective. But as the project’s size or complexity grows, more formal governance structures and operating procedures may be required in the interests of legitimacy, accountability and transparency, and to facilitate fundraising.

Separate governance structures may be unnecessary for multistakeholder work undertaken by a single group in a single location. In this case, the working group and the governance group will be the same entity. Nevertheless, if such groups raise funds or employ staff, their members should be aware that they would have the de facto responsibilities of trustees.

In terms of size, Nan believes that “Greater structure (more committees, coordination hubs, etc.) allows for greater size, communication and geographical spread. Less structure will need stronger personal relationships. Whether development is bottom-up or top-down will influence levels of participation, as will levels of centralisation or decentralisation. The more top-down and centralised, the more you trade off participation for efficiency, speed and leadership.”

TIP Avoid unnecessary ill feeling by inviting all those involved in the multistakeholder process to contribute ideas for your governing body’s name. Names mean different things to different people and some will have a strong preference for say, “Steering Group” versus “Management Group” or “Working Group” versus “Board”

3.2 Selecting governing body members

A Note On Representation

It is important to clarify early on whether individuals participating in a multistakeholder process are representing a perspective and bringing their experience in a particular organisation to the group, or formally representing an organisation or sectoral interest, for example, a company or the private sector. What motivates participants will have a significant impact on the speed of the dialogue. If people are formal representatives, they may be limited in what they can say or do in terms of decision-making, without first obtaining a mandate from their constituency.

Ideally, a multistakeholder group should govern multistakeholder work. Having a governing body that reflects a broad range of perspectives and backgrounds is as important as taking care of how the group is established. If the process is multi-locational, ensuring that the perspectives of different participating groups are included will improve significantly the strategic overview of the governing body.

A clear decision about whether the members of the governing body should be elected, selected or invited is needed. Although elections seem the most “free and fair,” in practice, the difficulty in bringing together a fully balanced and comprehensive multistakeholder electorate dilutes their democratic value. In these circumstances, a selection

DEFINITIONS

Election: a process whereby people vote for a person or party to fill a position

Selection: an informal process of identifying individuals for potential appointment, considering their suitability, taking soundings about their acceptability to the wider constituency and exploring with them their willingness to accept an available position.

Invitation: the process by which the governing body invites an individual or organisation to become a member, perhaps after deciding between a number of individuals whose names have been put forward.
process that takes soundings from stakeholders, regarding an individual's or organisation's acceptability, may be the simplest way to proceed.

Regardless of selection technique, any vagueness, uncertainty or lack of transparency in establishing the governing body is undesirable and likely to generate suspicion and mistrust. In most circumstances, publicising the selection process of governing body members is therefore recommended. Any notification should include the criteria for identifying the best candidate; a timescale for the process; whether and how candidates are nominated, or if the post will be advertised; and who will be involved in making the final decisions.

Notwithstanding the potential impact on group dynamics of including new people in a governing body, if widening its membership will improve transparency and accountability through specific representation of a missing stakeholder or perspective then it is advisable to go ahead and increase the number of members.

When new members join the governing body, they should receive an orientation regarding its history, culture and processes.
FORMING GOVERNING BODIES: What The Water Dialogues Did

- When they began, the seven founding members of the project had no formal governance body but worked collaboratively to develop the Scoping Process.

- At the 2004 Berlin multistakeholder meeting, the founding members of The Water Dialogues were expecting to stand down. In the event, participants requested that they continue their role of guiding and supporting the project while expanding their membership to include missing perspectives.

- Eighteen months later, Dialogues had been established in Brazil, South Africa and Uganda. New processes were beginning in Indonesia and the Philippines, a two person International Secretariat had been formed and the project had convened its first international meeting.

- At this meeting, the International Secretariat proposed an expansion of the governing body (now known as the International Working Group) to include a representative/link person from each of the national Dialogues.

- The Water Dialogues agreed that five new members would join the International Working Group (IWG). Alongside other duties as IWG members, the new members would act as links between national and international levels.

- Meanwhile, at national level, the Dialogues were establishing their own multistakeholder governing bodies known as National Working Groups. In some countries, the groups were elected by the multistakeholder participants at the First Meeting (see Section Four), in others they were selected. Occasionally, to ensure a specific perspective was represented, an individual or group with the right “fit” was invited to join.

- As the project continued, some members of National Working Groups (NWGs) began to question the role of the IWG. If the emphasis was on national level dialogues, did they really need an international body? Why should an international body have any say over national level activities? What was the relationship between the IWG and the International Secretariat?

- In response, at the project’s next international meeting, the International Secretariat arranged a session that gave participants the opportunity to discuss and agree the purpose and governance functions of the international governance body, as well as the International Secretariat. The results went to all members of NWGs for their comment and amendment before a final version was distributed and approved.
3.3 Criteria for and roles of governing body members

Example: Person Specification For A Governing Body Member

- Represents a specific perspective on the issue
- Open to work with people with different perspectives and has intellectual curiosity
- Able to dedicate the time required to be an active group member
- Supportive to the goals and objectives of the process
- Has credibility/good reputation in the sector/on the issue being addressed
- Willing to take dialogue discussions back into their organisation and the wider sector
- Resilience, flexibility and patience
- Ability to see the big picture, to make connections
- Able to speak (the language of the group)

If seeking a new member to join an existing group, additional criteria might include:
- Prior knowledge of/familiarity with the multistakeholder process and/or a “known quantity”

In multistakeholder boards, all members should have an equal level of authority and share responsibility for fulfilling the purpose and functions of the group. In addition, members should have specific responsibility for representing and advocating the views of the board to other stakeholder groups.

Governing body members should update their respective organisations, and others sharing their perspectives, on progress and developments within the multistakeholder project. Over the course of the process, governing body members may need reminding of the importance of providing regular updates. Otherwise, they may find that while they have been continuously learning and modifying their views, their organisations, who have not had the same experience, cannot understand or appreciate changes in perspective.

The governing body may delegate responsibility for specific areas to sub-groups who will take the lead in researching, discussing and making recommendations to the main governing body regarding actions required.

3.4 Tensions in the governance and coordination of multi-locational processes

Multistakeholder processes that take place in multiple locations bring with them all the challenges and complexities associated with any long distance organisational structure. Being separated means that the work may be slower, different agendas may flourish in different locations, and misunderstandings may be greater than if everyone were located in the same place.

As discussed at length in Section Seven, building relationships is a fundamental basis for effective multistakeholder work. This is much more difficult to do this when there is no face-to-face contact. As McCurley and Lynch point out, we work better with people where we share a personal relationship or with those where there is a sense of shared experience. “We are more likely to trust and work well with people when we have a sense of ‘who they are’ and think they know us and value us enough to look after our interests as they do their own.”

Much communication in an office takes place by osmosis; we learn things simply by being in the vicinity. When colleagues are separated, none of this happens. Many events and activities may go unreported and then forgotten when feedback eventually takes place.

TIPS

- There is no reason for a group in one location to mistrust a group in the other – but no reason for trust either! Don’t be offended by continuous questioning of motives and actions.
- In multi-locational processes, the fear that the centre will needlessly hinder enterprise and activity in a group to which an individual belongs may accompany the fear that it will not properly control the activities of other groups!
ESTABLISHING GOVERNANCE ROLES AND FUNCTIONS: What The Water Dialogues Did

The purpose and functions of The Water Dialogues’ International Working Group (IWG) were set out as follows:

The primary purpose of the IWG is to:

- act as custodian of the project principles in order to maintain the integrity of The Water Dialogues
- ensure that safe spaces are created and sustained at international level enabling all views and voices to be heard
- encourage engagement with different stakeholder groups and safeguard the multistakeholder character of processes at international and national levels, ensuring these remain a core strength and characteristic of the project as a whole and of the national dialogues in particular
- demonstrate the global value of individuals’ common desire for better solutions for the poor, independent of ideology
- take overall responsibility for the good management of the project, delegating tasks and duties to the International Secretariat as appropriate
- monitor the work of the International Secretariat, National Working Groups and coordinators and provide support and guidance in order to ensure project objectives are met
- be accountable for finances, ensuring donor reporting and accounting requirements are complied with, as well as signing off the project’s annual accounts at international level
- resolve problems and concerns regarding the integrity of the project at international or national levels by investigating issues raised and, by means of dialogue with the actors involved and their peers nationally and internationally, providing clear and prompt responses
- fundraise for The Water Dialogues as necessary
- provide an international and wider perspective (beyond National Dialogues) on issues arising from The Water Dialogues process
- represent the project as required and inform and engage stakeholder peers and individual contacts regarding its work
- provide support and act as a sounding board for the International Secretariat.
The challenges of multi-locational processes increase if these involve working across cultural and language divides. It is important to work hard to reduce the sense of separation and establish a working culture that offers the sense of joint purpose for everyone involved in the long distance work relationship. People who feel they are working toward a mutual goal and perceive shared values and interests are more likely to behave responsibly towards each other.

“One thing is clear about network organisations, collocated teams, strategic alliances and long-term supplier relations: control is not exercised in the form of hierarchical authority.” (Sheppard & Tuchinsky, 1996:142)

In multi-locational, multistakeholder work, tensions are common between “them” and “us” or the “centre” (i.e. a governing body, secretariat or other entity that could be perceived as a headquarters) and the “periphery” (usually national or local entities). Separated dialogues worry about their degree of inclusion in the overall project and their degree of autonomy from it, if their inputs are valued, and if they are being kept informed of decisions. Examples of the way in which the “periphery” may express its apprehensions include: “The centre wants to control us; [it] doesn’t understand our work or our problems; [it] is consuming resources that would be better used by us.” Conversely, the “centre” may complain that the periphery: “Doesn’t respond to our communications; can’t see the big picture; or doesn’t care about the overall welfare of the project.” Distance therefore “results in a fragmented understanding from both sides.”

In a multi-locational dialogue or other process, it is important that each multistakeholder group is self-starting, motivated from within and takes executive responsibility for their work’s progress. However, any group with these qualities, let alone a group that has to manage the internal relationships between diverse stakeholders, will also tend to demand high levels of autonomy. Groups may develop their own goals and processes and initiate their own activities rather than adhere to the shared goals of the project, even if those shared goals were established together.

Lessons for Multi-locational Dialogues: The Water Dialogues Experience

Each participating group will have its own dynamics, its own analysis of the most important issues to explore in its own geographic, political and policy context, and its own way of exploring them.

It is not possible to determine the exact form and focus of the work of multistakeholder groups beyond the immediate group to which you belong.

If you want genuine ownership by participants of groups other than your own, you may propose, suggest and guide what another multistakeholder group should do but imposing an agenda simply does not work.

Instead of fixed aims and a fixed format, it is useful to establish an overall set of agreed principles, which will guide the work of all groups involved in the project.

Diversity rather than conformity is often a strength in multistakeholder processes: it gives groups the flexibility to generate creative solutions to local problems.

While communication helps to reduce distance, it is also true that people are more likely to communicate and more likely to forgive errors in communication with those that they know. In general, speaking to someone on the phone is a better way to build a long-distance relationship than communicating via email.

If possible, any multi-locational process should establish a budget for convening meetings that bring stakeholders from different parts of the process. Allowing people to socialise with each other, both in the formal sessions and over meals, is a critical element in developing commitment to the process as a whole and fostering understanding and personal relationships among the individuals involved.
### TIPS

- Tensions between the “centre” and the “periphery” or the overall governance body or secretariat and other participating processes are not exclusive to multistakeholder work.  
- Anticipate perceived asymmetrical power relations between e.g. national and international or local and national levels, even if the process comprises highly autonomous units who make their own decisions regarding their form, purpose, activities and budgets.  
- Lack of clarity regarding roles can cause friction, so these should be discussed and agreed.  
- Full consultation should take place on all issues affecting the overall functioning and design of the project. It is essential to consult on anything perceived as “controlling” any aspect of the work of participating groups.  
- Good communication is a key element in reducing tensions - the “centre” must communicate with its participating groups regularly, even if the communication ends up being one-way.  
- The fastest way to build relationships is in face-to-face meetings. If you can afford it, bring everyone together at an early stage. Or plan to do so over time.  
- All separated units should be encouraged to have bilateral communications with each other.  
- It is safer to duplicate communications than to assume that feedback from governance body members to the satellite processes they are part of will be automatic and comprehensive.  
- Don’t worry about uniformity of communications, use what works with each person or group.  
- Taking an interest in an individual's non-work activities, remembering their religious or national holidays, asking about their health, etc. can show that you value a person.
Section Four

Bringing Multiple Stakeholders Together

At the start of a multistakeholder process, the emphasis should be on ensuring that all key stakeholders are identified and made aware of the proposed process. If there is sufficient support for the process to take place, the next step is to form a working group to take the initiative forward.

4.1 Holding the first large stakeholder meeting

“No one party was excluded. Ever. For exclusion breeds resistance. We can and do recognise divergence, but above all we must provide a neutral, free and ordered space where violence is replaced by verbal debate, shouting by listening, chaos by calm.”

For any issue, the potential number of stakeholders is huge. Clearly, it is not possible to interact with them all but it is important not to be seen as exclusive. Every effort should be made to ensure all significant perspectives are included especially those with opposing views, without whom the process will lose legitimacy.

The First Meeting allows many different perspectives to be brought together to learn about the proposed multistakeholder process and explore the different priorities regarding its focus, scope and outcomes. Stakeholders can also determine how the process could add value to reforms of policy and practice.

The discussion of focus and form ensures that future participants strongly own the process and that a wide group of stakeholders acknowledges its democratic foundations.

It is desirable to keep the First Meeting to a manageable size. Exactly what this means depends on the issue you are addressing and its political and cultural context. As a very rough guideline, the meeting should have a minimum of 15 participants (in addition to the organising group) and a maximum of 75. Less than fifteen almost certainly means some important stakeholders will be missing. More than 75 will make discussion and decision-making unmanageable.

4.1.1 Forming a temporary group to organise a First Meeting of stakeholders

As soon as the idea of having a multistakeholder process emerges, it is good to form a small, temporary group of diverse stakeholders to organise a meeting to assess interest in having a multistakeholder process.

Having different stakeholders involved in this very first activity helps other stakeholders feel more confident that one organisation or point of view will not dominate the process.

As well as organising the First Meeting with a broader range of stakeholders, the temporary group should formulate proposals for the form and structure of the multistakeholder process and share them at the meeting.

Members of the group also should be the ones to issue invitations to the First Meeting. The person (or people) that initiates the process, makes the first contact and organises the First Meeting is very important.

“Maybe some other or some more stakeholders would have been invited or would have come if more than one organisation had organised the meeting.” (Indonesia Working Group member)
4.1.2 Identifying stakeholders

With the temporary group for the First Meeting formed, its members can draw on their knowledge to compile a list of stakeholder organisations and individuals to invite. If the group’s knowledge of the issue and its stakeholders is not comprehensive, it is useful to talk to issue specialists or conduct web-based research.

For the First Meeting, it is important to involve senior members of stakeholder organisations who have the authority to decide whether to commit time to the initiative.

“With Dialogues you cannot expect to have people think the same thing at the same time. You do expect people to think differently. But the important thing is to get everybody on board and agree a process.” (Philippines Working Group member)

4.1.3 Objectives and outputs for a First Meeting

The First Meeting’s objectives should be presented to the multistakeholder participants for their comment and agreement at the start of proceedings.

Objectives might be to:

- present findings and recommendations from scoping studies
- increase understanding of the concepts, methods and time frames for the proposed multistakeholder process
- explore the pros and cons of different options for the scope, structure and organisation of the initiative
- assess the risks associated with going ahead
- decide on whether to take the process forward and the form it should take
- make a preliminary identification of current policy and practice processes and opportunities to influence them
- identify a multistakeholder working group that can take responsibility for the next steps

Note that to begin the multistakeholder process, broad support (but not complete consensus) is crucial. If there is little interest, it’s time to think of other ways of working.

**Ensuring multistakeholders work as equals**

For successful multistakeholder work, it is necessary that everyone is treated equally and all contributions are given equal respect. Deliberate action is required to achieve this given the inevitable differences not only in the power and in financial resources of participants but in their seniority, gender, status, knowledge and experience.

To arrive at a point where everyone can speak freely without feeling exposed and the more powerful do not dominate the discourse or decision-making, the first step is to acknowledge openly that differences exist. This allows the participants themselves to generate ideas for creating greater equality. Ideally, this should happen early in the process so that problems arising from inequalities are easily rectified.

In addition, coordinators, facilitators and chairpersons must monitor and address the impact of power differences throughout the process, to create a level playing field.

“If these conditions are not met, there will be a great risk that the powerless will have no real voice and no real involvement in the issues.”* A fuller discussion of how to create strong and equal group dynamics is included in Section Seven.

* Hemmati, M., 2001, Multi-Stakeholder Processes for Governance and Sustainability, Beyond Deadlock and Conflict, p 233

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**TIPS**

- It is not essential to have a representative of every individual stakeholder group but it is important to ensure that the participants reflect the range of perspectives in a balanced way.
- Have all the “voices” in the debate in the room for this initial meeting. This should include both the “pro” and the “anti” voices and the voices of those directly affected.
- Try to ensure that significant actors who have decision-making power over the issue are present.
- Invite umbrella organisations that can bring the perspectives of large numbers of individual stakeholders, e.g. local government associations, consumers’ organisations and business federations.

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27 The power mapping technique described in Section 2.4.4 can be adapted to make this process more interesting and participatory
### Draft agenda for the first multistakeholder meeting: what The Water Dialogues did

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agenda item</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Notes &amp; time required</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Welcome</td>
<td>Workshop hosts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Introductions (name, organisation, link with the issue, etc....)</td>
<td>2-3 minutes per participant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Objectives of meeting</td>
<td>Facilitator - 5 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Overview of the issue; perceived problems related to improving policy and practice and/or resolving difficulties; results of any scoping of stakeholder views; and proposal of options for the form and structure of the multistakeholder process</td>
<td>Temporary organising group members; 45 – 60 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>BREAK</td>
<td>20 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Questions and comments arising from previous session</td>
<td>30 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Facilitated discussion of usefulness and possible risks of holding a multistakeholder dialogue</td>
<td>Facilitator 60 – 90 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>BREAK</td>
<td>45 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Decision on whether or not to go ahead and what form the process should take; selection of members of a multistakeholder working group to oversee the process; identification of stakeholders missing who should be involved; etc. ...</td>
<td>Facilitator and temporary organising group members plus members selected for the permanent working group 45 – 60 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Initial identification of tasks and timeframes</td>
<td>Facilitator and temporary organising group members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>30 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Closure</td>
<td>5 minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The times set out in the agenda are suggestions. The actual amount of time required for the First Meeting will depend on the number of participants involved, their level of knowledge about the process, the complexity of the issue and the degree of polarisation about the issue.
THE FIRST MEETING: Lessons from The Water Dialogues

Having an experienced, external facilitator for the First Meeting is strongly recommended. If the issue is controversial, the facilitator should not be associated with it, or should be from outside the country so that they are perceived as neutral.

If the local dialogue is part of a regional or international process, it may be advantageous to have assistance from, for example, the International Secretariat, governance body or others working on the same issue in a different location.

The purpose and objectives of the dialogue should be clearly conveyed to the stakeholders in the beginning itself so that there is no ambiguity about the reason for joining the process.

When presenting the purpose of the multistakeholder initiative, emphasise broad goals that everyone can support alongside more narrow ones.

Demonstrating openness and flexibility regarding the form and structure of the initiative and the approach to the issue helps to build ownership.

Taking breaks to allow participants to chat informally is part of the process. Providing a meal is a good way to encourage social interaction between the different stakeholders present.
4.2 Forming a multistakeholder working group

4.2.1 Issues to consider when forming a working group

**TIPS**

- The composition of stakeholders on the working group is extremely significant.
- Think about which stakeholders MUST be there for the process to be seen as legitimate.
- Don't forget about gender, culture, class, ethnicity, etc., when forming the group.
- Having experts and influential people in the group is key to helping access relevant information, providing an effective communication channel back to different types of stakeholders and influencing reforms of policy and practice.
- The sooner you can get the right people on board the better for the credibility of the process. Ask yourself how far you are willing to pursue them to achieve this.
- The advantage of involving stakeholders in policy-making positions should mean that there is a direct link from dialogue to policy-making and practice. Without regular outreach to policymakers during the process, it will be more difficult to get them to adopt findings and recommendations at a later stage.
- The disadvantage is that such people have little time to contribute to the process.
- Multistakeholder processes on controversial issues are political processes and members of the temporary group initiating the process will each have their own views on who should become part of the dialogue – and who should not.
- The more contentious the issue, the greater the need to find people who can represent a perspective, contribute their experience and are willing to listen to what others have to say.

A committed working group that can drive the process is a pre-requisite for successful multistakeholder processes. In many cases, this group will be the de facto governing body for the process.

In this context, a multistakeholder working group should be distinguished from the temporary core group that may form to organise the First Meeting, and the larger, less formal group of stakeholders that may be engaged in wider discussions and feedback session as the process progresses.

**Composition of working groups: What The Water Dialogues Did**

The Water Dialogues multistakeholder working groups varied slightly from country to country but generally included participants from the following institutions:

- central government
- local government
- a range of private and public sector operators from large-scale/multinational to domestic, small scale/informal
- regulatory bodies
- technical associations
- trade unions
- development and advocacy NGOs
- consumer and environmental organisations
- research institutions and academia

The working group should comprise:

- a good balance of views
- a good balance of the different stakeholder interests and sub-sectors, including national and/or international organisations, umbrella organisations, associations and federations
- a good range of geographic locations relevant to the issue being discussed
- organisations that can bring the perspectives and interests of those people most affected by the issue
- individuals with power to make decisions regarding the issue
- people committed to learning something new and doing something different.
FORMING A MULTISTAKEHOLDER WORKING GROUP:
Lessons from The Water Dialogues

- Be realistic about the size of the working group – aim for no less than eight but no more than eighteen – depending on the issue and range of perspectives involved. A large group will make it more difficult to build and establish trust.

- For processes where the issue is highly contentious, it is important that the same individual members and organisations attend regularly. Appointing fixed alternates or deputies for each group member helps to maintain consistency of personnel.

- Once the working group is formed, changes in its membership need to be kept to a minimum.

- As outlined in Section 3.2, it is important to clarify early whether individuals participating in a multistakeholder process represent a perspective, an organisation, or the interests of a specific sectoral, for example, the private sector. This will have a significant impact on how the process works. If people represent an organisation or sectoral interest, then they may be constrained in what they can say, do, or agree to without going back to their constituency to obtain a specific mandate.

- Potential participants should be aware of the time commitment they are taking on. Experience demonstrates that the work may take a lot longer than everyone expects.

- Apart from dialogue, research and advocacy, on substantive issues, time is needed for more mundane matters, such as supervising finances, secretariat staff or fundraising.

Not all key stakeholders will want to, or be able to, join the process. There are a variety of reasons for this including, inter alia:

- lack of time – the more senior the person, the more likely this may be
- no confidence in multistakeholder processes
- unwillingness to take the risks to reputation of dialoguing with the opposition
- determination to stick with existing views and positions
4.2.2 Should working group members be voluntary or remunerated?

One critical decision is whether stakeholders should be paid or contribute their time on a voluntary basis.

The advantage of a voluntary process is that it is sustainable without external funding and provides a model that can be replicated without the need for a complex project structure. It also ensures that all those who take part are genuinely committed to the process. Furthermore, if people are in full time employment, the time that they give to the process will be paid for by their organisations, thereby increasing ownership and strengthening organisational commitment to the process.

Since participating in a multistakeholder group is an added burden for its members, a possible disadvantage is that voluntary participants will not feel motivated to prioritise multistakeholder activities over other work commitments.

Also, if group members are self-employed, attending meetings and participating in other activities will mean sacrificing opportunities to earn a living. Others who could lose financially include those with childcare or other caring responsibilities who may incur costs of employing someone to substitute for them. Special consideration should be given to these members.

A compromise between having voluntary members and paying them to attend is to reimburse them for the actual costs incurred in participating.

4.2.3 Perceived risks of participating in multistakeholder work

"The main difficulty in getting civil society participation is overcoming their mistrust of any kind of agreement or collaboration with the private sector. Many civil society representatives consider the private sector to be solely concerned with profit maximisation and repatriation of funds, and not concerned about the social problems of access to water for poor people." (Brazilian Working Group member)

Perceived risks in participating in multistakeholder processes may affect the willingness of individuals and organisations to take part. Almost everyone involved in a multistakeholder process will have some concerns about the personal and professional repercussions of doing so, including risks to their individual reputations. Concerns and worries may include:

- being seen by colleagues and constituencies as endorsing or legitimising the views of other stakeholders
- through “sitting with the enemy” attracting accusations from their colleagues and constituencies of being “co-opted” by the opposition. “Some of the people looked upon me as a traitor” (International Working Group member)
- Those at the extreme ends of the spectrum of opinion on an issue may be particularly prone to these fears but may be willing to be engaged less directly, for example, through larger public meetings
- signing on to something that they cannot control
- other members breaching trust and confidentiality by making public use of the information shared in confidence to further the cause of the opposition. “There is a risk that statements made and information shared during meetings are used by other members publicly to put pressure back on ourselves.” (South African Working Group member)
- that other stakeholders might be participating only to promote their own views, or to seek publicity for themselves or their organisations
- losing credibility among peers and colleagues if the process is too slow or fails to produce results
- this may be a particular concern at the start of the process, when the pace of progress is slow due to the need to build trust, settle issues of legitimacy, engage with the administrative issues involved in establishing the process and so on
- that their organisation’s name will be on research findings that they do not support

Of course, participants may also perceive risks in not taking part in the process: “I think there is a bigger risk in not being involved. We can say we went through the process and we raised the issues. We can then say we do not agree with this and this and can say why.” (Uganda Working Group member)
When the Brazilian government approved a law on private concessions in the water sector in 1995 it generated an intense debate. Over the next decade, there was continuous conflict between the pro- and anti-privatisation lobbies, with many of those involved worn out by the non-stop fighting in the public arena. It was against this backdrop that The Water Dialogues in Brazil began.

The founding champion for the Brazilian dialogues was Antonio Miranda Neto. He already was a member of the Dialogues’ International Working Group to which he brought the perspective of municipal utilities and the public sector in his role as President of ASSEMAE, the association of public sector providers. In 2003, following the scoping study in Brazil, Antonio attended the national congress of ABES, the largest sectoral event in Latin America, which brings together between three to five thousand actors in the water industry. Having persuaded Cesar da Costa e Silva, then president of ABES, of the merits of a multistakeholder process, the two worked together to contact all the relevant stakeholders at the Congress to convene an informal meeting. At this meeting, The Water Dialogues presented its global scoping study. Participants then declared their interest and arranged another meeting to discuss the project further.

“Personally I felt a sense of relief when we were presented with the concept of all sitting at the same table and discussing matters together, rather than constantly having to defend our positions against each other in public.” (Brazilian Working Group member)

It is worth noting that this happened independently and in advance of the Berlin meeting that formally gave a mandate for the project to go ahead. At the time, critics saw Antonio and his organisation ASSAMAE as having a radical, left wing position on water service management, which meant that there was some initial suspicion among people about the motives behind the initiative. Simultaneously, Antonio also faced suspicions from the left. “I have taken a big personal risk. If the process is unsuccessful, I could lose the respect of an important part of my constituency, civil society groups and my work colleagues in the municipal water sector.”

The second meeting of the Brazilian Water Dialogues, with some additional stakeholders present, took place a few weeks after the ABES Congress. Once again, the global scoping study was explained, and everyone present agreed to take part in the process. Each organisation nominated two permanent representatives, which meant that if one person was unavailable the other could be present at meetings, thus ensuring consistency.

The group agreed to be open to representatives from all stakeholders. Between 2003 and 2004, the NWG discussed the wider participation of groups for the next phase of the project. A list of potential invitees was prepared and approved by the whole group and invitations were sent to representatives from public and private operators, regulatory bodies, professional and academic associations, trade unions, NGOs, consumers and government
4.3 Community participation issues

If the multistakeholder process is taking place at national, regional or international level, it may be difficult to find ways to involve ordinary members of the communities affected by the issue, unless there are grassroots networks or movements that can represent the perspectives of whole communities.

Nevertheless, for almost all issues it is important to find a way of hearing what ordinary women and men have to say. For The Water Dialogues, this has not always been easy to achieve although all national Dialogues have made efforts to ensure the process reflects the experience of poor people. This may be done via public hearings, holding special meetings with a variety of communities or, if primary research is being undertaken, through participatory research methodologies.

Bringing community members into a dialogue with policymakers, service providers and others involved in the issue whose activities have a direct impact on them, can have positive outcomes in terms of shared understanding and improved accountability and governance.

Definition: community

There is a great deal of debate about what constitutes a “community”. Here the term is used simply to refer to the ordinary citizens and groups who collectively make up the social groupings in a locality. It is not meant to imply a sense of social cohesion or identity between different individuals and groups, although this may exist.

Bringing communities and policymakers together: What The Water Dialogues Did

As part of the South Africa Dialogue, participatory research was carried out to assess the water and sanitation service provision in a community in iLembe municipality in KwaZulu-Natal province. This included a field visit by Dialogues members. Through discussions prompted by this visit, council and private sector concession staff identified grey areas in the service contract where national and local policy was unclear and responsibility was not assigned. This helped to clear the way to resolving some problems that have affected residents for some time. A local councillor attributed the action to the influence of NWG members. “Thanks for your visit to Nkobongo. It has made a positive improvement because iLembe District Municipality is now attending to the issue of sanitation here.” Councillor Sibangeni
Section Five
Resourcing Multistakeholder Processes

Fundraising can be a challenge for multistakeholder groups. Given the lengthy gap between submitting proposals and actually receiving funds, there is pressure to begin fundraising as soon as possible. However, this requires decisions. Not only about the exact nature and costs of the group’s work programme but also about the donors to approach, where to hold funds and who will be responsible for financial accounting. All of these issues take time to resolve. Furthermore, locating an acceptable donor that is willing to take the risk of funding an innovative and unusual project is not easy.

5.1 Are external resources necessary?

“MSPs are expensive and need a solid, well-prepared funding base to function properly and according to the ideals of inclusiveness, equity and transparency.”

At the start of the process, when a small group of stakeholders is developing ideas, it is usually possible to manage without any funding because each stakeholder can take turns in hosting meetings, producing minutes, providing copies of papers and so on. “During the First Meeting, members decided to share responsibility for hosting the meetings, covering costs of the meetings themselves, but not transportation.” (South Africa Working Group member)

While small donations by multistakeholder group members, say, for basic office services or meeting rooms is not controversial, receiving large amounts of funding from any single group member must be approached with caution and should not happen without the explicit approval of all members. Taking this precaution helps to ensure that other members and external observers do not misconstrue a donation as an attempt to dominate or hijack the group. It is also important to ensure that members do not resent others who choose not to contribute, despite having the resources to do so. “Resource pooling has been discussed (each member contributing some money to the project) but this isn’t possible for all members; outside funding will be required.” (Indonesia Working Group member)

Generally, once a multistakeholder process wishes to develop its activities and hire a secretariat or coordinator, undertake research, convene public hearings or arrange meetings with large numbers of stakeholders, it will be necessary to raise funds from external sources. The only exception to this rule is where the process has attached itself to an existing initiative or organisation and can use their resources or piggyback onto its host’s events.

5.2 When should fundraising begin?

The need to get funding in place as soon as possible – so as to maintain the momentum of the process – is at odds with the practical impossibility of preparing long-term funding proposals before the group has actually formulated and agreed the details of its activities. Furthermore, there is a need to “find the right balance between securing funds to enable the process to move faster, but not skimping on the time required to establish the commitment and trust of the group.” (International Working Group)

One solution to this problem is to opt for “seed” funding. In multi-locational processes, it may be that a central secretariat can raise these funds on behalf of the groups involved. But as the amounts needed are relatively small, it is also possible for groups to approach local donors to access these “start-up” funds.

Note that the time and challenges involved in fundraising may frustrate some group members who want to get on and address the substance of their work rather than “waste” time on such matters.

Nevertheless, there are some unexpected benefits. Working together on fundraising can be an important element in establishing the commitment of the group: “The usefulness of not immediately securing funding is that people show commitment that they have to do the work.” (South African Working Group member)

28 Hemmati, M., 2001
Fundraising involves significant time and effort, even after the project’s design is discussed and agreed. Proposal documents and budgets must be prepared, donors contacted and met, and negotiations regarding grant details conducted. There is often a gap between proposal approval and funds arriving. Establishing a fundraising subgroup with experienced members is advisable. This subgroup should report regularly to the full group to ensure agreement with the overall strategy.

When preparing proposals and budgets, remember to calculate the value of voluntary contributions and other cash or kind contributions. If possible, the draft fundraising proposal, including activities, should be read, discussed, and agreed by the full group. Taking a group of different stakeholders to meet a donor (e.g., government, private sector, and NGO members) is more convincing than one stakeholder alone. Carefully select members who are known to the donor and can explain the process’s purpose and anticipated outputs and outcomes.

Despite frustrations, shared responsibility for raising resources builds relationships and increases commitment among group members. Developing a fundraising proposal and receiving funds can result in objectives and activities being set in stone when, by nature, multistakeholder processes evolve unpredictably. For this reason, when writing proposals, it’s sensible to create flexibility in activities and timetables.
CENTRAL FUNDRAISING FOR MULTI-LOCATIONAL PROCESSES:
What The Water Dialogues Did

At the start of the process, GTZ were the major donor of seed money. Their funding covered the costs of a scoping study and most of the costs for the large stakeholder meeting that made the decision for the Dialogues to begin.

GTZ also donated funds for the following year alongside money provided by two members of the International Working Group (IWG), Thames Water and WaterAid. GTZ worked closely with the IWG and the newly formed International Secretariat to raise a large grant from DFID, the UK’s Department for International Development.

During the preparation of the DFID funding proposal, the International Secretariat and the IWG had to decide whether they should include a request for seed money to assist newly formed National Working Groups (NWGs) and if so, what level of seed funding would be appropriate.

Considerations included:

- providing too much funding at an early stage might tempt the NWGs to embark on activities before having built the necessary confidence and trust between members required for their work to be successful
- the knowledge that the international level of the project would be funding autonomous groups over which they had no authority or control despite being responsible to donors for accounting and reporting on how the funds were spent.
- not wanting NWGs to become dependent on the international level
- giving seed funds could be misinterpreted by NWGs as a sign that the IWG was trying to gain some control over them.

On the other hand, the International Secretariat was keen to have paid coordinators in place at national level to relieve the pressure on busy members of NWGs, especially the “champions” of the process who were driving it forward.

After much thought and discussion, the IWG decided that seed funding should be small and its distribution based on specific needs identified by NWGs.
5.3 Where will funds be held?

Deciding on an institutional home for accounting, financial reporting, and holding funds is a necessary precursor to fundraising but may require intensive discussion between multistakeholder group members.

One option is for the group to register itself as a charity or NGO and open its own bank account. But this is a time consuming and, in some countries, a costly process that may not seem worthwhile for what is a temporary, medium term initiative.

The alternative is to find an organisation willing to take the role of financial host. This could be the organisation of a trusted group member, or a known organisation standing outside the process. This may not be a simple decision as the proposed financial host must be acceptable to all group members. At the same time, it must be acceptable to potential donors, and these potential donors must be acceptable to the organisation.

One issue is the charge the financial host will levy for its services. Ideally, this should be a small fixed amount, rather than a percentage of the funds raised as this is more likely to reflect the actual costs of the work needed.

Holding funds: What The Water Dialogues Did

At international level, WaterAid, UK acts as the financial host to the project.

In South Africa, funds are held by the Environmental Monitoring Group (EMG), which has a member on both the National and International Working Groups.

The situation in the Philippines mirrors that in South Africa. Streams of Knowledge, which has a member on both the NWG and IWG handles funds.

In Brazil, the Dialogues are funded via a loan to the Brazilian Government from the World Bank with the money held by a government department.

In Indonesia, funds are held by FORKAMI, a respected “neutral” NGO, under a Memorandum of Understanding with the NWG.

After unsuccessful negotiations with potential hosts, the Ugandan Dialogues decided to register as an independent NGO and set up their own bank account.

5.4 Who will be Responsible for Financial Accounting?

Financial accounting: What the South Africa Water Dialogues did

In South Africa, the role of the financial host, EMG, has been spelled out in a written agreement. EMG has a person on the management committee of the NWG, as an accounting agent, plus a staff member on the NWG itself who provides a civil society perspective.

The ultimate and formal responsibility for funds always lies with the governing body of the process. Where the governing body and the working group are the same thing, members should be made aware of their responsibilities prior to fundraising. It is essential that members of the governing body take seriously their collective responsibility in relation to the funds they receive.

While someone employed directly by the working group may (together with the financial host), take day-to-day responsibility for dealing with invoices, payments and bookkeeping, etc., the overall responsibility for financial management lies with the governing body. It is important that multistakeholder groups ensure that good accounting practices are followed. This requires scrutiny of accounts and supervision of staff to ensure they manage finances in the best interests of the project. Some of this responsibility could be delegated to a treasurer or finance subgroup chosen from members of the governing body, but this does not negate the need for the whole group to review budgets, expenditure, and financial accounting at regular intervals.

TIP Transparency in financial transactions will prevent money becoming a source of discord. Transparency regarding payments to members or the group for services provided or expenses incurred is especially important. Being able to present accounts to outside observers, if requested to do so, will give the process credibility.
5.5 Deciding on donors

In a multistakeholder group, determining which donors are suitable may provoke vigorous debate. Some stakeholders may have strong negative views about specific donors due to their links to a particular perspective or because critics see their past work on the issue as having had a detrimental impact. Others may either support the view and activities of specific donors or take a more pragmatic view and feel that the most important criteria for acceptability is that no unhelpful conditions are attached to grants.

All multistakeholder groups working on contentious issues will have to grapple with the problem of finding “neutral” donors who are willing to support their processes without setting difficult conditions or interfering in the design of the project.

5.6 Tensions between being a process and a project

“There is a tension between being a project, which becomes concrete and time-bound when you have funding, and being a dialogue which is an organic process that cannot be rushed.” (International Secretariat member)

The question of the speed at which a multistakeholder process progresses towards its goals can be a source of tension, not only between the project and its donors, but also between the participating stakeholders. This is true for both single location projects and multi-locational projects.

Raising funds for multistakeholder processes usually involves preparing fundraising proposals that have to set out a timetable for the work. Most donors are accustomed to funding projects, not processes. They expect grant proposals to include a precise set of activities, a fixed timeframe, and clearly identified and tangible activities, outputs and outcomes. This is not easy to deliver for multistakeholder processes which are characterised by unpredictability and are likely to adapt their focus and activities to match changes in the local context or to meet the needs of their members. This will be especially true of dialogue processes and those focused on contentious issues. As a result, they are almost impossible to timetable. In addition, while the focus on final outcomes usually remains the same, group members may change their activities and outputs as the process progresses.

Tensions arise because participants struggle to balance the need to do what they said in their project proposals with the realities of managing a complex process that by its nature must respond to the changing needs and wishes of its participants. This tension can be particularly stressful for those tasked with reporting to donors.

The challenge is amplified by the difficulties in describing and quantifying progress to donors. For many months at the early stages of the process, progress is all about building relationships and identifying priorities for future work. While transformations in attitudes can be seen to be taking place, these are not easy to quantify. Furthermore, at this stage, members of a multistakeholder group may be reluctant to admit that their attitudes have changed, let alone report such observations to donors. “It is said that National Working Groups find it difficult to identify tangible achievements, yet achievements do emerge from stakeholder reflections, updates and interviews. Each country has developed a process unique to their situation and achieved a number of things ranging from shifts in personal attitudes, relationships, capacity and understanding to some shifts in the national policy space and discourse on water and sanitation.”

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DECIDING ON DONORS: What The Water Dialogues Did

In The Water Dialogues national groups, ideological discussions and arguments about which donors were suitable mirrored the fault lines in the debate over PSP, with some group members fiercely opposed to receiving funds from the World Bank or its regional offshoots because these institutions were actively promoting PSP.

“One member is unable to accept funds from either the World Bank or the Asian Development Bank for ethical reasons. Because at the time most of the bilateral donors were channelling their money through a trust fund managed by the World Bank, this placed severe restrictions on the sources of funding. Some members were frustrated with this position because they didn’t understand it. The member who was rejecting funds from the ADB and World bank offered to resign ‘if taking part in the group will limit its funding opportunities.’ However, the group decided that their participation was more important and that alternative sources of funding could be found.” (Indonesia Working Group member)

There were also concerns that donors might impose unacceptable criteria on group activities or research. In Brazil, the national group was at ease about receiving a grant from the Government of Brazil funded by a loan from the World Bank but disturbed when Bank staff wanted them to make changes to their research methodology. After a meeting between World Bank staff and the National Working Group (NWG), the Bank agreed that the group should proceed with their research as originally planned.

In South Africa, having approached the national office of the UK’s Department for International Development (DFID) for funding, the NWG eventually decided that it would not be possible to accept its funds. These came with two conditions that didn’t fit well with a multistakeholder process. Firstly, the funding contract would be with a large firm of accountants rather than DFID itself. Secondly, open tender would be used to recruit staff to coordinate the Dialogues and manage the research. The appointment would therefore not be in the sole hands of the NWG.

While recognising DFID had a rationale for contracting out grant management and promoting transparent tendering processes, the NWG was disappointed that there was little flexibility in adapting these protocols in the face of a novel type of project. In the event, the NWG received funding for its work from IrishAid whose rules grant-making protocol, although thorough were more accommodating.
REPORTING TO DONORS: What The Water Dialogues Did

The International Secretariat had the responsibility of managing the natural tension between an open-ended, unpredictable, non-linear dialogue process and donor expectations for clarity around project timeframes and deliverables in relation to seed funding and funding international meetings and events.

Aware that “results” from the Dialogues would take time, the International Secretariat wanted to create realistic expectations for what donors could expect from the process and when.

- In the first phase of the project, progress reports to donors would describe and catalogue the creation of groups and their initial activities.
- The next phase would focus on alterations in group dynamics; the impact these changes were having on how the issue was being discussed; and any differences in how participants are interacting and behaving outside the realm of the process.
- The later stages of the project would feature the development of research activities and any interim changes of policy and practice resulting from multistakeholder engagement.
- The final outputs and outcomes from the Dialogues would be delivered only at the very end of the project.

To be able to do this, the International Secretariat started gathering information on process early on and wrote quarterly reports on activities and changes for each national dialogue.

The Dialogues were fortunate that its major donors – DFID, GTZ, WaterAid and Thames Water – understood the importance of process in such an initiative and took a sympathetic approach to delays to, and changes in, delivery of project outputs.
Section Six: Supporting The Process – Secretariats, Coordinators And Consultants

“The International Secretariat was a very important requirement as we thought it would drive us all crazy if we had to manage the process ourselves. None of us had enough time to give to the process. So it was very important that someone coordinated all the activities.” (International Working Group [IWG] member)

6.1 Why have a coordinator or secretariat?

One of the strongest recommendations for a successful multistakeholder process from participants in The Water Dialogues is to have a coordinator to support the working group. This should be a priority as soon as the group is formed.

Having a coordinator or manager is best practice for any project but may be resisted by multistakeholder groups either because they would like to keep the initiative completely voluntary, or because they do not want anyone to disrupt the sensitive relationships between group members. However, the need for dedicated staff time arises because members of multistakeholder working groups usually have very demanding jobs and, regardless of their commitment to the process, have little time available for things like organising meetings, fundraising, reporting on meetings, maintaining accounts, coordinating and managing research or doing advocacy and communications work. Having a small secretariat to take on these roles enables multistakeholder group members to devote their energies to making strategic decisions and dialoguing on substantive issues. In multi-locational processes, each participating unit may have its own secretariat/coordinating office.

This does not mean spending large amounts of money setting up a new, independent physical space. Often consultants will be able and willing to work from their own homes or offices. Alternatively, it may be possible for one of the working group member’s organisations to provide desk space for the secretariat.

6.2 Things to consider when establishing a secretariat

“There is tension between the coordination person/office taking on a leadership role, seeing the big picture, and giving people the space to be self-directing. How far does the coordinator lead and how much do they facilitate and help build capacity? The tension between the two is real and continuous, and in many ways is the nature of the job.”

Paid coordinators and secretariat personnel can give far more time to the process than voluntary members of multistakeholder groups can. This means they develop a more comprehensive understanding of the whole process than is possible for most working group members. To prevent this becoming a problem, it is necessary for coordinators to:

- find a balance between leading and adding value to the work on the one hand and facilitating and enabling it on the other, so that the process does not lose its multistakeholder character
- have clearly defined and limited parameters for taking autonomous decisions and when in doubt always refer decisions to the whole group or its relevant sub-groups.
- avoid a situation where members feel a decreasing need to be closely involved with the process, because they trust the coordinator/secretariat. Ensuring that all major decisions are referred to group members, and there is regular written and oral communication with members to discuss issues as they arise, will help to prevent this problem.

Complete transparency on the part of the secretariats is vital to maintain trust. Information flows should not be limited in any way.

If a secretariat or coordination office becomes too “institutionalised” and does an increasing amount of the work itself, then costs will begin to rise. It is preferable to keep these functions small and allow maximum participation by all members of the process at minimal cost.

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31 (Action Research Group 4 Notes 2001) quoted in Church, M. at al, 2002
THE VALUE OF A CENTRAL SECRETARIAT IN MULTI-LOCATIONAL PROCESSES: Lessons from the Water Dialogues

According to National Working Groups (NWGs) having a central (international) secretariat is useful because:

- National processes are more vulnerable and fragile without the presence of an external, international secretariat that provides practical assistance and methodological support.

- If there is no international secretariat, national Dialogues run the risk of their “safe space” for policy debate being eroded. Having an international element to the project—in this case an International Secretariat and Governing Body—was important in ensuring the legitimacy and independence of the national Dialogues.

- Without deliberate efforts to link participating dialogues and bring them together to share their experiences and findings, the overall quality of these processes will be severely diminished. Domestic policy recommendations will be weakened if they are not informed by international comparisons.

- Without financial and practical support to facilitate access for national groups to the international policy community, it is unlikely that individual country dialogues would be able to have a significant impact on global debates, policy-making and practice.
Active supervision by members of governing bodies is necessary to ensure the work of staff and consultants reflects agreed plans, that finances are well managed, and work is of a sufficiently high quality. An effective way to ensure personnel are properly supervised is to create a management subgroup that can:

- keep monitoring the work of secretariat and maintain regular two-way communication – both verbal and written
- be available to discuss issues of concern or brainstorm new ideas
- provide clarity on who can make which decisions, and when default decisions are acceptable
- meet with staff or consultants to provide personal support and guidance

For secretariats and coordinating offices, one of the consequences of being a small, impermanent entity with either a small office, or no office at all, is that personnel can feel isolated. For this reason, having a dispersed team is not recommended.

### 6.3 Challenges for secretariats and coordinators

Except in cases where a multistakeholder process is closely attached to an existing organisation, when coordinators are recruited, they should expect to have to establish the unit, or virtual office. This requires creating from scratch all the necessary personnel, financial and reporting systems. Given the time constraints on multistakeholder groups, they may also need to draft their own roles and responsibilities, and those of governing bodies. In addition, if the “project” has not been fully conceptualised or elaborated they will need to develop options for how to proceed in order to achieve the project’s objectives, and bring stakeholders together to make decisions about this.

In all multistakeholder processes, staff and consultants will report to governing boards whose members come from a variety of perspectives and organisational cultures and may be from different cultural backgrounds and/or be dispersed. Furthermore, members may have very different priorities and approaches in terms of both process and substantive issues. Most importantly, for all members the multistakeholder process is only one of many priorities and responsibilities they have.

Given the major roles they play in fundraising and reporting to donors, coordinators and secretariats will feel responsible for delivering the activities and outcomes detailed in funding proposals. However, they are dependent on the performance of the multistakeholder group over which they have no authority beyond their personal ability to persuade and motivate.

Since the work of secretariats is focused exclusively on the multistakeholder process, they are privileged by their detailed and comprehensive view of the process, which enables them to learn quickly about what seems to work. But as they have no authority and rely only on powers of persuasion, their recommendations may be ignored. When things go wrong, this can be frustrating. Of course, this is something also experienced by individual members of multistakeholder groups and being able to recover from difficulties is all part of having a successful dialogue. Also, it occasionally happens that past practice is not a predictor of future outcomes, and paths that were difficult for one group turn out to be a successful way forward for others.

32 Secretariats of multi-locational processes are likely to be particularly vulnerable to this problem.
THE ROLE OF AN INTERNATIONAL SECRETARIAT:
What The Water Dialogues Did

At international level, the project’s secretariat serves both the International Working Group and National Working Groups. Together these groups identified the following areas of necessary support:

**Project management support**
- support in establishing governance structures, financial and project management systems and with the recruitment of staff
- assistance with national and international level fundraising, including preparing proposals and donor liaison
- guidance and support in relation to overall strategy development and the intellectual framework for their activities
- assistance with monitoring and evaluation
- support to resolve conflicts and encouragement

**Research Support**
- advice and guidance on research methodologies and assistance and encouragement in seeking comparability in ToRs between countries
- establishment of a framework for academic and peer review of research proposals and outputs within and between national dialogues and at international level, including organising communication between NWGs and an International Academic Panel*
- analysis of the overall conclusions and recommendations from the research carried out by national dialogues highlighting the differences, commonalities and points of interest from the research for NWGs and the IWG
- preparation of an overview report that summarises the conclusions and recommendations from national level research carried out by NWGs
- assistance with editing and writing of research documents
- preparing summaries of research and assessment methodologies (financial, technical, institutional and socio-political analysis)
- providing updates on trends among key international actors and policymakers in the sector

* For further information on academic panels see Section 9.7
THE ROLE OF AN INTERNATIONAL SECRETARIAT:
What The Water Dialogues Did (continued...)

Communications, Learning and Advocacy
- help with developing national and international advocacy and communication strategies
- maintenance of the project website, in liaison with NWGs and provision of regular updates to sector stakeholders
- management and promotion of communication, learning and exchange between the national dialogues
- promotion of the outputs and outcomes from national level dialogues with international stakeholders
- dissemination of research and process findings to a broad range of international sector actors

Process Recording
- assistance with recording the methods and processes used to start and maintain multistakeholder dialogues at national and international levels, internal dissemination of the lessons learned
- production of a guide to conducting multistakeholder dialogues and advocating and disseminating the lessons learned
- advice to countries that are interested in setting up similar dialogues

General
- overall coordination and supervision of the dialogues
- action to ensure project principles are followed in all national dialogues and political independence, accountability and transparency are maintained
- operational responsibility for the financial management of international secretariat funds and for timely and accurate reporting to donors and provision of management and financial information to IWG members
- to continue activities during periods of tension
Secretariats should not assume that, because the representatives from participating groups on the governing body understand the secretariat’s role, everyone else involved in the multistakeholder process does too. Instead, it is helpful to inform each member of participating groups of the secretariat’s role and responsibilities.

Any residual confusion between the roles of the secretariat and, for example, an international governing body should be resolved on a case-by-case basis.

At the start of a process, almost every aspect of work done by a coordinator or international secretariat is likely to be questioned by someone, even if a “collective decision” has been made. As work progresses and trust develops between the secretariat and members of the process, questioning decreases; but it never stops completely. Retrospective questioning of agreed approaches and activities should be anticipated. This is all part of a healthy multistakeholder process, so secretariats and coordinators should not feel frustrated.

It is hard to establish strong relationships across countries and cultures only using emails. Meeting members of groups operating at distance is very important in establishing mutual confidence and trust. “There is an openness and willingness within the Indonesia group because I was there and met with people and could provide support to them in a very immediate way. It think it probably saved six months of relationship building time if that had to happen at long distance. Going there, meeting people, understanding what they have to address and face - this all helps to generate different perspectives on the relationship.” (International Secretariat member)

Because different countries may begin work at different times, everyone will have a slightly different understanding of the project. International secretariats and coordinators may find that some national groups want more support than others. It is sensible to give individual support to those that want it, while involving others in larger substance or methodology focused activities.

Where most communication with a dispersed governing body is by email, unless correspondence is acknowledged, it will not be clear whether it has been read. This means that the secretariat cannot be sure if members are actively engaged in decision-making.

Establishing a “default decision-making” policy, whereby no response indicates approval, allows work to progress but default protocols should never be used for significant decisions, as this will disempower the group. It is better to take time, send reminders and contact members by telephone to give them every opportunity to be involved in the decision.

The use of new, computer-based telephone technologies like Skype, now make frequent long-distance calls and teleconferences an affordable option.
Section Seven
Building And Sustaining Multistakeholder Processes

7.1 Building Trust and Creating a Safe Space for Dialogue

“In an organisation of peers, trust is the key. It takes a long time to build trust, and it has to have a component of personal contact. But once built it operates like strong glue. It’s a very big thing to lose, once you have it you don’t want to break it.”

For multistakeholder groups, establishing constructive working relationships takes time and cannot be rushed. If a group is addressing an emotive issue or one where views are polarised, building mutual respect and trust may take many months, depending on the frequency of its meetings. The time invested in building strong relationships is worthwhile because without building solid foundations, maintaining momentum and the continued commitment of working group members will be difficult.

For any sense of collective responsibility to emerge within a multistakeholder group, ensuring that every member is fully informed, and has a chance to have a say before a decision is taken, is crucial.

Nevertheless, it is important to find the right balance between time spent in building the trust between group members and time devoted to addressing the substantive issue so as to avoid frustration among the more task-oriented group members.

As noted in Section Four, consistency of personnel is a critical factor in developing confidence in stakeholder groups. “Personal relations make or break the work. In an environment where there is no hierarchy, if you don’t get on, individuals’ attitudes to authority, leadership, and conflict can begin to paralyse effective networked relationships.”

The individual is the primary agent in the relationships needed to sustain a multistakeholder process, so when individuals change or leave, these relationships must be built anew.

Spending time discussing codes of conduct or confidentiality agreements, developing and agreeing fundraising proposals, creating job descriptions and other project management activities may seem mundane but allows group members from different perspectives and working cultures to learn how to dialogue with one another. In this sense, these tasks can be a rehearsal process for when the “real” dialogue begins.

TIPS

In the early stages, it is dangerous to hurry the process as this can result in collapse. “It’s important not to rush any of those processes and be open to re-opening (previously) agreed positions and discussions.” (South African Working Group member)

In particular, all members of the group must have the space to understand and reflect on the issues raised and, where possible, reach agreement, before moving on. “Resist the urge to take decisions quickly in order to hasten the Dialogue process. If members feel pressurised to take decisions quickly, the Dialogue process itself will be jeopardised.” (Indonesia Working Group member)
Focus On The Benefits Of Dialogue

- The dialogue process is about learning to listen to others’ views and perspectives and creating spaces in which all views can be expressed without restriction and without participants compromising their values or positions.

- Dialogue is also about knowledge transfer that will enable participants to gain insights into other sectors and others’ experiences. New learning is generated which in itself may shape thinking and future actions beyond the life of the dialogue process.

- The process has the potential to remove the barriers between previously opposed individuals and groups, demystify them and correcting the misconceptions that surround them. Dialogue members come to understand the limitations and challenges institutions face, and how their stakeholders influence these obstacles.

7.1.1 Establishing the rules of engagement

Some groups find it helpful to develop a Memorandum of Understanding or a Code of Conduct detailing how the dialogue will operate. This can help the group to understand what is expected of them in terms of commitment, confidentiality and keeping an open mind. The exercise of developing a Code of Conduct also provides members of the group with an opportunity to get to know one another before tackling divisive issues straight away. For this reason, simply adopting Codes of Conduct developed by other groups is not recommended. In The Water Dialogues’ experience, it is a shortcut that does nothing to strengthen relationships in newly formed groups.

7.1.2 Techniques for Building Good Group Dynamics

**Problem:** Members of the Group worry that their discussions will not be confidential.

**Solution:** Design and agree a confidentiality agreement. Coming to an agreement regarding the confidentiality of discussions within the working/steering group for the process is a significant aspect in building trust and allowing free and frank discussion to take place. Each group will develop its own rules on confidentiality to suit the issue being addressed, and the context within which it works. Agreements usually outline the extent to which discussions within the group or documents submitted by group members, can be disclosed or quoted to non-group members, including home organisations. Some groups may operate “Chatham House Rules”, whereby participants are free to use whatever information is disclosed in a meeting but may not reveal the identity or affiliation of the speaker, nor that of any other participant present.

The intention of confidentiality agreements is to allow people to speak freely as individuals and to express personal views, including those that may differ from the positions taken by their organisations. Such agreements mean that group members can be more relaxed about what they say and not have to worry about the implications for their jobs or reputations of being quoted publicly.

**Problem:** Members of the group are worried that others will dominate and hijack the agenda.

**Solution:** Create the right environment for meetings by convening them in spaces recognised as neutral or rotating the venue so that each group member hosts meetings in turn. Allow all group members to input into the agenda for meetings and to agree the final draft agenda. Choose someone to chair the meeting who is respected by all members, or invite an external facilitator to do this. Alternatively, rotate the role of chair among group members. At the end of every meeting, have a space where all members can give a personal evaluation of what went well, and what did not, and how things could be improved.
Encouraging equal relations in multistakeholder groups

- As noted in 4.1.3, creating an environment where the most powerful members of a multistakeholder group do not dominate the discourse and decision-making is essential for success.
- Decisions regarding which issues will be addressed, the focus of research, the selection of staff and consultants, and which messages will be communicated to which actors, are all areas where lack of care could result in the wishes of the less powerful being ignored.
- A first step in addressing the perceived differences in power and knowledge between participants is for all members of the multistakeholder group to acknowledge that inequalities exist. This sets the scene for members to deal with them actively and creatively.
- Coordinators, facilitators and chairpersons have a special responsibility for addressing power imbalances and creating an atmosphere in which everyone can speak freely and have an equal say in decisions. Note that failure to participate fully may also be a result of apathy, shyness and, in international settings, language ability all of which are important.
- Impartiality is necessary in coordinators, facilitators and chairpersons and they must be aware of and work to overcome their own biases. Those who find it difficult to maintain neutrality should avoid these roles.
- One result of giving attention to inequalities may be the development of protocols and guidelines for communication.* Another will be increased levels of active listening.**
- The coordinator, facilitator or chair’s conduct can also create a safe atmosphere. In addition to being impartial, calm and adopting neutral body language, they should ensure that the physical space and seating arrangements are conducive to open discussion.
- In addition, each meeting should adopt ground rules before discussions begin. These should be devised and agreed by participants and cover, for example:
  - Encouraging everyone to participate
  - Having only one person speaking at a time – no interrupting
  - Remembering everybody’s ideas have merit and should be treated with respect
  - Leaving mental baggage behind
  - It is everyone’s responsibility, not just the facilitator’s to ensure every participant abides by the ground rules.

* An illustration of such guidelines taken from the South African Dialogues can be found in Section 7.2
**For information on active listening see Section 7.3
CODES OF CONDUCT: What the Water Dialogues South Africa Did

Code of Conduct for the South African Working Group, 5th October 2005

We, the undersigned members of the South African Working Group, delegated or authorised to represent our institutions or sectors, guiding the South Africa process of the Global Review of PSP, undertake to abide by the following Code of Conduct for the duration of our working together on the national process for the Global Review of PSP. We agree that the following principles will guide our behaviour and interactions on this Working Group:

- **Openness and transparency** – this means that we will clearly share our views and positions, avoiding hidden agendas, and we will also be prepared to enter into discussions on our positions.

- **Open minds, co-operation, and a spirit of serious inquiry** – we shall be willing to explore controversial or difficult questions with an open mind. The group will try to understand the real issue as it is – this means that issues will be explored more deeply to try to understand what is really happening on the ground and to understand the concerns that lie beneath people’s positions.

- **Mutual respect** – we shall treat each other with mutual respect, particularly where there are differences. Mutual respect includes the need to listen to each other, and to be willing to agree to disagree. This also means that opinions expressed here shall not be distorted or taken out of context in order to be used in other forums.

- **Respect for minority views** – minority views should always be recorded.

- **Confidentiality** – this means that discussions leading to decisions are not in the public domain, but that the agreed minutes are in the public domain. In the case of unresolved issues that form part of an ongoing group discussion, the group agrees to clarify what will be reported back to sectors and what will be held over until the next meeting or conclusion of the discussion on that particular aspect. The group will discuss further identifying a Chairperson for the group, who could be provided with an agreed terms of reference and identified as the spokesperson for the group.

- **Multistakeholder process** – the group agrees that multistakeholder guidance of the methodology and of the process is critical, and that a consultant-driven process must be avoided.

- **Collective interest** – the group will strive to make workable solutions, and not just to protect personal ideology.

- **Dynamic and forward-looking** – the group recognises that the sector is dynamic so we have to engage with current dynamics and dialogues, and to make sure that the review also has a forward-looking element.

- **Approach** – important elements of the approach include agreeing on working definitions; recognising cost implications of the need to distinguish between facts and perceptions (solid funding will be needed to get “harder facts”); and looking at what is happening in other countries.

- **Commitment to the process** – once our organisations have signed on to participate in the review, this means that we are committed to seeing the process through to its conclusion. The only grounds then for disengagement from the process would be if there is a substantial deviation from what was agreed at the start. If this appears imminent, the group should be alerted well in advance of any actual withdrawal, to allow for a process of negotiation and/or conflict resolution to attempt to remove the need for any disengagement.
Problem: Participants stereotype people from different types of organisations, e.g. private sector people are only interested in profit; government employees are lazy; NGO staff are impractical idealists.

Solution: It takes a conscious effort to listen through stereotypes and hear what is actually being said. Using the active listening techniques employed by negotiators will help you engage with others without being judgmental.

Active listening techniques: a brief introduction

Pay attention
- Listen for the whole message by paying attention to body language, feelings, and the meaning of what is said and what is not said.
- Give the speaker your undivided attention, and acknowledge the message. Recognise that non-verbal communication also “speaks” loudly.
- Put aside distracting thoughts. Don’t mentally prepare a rebuttal! We can listen three to five times faster than someone can talk. This means we tend to predict what they will say and mentally engage in developing responses rather than listening to what is actually said.

Show that you are listening
- Use your own body language and gestures to convey your attention.

Defer judgment
- Allow the speaker to finish. Interrupting is a waste of time. It frustrates the speaker and limits full understanding of the message.
- Do not prejudge people because of previous history, dress, accent or other irrelevant characteristics.
- Don’t interrupt with counter arguments.

Clarify and ask questions
- Our personal filters, assumptions, judgments, and beliefs can distort what we hear.
- Ask questions to clarify certain points. “What do you mean when you say...?” “Is this what you mean?”
- Use short, open questions prefaced by why, where, who, what, how - to dig deeper into issues.

Paraphrase and summarise
- Give a review or summary of what you heard to check that your understanding is accurate; i.e. repeat in your own words what the other person has said.

Respond appropriately
- Be candid, open, and honest in your response.
- Assert your opinions respectfully.
- Treat the other person as you would like to be treated.

Adapted from Kent, J., and Touwen, A., 2001
**Problem:** During the confidence building stage of a multistakeholder process, those members who are on the weak side in asymmetrical power relationships (or those who are by their nature diffident) may be afraid to speak out in case their contributions are criticized.

**Solution:** It is essential to invite these people to say what they think and accord them respect when they speak. As group members learn to separate the professional from the personal and their ideologies from their technical knowledge, it becomes easier to have free and frank discussions. Until this stage is reached, all group members should pay attention to, and openly discuss, the styles of communication in use. Chairs or facilitators should identify and stop instances of aggressive and passive-aggressive behaviour when they occur and encourage everyone to communicate assertively for the benefit of the whole group.

**TIPS**
- Do not allow cynics, or people who regularly argue that previous experience means what's being proposed will not work, to dominate discussions. Thank them for their contribution but note that, e.g. a change in the context, or the new approach to be adopted to the proposal will alter the outcomes.
- Manage the behaviour of people who talk all the time by acknowledging that they have valuable contributions to make but that it would be good to hear from some of the quieter participants.
- Make sure that quieter people are encouraged to speak by asking for their thoughts on the issue.
- Monitor people trying to impose a single solution and ensure everyone is asked to contribute their ideas.
- If people deviate from the agenda, recognise their contribution but ask for their opinion on the specific issue under discussion.

**Three Steps to Assertive Communication**
- Describe the situation or idea as clearly and specifically as you can.
- Express how you feel about the situation. Note: use “I” or “my” statements, not accusative “you” statements to refer to how you are thinking and feeling.
- Specify what you want. Include a specific deadline.

**Styles of communication**

**Passive communication**
Passive behaviour means allowing others to decide what will happen to us, our project, and so on. Passive behaviour is revealed when we:
- Don’t participate or share our thoughts and ideas.
- Keep our voice low and/or avoid eye contact; or avoid calling attention to ourselves.
- Verbally agree with others despite our real feelings.
- Bring harm or inconvenience to ourselves to avoid harming or inconveniencing others.
- Consider ourselves less knowledgeable or capable than others.
- Always stick to the middle-of-the-road and refrain from taking a stand.

**Aggressive communication**
Aggressive behaviour essentially is the complete opposite of passive behaviour and is revealed when we:
- Interrupt others when they are speaking.
- Try to impose our position on others.
- Make decisions for others.
- Accuse, blame and find fault with others without regard for their feelings.
- Bring harm or cause inconvenience to others rather than to ourselves.
- Consider ourselves stronger and more capable than others.
- Accept responsibility and positions of authority in order to manipulate or influence others.
Styles of communication (continued...)

Passive aggressive communication
Passive-aggressive behaviour is a combination of the two previous behaviours. It is revealed when we:

- Refuse to participate and share thoughts when it is appropriate, for example during a meeting, but then become vocal with one or two people or in a back room when the issue can no longer be addressed.
- Deny people an opportunity to deal with dissent – by not expressing our opinions openly.
- Whisper or exclude some people from hearing your point of view.
- Make side comments that not everyone can hear and no one can respond to because the comments were not addressed to the entire group.

Assertive communication
Assertive behaviour, in contrast, is self-enhancing because it shows a positive firmness. Assertive behaviour is revealed when we:

- Allow others to complete their thoughts before we speak.
- Stand up for the position that matches our feelings or the evidence.
- Make our own decisions based on what we think is right.
- Face problems and decisions squarely.
- Consider ourselves strong and capable, but generally equal to other people.
- Face responsibility with respect to our situation and our own and others’ needs and rights.

Adapted from Kent, J., and Touwen, A., 2001

7.2 Decision-making in multistakeholder groups

“In multistakeholder work, practically everything is contestable and contested, including the way in which the work should be organised and governed.” (International Secretariat member)

In multistakeholder processes, individuals' values and beliefs often are in conflict with those of others, yet if they are to be able to reach shared recommendations, they need to achieve “an aggregation of individual interests, or judgements, or well-beings, into some notion of social welfare, social judgement.”

7.2.1 Choosing decision-making methods

Ideally, you should use a variety of tools when selecting the best solutions to problems, generating full participation and allowing debate to happen. The guiding principles for selecting an appropriate decision-making process should be its flexibility and fitness for purpose.

Some participants may favour voting on decisions. Regardless of its value and outcomes in other circumstances, this type of governance is not recommended for multistakeholder processes. Majority voting is not a helpful way of resolving disputes in a multistakeholder setting. It is a way of imposing the views of the majority on the minority, leaving minority stakeholders disempowered, angry or silent.

Likewise, although achieving consensus may be something to aspire to, as detailed in Section 7.2.2 below, it is not a helpful way to proceed in terms of multistakeholder work. Instead, collective decision-making may be preferable.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Consensus</th>
<th>Collective Decision Making</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Encourages lowest-common-denominator solutions which offend no one</td>
<td>Encourages the free exchange of conflicting views, which excites everyone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tends to stick with the familiar and stifle provocative debate</td>
<td>Explores the unfamiliar and stimulates provocative debate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Can’t we all agree” approach</td>
<td>“Promote diversity” approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watered-down solutions</td>
<td>Innovative solutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keep your real opinions to yourself</td>
<td>Express your real opinions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from Surowiecki, J., 2005

Collective decisions cannot be made if one group has or appears to have all the power. They depend on members of the group respecting each other’s abilities and potential contributions. In a multistakeholder processes, all members of governing bodies should be given the opportunity to contribute to the effectiveness of each and every board meeting and any decisions made between meetings.

7.2.2 Problems with seeking consensus: a note on confrontative or mindful dialogue

A confrontative or mindful dialogue differs from the problem solving and more reformist approaches characterised by consensual oriented dialogue. Rather than a negotiating process, the concept is more closely related to what in Buddhist thinking is known as loving speech and deep listening.

Confrontative dialogue is a transformative dialogue – confronting and visualizing power structures through non-violent means. The intention is to meet “the other” with an open mind, energetically trying to understand the logic behind the positions and pattern of actions of different actors. The aim of the confrontative dialogue is to understand different points of views and interpretations of factual matters and thereby to become aware of your own patterns of action and thought. By making positions and conceptions visible, the roots of different opinions become identifiable and the attitude towards “the other” may be transformed, increasing the room for manoeuvre regarding what is possible.

The process requires confidence building and for the parties involved to make an effort in order to understand the motives and logic of the other partner. The objective is transforming and transcending patterns of thoughts, not winning a discussion. If confronted too aggressively the actors will take a defensive position and the objective of the dialogue will be lost. Paradoxically as it may seem, such confrontation is non-aggressive. In fact, the method is some kind of a hybrid between Northern confrontative traditions and some Southern, more consensual approaches.

Hence, the confrontative dialogue offers a possibility for the more powerless and weaker partner to join the dialogue without fear of being co-opted into the logic and rationale of the powerful. On the contrary, often the identity of the weaker partner is strengthened by the affirmation of the fact that the differences could be considered legitimate. The confrontative or mindful dialogue should be understood as a method for conversation suitable in asymmetric relations where the distance between the powerless and the powerful is great.

This type of dialogue is a process constituted by different phases over a lengthy period. The first phase is a question of strengthening the identity and self-respect of the weaker partner. An arena must be created where different points of view could be formulated and further developed. As a second phase, coinciding interests and entry points could be identified, followed by a possible third phase of more negotiating, oriented and aiming to identify common approaches and possible measures to take.

For the method to work, four conditions are needed:

- All parties must be aware of the aim of the dialogue: to make diverging values and interest visible and understandable, and to illuminate political alternatives. This type of dialogue must not be confused with more consensually oriented dialogues, where differences are suppressed or glossed over nor with a traditional debate in which parties try to beat each other by scoring intellectual points.
- It is important that the weaker party is allowed to have a strong role in setting the agenda.
- The process requires a facilitator who understands both confrontative dialogue and the content and complexity of the issues to be addressed. The facilitator should assist the participants by summarising what has been said and illuminating diverging as well as coinciding values and interests.
- Sufficient time is essential. Lack of time creates a debate-like atmosphere and may turn the discussion into a fight for cheap points. The confrontative dialogue should be understood as a process over time, which requires a series of meetings.

.../continues
DECISION-MAKING: Lessons from The Water Dialogues

- Secretariats and coordinators need to anticipate and provide to governing bodies the information needed for effective decision-making.
- For complex issues of substance, a “decision” does not require there to be a statement promoting only one option. It could mean deciding and publicising the fact that there is no agreement. Or that the group has agreed to present some options for consideration by external audiences. However, once a decision is made, all members of the group should take collective responsibility for it.
- It is important to make a clear distinction between the core/working/governance body and meetings of a less formal, wider range of stakeholders. In general, working group decision-making meetings should only be open to non-members by specific invitation. Consistency of personnel, especially for multistakeholder work on controversial issues, is an essential basis for building trust and creating a safe space for discussions.
- Open entry to meetings, rather than delivering transparency and democracy, can result in the dialogue being subject to political manipulation by interest groups “packing” the meeting to promote their perspective. These groups can act powerfully but without responsibility, never having to worry about the long-term consequences of their behaviour.
7.3 Sustaining Personal and Organisational Motivation

“I was tired of empty debates and just being at corners to mark positions. The proposal of a dialogue was very exciting for me. So it was both emotional and rational. It was good to leave preconceived ideas outside the room” (IWG founding member)

A commitment to the dialogue and a desire to find solutions that will contribute to improving policy and practice are the key factors motivating people to take part in multistakeholder processes. “A process like this has to work with those who show the most commitment and are prepared to dialogue” (IWG member)

For many people, taking part in a voluntary multistakeholder process usually means adding extra responsibility to already demanding professional lives. This means that strong personal motivation is required to sustain participation in processes that may happen over months or years. “Although the group is still highly motivated, the members found it difficult to take time out from their regular office work to attend the meetings. They therefore could not remain as involved as they would have liked to be. Since most members are in fulltime employment, their first commitment is always to their job, especially if a choice has to be made between work commitment in the office and attending a Dialogues meeting. In order to overcome this problem, some members began sending their own representatives to the meetings. Although this helped the absent members to keep track of recent developments, it did not hasten the process of decision-making.” (Uganda Working Group member)

Factors that motivate stakeholders to participate include:

- personal involvement with the issue
- the desire to see a problem solved for the benefit of disadvantaged stakeholders and citizens
- interest in bringing together different perspectives in order to break down barriers and demystify opposing perspectives and ideologies
- expectation that learning from others and sharing their own knowledge and expertise will promote better understanding
- a wish to promote their own views and beliefs and influence other stakeholders
- an intellectual curiosity to understand the complexity of the issue better through hearing multiple perspectives and new “facts”
- a desire to influence policy and practice through the process
- a belief that their organisation will gain recognition by being a part of the process.

Expectations regarding the factors outlined will be different for different people and organisations participating in the dialogue. The extent to which their diverse expectations are seen to be realised is a key factor in sustaining motivation and participation of group members.

Factors that have a negative impact on motivation include:

- slow pace of the multistakeholder process
- loss of momentum due to funding constraints
- lack of buy in from key decision-makers
- perception that the confidentiality of discussions is not respected
- a member or group of members trying to hijack the process
- feeling that membership or dialogue is not evenly balanced in terms of perspectives or types of organisations involved
- feeling that no new views or new information is being generated
- pre-existing conflicts between members or stakeholder groups negatively affect relations within the group
- perception that some members are more committed than others
- feeling the contributions of some group members are not matched by those of others
- a shift in focus away from the core issues to be addressed
- outputs from the process such as research reports are not acceptable to all members
- changes in personal and organisational priorities
- overwhelming workloads in home organisations.

7.4 The Impact of Context and Culture

Each dialogue process is unique and has its own dynamic, which is influenced by the culture and context in which it takes place. Levels of familiarity with participative forms of democracy and participative policy-making forums and the strength of civil society will have an impact on the form of the dialogue, as will national traditions with regard to etiquette and acceptable behaviour. Participants in multistakeholder processes must consider the appropriate forms of dialogue to adopt given their cultural context.
MOTIVATIONS FOR PARTICIPATING IN MULTISTAKEHOLDER PROCESSES:
What The Water Dialogues Members Expected

- to get a better understanding about how to move ahead and break the policy stalemate in water service provision
- “I expected to meet the various stakeholders involved in the water sector. Interact with them. Share views, learn more about people’s needs and expectations. That was my motivation and my expectation from The Dialogues. Also to contribute to making service delivery better.”
- to gain an understanding of the respective positions and rights and responsibilities of the different stakeholders
- “We got involved because we wanted to give others the benefit of our knowledge and opinions – it is a good opportunity to explain how things should be.”
- to generate evidence that would be useful in furthering their own policy and advocacy work
- to demonstrate through documentation of the process that dialogue is possible and stakeholders can work together
- “I like the matter, the method, and am interested in the process.”
- to learn more about what was happening in other countries and at the international level.
- to have a better grasp of how other stakeholder organisations think
- to understand the foundations for the critique of their organisation by other actors
- “To a certain extent it was a very basic, to get a better understanding of where the unions and NGOs come from. To know where the real private sector critics come from, what they think, what their impressions are, what their critique against the private sector is. What they want, what their objectives are, about the private sector, building better relationships”
- to build better relationships with other stakeholders
- “Interest in the topic and the people on the IWG.”
MAINTAINING MOTIVATION: Lessons from The Water Dialogues

“Sharing roles and responsibilities among members helps to keep people involved – every member wants to do something.”

- Pay attention to communications. Good information flow is crucial.
- Clarify the roles that different individuals are expected to play at different stages of the process. “Overlapping of roles and responsibilities can cause confusion or even conflict.”*
- Encourage sharing of responsibilities such as hosting meetings and planning activities.
- “Sharing roles and responsibilities among members helps to keep people involved – every member wants to do something.”
- Hold regular meetings with focused agendas that deal with substantive as well as administrative or business issues.
- Don’t hold meetings without having a clear objective.
- Respect differences in pace and capacities of partners. Stakeholders differ in the speed with which they can take on board new ideas, make decisions and act.
- Build on the interests, strengths, and capacities within the group and use these to keep people engaged.
- Engage stakeholders in activities that will have tangible outputs. Avoid unnecessary bureaucracy. Bureaucracy consumes people’s time and energy, and erodes the commitment and enthusiasm of partners.
- Create space and opportunities for each member to participate and contribute.
- Continue the trust building activities.
- Utilise the strengths and interests of stakeholders to find answers and solutions for the issues that need to be resolved.
- Encourage people to share openly their opinions about how the process is working.
- Emphasise the contribution that each member has made to the process.
- Identify and analyse the personal growth and development of stakeholders as a result of being involved in the dialogue.
- Recognise different levels of commitment and interest of members at different stages of the dialogue.
- Emphasise the common goal and purpose of the dialogue.

*Waters-Bayer. A. et al., 2005
Dealing with Conflict

“There has been too much politicking, too much ideology, too much stubbornness and lack of willingness to listen. This is all very tiresome and exhausting. In addition, we have no funds for coordination, facilitation or for research. The burden of being part of the process is too great.” (Philippines Working Group member)

The causes of conflict

In multistakeholder processes, minor conflicts are inevitable. But if dealt with quickly they should not lead to crises. Participants should be encouraged to share their concerns and feelings so that these do not fester below the surface. Nevertheless, from time to time, more serious conflicts arise that can cause the process to come to a temporary halt. This is likely to become permanent unless specific action is taken to mediate between members of the group so that positive relationships can be re-established.

As each multistakeholder group is unique, the causes of conflict are hard to predict. Some factors that may lead to serious conflict include:

- behaviours that leave people feeling threatened or cause them to lose face
- active public campaigning by one stakeholder against another
- individuals/organisations advocate their own messages in parallel to the multistakeholder group
- one member taking legal action against another regarding the issue
- impatience with process and the desire for immediate results
- breaches of confidence
- behaving in a judgemental way and not respecting feelings.

Mediation in multistakeholder processes

Mediation is probably the best way to resolve conflicts in multistakeholder groups. This should be conducted by a respected, impartial outsider. “You might think of the mediator as a referee, establishing ground rules for effective problem-solving. Other times the mediator becomes a coach, suggesting more effective strategies for pursuing your goal, or offering encouragement when the situation appears impossible to resolve.”

It is important to involve everyone concerned in generating solutions and deciding on outcomes as this will increase the likelihood of reaching practical agreements that the group can own.

As in all mediation, the first step is to explore systematically the interests of each participant through one-to-one conversations. Once this is done, it is common for the mediator to bring all the parties together or introduce some shuttle diplomacy. The mediation process may involve one or more such meetings, depending on the complexity and seriousness of the conflict.
**Make positive assumptions**
- It is normal but unhelpful to begin by presuming a great deal about both issues and other people. It is better to assume that you have a great deal to learn about both.
- Issues are often far more complex than you may think and other people are not as simple, thoughtless, and intransigent as they might seem!

**Keep an open mind**
- When listening to the perspectives of others and/or learning more about specific issues, try to remain open to the possibility of changing your perspective.
- Changing your perspective and understanding does not mean compromising your core values.

**Create a safe space**
- Recognise one another's histories and concerns and start to explore options for working together.
- Agree ground rules that provide safety for participants.
- Avoid antagonising or humiliating each other by agreeing rules for conduct, for example, “take turns talking”, “no personal attacks”, “listen attentively”.
- Do not allow sustained group criticism of any specific stakeholder or his/her perspective. Stop, summarise what has been said in terms that are not personal, invite the stakeholder to respond.
- Remember that everyone brings passion to their work and that criticising someone’s organisation will feel as if you are criticising them.
- It is good to communicate between meetings and essential that everyone is kept in touch with progress, whether or not they attend meetings.

**Avoid stereotyping**
- Try not to pre-judge what someone will say – listen carefully so that you hear what they actually are saying.
- Find ways of expressing your thoughts that will help to prevent others from switching off.

**Deal with your feelings**
- If say, pressures of work or family have left you feeling stressed, grumpy, impatient or exhausted, tell members of the group at the start of the meeting. This will help them to understand your behaviour and give them the opportunity to be sympathetic.
- When you are exhausted, expect to feel the dialogue will never succeed, that it is an impossible task, waste of time and energy. Everyone has these doubts. Wait until you are rested before making any critical decisions.

**Detail, not doctrine**
- Focus on learning about the specifics rather than the generalities of the subject.
- Build a working consensus about practical steps forward for the issue rather than pursuing discussions around more abstract worldviews.
- Explore specific options together in order to generate practical proposals.
- Devise options that satisfy the concerns and interests of all stakeholders.
Confidentiality
- Agree protocols that enable participants to indicate which parts of the dialogue are strictly confidential and “off the record” and may not be spoken about outside the meeting
- Agree “sign off” procedures that ensure all documents are approved by the membership before they are made public. This means that everyone must say “yes” or “no”
- Resist all temptations to leak information to the media or outside groups to further your cause because, at best, this will cause serious difficulties for the group requiring major trust rebuilding exercises, and at worst, will cause it to split completely

Basic requirements
- Funding is key to long term success – urgent work is required to agree acceptable funding sources and prepare a funding proposal
- Engage a coordinator/secretariat as soon as possible after starting your multistakeholder process. This will relieve pressure on members of the group – all of whom will be busy with their “real” jobs.
- Success is associated with having a paid person who can organise meetings, prepare funding and/or research proposals, prepare reports of meetings, ensure regular communication between members, encourage participation, represent the dialogues and so on

Be realistic about progress
- Be prepared to take small steps towards the overall goal
- Be realistic about what you want to achieve, and think about how you can demonstrate to others that you are being realistic
- When there are problems in moving forward, consider new or different options that might meet your needs as well as those of the other people

Be realistic about outcomes
- Do not expect participants to reconcile their value systems
- Instead, expect to explore carefully how disputes over specific options and the detailed elements that these involve can be resolved

Reflect on the price of failure
- A return to bilateral working or the status quo
- No improvement in understanding what works and what doesn’t, nor why or how it works
- No consensus or reliable advice for policymakers or key actors on the advantages and disadvantages of different options
- Slow progress towards meeting your over-arching aims

“If you want to walk fast, walk alone.
If you want to walk far, walk together”
West African Proverb
Section Eight
Organising And Conducting Multistakeholder Meetings

Bringing stakeholders together in face-to-face meetings is an essential element in creating an environment in which open dialogue can take place. Direct interactions between stakeholders allow mutual exploration of ideas and play a key role in changing the way members perceive each other. Section Seven deals with some of the elements needed to develop a safe space and ensure that all members of the group are able to contribute on an equal basis. This Section focuses on some basic guidelines for multistakeholder meetings, the advantages of using a facilitator and reflections on why meeting together is so important to multistakeholder processes.

Of course, many interactions between stakeholders happen outside meetings and a large amount of the work of a multistakeholder initiative takes place between meetings. Some of the issues involved are addresses in 8.4 at the end of this section.

8.1 Types of multistakeholder meetings
Types of meeting include:

- regular meetings of the working group that is steering the process – usually 10 to 15 people
- longer workshops for planning, framing and debating the issues, developing research questions, assessing research findings and agreeing conclusions
- multi-locational process meetings that bring together working group members from different locations. These may be:
  - large meetings to share progress, develop strategies and plans of 40 to 50 people
  - smaller meetings on specific topics, e.g. research methodologies of 10 to 20 people
  - meetings with a wider range of stakeholders not directly engaged in day-to-day activities to inform them of progress, relay research findings etc... of usually 30 to 100 people.

NOTE: Roundtable and other forums for communication and advocacy involving different kinds of stakeholders are discussed in Section Ten.

8.2 Basic guidelines for multistakeholder meetings
The normal best practice guidelines for any meeting are of increased importance for those involving multiple stakeholders.

- Fix a date for the meeting and inform all those who should attend
  Finding a date when a group of busy people can all attend the meeting can take time. So it may be helpful to do this at the end of each meeting, when everyone is together. If anyone is missing, it is best to gather a number of possible options so that the final date chosen is one when this person or persons can also attend. “It is important that everyone is active in the dialogues. If someone has missed more than one meeting, we usually begin by asking them for dates when they will be available and then see if these suit other group members.”

  In Indonesia, the use of the short message service (SMS or text message) on mobile/cell phones has proven to be a very effective, practical and cost-effective means for scheduling meetings. “A short message using cell phones reflects urgency, and yet its level of ‘disturbance’ is generally considered low by the NWG members in comparison to a conventional telephone call.” (Indonesian Working Group member)

- Choose a suitable venue
  The venue for the meeting must be acceptable to all participants. Often members may offer to host meetings. This is good but it may not be wise to use one member’s venue too often, even if it is more comfortable or better equipped than that offered by other members, in case this leads to resentments within the group. In Indonesia and the Philippines, NWGs ensured that venues rotated between members of the national core group. Note that
in some cultures, etiquette may mean that it is very difficult or impossible to disagree with or criticise a host, which could limit dialogue. When it comes to choosing a venue, this should be done with the explicit agreement of the group.

- Ensure timed agendas are circulated and approved in advance of the meeting
  Each meeting should be preceded by a consultation regarding its content. It is good to start with a call for ideas regarding agenda items from all those who will be attending. A coordinator, secretariat or member of the working group may then produce an initial draft agenda. This should be circulated for comment before a final agenda is prepared.

  NOTE: Even if the objectives and agenda are agreed in advance of the meeting, it is helpful to allow participants to review, amend and prioritise items at the start of the meeting.

- Set out objectives for the meeting in advance
  Meeting objectives should also be the subject of consultation. Often this may happen alongside consultation on the agenda. Having clear objectives not only allows for meeting evaluations but also alerts participants to the reason why agenda items have been included.

  Gather together and distribute, in advance if appropriate, all the necessary information and papers needed for an informed discussion of agenda points.

  The meeting organisers should prepare or source the background materials required to support discussions. These should be disseminated in advance and some additional hard copies made available at the meeting itself. It should be clear which materials are from the multistakeholder process itself and which are from external sources.

- Encouraging attendance
  Since members of multistakeholder groups are very busy people, it is good to telephone each participant the day before the meeting to remind them of the date, time and venue and to encourage them to prioritise the meeting over other commitments.

- Appoint one or more chairpersons to guide the meeting and ensure everyone feels able to contribute
  As noted in Section Seven, in addition to ensuring sessions run to time and achieve their objectives, chairpersons must behave impartially and ensure everyone has the opportunity to contribute to discussions.

- Make sure the content of the meeting is recorded and the record is distributed promptly
  Having a record of every multistakeholder meeting allows members to check that their perceptions of agreements and decisions made is reflected in the general understanding of what took place.

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**Tips for conducting multistakeholder working group meetings**

- Formality is useful. Each meeting should include:
  - a review of and agreement on the minutes/record of the last meeting
  - follow up on action points and a review of outcomes
  - prioritisation of agenda items when time is short/items are many

- There should be clear ground rules so that meetings are not used as venues for direct attacks on specific individuals or institutions. If the meetings are to be a safe space, everyone needs to be confident that what is said won’t be used against them, nor taken out of context.

- Having the same people at each meeting is essential for building trust. If a person representing a specific perspective is unable to attend then his/her fixed alternate should attend instead.

- Meetings must be productive and interesting so that people look forward to them and give them priority over what is happening in their offices.

- It is important to find a balance between process and management and discussions of substance.

- If there are no skilled facilitators among the group, it may be useful to bring in an external person with experience of facilitating groups with diverse opinions to play this role, especially during the first two or three meetings.

- Prompt, accurate documentation of meetings is needed to act as a record of what’s been talked about and what’s been decided or agreed that can be referred back to if needed.

- Focusing on process, administration, governance and fundraising can be a useful way for members of the group to build relationships. Although these issues might not be very controversial when discussed between people with the same perspective, or who belong to the same organisation, in a multistakeholder group there will be plenty of differences of opinion that will allow group members to develop ways of dealing with disagreement.

- If too much time is spent focusing on process and business issues, group members may become frustrated with the lack of attention to substantive issues and begin missing meetings.
8.3 Facilitation

“Trusted and skilled facilitators can play a key role in enabling stakeholders to work together constructively in the early stages of a network/partnership process, and in helping with process design issues.”

Those members of The Water Dialogues that have used a facilitator strongly recommend their use to ensure a safe environment in which everyone has an equal opportunity to speak.

How a meeting is conducted has a big effect on whether people feel comfortable and willing to engage actively in the process. Well-facilitated meetings enable constructive discussions and efficient decision-making, and help to keep the process focused on its purpose.

For smaller group meetings, good chairing by members of the group may be adequate. For larger meetings, a facilitator is recommended. If resources are a problem, facilitation could be provided by an experienced and skilled person from within the group, but experience shows that external facilitation is generally more successful.

For multistakeholder processes, the facilitator must be trusted by all participants. In relation to the key issue, he or she must be seen by the group as sufficiently neutral. The ideal is someone already known to the group’s membership. In any case, it is essential to consult everyone attending a meeting about which facilitators are under consideration, so that any objections can be raised.

Facilitators for multistakeholder processes should have experience of managing tensions between people who disagree about an issue. They should have the flexibility to allow, for example, seemingly agreed positions to be re-examined, while keeping the group focused on the agreed timetable and objectives for the meeting. And, to make them aware of contentious issues and other sensitivities, they should get a full briefing in advance of the meeting.

Tips for facilitating multistakeholder meetings

- Facilitators should keep in mind, and remind participants as necessary, that there are people from different organisational backgrounds, different approaches to problem-solving and different areas of experience in the room and that this will be reflected in the way they express themselves. Diversity of opinion and behaviour is what multistakeholder processes are all about.
- Facilitators must be ready to deal with participants who are disruptive, disrespectful of others or don’t play by the rules.
- As in any group process, it is important that a few members do not dominate the proceedings. If these members are very vocal or put forth their views forcefully, others who disagree may shy away from participating unless specifically asked to do so.
- Every effort should be made to ensure that all participants contribute to discussions. Quieter individuals, or those from cultures with a more gentle approach to debate, or those who refrain from speaking, need special attention. They may feel more comfortable speaking in small groups than addressing plenary sessions.
- Varying cultural norms should guide the facilitator with regard to what types of activity and decision-making will be appropriate.
- It is helpful to summarise discussions at regular intervals and to identify to participants any areas that they have not yet addressed. Re-stating common thinking and any agreements reached can help to build momentum in the meeting.
- Decisions should not be forced on the group. If views are divergent and cannot be reconciled, decisions are best deferred until another time.
- Facilitators should respect the need for some participants to consult their organisations before making any commitment.

“Dialogues are very dynamic. There is no straight line to them. You have to realise that sometimes you have to take a step back then a step forward simply because you are waiting for everybody to come together.”
(Uganda Working Group member)
8.4 Extended meetings and central meetings of multi-locational processes

At any level, extended meetings or workshops of one to three days in length are effective means of consolidating relationships and moving forward on issues of substance. They are even more critical in the life of multi-locational processes where they enable participating groups to not only share and level off on experience and learning from each location, but also to get to know one another as people.

The purpose of workshops that bring together participants from the different groups involved in a multi-locational process is to help build and strengthen relationships between these groups, and between them and any central or international group or secretariat.

Extended meetings provide spaces for participants to focus on specific elements in the multistakeholder process such as the development of protocols, research, fundraising, process recording or advocacy and explore commonalities, methods and technical issues. In addition, they are occasions to raise problems faced, share and reflect on activities, and make or reaffirm decisions on future activities. Such meetings can also be very motivating for all concerned in the process – providing renewed energy, commitment and purpose.

"These meetings are so important because of their motivational nature. They help re-motivate you and provide technical guidance. I have been to two of them. They have been turning points in my life and the life of the dialogue in my country. They have unlocked areas where we had got stuck...Nationally when you share some of these issues you may not find solutions in the group but when you come to an international meeting you can talk about the same issue and find the insights from others more practical. Every country is struggling with similar issues." (Uganda Working Group member)

"The first weekend extended meeting conducted by the Indonesian NWG in Bogor has been really instrumental in how the dialogue took its shape afterwards." (Indonesia Working Group member)

The experience of The Water Dialogues is that despite the expense involved, international meetings bringing together people from the different groups of a multi-locational process are cost-effective. They help to provide a better understanding of the whole project and the roles of all those involved. “There is an obvious shift in perceptions and relationships with those that have attended these meetings and those who haven’t attended. People begin to have a much clearer notion that they are part of a much larger whole. Also, their understanding of the roles of the International Working Group and International Secretariat changes once they attend an international meeting. We begin to notice the changes immediately after the meetings.” (International Secretariat member)

8.5 Factors to take into account when designing the meeting include:

- Preparations will consume a large amount of time and energy.
- Logistical tasks including locating a venue, arranging rooms and menus, booking flights or obtaining visas must begin at least ten weeks before the meeting takes place, ideally three to four months beforehand.
- The task of discussing and agreeing an agenda should begin at least three months before the meeting to allow sufficient time to contract external resource people required and prepare and disseminate background materials. All groups and participants should be asked to contribute ideas about the agenda.
- The secretariat or coordinating office should prepare a first draft for circulation and feedback before being finalised.
- Do not assume that everyone will have read the agenda. Items seem sensitive or controversial, have a teleconference with selected participants to discuss how they intend to handle them.
- The design for the meeting agenda needs to address the fact that:
  - the meeting brings together people from different cultural backgrounds, who don't necessarily know each other and have opposing perspectives on issues but who need to be able to work together constructively
  - participants come from a variety of working cultures - from NGOs who put a premium on process, to business and government organisations that emphasise substance and rapid decision-making
  - everyone always wants to have a short meeting but they also want to have many different topics on the agenda and have plenty of time allowed for discussion
  - participating groups may be at very different stages of development - some may have hardly begun, others are almost finished – but everyone wants to be able to give a positive impression of their work
  - everyone wants to present and talk about their own work, but listening to a series of presentations regarding the work of others may not be so attractive
  - everyone attending, with the exception of full time national coordinators and secretariat members, have full-time, senior, stressful jobs and little time to prepare for the meeting.
  - regardless of the clarity of briefs sent to presenters regarding what they are expected to report there is no guarantee that they will do what is asked – so it is important that the agenda allows the space to adapt accordingly
- For these reasons when producing the final draft agenda it is necessary to think about how to sequence items to maintain interest, the balance between presentations and discussions, and between plenary sessions and small group work, and how to tensions and sensitivities will be managed.

8.6 A note on encouraging interactions between groups and across cultures

In a multistakeholder context where people may be suspicious of strangers, time spent on introductions at the beginning of the meeting is time well spent. Facilitators and chairpersons should seek amusing methods for introductions that ensure everyone knows who everyone else is.

During the course of the meeting, having participants involved in monitoring the mood of the workshop and providing energisers, putting up flipcharts, or perhaps acting as shepherds to bring back people from breaks helps to break down divisions between participants and get them to work collaboratively. Getting participants to form Home Groups which put people from different nations and with different perspectives together to complete such tasks helps to build relationships between a wider range of participants than might happen without intervention.

Instructions for Home Groups

- Divide participants into “Home Groups” of between five and eight people at the very beginning of the meeting by simply counting off one, two, three, four, etc., depending on the total number of participants, until each person in the room has a number. The number a person is assigned is the number of their Home Group.
- Have each Home Group in turn put up their hands so that members can see who else is in their group.
- Tell the Home Groups that they will meet each evening immediately after the workshop closes to discuss the day’s work and provide feedback to the facilitator and organisers on what went well, what went less well, and what could make things better. (This feedback is used to revise the agenda or build in ideas for the following day. Using this method can quickly identify and handle problems before they become serious.)
- Inform the Home Groups that they will be assigned specific tasks each day of the workshop, with the responsibility of each task rotating between the groups. These tasks include:
  - **Timekeeping**: ensuring presentations and sessions keep within agreed timings by alerting the facilitator when this is not happening; acting as “shepherds” to ensure that people return from breaks and lunches on time.
  - **Mood monitoring**: keeping an eye on the mood of the group and alerting the facilitator to the need for energisers when energy is beginning to flag. The group may also run energisers themselves. Also, speaking to the facilitator if people seem to be fed up, cross or upset.
  - **Assisting with flipcharts and maintaining a good environment**: helping to write and pin up flip charts during feedback sessions; monitoring the temperature and lighting in the room; keeping an eye on the tidiness of the room and suggesting clean ups.
  - **Providing a review of the previous day’s proceedings**: creating an amusing and innovative way of recapping the previous day’s proceedings to be presented to plenary in five to ten minutes at the start of the day. Blow by blow descriptions of what happened are not allowed. Instead games, quizzes, skits, songs and dramas are expected!

**NOTE:** Don’t assume that all participants will be accustomed to working in this way. Some may need encouragement. Others will need reminding of their responsibilities during the course of the workshop.
8.7 Facilitating work between meetings

As noted at the start of this chapter, a lot of the work of a multistakeholder initiative takes place between meetings. Among other things, coordinators and secretariats must take responsibility for ensuring all stakeholders are kept up to date with developments in the day-to-day running of the project and are involved at all stages in research, communications, advocacy and planning an implementing a range of activities.

Multistakeholder group members themselves may wish to follow up with one or more colleagues on discussions held during meetings and special sub-groups that have been set up will wish to attend to their specific responsibilities.

If a meeting has involved particularly robust exchanges between stakeholders, there may be a need for a colleague or coordinator to mediate between, or reassure, those involved.

Tips for technology aids

- Outside of formal meetings, if the local context permits, the use of new technologies can make communications between stakeholders, coordinators and secretariats much easier.
- It is helpful to set up an email group or listserv for:
  - the working group members
  - specialist sub-groups of the working group
  - participants in regional or international meetings held by multi-locational processes
  - the wider group of stakeholders that are not part of the working group but are engaged in occasional meetings, to inform them of progress, relay research findings etc....
  - All email groups and listservs should include the coordinator and/or secretariat staff.
- In addition, establish an email group or database of all stakeholders who should receive newsletters, updates, briefing papers and other project materials.
- As noted above, sending texts or SMS messages via mobile phones is a very effective way of ensuring important but short communications get through to people who are very busy and may be receiving huge numbers of emails on a daily basis. SMS messaging is cheap, does not require the recipient to deviate from other work, but provides them with something in writing that can be referred to later if necessary.
- Where distance prevents face-to-face interactions, telephone calls offer effective, high quality communication:
  - to reduce the costs of long distance or international calls and teleconferences employ free computer based technologies like Gizmo5 and Skype
  - where technological constraints make this inappropriate use special rate phone cards
- Regular newsletters and update or briefing sheets are a useful way of keeping all stakeholders not directly engaged in project activities up to date with progress and findings.
Section Nine
Multistakeholder Research

9.1 Why carry out research?

“Only through joint research will we be able to understand the real problems involved in a balanced way”
(Indonesian Working Group member)

“Research is important. You can’t establish a dialogue without it. Only when discussing case studies do we get beyond slogans and start talking about the complexities and the details.” (South African Working Group member)

Many multistakeholder processes are aimed at resolving issues where stakeholders hold radically different views. The fact that there may already be a mass of research about the issue is of little help to multistakeholder groups because no “side” trusts the evidence produced by another side. The driver for multistakeholder research is thus the need to generate evidence that is agreed by all parties, so that debates can move forward and coherent recommendations can be made to policymakers and practitioners.

Undertaking multistakeholder research is a demanding but rewarding exercise. Experience demonstrates that even interim research results can influence the thinking of members of multistakeholder groups. If these members are in senior, decision-making positions, this can change both the terms of the debate and the associated policies and practices.

Some multistakeholder groups would like to conduct their own research, but their regular workloads usually make this impossible. Also, not everyone in a multistakeholder group will have the necessary research experience and skills. More importantly, if only one or two members of the group are involved, they may find that having their work subjected to robust critiques by group colleagues a difficult and painful experience. Thus, contracting external research teams with an experienced team leader often will be the best way forward.

Lessons From The Water Dialogues

- Multistakeholder groups may find that one or more of their members would like to act as researchers, especially for secondary research tasks.
- This can be successful but will create stresses on both the individual and the group when critiquing research findings.
- Members of multistakeholder groups who do decide to take on research tasks need to be calm and patient in the face of criticism and willing to explain repeatedly their rationale for what they have written.

“It is better not to do it again! Although I was very careful, people were suspicious that the findings reflected my personal opinions. Even after discussions and re-writes, for the final draft there were new critical comments from people who hadn’t commented earlier. Next time I shall give it some distance.” (National Working Group member)

- For primary research, it is usually best to keep the roles of researcher and multistakeholder group member separate. If working group members wish to pursue this avenue, it is best for them to resign from the group.

9.1.1 The need for all group members to be continuously involved

The full engagement of all members of multistakeholder groups is needed at all stages of the development and review of research. This is to ensure that the research has a genuine multistakeholder character, and is “owned” by everyone in the group. Failure to engage all members of the group may lead to serious problems when final reports are ready for sign off.

Where possible, all group members should attend every research-related meeting. This ensures that all perspectives are considered, and avoids the group having to go back over old ground later on to deal with the concerns of members who were absent.
An absolute minimum requirement is for coordinators or secretariats to provide those missing meetings with verbal progress reports and relevant documentation highlighting questions the research is generating. In response to these updates, members should provide written or oral comments. At minimum, members should provide simple yes or no answers to questions. Silence cannot be taken to mean yes! It may simply mean the documents have not been read.

**Lessons From The Water Dialogues**

- The time needed to design, commission, manage, review and agree multistakeholder research should not be underestimated. A rough guide is to work out how much time you think you will need then double it!
- The amount of work involved in preparing for and undertaking research means that it is a great advantage to have a paid member of staff coordinating the process.
- Designing, managing and reviewing the first piece of research takes much longer than the second or third as the multistakeholder group becomes accustomed to managing the process.
- At all stages of the research, expect a continuous iteration between working group members to arrive at formulations that can be agreed.
- Synthesis of national level findings is complex. Much of the data gathered from primary research in different locations will not be comparable. In these circumstances, it is better to draw interesting, specific, qualitative information to the attention of policy formers, rather than forcing the evidence into very broad generalisations.
- It is unproductive to try to force reluctant multistakeholder groups into undertaking formal research. Instead, they should be encouraged to find other ways of obtaining the data they need to reach their objectives.

**9.2 The differences between conventional and multistakeholder research**

"This type of research is very different. When there is only one person or organisation commissioning the research, the result is more one-dimensional and the results tend to prove what you want to prove!" (South African Working Group member)

Multistakeholder research is more challenging and takes more time than conventional research.

In conventional research, it is usual for one person or one organisation with a single point of view to commission the study. If that person or organisation is also funding the study then they will have full control of the research agenda and methods.

In multistakeholder processes, a group of individuals with divergent agendas commissions and manages the research. Consequently, tasks that are relatively straightforward in conventional research, such as establishing the specific focus of the study, developing basic research questions and agreeing the choice of researchers, can consume significant amounts of time.

Conventional research usually proceeds along a straight line

**Hypothesis** ➔ **Case study/data collection** ➔ **Analysis** ➔ **Conclusions**

Multistakeholder research is an iterative process. This means it can be slow but it has the advantage of allowing those involved to learn continuously along the way, and for the group to make immediate use of information at opportune moments.
The research usually proceeds in a series of loops. For example:
9.3 Issues and challenges for multi-locational processes

While all multistakeholder research faces many challenges, these are magnified when research is multi-locational and the intention is to bring results together for an overall synthesis, or to generate overall policy recommendations.

In conventional research, to enable synthesis of findings from studies occurring in different countries or locations, researchers develop and apply standard methods and questions. But in multistakeholder research, this is difficult, if not impossible. The reality is that different groups in the same process may decide to adopt or reject any centrally devised research methods. Furthermore, they may opt to address different issues or different aspects of the same issue. Attempts to impose identical research questions and methodologies on different working groups are unlikely to succeed in the face of national and local priorities, internal dynamics and the interests of the individuals and organisations involved.

On the plus side, the overall multistakeholder process will be strengthened by developing its own, indigenous methodology. And the very act of designing the research will increase commitment among participants. In addition, in a multi-locational project, groups that are slow to start research will be able to learn from the experiences of groups that begin earlier.

The disadvantages however, are there are fewer opportunities for the different groups to share findings and identify key themes during the research phase. Also, there is a danger that once one group has finalised its research and recommendations, it will be unwilling to revisit these in the light of evidence from other countries.

That said, if some level of comparability is essential the best way to achieve this is to bring together representatives of national/local groups to develop a shared core methodology and shared research questions. A series of face-to-face meetings between group representatives is the best way to facilitate this, but it involves significant costs. An alternative is to begin the process through emails and teleconferences to allow for a series of iterations in response to comments from different working groups; then hold a participatory international process to make the final decisions.

However, the above approach depends on the groups from each participating country forming around the same time. From a research point of view, it is ideal for all participating groups to begin their research simultaneously. While this does not guarantee the same rates of progress in different locations, it does provide the best chance of groups being able to share their preliminary findings and learn from each other's results. And for cross-country overviews to be prepared while all results are up-to-date.

In cases where this is not possible and multistakeholder groups have begun work at different times, it would be helpful for the central secretariat to support newer processes to raise funds and commence research activities as soon as they are ready. Alternatively, the central secretariat could provide funds itself for the pilot phase of research, allowing individual groups to start research while seeking their own funding.

9.4 Developing Multistakeholder Research

“*It's important that multistakeholder research is of a high standard, because those who don't like its findings are certain to try to find ways to challenge them.*” (Member of the International Academic Panel)

It is beneficial to build on the strengths of being a multistakeholder group when developing research questions and methodologies. This means engaging in processes that allow full participation from all group members when drawing up research parameters and approaches.

Group members should be encouraged to reveal differences in their perspectives, and discuss what these might mean, rather than try to achieve consensus. Only after a thorough exploration of issues should the whole group try to agree what these differences mean for the research’s focus and methodology. *“You have to shepherd the sheep first, only when they’re together can you organise the research.”* (South African Working Group member)

Funds are a constraint on the scope and depth of research so it is essential that multistakeholder groups make the most of their funds by taking time and care in the selection of research questions and case studies. Choosing the research design and research team must be the joint decision of the entire working group. Otherwise, members may argue that the results are biased against their perspective, because either the wrong data was collected or biased researchers were used.
MULTI-LOCATIONAL MULTISTAKEHOLDER RESEARCH: What The Water Dialogues Did

- As noted in Section 2.2, the Dialogues undertook an international scoping study to assess the interest in multistakeholder dialogues on private sector participation in the sector.
- Participants in the scoping study generated a series of questions which were reframed and grouped into a final 31 questions.
- Participants in the 2004 Berlin meeting that provided the mandate for the project appear to have assumed that this series of questions would form the basis for future work in participating countries, but no hard and fast rules about this were established.
- While some national Dialogues began preparing research terms soon after this meeting, others did not do so until late 2006 or 2007.
- The terms of reference produced varied significantly in terms of scope, scale and approach, reflecting the autonomy of national groups, their differing aspirations and the different policy emphases of national governments.
- The outcome was that, while three countries focused on private sector participation (sometimes comparing this to public sector performance), two countries focused on a wider variety of sector issues including for example.
- This had obvious implications for an overall synthesis of findings at international level. Instead of attempting a full synthesis across all areas of the research, the most common thematic areas were identified. The specific national experiences and analyses of these themes were integrated into additional research on the international context for each theme.
- At international level, the aim of research into issues of common interest was to give national dialogues information on international policies, trends and experiences to enable more effective advocacy both nationally and internationally. In addition, the international research papers that include specific examples from national research should be valuable documents in their own right.
- In practice, the extent to which national dialogues have been able to make use of international research is not clear. One problem related to timing. The international research became available at the same time as national groups were dealing with large amounts of other documents, including their own research findings.
When conducting research to generate robust findings and resolve disagreements, the temptation is to aim for something that is comprehensive, statistically significant and extremely detailed. If money and time are limitless, this may be the way forward. But experience demonstrates that evidence alone will not resolve differences of opinion as data can be interpreted in many different ways, so groups should not be too concerned when they have to balance the ideal with the practical.

9.4.1 Case Studies

Case studies can provide rich insights into how an organisation or system works and provide the sort of depth and detail that is hard to obtain through sample surveys. The richness of the material means case studies can demonstrate practical, specific models of how and why organisations or systems can become more effective.

When selecting and conducting case studies, remember to:

- stay focused on the key issues of the multistakeholder process
- balance geographic and political contexts
- include places where something interesting has happened, including successes and failures
- incorporate examples that will cover the wide range of possible lessons to be learned.

Of course, case studies are not the same as statistically valid sample surveys and unless a large number of them are undertaken, they cannot demonstrate widespread patterns. In South Africa, during The Water Dialogues' consultations on research design, the number of case studies to be carried out was reduced from an ideal 24, to a more manageable and affordable 9, which were chosen to provide the essential breadth and depth needed. “Ambition was grounded in what was doable without losing any essential evidence” (South African Working Group member)

As for all forms of research, case studies require careful design. Findings must demonstrate clearly that the core issue of the multistakeholder process was the most significant variable for determining outcomes.

9.4.2 Using participatory research to bring grassroots stakeholders into the process

In multistakeholder research, it is important to consult those communities and individuals most directly affected by the issue yet traditionally marginalised from policy-making and governance. Participatory research is an integral part of full multistakeholder involvement; and it should be contrasted with more extractive research methods, like surveys, that separate the analyst and the subject.

The value of participatory research is that it yields high quality information and analyses of complex local realities that are difficult to access in any other way. Typically, it uses a diverse set of tools and techniques that enable information sharing and joint analysis that can empower the people involved. In this way, it can provide the basis for locally generated, acceptable (or “owned”) and enduring solutions.

The type of tools that may be used include, for example, classic participatory rural appraisal (PRA) tools such as focus group discussions, Venn diagram’s, pie charts, ranking and scoring matrices, timelines, trend chart, resource maps or seasonal calendars. Of course, it is not the tools that are participatory but the way they are used to support the research process. This requires from the research team specific skills and careful planning and facilitation.

In relation to poor or marginalised communities, research teams should be sensitive to, and open about, the fact that research may not lead to any immediate action to improve the community’s circumstances. Indeed, there may be an inherent tension between the short term, immediate concerns of communities and the long-term, structural and policy concerns of working group members.

TIP

- Start fundraising for research as soon as possible because it takes a long time to have proposals accepted and grants approved.
- When preparing a budget for research consider including costs of:
  - pilot studies
  - initial scoping exercises for each case study to be undertaken that can identify what data exists and what does not
  - a first and second presentation by the researchers to the working group
  - the main body of the research plus a second round of research to collect any additional data required by the working group
  - joint meetings between researchers/research teams
  - community meetings and dialogues
  - research visits by members of the working group
  - synthesis and building an analytical overview – especially if a number of case studies are carried out
  - redrafting the final report once or twice in line with working group analyses of the data
  - translation of research reports into other languages – both local and international
  - editing, designing, printing and distributing the research report
  - a series of workshops with key stakeholder groups to give presentations of the key findings
CONSTRUCTING RESEARCH TERMS OF REFERENCE: The Water Dialogues South Africa experience

- The research design was guided by a problem statement, which was developed by the National Working Group (NWG), from the international problem statement.
- The Coordinator created a draft research design within a framework set by the NWG.
- The design included overall guiding research questions; a typology of different institutions to be studied; an outline of what would be measured; and a set of indicators which were drawn from the work of the International Academic Panel.
- The draft design was presented to a meeting of the working group for comment and was revised based on the feedback received.
- The Coordinator also consulted with members of the International Academic Panel regarding the proposed methods and overall plan and their inputs were integrated into the research design. "It is helpful to get feedback on the general research design from academics at an early stage, especially on issues such as causality, assumptions and variables to be considered." (Coordinator, South African Working Group)
- The final draft design was re-submitted to the working group for approval before being presented by the working group to a wider set of stakeholders.
- Comments from the wider stakeholder meeting were included in the final version.
To mitigate the effects of these tensions, one option is for researchers or coordinators to link communities to local NGOs who could provide the immediate support needed. Alternatively, they can organise local dialogues between communities and decision-makers to enable a direct exchange of views. This was the approach taken by The Water Dialogues in South Africa. Experience shows that such direct links between communities and local decision-makers are valuable, not only because understandings on both sides are often based on misconceptions, incorrect assumptions and lack of information, but also because they build the capacity of communities to engage in advocacy and cooperative activities.

### 9.5 Choosing the right research team

As Munnik points out, the multistakeholder process “makes high demands on researchers. They are expected to put “new” or “ideologically untainted” information on the table, in order for stakeholders to “identify, critically analyse and evaluate these approaches” with the objective of achieving a greater understanding of the specifics of the issue and developing more effective models to resolve it in the future.

Finding the right researchers with all the necessary skills is not easy. To ensure that researchers meet the high demands of multistakeholder work (including the need for exceptional levels of flexibility), and enjoy the confidence of the entire multistakeholder group, it is necessary to take time and care when developing the research team’s Terms of Reference.

#### Finding the right research team: What The Water Dialogues did

- South Africa used the networks of all the participating stakeholders to advertise the posts.
- Indonesia used internet mailing lists to ask for expressions of interest and received thirteen responses.
- Brazil engaged in a public process, advertising in an international newspaper that is on sale in Brazil.

#### 9.5.1 Drawing up person specifications and consultancy Terms of Reference

Terms of Reference for research teams should include the following information:

- overall purpose of the multistakeholder project
- objectives for the research
- specific information regarding the focus, scope and design requirements for the research
- person specifications for the research team including the specific skills, experience and attitudes needed
- what is expected from the researchers
- a note on the flexibility required to work with a multistakeholder group
- the terms of the contract – including timetables, duration and remuneration, etc...

It is very important that the Terms of Reference are sufficiently robust to avoid bias in recruitment. To check this, the working group should say a clear “yes” or “no” to the Terms of Reference, including person specifications, before these are made public.

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41 For more information see “Facilitating Advocacy for Communities” in Section 10.2.3
42 Munnik, V., A Review of Participatory Research Methods used by Community Researchers The Water Dialogues-South Africa, 8 January 2007, internal document
RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION:  
The Water Dialogues Indonesia experience

“After advertising and short listing by the National Working Group, we asked a number of research teams to make presentations to the Working Group. Unfortunately, in the end only one turned up. Some of us thought the team was fine but, because it had an engineering background, others were worried that the emphasis would be on business and finances, performance indicators and so forth, with nothing about consumers, especially poor consumers. We met twice to discuss. At the second meeting, someone suggested that we should ask the research team to include a social scientist to correct the balance. Luckily, there was a member of the group who knew someone with expertise in community research and who had the confidence of the members expressing concerns. Only after the research team agreed to include him, and he agreed to carry out the work, did the Working Group give the go ahead and contract the researchers.”

(Coordinator, The Water Dialogues, Indonesia)
9.5.2 The selection process

In deciding on the form and content of the selection process, the multistakeholder working group needs to address the following questions:

- Who will be involved in short listing – the whole core group or a special sub-group?
- How will the selection process be structured? Will there be interviews, presentations, tests/exercises, group work, and/or a workshop with the working group?
- What questions will be asked? For multistakeholder processes alongside probing research experience and knowledge, it is necessary to ask questions that reveal their perspectives and opinions regarding the issue the group is addressing.
- What tests will be needed? For example, writing ability, financial skills, analytical capacity....
- How will you assess a candidate’s attitudes, flexibility and ability to adjust to the culture of multistakeholder work?
- Will you ask researchers to provide you with recent examples of their work, e.g. reports or articles?
- Where will the interviews take place and who will be involved?
- Who will be on the selection panel? Who has experience of selecting staff?
- Will you take up references? (Ideally, do this before making a final choice.)

9.5.3 Contracting research teams

Researchers should sign detailed, short-term contracts outlining exactly what is expected of them. While the anticipated number of working days may be the basis of the contract, as is good practice for all research and writing contracts, researchers should be contracted against deliverables not against days worked. At the same time, research contracts should include the costs of a series of presentations and re-drafting exercises, in line with the iterative nature of the process.

Contracts should include:

- clarity regarding the identity and role of the research team leader, and the specific responsibilities of this person in relation to ensuring contractual obligations are met
- deadlines for all stages of the work, including the dates when feedback should be given to the working group, as well as how this feedback should be given penalties for not meeting deadlines
- clauses outlining the ownership of information, i.e. that all information generated is the property of the working group and can only be used with their specific permission
- confidentiality clauses that ensure all discussions, presentations, written materials recorded or collected by the research team, plus any communications with the working group remain confidential to the project
- a note stating that the first line of communication should always be with the coordinator or the entire working group. This is to prevent patronage or side discussions with particular individuals in the working group that could distort or disturb the process.

Depending on the knowledge within the research team, it may be useful to include time for the researcher to interview members of the working group so that they can benefit from the members special expertise on specific themes or issues included in the research terms of reference.

It may also be useful to include time for the research team to spend an orientation day with the group.

Consider a written researcher protocol or code of conduct that outlines the expected behaviour of research team members, for example, regarding objectivity, respect for interviewees or sensitivity in working with poor communities.

Note that researchers may be needed at a number of ad hoc events, for example analysis workshops, meetings of larger numbers of stakeholders or briefings with other researchers. This should be built into budgets and their contractual obligations.

.../continues ➩
HOLDING A SELECTION WORKSHOP:
The Water Dialogues South Africa experience

- All candidates on the final shortlist were invited to a workshop with available members of the NWG. Candidates received a per diem and paid transport costs.
- The day began with a presentation on The Water Dialogues and about the specific research to be carried out.
- Candidates divided into groups for exercises with NWG members in each group. The exercises focused on:
  - how they would deal with contradictory data and findings from municipal officials, private sector, and community research
  - their understanding of the public – private debate regarding water service provision
  - ability to work in a team comprised of researchers with different skills, approach, and backgrounds
- The full group of candidates was asked to provide feedback on the project and the research.
- Each candidate was asked to write a page and a half on private sector participation in water and sanitation services to test their writing and thinking skills.
- At the end of the day, the Coordinator and participating NWG reviewed the tests and candidates’ performances and assessed candidates using a rating sheet. They discussed their assessments.
- During the next Working Group meeting, members formed groups that reviewed the cvs of candidates selected by this group and filled in a form ticking strong support, acceptable, or objections and reasons.
- The Coordinator reviewed these forms, selected some of these researchers and proposed research teams.
- The candidates still had to be supplemented by researchers recruited by the NWG.

NOTE: expect to lose up to 50% of candidates at the interview stage – it’s better for this to happen now than to invest in doubtful candidates and waste money on poor research.
CHALLENGES FACING RESEARCHERS: Lessons from The Water Dialogues

- The topics to be researched may be large and complex but the money is unlikely to be anything more than adequate.

- Multistakeholder terms of reference for case studies reflect the interests of each stakeholder and working group members may find it hard to accept that collecting the data requested is not always possible because it simply doesn’t exist. “The stakeholder from the ministry wanted some information collected that local government was supposed to produce by law, but in fact nobody does. So it didn’t matter how often it was asked for it just didn’t exist.” (South African Working Group member)

- Working group members often wish to add new questions or change existing ones in line with their specific interests when results are presented, which requires additional fieldwork that may not be covered by the contract.

- Although having some prior knowledge of the area/institution is a help, if the issue is controversial, potential sources may be suspicious and reluctant to reveal information. Researchers can feel that they have been dropped in at the deep end when potential informants complain that, for example, there was no prior consultation on the Terms of Reference, researchers have arrived without warning, or the rationale for interviewing one person rather than another is unclear. “Working groups shouldn’t under-estimate the difficulty of explaining a multistakeholder project to case study informants. Perhaps having a visual presentation that researchers could use would help?” (South African researcher)

- Comments from multistakeholder groups on research results are diverse and often contradictory. Research teams therefore have to find ways to accommodate these comments without losing the character of the different views. “It would be good for members of the working group to spend a bit of time with communities in the case study areas understanding the day to day realities of people’s lives. They wouldn’t be there simply to observe but would be asked to collect data. Having pairs who don’t see eye to eye work together could make people more conscious of the specific realities and the need not to generalise too much.” (South African researcher)
9.6 Reviewing and interpreting research findings

“When results come in the first question is, are they accurate? But the next is how they should be interpreted. It is amazing that there can be totally different interpretations of agreed data.” (South African Working Group member)

9.6.1 Impacts on group dynamics

The work of reviewing research data, agreeing evidence and then debating what it means requires careful planning and facilitation. Groups and secretariats should expect tensions to arise when multistakeholder working groups begin to review their research findings. This is a delicate moment in the life of a multistakeholder process and must be handled sensitively.

On one hand, it is a moment when personal ideologies may be challenged and old sensitivities sparked between group members who have come to respect and often like each other. On the other, it is an opportunity for stakeholders who are expert in the issue and want to understand and improve how things work to gain new insights together.

“Following an earlier intermediate presentation of research findings, we had two final presentations. Over two days we reviewed more than 100 slides but there wasn’t always total agreement regarding the conclusions. Some people asked for modifications. Often the old questions about public versus private were raised again. It was a very sensitive moment. But in the end, everyone accepted they couldn’t have the exact result they would like and we should stay with what was found in the field research. This was possible because everyone agreed that the research was of good quality and could be trusted.” (Brazilian Working Group member)

9.6.2 Research review processes

It is good practice for research teams to be asked to make interim presentations of the data collected. This is so the working group can deal in a timely fashion with any preliminary problems with data analysis or amendments to the direction of the research or clarifications regarding the key areas to be emphasised.

Where case studies happen in sequence, working groups should give special attention to crosscutting themes and issues emerging from pilot studies and explore these further in case studies that follow.

In addition to providing written reports, it is helpful for researchers to give presentations of their findings to the multistakeholder working group because this allows direct questioning and discussion to take place with those closest to the material.
Facilitation
“Negotiating the final product will be key. We will need rationality rather than ideology, but we have said that we will engage with minority views and register these, so I don’t think that we will have to part ways. At least, not if we have a good facilitator!”

- Employing an external, neutral facilitator to remind the group of the rules of engagement when things get tense is strongly recommended. Using a member of the research team is not advisable.
- If possible, the facilitator should have sufficient knowledge of the issue being discussed to assist with strategic direction of the discussion as well as the process – but finding someone with enough expertise who is considered neutral is not always possible.
- When debate becomes aggressive and personal, the facilitator can help stakeholders take a step back and remind them that they are present because they all want to achieve the same overarching goal.

Codes Of Conduct
- Having a code of conduct for the group that can be referred to when the debate gets rough is very beneficial and is a useful tool during discussions on research findings and if used by the facilitator and members prevents meetings being dominated by a few forceful voices.
- It is good practice for groups to consider in advance how to respond if any member rejects findings that do not fit their understanding or position on what is happening.
- Don’t try to force multistakeholder groups into behaving like UN drafting committees – it’s unlikely to work and isn’t helpful!

Recording And Reporting
- Record all discussion and integrate key points into the research reports – if this isn’t done, it will be very difficult to capture different perspectives and create meta messages for advocacy. Note that the documentation of multistakeholder group dialogue on research findings requires a skilled person who is well-informed about the subject area to sift key points from the discussion.

Analysis And Interpretation
- Be prepared to build alternative explanations. If research findings reveal, for example, that the type of institution form is not the main driver of what is happening, the focus will have to shift to management culture or financing, etc.
- Make conscious the process of analysis. Continually check back to see whether analysis is not simply opinion but is substantiated by evidence.
- Don’t reify the research or let research findings act as a straightjacket. Research should provide a solid foundation for dialogue but not restrict it where the experience (not opinions) of Group members could add substance.
- Research should not prevent the group from looking forward and discussing future possible scenarios.
Finding the right level at which analysis should begin is not simple. The Water Dialogues South Africa graphic below identifies the different levels of analysis that are involved when research data is subjected to multistakeholder dialogue.

Some data and its analysis may produce insights and information that could be useful immediately to policymakers or think tanks. Multistakeholder groups need to think about under what circumstance they would be happy to release information early and whether any criteria should be set for this, or whether decisions are best made on a case-by-case basis. In terms of taking final research results to the wider stakeholder audience the group has been interacting with, this is probably best done after the group has agreed the raw data and before the research reports are finalised to allow this wider groups comments to be incorporated into the final analysis.

**TIP Don’t suppress differences in interpretation**

When interpretation of agreed data/findings leads to conflicting conclusions among NWG members

- Don’t go for the lowest common denominator to achieve consensus
- Expose differences as being the real situation
- Emphasise that even with strong data arriving at conclusions is complex
- Minority views shouldn’t block the recording of agreement by the majority but must be recorded
9.7 Working with academic panels

“Research reports need to find a balance between very rich and complex descriptions and creating documents that are interesting and readable to those not already expert in the case being studied.” (International Academic Panel member)

The purpose of forming an academic panel to accompany a multistakeholder process is to provide intellectual stimulus to members of multistakeholder groups and enhance the quality of research. Academic panels provide a valuable support to working group members and coordinators and secretariats. At the same time, the presence of an academic panel can give external readers increased confidence in the research findings.

Academic panels are made up of a small number of well-known and widely respected academics working on the issue. Taken together, it is important that the panel covers a wide range of expertise and perspectives. All members of the multistakeholder working group ought to be involved in nominating potential panel members. It is helpful for coordinators or secretariats to produce a full list of nominated candidates that includes a short note on the background and work of each one. The working group can then discuss and decide whom they wish to invite.

Potential academic panel members should be given a clear account of what is expected from them when they are invited to join. They should also be informed of any honorariums or fees they will receive in recognition of their contribution to the initiative.

Because of the nature of multistakeholder dialogues, it is very difficult for academic panels to have any formal authority over how multistakeholder groups carry out their research. Nevertheless, in an advisory capacity they command high levels of respect, which means their guidance is usually taken seriously.

The activities of academic panel members include:

- commenting on research questions and providing guidance on ToRs and research methodologies
- providing information regarding existing and forthcoming research on the issue as well as institutions to be consulted
- advising on how to deal with any problems encountered in obtaining data or analysing and using statistical data
- supporting researchers in the use of participatory methodologies
- reviewing draft research findings commenting on draft research reports
- acting as a specialist resource person to working groups
- participating in multistakeholder group meetings and workshops.

NOTE: In multi-locational processes, panels attached to each participating multistakeholder group may complement the work of a central/international academic panel.
Section Ten
External Communications

In the interests of openness, to build support for the process and as part of forming the relationships necessary for successfully influencing a wider group of stakeholders, multistakeholder processes need to communicate with the outside world.

As anyone who has worked in a large alliance will know, developing materials and positions that accurately and fairly reflect the views of all members due to slight differences in interpretation and emphasis is not an easy task. These difficulties are exaggerated in multistakeholder contexts by the fact that some group members have opposing perspectives.

Thus, early communications, when relationships within the group are easily broken, need to be approached with sensitivity. But even in the later stages of multistakeholder work, arriving at agreed messages and texts requires patience and flexibility.

10.1 Developing a basic communications strategy

In any setting, communications work benefits from having a simple communications strategy that identifies realistic priorities and objectives for this work within an appropriate timeframe, budget and resource base. This is especially true for multistakeholder groups because of their limited time and resources.

Developing a simple strategy involves answering, in sequence, a series of questions:

- What do you want to achieve through communicating? Separate objectives should be set for each communication activity as well as for the overall communications strategy.
- Who are your audiences? Whose thinking do you want to influence?
  > Who can assist the cause?
  > Who might become an obstacle later, if they are not kept informed?
- What key messages do you want to get across?
- Which information should be publicised?
- When will communicating be most effective over the next 6/12/24/36 months?
  > Are there any specific events or opportunities for communications?
- How best can the information be conveyed? Which channels of communication are appropriate to the various audiences?

What budget do you have for communication work, now and in the future?

10.2 Establishing approval protocols

Approval protocols are vital in multistakeholder work. Unless it is clear who should be involved, and at what stage, and when materials for external use should be reviewed and signed off, trouble is almost inevitable. The approval protocols should also cover how the group will handle materials produced by its members that cite the group or are about its work.

It is necessary for all multistakeholder group members to have an opportunity to see and comment on all written communications and other materials. In multi-locational processes, this means consulting the members, or their delegated representatives, of all participating groups. The time allowed to provide comments should be commensurate with the time pressures facing group members from their normal work responsibilities, usually no less than seven days.

As is the case for research, developing multistakeholder communications is an iterative process with different drafts of documents going back and forth for approval as amendments are made. Publishing schedules should be designed to allow plenty of time for this.

Where group members fail to respond to invitations to comment, it is necessary for coordinators and secretariats to chase comments by email or telephone. And, if the material includes anything that might be sensitive or contentious, do a follow up check with any members who still do not respond to confirm they do not wish to comment.

Throughout this section unless specified in the text, the term communication refers to communication beyond the immediate multistakeholder group to the external world.
10.3 Identifying audiences

“The more thoroughly you understand your target audience(s), the higher the probability of communications success. The more refined the target audience description, the more precise and effective your communication will be.”

An important part of developing a communications strategy is to be clear about who the group wants to reach. What do they need to know and why they need to know it? What do you want them to do as a result? Answering these questions helps to prioritise among the different possible audiences.

For the purposes of effective communication, there is no such thing as the general public. Young people, old people, women, men, academics, farmers, politicians and sports fans will all respond to different approaches, different styles and different uses of language. For example, a long technical briefing paper is unlikely to be the best way to get a message across to teenagers, while a viral email may not impress senior civil servants.

10.4 Developing Basic Messages

It is helpful for a multistakeholder group to create a basic message that describes in five (long) sentences (not long paragraphs):

- Who it is
- What it wants to achieve
- Why it wants to achieve it – positive or negative consequences of no action
- How it proposes to achieve it – methods to be used and what needs to change
- What action it wants the audience to take

Note that the message should be written in simple, unambiguous language that an ordinary person can understand. Although this may seem to be an easy task, it takes time and practice to get the basic message right. The investment of time is worthwhile. Once it is developed and agreed, it enables members of multistakeholder processes to convey the key elements of their work quickly and effectively. The language of the basic message should be adapted to suit different types of audience.

The basic message also can provide the foundation for additional messages developed to address specific topics. When the message has been drafted, ask:

- Are the specific characteristics and achievements of the group evident
- Does it clearly describe the issue and what needs to happen/change
- Is it positive and forward looking rather than negative and resentful
- Will it arouse passion, strong feelings or enthusiasm
- Will it motivate the audience to change and/or do something

A good message does not have to include all the elements above but must include two or more.

For multistakeholder groups, developing specific issue-related messages is very challenging given the diverse perspectives of their members. Some ideas about how to overcome these difficulties are discussed in Section 11.4.

10.5 Deciding on the media mix

Decisions regarding the best mix of media to employ are closely linked to the type of audience to be reached. They also depend on the budget and skills available to the working group as well as which technologies are easily accessible to the group and its audience.

Given their intended audience and the messages to be conveyed, multistakeholder groups should decide which would be the most appropriate medium, or mix of media. Some types of media include:

- face-to-face contacts
- phone calls
- reports, briefing papers or books
- websites
- meetings, workshops or roundtables
- dance, drama, street theatre, etc..
- songs
- radio or television news or programmes
- newspapers
- magazines
10.6 Developing the process’s identity

Multistakeholder groups often face the task of making a large impact using limited resources. Employing a consistent, attractive, design format that can be used on letterheads, business cards, publications and websites, etc., that is, having a “visual identity”, is one way to achieve more recognition for less money. It is best to create this identity early on in the process, before communications work begins.

The first step is to give the multistakeholder process a name. Clearly this must be acceptable to all members of the group. Ideally, it also should be short and easy to remember. One way to get round the often present desire of group members to use the name to describe everything that the group does, is to combine a short name with a longer strapline that is used alongside it.

The next step is for the working group to agree the type of image the project should promote to the outside world. This might be:

- professional, intellectual, serious
- steeped in history
- modern and innovative
- open and transparent
- multicultural and collaborative
- dynamic, stimulating, different

This image could also be associated with a specific subject or location, such as:

- water, forests or ethical standards
- urban areas, Indonesia, Africa or global

Unless the multistakeholder group includes people with creative design and graphics skills, once the image is agreed, it is usually best to commission specialist designers. Designers should be asked to come up with some options for colours, fonts, symbols or logos and layouts that could be used in all materials produced by the group.

It is very important for there to be consultation among members during the development of the image and on the ideas produced by design teams. Because members of multistakeholder groups come from different organisational cultures, with different attitudes to the use of marketing and communication techniques, expect debate on all aspects of the identity.

For multi-locational, multistakeholder processes, getting acceptance for a shared name or single visual identity may be difficult. This is because participating groups like to develop separate identities that reflect their own characteristics and contexts. If this is the case, it is helpful if, for external publications, the symbol for the overall project is used alongside that of the participating groups.

10.7 Building and maintaining support for the multistakeholder process

There is always some overlap between communications and advocacy activities. Here, promoting the multistakeholder initiative itself is included under communications while promoting its findings and recommendations is covered under advocacy in Section Eleven.

There are many activities for promoting multistakeholder initiatives including:

- Producing and disseminating brochures, leaflets or reports about the process and the issue it focuses on
- Sending regular updates on progress to all contacts
- Meeting with key decision-makers and potential donors to discuss the intended work
- Making presentations at events where stakeholders in the issue will be present
- Maintaining an active website and/or blog
- Hosting workshops and seminars for issue stakeholders

**Definition: Visual Identity**

The overall impression of an organisation which is projected internally and externally through its letterhead, brochures, newsletters, etc. ... through the use of colours, type styles, symbols, design formats, etc.. used repeatedly and consistently in all communications.

**Definition: Strapline**

- A strapline is a British term used to describe a secondary sentence attached to a brand name or name of an organisation. Its purpose is to emphasise a phrase that explains the organisation’s core purpose by which it wishes to be remembered.
- Straplines may also be used to strengthen the image of a brand; or as explanatory sub-headings in newspapers.
- Some examples include: Nokia: Connecting people; or HSBC: the world’s local bank.
- Oxfam has recently changed its strapline from “working for a fairer world” which contained the ambiguous term “fairer,” which in some cultures has the primary meaning of “whiter” to “Be humankind”.

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**NAMING THE MULTISTAKEHOLDER INITIATIVE:**
What The Water Dialogues Did

When the International Secretariat was formed in November 2005, the official name of the process was the “Global Multistakeholder Review of Private Sector Participation in Water Supply and Sanitation,” commonly shortened by founding members to the “Global Review of PSP”.

The International Secretariat gained permission to come up with a new, shorter name that would be easier to publicise through brainstorming ideas for final selection by the IWG. The result was the name and strapline by which the project is now known:

The Water Dialogues: multistakeholder dialogues on water and the private sector

**CREATING A VISUAL IDENTITY:**
What The Water Dialogues Did

- Prompted by forthcoming activities at the World Water Forum 2006 in Mexico, work began at international level to develop an attractive identity for the project.
- In developing a “visual identity,” the designers were asked to develop a smart, modern design that would help the project stand out, inspire confidence and make a favourable impression on governments, international donors and other influencing targets, and reflected the involvement of government, business and trade unions in the process. This image was in contrast with the traditional NGO style used for the scoping study.
- Having seen three proposals from the designers, the International Working Group (IWG) delegated the final decision regarding design to the International Secretariat.
- With a choice made, the International Secretariat sent out files with the design, fonts, colours, and so on to members of all participating Working Groups with a suggestion that it would be helpful for everyone to use the same name, designs, fonts, colours and logo in order to raise the overall profile of the Dialogues.
- The responses were immediate. One national level group said that it was already calling itself the Global PSP Review and could see no reason to change. Another noted that it would be calling itself the “water and sanitation dialogues.” And a member from another group objected to the use of a logo and complained vigorously that the International Secretariat was trying to impose a corporate image on the process.
- This was a useful lesson for the new International Secretariat. Clearly, it had not consulted fully enough before commissioning the designs. Nor had it taken sufficient care to explain the reasons why it thought a visual identity was important. And it had not thought carefully about the terminology it used in describing the visual identity package. For some stakeholders the use of any marketing techniques and terminology would be unacceptable.
- The International Secretariat responded by sending an apology for creating misunderstandings and re-stated that adopting the name and the visual identity was optional.
- In the end, two countries called themselves “The [country name] Water Dialogues,” and sometimes made use of the designs. A third used the name but had a different symbol/logo. A fourth used the designs, including the symbol, but retained the “water and sanitation dialogues” name to emphasise the importance of sanitation. The fifth retained the name the Global PSP Review.
COMMUNICATING TO BUILD AND MAINTAIN SUPPORT:
What The Water Dialogues Did

A few of the different ways in which The Water Dialogues built support at international level are outlined below:

- Very early on, founding members of the Dialogues began to promote the proposed project with key donors. This resulted in a grant from GTZ that enabled the Scoping report to be researched and written.

- Using the Scoping report, and the positive reaction to starting The Water Dialogues at the Berlin meeting in 2004, International Working Group (IWG) members and the Coordinator sought out and met with a large number of stakeholders, including bilateral donors at the UN Convention on Sustainable Development meeting in New York in 2005. They argued for the need to find new ways of working to break the policy paralysis affecting the water sector and the feasibility of multistakeholder dialogues as vehicles for achieving this.

- During the winter and spring of 2005, IWG members and the new Coordinator arranged a series of meetings with DFID, some of which involved representatives from GTZ, to promote The Water Dialogues and encourage DFID to provide financial support to the process.

- As noted in 10.6 in advance of the World Water Forum in Mexico, 2006, the International Secretariat coordinated the development of a visual identity for The Water Dialogues as well as an introductory brochure providing brief information about the project. This was widely distributed at the World Water Forum including at a meeting hosted by The Water Dialogues.

- In 2005, 2006 and 2007, the project took advantage of Stockholm International Water Week to present its work and provide updates on progress through side meetings to which a wide variety of interested stakeholders were invited.

- From spring 2006 onwards, The Water Dialogues produced six-monthly email updates and sent them to some 300 hundred stakeholders who had registered an interest in the initiative. The project also created a website to provide basic information on its work.

- Members of the Working Groups and the International Secretariat also made a point of promoting multistakeholder processes generally and The Water Dialogues specifically at sector meetings.
Section Eleven
Advocacy

“We are building a strong platform for future advocacy and I am optimistic that we will end up improving service delivery through better regulation and a better institutional environment.” (South African Working Group member)

Multistakeholder groups will want to undertake advocacy on a range of issues. Many will wish to promote multistakeholder processes – as better forms of governance that result in improved planning and policy. As their research results start to yield new insights, they will want to ensure that this influences a wider group of sector stakeholders and makes them take action. In addition, if specific sub-issues emerge during the course of research and dialogue that present immediate opportunities for making improvements they will want to advocate these to relevant stakeholders. And, once they have completed their analysis and agreed recommendations, multistakeholder groups will wish to lobby relevant decision-makers to achieve changes in policy and practice.

For multistakeholder groups, arriving at shared advocacy objectives takes time and patience. While advocacy to promote the value of multistakeholder processes themselves may be possible while dialogues are new, advocacy for policy and practice changes on issues usually has to wait until the process is nearing its end.

Given the time lag between starting multistakeholder processes and arriving at conclusions, it is essential that multistakeholder groups continuously monitor developments in attitudes, institutions and policies related to their issue so that they can make strategic decisions about how they will handle significant changes in the external environment.

11.1 The importance of advocacy between multistakeholder group members

A key space for advocacy is within the multistakeholder working group itself. The different stakeholders with their different ideas, perceptions and insights on the issue will naturally seek to influence each other. Indeed, this is a fundamental part of what multistakeholder dialogues deliver – mutual advocacy between participants that results in all involved having a more comprehensive knowledge and understanding of the issue. When multistakeholder groups include members with decision-making powers within their organisations, there will be an automatic and continuous influence on policies and practices as the dialogue continues.

Definition: Advocacy

“Advocacy can be defined as action aimed at changing the policies, position and programmes of governments, institutions or organisations involving an organised, systematic influencing process on matters of public interest.”*


The advocacy toolbox
(Hilary Coulby for INTRAC)

• Strategy development
  › research and analysis into issues – their causes and consequences
  › identification of the solutions and changes needed
  › power mapping
  › stakeholder analysis
  › setting issue and process objectives
  › outlining methods, tone and approach
  › laying out a timetable of activities and assigning responsibilities
• Networking, alliance building
• Conferences/seminars/roundtables
• Reports and briefings
• Lobbying
• Exposure visits
• Campaigning
• Media work
• Social marketing
• Running an active website
Advocacy between members of multistakeholder groups: The Water Dialogues Indonesia experience

There was broad agreement among Water Dialogues participants in Indonesia that conducting a dialogue was going to be useful only if it could be aligned with the national reform process.

The enactment of a new Law on Water Resources in Indonesia at the end of 2004 had given rise to many controversies as some saw this law as an instrument to legalise the privatization of the sector. In particular, NGOs considered that the new law violated the national Constitution, which states that the water sector should be controlled by the State.

The First Meeting of The Water Dialogues in Indonesia took place shortly after the law was passed. Some months later, the government adopted a number of revisions to the regulatory framework.

One of the members of the Indonesia Working Group from national government, who was involved in the formulation of the new regulation, testified that The Water Dialogues discussions and insights from multiple stakeholders had a clear impact on his perceptions and had influenced the way he approached the new regulations.

He noted that he “never had a conversation with NGO people” before The Water Dialogues began but that some ideas from NGO members of the Working Group had been taken into consideration when drafting revised regulations.

A framework for advocacy: Adapted for The Water Dialogues by Chris Stalker

Below are ten steps to building an effective Advocacy Strategy that may be relevant and helpful for The Water Dialogues:

1. **Define the issue.** Advocacy begins with an issue or problem that requires a policy and practice change and/or capacity and space being created for civil society to participate in policy decisions that affect citizens (and consumers). The research surveys conducted by National Working Groups at the national level may assist with this analysis and could underpin the development of national advocacy action plans.

2. **Set goal and objectives.** A goal is a general statement of what advocates hope to achieve in the longer term (typically three–five years). The advocacy objectives should be based on research and evidence and describe short-term, specific, measurable achievements that contribute to the advocacy goal. Advocacy objectives should ideally include the following components: policy actor, policy solution, and timeframe/degree of change. Given the finite nature of The Water Dialogues, it may be helpful to identify short-term objectives for 2009/10 and conceptually consider them as a way of contributing to a longer-term aim, for example, assessing the extent to which multistakeholder dialogue at national levels has contributed to progress on the Millennium Development Groups by 2015.

3. **Identify target audience.** The primary target audience includes the decision-makers who have the authority to bring about the desired policy change. The secondary target audience includes persons who have access to and are able to influence the primary audience. Advocates must identify individuals in the target audience, their positions, and relative power base and then determine whether the various individuals support, oppose, or are neutral to the advocacy issue.

4. **Build support.** Building a constituency to support the advocacy issue is critical for success. Advocates must reach out to create alliances with other NGOs, networks, donors, coalitions, civil groups, professional associations, women’s groups, activists, and individuals who support the issue and will work with you to achieve your advocacy goals. Multistakeholder dialogues can be, by definition, a way of building support, especially when a National Working Group engages with wider groups of stakeholders.

5. **Develop the message.** Advocacy messages are developed and tailored to specific target audiences in order to frame the issue and persuade the receiver to support the position. There are three important questions to answer when preparing advocacy messages: Who are you trying to reach with the message? What do you want to achieve with the message? What do you want the recipient of the message to do as a result of the message (the action you want taken)?

6. **Select channels of communication.** Selection of the most appropriate medium for advocacy messages depends on the target audience. The choice of medium varies for reaching the public, influencing decision-makers, educating the media, generating support for the issue among like-minded organisations/networks, and so forth. Some of the more common channels of communication for advocacy initiatives include meetings with parliamentarians and officials, meetings with private and public sector, press kits and press releases, press conferences, fact sheets, a public debate, a conference for policy-makers, and so forth.
A framework for advocacy: Adapted for The Water Dialogues by Chris Stalker (continued...)

7. Draft implementation plan. Advocates should draft an implementation plan to guide its advocacy work. The plan should identify activities and tasks, responsible persons/committees, the desired timeframe, and needed resources.

8. Collect data. Data collection supports many of the stages of the advocacy process. Advocates should collect and analyse data to identify and select their issue as well as develop advocacy objectives, craft messages, expand their base of support, and influence policy-makers. Data collection is an ongoing activity for the duration of the advocacy work.

9. Track, monitor and evaluate. As with data collection, tracking, monitoring and evaluation occur throughout the advocacy process. Before undertaking the advocacy work, advocates must determine how it will monitor its implementation plan against the objectives identifies in (2). In addition, the group should decide how it will evaluate or measure progress and results. In specific terms, what will be different following the completion of the advocacy? How will the group know that the situation has changed?

10. Raise funds. Resources help support the development and dissemination of materials, cover travel to meet with decision-makers and generate support, underwrite meetings or seminars, absorb communication expenses, and so forth. Advocates should ideally develop a fundraising strategy at the outset of the advocacy work to identify potential contributors of financial and other resources (but also take the necessary steps to ensure that the resources required to deliver the fundraising strategy are not at the expense of the overall advocacy strategy!)

   * In addition, at some point in your advocacy, you will need to write down these plans into a strategy document. This could be an organisational strategy for advocacy or campaigning, or the strategy for a single piece of advocacy.

   * This document will have many audiences and purposes:
     - To solidify the plans, relating the activities to the aims
     - To gain approval and the release of resources
     - To communicate plans to other stakeholders and win their participation
     - To be a reference point for future evaluation and to demonstrate a degree of accountability

   * To be effective in fulfilling all these functions, the strategy document needs to be clear, concise and easy to read. The following format is ideal:

     i. Aim
     ii. Primary Objectives
     iii. Strategies (audiences, media, political, donors, other partners)
     iv. Actions & Timeline
     v. Resources (human, financial, intellectual)
     vi. Risks & Assumptions
     vii. Monitoring & Evaluation Process

11.2 Developing an advocacy strategy

The steps required to develop a multistakeholder advocacy strategy are the same as any used by an individual or group. However, there are some distinct problems faced by multistakeholder groups, which the following section addresses.

11.3 Advocacy to wider audiences during the multistakeholder process

It is important not to wait until dialogue, research and analysis is complete before reaching out to wider groups of stakeholders. For successful influencing, stakeholders beyond the core working group need to be kept in touch with developments. Giving key stakeholders the opportunity to think about and discuss insights arising from the multistakeholder dialogue, prepares the ground for advocacy at a later stage. The precise methods used to keep stakeholders up to date will depend on the issue, the character of the working group and the context within which the process is taking place.
11.3.1 Forums with wider groups of stakeholders

It is good practice for multistakeholder groups to share their work with a broader group of stakeholder organisations and individuals throughout the dialogue process. For contentious issues, it is also important to share final research findings with this broader group for their comment and validation. These meetings are a form of advocacy in that they are opportunities to promote the value of multistakeholder process itself, as well as the research and fresh thinking on the issue.

**TIPS**

- For larger meetings of forty or more people, where small group work is envisaged, there will be a need for two or three experienced facilitators, plus enough note takers for each small group.
- Note that, even if the organisations invited to attend a forum remain the same, the individuals who come to meetings will differ. This means taking time at each Forum for brief presentation on the multistakeholder process and the issue it addresses.
- When developing the agenda, remember that, unlike working group members, participants will not have had the experience of building relationships, exploring issues and adjusting perspectives across ideological divides. Outlining this journey may be helpful.
- Having one or more independent, neutral facilitators is often a better option than having multistakeholder working group members lead the meeting.
- Including work in small groups creates a space for all participants to engage fully in discussions.
- For longer meetings, it may be useful to hold a separate meeting the evening before the full meeting begins for participants from those stakeholder groups that are nervous about participating. These participants may feel they are taking a risk in attending the meeting; be very wary of being co-opted; want to be sure that the agenda provides a fair opportunity for all perspectives; and may feel more able to contribute to the proceedings if they can get to know each other before the main event begins.
- Beware of trying to cram into one meeting everything that working group members would like to communicate. Participants have a limited capacity to absorb new information and will switch off when they reach overload. Providing time for discussion and exploration of issues is therefore more likely to result in successful learning.
- Working group members have an important role to play during meeting breaks. They should use this time to talk to stakeholders that share their background or perspective, and provide additional information about the process and subject matter so that these participants are on board and feel comfortable.

It is very important that the working group have clear objectives for each forum meeting it holds. For example, does the group intend to update participants on the dialogue’s progress, or to give feedback on research? Does the group want participants to comment on or validate their work or findings? Or is the objective for the forum to provide a space for dialogue on the issue or the process? Each of these objectives will require a different approach, agenda and length of meeting. Updating wider groups of stakeholders on progress of the dialogue is possible in an hour or two, but creating a safe environment to hold a genuine dialogue on a contentious issue is likely to take two or more days.

11.3.2 Roundtables

Roundtables bring together expert speakers with groups of 30–50 key stakeholders to address specific issues within the multistakeholder group’s overall remit. The purpose may be to deal with topics that traditionally have received insufficient attention, or those that would benefit from stakeholders, including policymakers and practitioners, sharing their knowledge and experiences. Roundtables should create space for the development of new approaches to policy and practice, facilitate greater understanding and provide the opportunity for each participant to learn something new.

Members of the multistakeholder working group should identify roundtable speakers based on their perspectives and the specialist knowledge they can contribute. Speakers may give their services voluntarily, or for a fee, in which case they may be expected to provide written versions of their presentations for inclusion in the roundtable report.

Venues for roundtables should be centrally located for easy access by key stakeholders, ideally in a well-known street or building, and have good facilities. If funds allow for hiring a large space, it is ideal for all participants to sit in a horseshoe or “U” formation, so that everyone has face-to-face contact.
**WIDER STAKEHOLDER FORUMS:**  
The Water Dialogues South Africa experience

**Reporting from breakout/small group work**
- In most instances, the reports from the breakaway sessions to the plenary will not adequately reflect the quality of discussion or key strategic issues or interests which emerged in the small groups.

- Some reports may be biased in favour of the presenter’s position on the issue, which will cause friction and complaints from their fellow group members.

- It may be preferable for a neutral party, for example a facilitator or note taker, to have responsibility for capturing the discussion and presenting each small group’s findings. Ideally, time should be allotted for the neutral presenter to check back with the group on what they intend to say before the presentation takes place.

- Without taking care regarding feedback, it will be difficult to build a platform for the larger forum dialogue or generate the quality of discussion desired on emerging issues or points of contestation.

**Balancing Presentations and Process**
Finding the right balance between providing information through presentations and giving time for engagement with this information is a critical aspect of all multistakeholder meetings.

If too little time is allocated to data and information there is a danger that participants will lack new material to move the debate forward.

If too much time is allocated to presentations, there will be insufficient time for participants to contribute their diverse experiences and understandings and to engage in constructive debate regarding interpretations.

**Handling challenge**
As outlined in Section Seven, it takes multistakeholder working groups many meetings to build mutual trust and respect, and be able to agree to differ respectfully.

Forum participants have not had this opportunity and when differences emerge, there may be a tendency for these to become personalised or evoke defensive responses.

Unless facilitators recognise and address such behaviour, it may further entrench the positions of some participants rather than allowing for constructive dialogue.

Allowing flexibility and time in the agenda for conflicts and differences to be surfaced and dealt with in a way that is affirmative for all involved, will produce more positive results than trying to shut them down in order to keep to a pre-ordained schedule.

.../continued
Group dynamics and Dialogue versus Discussion

- Many participants may express clear ideological positions. While it is helpful to get positions on the table, by itself this changes very little.

- A significant difference will exist between participants and working group members. The latter, given their history of working together over an extended period, will be more open in their approach.

- There will also be a difference between those individuals who have attended previous forums and those attending for the first time. The former will be familiar with the process and the research findings, will have argued and grappled with the issues, and will be keen to move forward to a new level of analysis or action. These individuals may become impatient with others whose level of understanding and engagement is more limited.

- Presentations, questions and answer sessions and discussion may lead to new awareness, but seldom leads to action or change.

- An important aspect of dialogue processes is to enable individuals and groups to move beyond ideological positions so that new thinking emerges. But this takes time and brief contact, such as during a one day forum, may not have much impact.

- For genuine dialogue, it might be best to hold a two-day meeting and create structured social space in the evening that encourages individuals to get to know participants from different perspectives and backgrounds.

- Notwithstanding, the caution regarding the impact of a “presentation plus discussion” format, the “reality check” provided by an objective presentation, of research findings for example, is likely to encourage stakeholders to think more broadly about the issue, with the hope that future engagement between them will be more open and constructive.

- “The effectiveness and impact of a Forum such as this rests on the quality of the overall process and the quality of meeting that is facilitated. I would strongly recommend that the final Water Dialogues Forum dialogue be extended to 1½ or two days to allow time for the group to settle and begin to engage with each other in more real and dynamic ways.” (Facilitator, South Africa Water Dialogues Forum, October 2008)
Working group members should work with coordinators or secretariats to draw up a list of invitees. Because of the limits on overall numbers, this often involves prioritising between possible participants based on their involvement with the topic and/or their policy or decision-making power.

Invitations for roundtables, requesting confirmation of attendance, should be sent out at least seven days prior to the event, specify the speakers, the focus of their presentations and overall objectives and agenda for the event, as well as information regarding the venue. In some cases, it may be useful to send a full list of invitees so that people know who else is likely to attend.

The format for roundtables will vary according to the topic and the number of participants. Usually a roundtable will be a long half day meeting in which two or more speakers give presentations followed by question and answer sessions and then small group and/or plenary discussion lead by a facilitator or moderator. Good facilitation is essential for the success of these events to ensure that participants do not stray off the topic and that everyone has a chance to contribute.

Working group members should receive draft roundtable reports for comment prior to distribution to all participants and donors funding the roundtable, and before publication on relevant websites.

Note that roundtable discussions may result in the need for follow up on the topic in the form of further targeted lobbying on recommendations arising, or discussions with policymakers and practitioners to ensure progress on issues identified as requiring attention.

11.3.3 Facilitating advocacy for communities

To build on multistakeholder research processes at community level, once those involved at the grassroots have seen the research results it is useful to arrange for community representatives to come into direct contact with decision-makers.

To prepare for such meetings, community members should be brought together to discuss their views and develop priority questions which they would like the decision-makers to answer. Decision-makers should receive a consolidated list of questions before the joint meeting, so they can provide proper answers. The meeting should also select a small number of representatives who will meet with local level decision-makers and other key stakeholders.

The responsibility for contacting the decision-makers and other significant stakeholders lies with the multistakeholder group, or its coordinating body. Note that it can be difficult to find a time when everyone can be present. Also, that the decision-making body may be reluctant to participate. If this is the case, it is useful for members of the working group from the same background to persuade its most senior staff personally that it is in their interests to participate. Once senior management is on board, other staff will be more willing to attend.

On the day, it may be tactically advantageous to allow the top decision-maker present to welcome everyone to the meeting and speak briefly about the issue. Otherwise, the facilitator should do this. It is important that participants each introduce themselves individually, so that everyone knows to whom they are speaking. The facilitator should remind participants about the purpose of the meeting and the role of the multistakeholder project in the process, and/or about the research findings. The meeting can then move straight to a session devoted to answering the questions from the communities, followed by a plenary discussion. After this there could be further discussion sessions, in plenary or in small groups, depending on the issue and the willingness of all stakeholders to give time to the process. Before the meeting ends, the facilitator should try to get attendees to identify the next steps, and work out how to monitor them.
**ROUND TABLES:**

The Water Dialogues’ experience

The first roundtable in Indonesia focused on financing for the water sector and attracted a large number of prominent high-level stakeholders from government, donors and civil society. Government commentators noted that the roundtable provided a useful opportunity to access information from other government departments and learn about the current thinking in government and donors.

In the Philippines, The Water Dialogues Working Group opted not to carry out a full independent research programme. Instead, it organised a series of 10 roundtables on very specific topics. The prime objective was to share experiences and expertise of a diverse group of sector actors. The format was for resource persons, both Working Group members and other stakeholders, to present their views and for practitioners and policymakers to react to these. Sometimes information sharing would by itself bring breakthroughs in policy or practice, but on other occasions policy gaps would be identified and policy recommendations formulated for further advocacy. “The Water Dialogues were good for addressing more specific issues, for example, the roundtables on financing, water cooperatives and small scale water providers allowed us to get a very good sense of the constituency’s needs and issues and to amplify messages from ground level when we took the information into the Roadmap.” (Philippines Water Dialogues member) A fuller account of the outcomes from roundtables in the Philippines is available in a special case study produced by The Water Dialogues.*

Advocacy at local level:
A Planning Checklist from The Water Dialogues South Africa

- Liaise with local researchers to develop a list of principal contacts within key organisations including, e.g. local government, relevant businesses, community organisations
  - Ideally these should be those higher up in organisations with decision-making power
- Determine a date for the local dialogue in consultation with all the principal contacts
  - Try to ensure equal numbers of participants from each of the stakeholder groups
- Book facilitator(s) and a venue
  - Consider how community members will get to the venue and how their travel expenses will be reimbursed
- Decide on who will present the local findings from the multistakeholder work
- Decide who else should make presentations, for example local government, community or industry figures
- Hold a meeting with the facilitator(s), presenters and others involved in running the meeting to:
  - Develop a timed agenda
  - Confirm which areas of the work will be emphasised in presentations
  - Make decisions about translation, note taking, etc.....
- Confirm participant numbers and book drinks, snacks and meals
- Call community, government and business representatives and so on to confirm date and venue
- Make sure there are name cards for each participant
- Prepare an evaluation sheet for completion by participants
Adapting standard advocacy practices to multistakeholder work

The diagram below is from The Water Dialogues South Africa and illustrates how, for multistakeholder dialogues, the process in moving from research to advocacy tends to result not in single policy options but a series of options shaped by stakeholder values and perspectives.

For most advocacy initiatives, reaching consensus with sister organisations addressing the issue on key messages is seen as a necessary foundation for success. Thus, for multistakeholder advocacy, the first consideration is the extent to which diverse organisations and individuals can reach common conclusions and recommendations. However, as discussed in Section 7.2.2, groups may not be seeking consensus. In addition, once respectful relationships have been built between those with opposing views, there may be a reluctance to push for single conclusions in case these re-open old quarrels.

As noted in Section 10.4, the development of advocacy messages can be a critical moment in multistakeholder work. Deriving simple advocacy messages from detailed, complex and context specific research is far from easy in any circumstances. In a multistakeholder situation, the values of members and their organisations will be at stake. This means that arriving at joint recommendations on broad issues may be impossible without resorting to the type of clichéd generalisations that mean very little. Thus alternative approaches to advocacy are needed that are rooted in the ethos of multistakeholder work and do not rely solely on simple messages.
Moving from research to policy

(The contents of this box are adapted from and draw heavily on materials produced by the ODI – RAPID Programme http://www.odi.org.uk/rapid/)*

Evidence matters
• Evidence can be used to refute or challenge your opponents
• Evidence can be used to demystify issues – complex evidence can be used to back up a simple and understandable narrative
• Policy objectives without any evidence are pointless, but evidence without goals is also meaningless
• Evidence will not solve all the policy questions, but it can make an important contribution
• It can support policy, it can undermine policy, but on its own, it will never determine a policy

Obstacles to be faced (i)
• Even if there is clear and unambiguous evidence that is known by all actors involved in a policy process, this will not necessarily lead to an evidence-based policy
• Political factors and resource prioritisation are more important factors in determining policy formulation and outcomes
• Evidence is never clear and unambiguous!

Obstacles to be faced (ii)
(from ODI survey - 50 case studies)
• Civil groups have limited time to read research papers
• Civil groups have limited skills in adapting and using research results for policy development
• Policymakers not used to drawing on research and evidence
• Policymakers have limited capacity to use and adapt evidence for policy processes
• So....it is important to keep messages to policymakers simple

The importance of politics
• Political context is crucial - the adoption and use of evidence in policy-making both in democratic and less democratic political systems
• Likelihood of policy uptake can be described using the following formula developed by Julius Court at ODI:
  › Policy uptake = Demand** – Contestation***

** demand refers to policymakers' and societal demands
*** contestation refers to the degree of variance with prevailing ideology and vested interests
Moving from research to policy

Factors influencing policy making

- Pragmatics and Contingencies
- Experience and expertise
- Judgement
- Evidence
- Resources
- Lobbyists and Pressure Groups
- Habits and Tradition
- Values and Policy Context

Source: Phil Davies Impact Insight Meeting, ODI, 2005

What helps research impact on policy

- **Relevance**
  - Did it provide a solution to a problem?
  - Does it say what to do?
  - Does it say how to do it?

- **Credibility**
  - Is the research approach and methodology sound?
  - Are the researchers experienced/qualified/respected?
  - Is the evidence clear?

- **Advocacy**
  - Is there regular contact with decision-makers and key sector stakeholders?
  - Is there a strategy for getting the messages across?
  - Do you have a strong story/narrative?
  - Can you present detailed evidence to support possible measures and outcomes?

Conclusions

- It is possible to improve the impact of research on policy if you:
  - really, really want to do it
  - understand the context (especially political context)
  - use a strategic approach
  - develop the right skills in the team
  - engage, engage, engage
### Identifying where simple messages are possible

Before abandoning the notion of simple, joint messages completely, multistakeholder groups should explore the possibility of developing and agreeing some consensus messages on detailed, technical areas of their research findings aimed at specific advocacy targets. These should be drawn directly from instances where the interpretation of research findings has resulted in agreement between all members of the group.

### Tips for formulating policy recommendations

(adapted from a presentation by Helen Collinson  helen@hcollinson90.freeserve.co.uk)

- Don't just present policymakers with a list of recommendations in isolation. You also need to provide some information (however brief) about the problem/issue and your concerns.
- As far as possible, base your recommendations on real evidence (either from research undertaken on a given issue or your on-the-ground experience). Policymakers are unlikely to take your recommendations seriously without such evidence.
- Make sure your recommendations are **reasonable and viable**. It might help to imagine you are in the shoes of the person or institution to which the recommendation is targeted.
- Make sure your recommendations are **as specific as possible** and are asking the person or institution to do something. Avoid broad rhetorical statements that policymakers can easily agree with, but on which they cannot act.
- Try to ensure your recommendations relate to **real political processes and opportunities** which the person or institution has some power to influence (e.g. forthcoming parliamentary bills, budget planning processes etc.).
- Only put **one ‘ask’** in each recommendation. Clear, succinct recommendations (of no more than two or three lines) will be more difficult for policymakers to ignore and will be easier for you to monitor if they are implemented.
- Try to avoid recommending that the targeted person(s) or institution 'doesn't do something' or 'stops doing something' as this can appear negative and confrontational. This may be appropriate for public campaigns if all else fails but not at this stage. **Turn each “don’t do/stop doing” into a positive “do”**.

### Delivering complex information

Where simple, consensus messages are not a possibility, it is necessary to adapt advocacy to encompass greater levels of complexity. Multistakeholder dialogues and research produce a wealth of incredibly rich and detailed information. Instead of losing this in an effort to meet the demand for simplicity and broad agreement, multistakeholder groups should find ways to deliver complex information to key audiences that retain the quality of their data and deliberations.

There will be a variety of vehicles for doing this. The most obvious are presentations, seminars or workshops. One advantage of these methods is that they allow those stakeholders that multistakeholder groups wish to influence to interrogate findings and question the group to elicit additional information.

Clearly, this approach will be more appropriate to some targets than other targets. It will work well for policy units within the civil service, trade unions, NGOs, private sector managers and communities. It is less likely to be effective with, for example, ministers or senior politicians who generally seek simple answers delivered in one or two sentences (see box below) who will be more likely to respond to the type of simple, technical messages discussed in 11.4.1.

Separate seminars/workshops should be held with each advocacy target. The special interests of the target audience should determine which elements of the multistakeholder findings are prioritised in presentations.

If the multistakeholder working group can reach agreement on joint recommendations for any sub-sections of their issue, this will be particularly persuasive. But where different group members have different interpretations of the evidence, these should be presented in a straightforward way as a series of proposal options. This will enable the target audience the opportunity to explore them and arrive at its own conclusions. Indeed, allowing space and time for a dialogue between the decision-makers and the members of the multistakeholder group that facilitates a more detailed interrogation of the issue is an important part of these workshops.

It would be sensible to begin by holding workshops in those organisations, which have members represented in the working group. This would allow coordinators and groups to develop their skills in selecting and condensing parts of their overall findings that are especially relevant to each target audience. It would also enable the multistakeholder group to practice delivering differing interpretations of the findings in what should be comparatively safe environments.
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A Guide to Multistakeholder Work
Lessons from The Water Dialogues
Hilary Coulby