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WHAT IS A 'GOOD PRACTICE'?

A framework to analyse the
Quality of Stakeholder Engagement
in implementation and follow-up
of the 2030 Agenda

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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1. THE INTRODUCTION
– WHAT IS THIS PUBLICATION ABOUT?

> **Stakeholders from different sectors and at all levels are called on to play different roles in contributing to the 2030 Agenda**

One of the most prominent aspects of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is the significant role it assigns to stakeholders in implementation, follow-up and review. While governments have the main responsibility for implementing the 2030 Agenda, **stakeholders from different sectors and at all levels are called on to play different roles in contributing to the 2030 Agenda**. The 2030 Agenda highlights two roles that stakeholders can play in particular: holding governments **accountable** for their actions or lack thereof[1] (e.g., by tracking implementation or engaging in advocacy activities) and making their 'own **contributions**'[2] to implement the SDGs (e.g., by aligning their own actions or by providing services). The latter sometimes happens in close collaboration or even on behalf of governments. In practice, there are additional roles that stakeholders can play, such as providing inputs to policymaking. Some stakeholders will focus on one or the other role and some will play overlapping roles.

This publication focuses on **the first-mentioned role that stakeholders play: holding their governments to account. The 'accountability role' of stakeholders** is not only explicit in the narrative of the 2030 Agenda, including its call to 'Leave No One Behind'. It is also refined and supported by one entire goal: SDG 16, which promotes, *inter alia*, effective, accountable and transparent institutions (16.6), responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making (16.7) and access to information and fundamental freedoms (16.10) as well as targets on Peace, Justice and Inclusion across SDGs.[3] **SDG 16+** can thus be seen as **enabling stakeholders to play their accountability role**.

> **Many stakeholder engagement practices are strong in some ways but weak in others**

Five years into the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, countries' strategies to engage stakeholders are still **at an early stage and sometimes partial or superficial, as discussed further below**. Also, **many stakeholder engagement practices are strong in some ways but weak in others**, with little guidance available to analyse this systematically. The

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1   For example, para 47 and 73 stress that review and follow-up processes will ensure "accountability to our citizens" and para 74d promises that reviews shall be "open, inclusive, participatory and transparent".

2   For example, para 89 calls on "[major groups and other relevant stakeholders] to report on their contribution to the implementation of the Agenda" and para 74d promises to "support the reporting by all stakeholders".

3   The existence of targets on Peace, Justice and Inclusion in SDGs other than SDG 16 is often referred to as 'SDG 16+'.

Covid-19 pandemic has added to the challenge: Governments may have fewer resources or dedicate less attention for engaging stakeholders while, at the same time, dialogue between authorities and people is more important than ever in order to guide government action and maintain social cohesion.

Against this background, the overall goal of this publication is to offer **a tool for governments, stakeholders and development partners** alike, and ideally jointly, to examine the quality of stakeholder engagement practices at different stages of the 2030 Agenda cycle against **key principles**. The tool can also be used by UN agencies in their own stakeholder engagement processes. It is hoped that this will help **improve** stakeholder engagement practices, **foster dialogue** between implementers of a practice and stakeholders, and **support learning** across countries.

The following chapters highlight what guidance is currently missing (2. The Gap), explain how the present analytical framework was developed (3. The Methodology), present the analytical framework and key findings from testing it with practices in five countries (4. The Analytical Framework) and offer guidance on how to use the framework in practice (5. The User Guide), including during a pandemic or similar crisis.

> *A tool for governments, stakeholders and development partners alike, and ideally jointly, to examine the quality of stakeholder engagement practices at different stages of the 2030 Agenda cycle against key principles*

Readers and users are strongly encouraged to share their feedback on and experiences with the framework with us so we can document them on an ongoing basis in a dedicated space on the SDG 16 Hub (www.sdg16hub.org). Please contact us via contact@sdg16hub.org.

2. THE GAP
– WHAT IS MISSING?

Analyses of Voluntary National Reviews (VNR) since 2016 show that, although the majority of **governments report on engaging stakeholders in processes related to the implementation and follow-up of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, many struggle to set up and maintain open, inclusive, participatory and transparent processes** (UNDESA, 2020).[4] In many cases, engagement strategies are at an early stage, insufficient or superficial. This may be due to reluctance to engage stakeholders where this is less common. Governments have also indicated the need for support to address practical challenges, e.g., on identifying relevant and new stakeholders, the level and type of engagement at different stages, resources for engagement, cultural barriers, and technical and social constraints.

There are various efforts to support national governments in strengthening stakeholder engagement in implementing the SDGs. **So far, much of the guidance** by the United Nations (UN), by Member States or by stakeholders themselves **focuses on providing anecdotal evidence, usually from the perspective of just one actor and without qualitative analysis**. Such an illustrative approach neglects the fact that, in practice, few efforts to engage stakeholders can be considered exclusively 'good' or 'bad'. **Many stakeholder engagement practices are strong in some ways but might be weak in others**. What is missing, thus, is **guidance on how to analyse different aspects of stakeholder engagement practices systematically**. Ideally, such analysis is carried out by national actors themselves and jointly, so they can adapt their own practices and share learning directly with their peers. As we move into the Decade of Action for Delivery,[5] the need for such 'how-to' guidance on stakeholder engagement in SDG processes will increase.

Against this background, UNDP and UNDESA joined forces to develop the present framework. Its objective is to enable governments, stakeholders and development partners alike, and ideally jointly, to **examine and strengthen the quality of their stakeholder engagement practices**. UNDP and UNDESA stand ready to continue supporting national partners in using the framework and in documenting their experiences so that national actors across countries and regions can learn from each other.

Although the majority of governments report on engaging stakeholders, many struggle to set up and maintain open, inclusive, participatory and transparent processes

Little guidance is available to analyse the quality of stakeholder engagement systematically

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4   Multi-stakeholder engagement in 2030 Agenda implementation: A review of Voluntary National Review Reports (2016-2019) – https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/26012VNRStakeholdersResearch.pdf

5   A/RES/74/4, Political declaration of the high-level political forum on sustainable development convened under the auspices of the General Assembly

3. THE METHODOLOGY
– HOW WAS THE FRAMEWORK DEVELOPED?

The framework was developed by UNDP and UNDESA with the support of an Expert Advisory Group of experts from civil society, national human rights institutions and government representatives (see Box 1).

The development of the framework included the following steps:

- First draft elaborated by UNDP and UNDESA
- Review by Expert Advisory Group
- Review and testing against seven diverse stakeholder engagement practices in five countries[6] (Benin, Finland, Jamaica, Jordan and Timor-Leste, see section 4.2) by an external consultant:
  — Desk-based review of relevant literature and refinement of framework
  — Analysis of country practices against the framework via desk-based research and interviews with two governments and two stakeholders[7]
- Review of consultant findings and refinements by Expert Advisory Group
- Finalization for publication

The framework was developed by UNDP and UNDESA with the support of an Expert Advisory Group

Box 1. Expert Advisory Group

The Expert Advisory Group's tasks included:

- Providing feedback on different versions of the framework and on a selection of practices that could be used to test the framework;
- Reviewing the findings from testing the framework; and
- Considering piloting the framework in a 2030 Agenda-related process in their own countries.

The group included individuals working or affiliated with the following institutions but acting in their personal expert capacity: ForUM Norway, Danish Institute for Human Rights, German Institute for Human Rights, Together 2030, SocialWatch, Stakeholder Group of Persons with Disabilities, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Argentina and Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark.

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6   The country practices were selected via the following criteria: region; country typology; presence of VNR reports; existence of institutionalized stakeholder engagement mechanisms; existence of formal, institutionalized SDG implementation body; availability of information; availability of contacts.

7   For the purpose of the testing exercise, the framework was shared with the interviewees prior to the interviews. The interviewees then responded to questions on their country practices based on the framework and also shared their views on the framework itself.

4. THE ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

Conceptually, the framework is based on **three key principles** of quality stakeholder engagement, including **two dimensions each**, that are highlighted across the 2030 Agenda and specifically reflected in SDG 16, while building on existing literature on quality stakeholder engagement by UN agencies, civil society actors and others (see Bibliography):

1) **Inclusion**,[8] covering non-discrimination and accessibility;
2) **Participation**,[9] covering access to information in relation to the substance on which the engagement takes place and influence in decision-making; and
3) **Accountability**,[10] covering transparency about the engagement process and responsiveness.

Diagram 1: Principles and Dimensions of the Analytical Framework

Inclusion
1) Non-discrimination
2) Accessibility

Partici-pation
3) Access to information
4) Influence in decision-making

Account-ability
5) Transparency
6) Responsiveness

Quality of stakeholder engagement
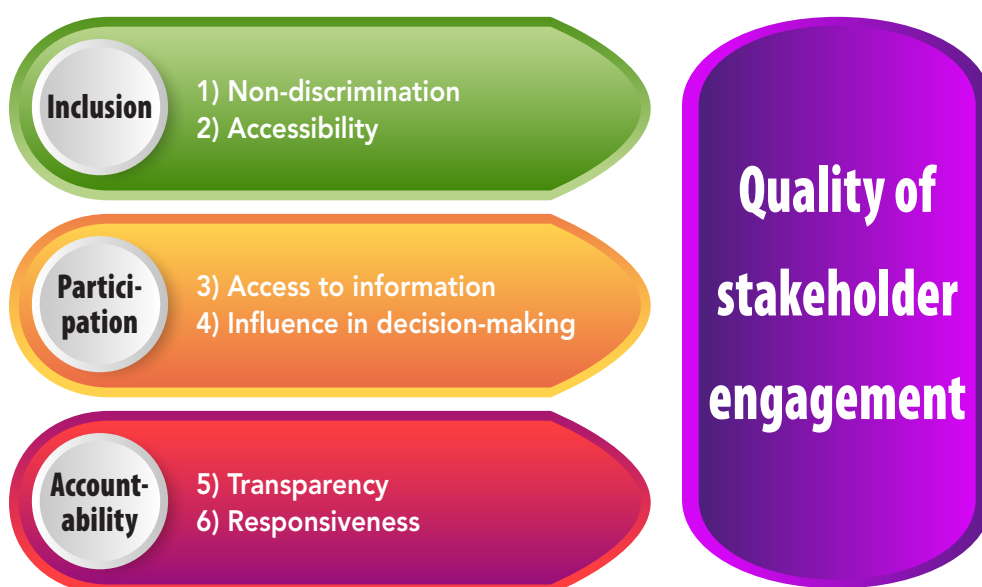
For each dimension of the framework, **four levels are identified** on a continuum to represent increasing levels of quality stakeholder engagement. The first level (0) points to very limited efforts with respect to quality stakeholder engagement. Each level that follows (1-2) shows an increasing step of effort, culminating in the highest level (3), which includes a set of criteria that demonstrates inclusive and collaborative stakeholder engagement. The levels have been deliberately structured as mutually exclusive **to facilitate analysis of engagement practices in a simple yet robust manner**. Below is a list of the key definitions of the principles and aspects included in the framework.

To fully realize these key principles and dimensions, an enabling environment for stakeholder engagement is important and structural constraints in this regard should be noted (see User Guide).

A printable version of the framework can be found in Annex 2.

> *Conceptually, the framework is based on three key principles of quality stakeholder engagement, including two dimensions each, that are highlighted across the 2030 Agenda and specifically reflected in SDG 16*

> *For each dimension, four levels are identified on a continuum to represent increasing levels of quality stakeholder engagement*

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8   For example, reflected in para 3, 8, 17, 35, 74d, 77, 79 and SDG 16.3, 16.7, 16.9, 16.b of the 2030 Agenda.

9   For example, reflected in para 72, 74d, 84, 89 and SDG 16.7, 16.8, 16.10 of the 2030 Agenda.

10   For example, reflected in para 47, 73 and 16.3, 16.4, 16.5, 16.6, 16.10 of the 2030 Agenda.

Box 2: Definitions

GENERAL

Stakeholders

The term is used here in its broadest sense, as expressed in the Preamble of the 2030 Agenda.[11] It includes **all non-governmental actors that can contribute to the 2030 Agenda**, such as individuals, civil society actors, youth and women organizations, indigenous peoples, movements and networks, academia, the private sector, trade unions and institutions with an accountability function, such as human rights institutions, parliamentarians or supreme auditing institutions. In addition, the framework considers **local and regional governments** as stakeholders, given their dual role as government actors ('duty bearers') and actors that need to be included in national engagement practices. In many cases, however, subnational governments will themselves be important implementers of engagement practices at the regional and local levels where the closest people-government interactions take place. Where the framework refers to diverse stakeholders, this includes diversity across stakeholder groups as well as within a particular type of stakeholder group.

Practice

In the context of this tool, practices refer to methods of stakeholder engagement **at different stages of the 2030 Agenda cycle such as policy formulation, implementation, monitoring and reporting and follow-up**. For example, consultations and inclusion in reporting cycles are examples of stakeholder engagement practices.

Implementers

This term is used to describe those **actors in government institutions that organize and coordinate engagement practices** and are thus responsible for its quality.

PRINCIPLES AND DIMENSIONS

Inclusion

The extent to which the practice is carried out with dedicated efforts to meaningfully include diverse stakeholders, particularly those left behind, in a non-discriminatory and accessible manner.

Non-discrimination
The act of engaging actors equally and fairly, without discrimination of any kind as to age, race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth, disability or other status.[12] Ensure that different population groups, especially those so far left behind, are represented and employing temporary special measures if needed.

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11   From the 2030 Agenda Preamble – "**Partnership** – We are determined to mobilize the means required to implement this Agenda through a revitalised Global Partnership for Sustainable Development, based on a spirit of strengthened global solidarity, focussed in particular on the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable and with the **participation of all countries, all stakeholders and all people**."

12   These features are enumerated in the 2030 Agenda, paragraph 19.

Accessibility
How access to a particular practice is guaranteed in terms of location, how information is presented so it can be used effectively by a wide range of people (e.g., persons with disabilities, older people, speakers of other/native languages) and how safety and security for communities more vulnerable to discrimination are provided.

Participation
Extent to which the practice provides stakeholders with necessary information to effectively engage and present solutions and provides opportunities for influence in decision-making.

Access to information
The availability of information about the substance; most particularly, it refers to data and information publicly made available through official channels such as media, websites, etc. with sufficient time and clear opportunity for stakeholders to consult with constituencies they represent and prepare to participate in engagement opportunities.

Influence in decision-making
Openness to allow stakeholders to provide input, actively participate and have their perspectives considered in decision-making processes. Also refers to openness to explain how substantive inputs have impacted outcomes.

Accountability
Extent to which the implementer of the practice is transparent and responsive to stakeholders. This includes ensuring both that necessary information is available about the process related to the practice itself and that opportunities for feedback are brought forward and addressed.

Transparency
The availability of information about the processes, meaning that the development and steps taken regarding/towards a particular practice can be tracked by all stakeholders and the media.

Responsiveness
The reception of feedback, including grievances, on how the engagement process reflects the principles of inclusion, participation and accountability; availability and ability to redress weaknesses, for example by adapting the process.

4.1 Analytical Framework – Quality of Stakeholder Engagement in SDG Implementation and Follow-up

				INCREASING INTENSITY →		
	CRITERIA	**Level 0**	**Level 1**	**Level 2**	**Level 3**
Inclusion	**1. Non-Discrimination**	Implementer of the practice makes no effort to engage a diverse range of sectors and actors, especially groups that are traditionally left out of decision-making in SDG processes.	Implementer of the practice occasionally invites some – often the same – groups. Others that are affected by the issue are missing and resources have not been allocated to support inclusion.	Implementer carries out occasional mapping/s to identify sectors and actors most left behind that should be engaged, includes stakeholders that have selected their own representation and allocates resources to facilitate inclusion. No evidence of inclusion of diverse actors in designing the process.	Implementer of the practice does all of the following: – Identifies diverse sectors and actors left behind, based on regular disaggregated data and an in-depth stakeholder mapping. – Includes stakeholders that have selected their own representation. – Includes diverse actors and those most left behind in the design of the process. – Allocates sufficient resources for those furthest left behind in the design process.
Inclusion	**2. Accessibility**	Implementer of the practice does not address accessibility issues such as access to buildings; distance to venues; language awareness; knowledge, time or digital barriers; safety and security of vulnerable groups.	Accessibility has been identified as a requirement and implementer of the practice allocates resources to address accessibility requirements upon request or on an *ad hoc* basis.	Implementer of the practice identifies accessibility concerns early on and uses this information to design the engagement process with resources allocated as necessary.	Implementer of the practice does all of the following: – Has a system to identify accessibility requirements on an ongoing basis in consultation with stakeholders. – Uses information regarding accessibility to design the engagement process alongside stakeholders. – Makes resources available to reduce barriers to the maximum extent possible.
Participation	**3. Access to Information (information about substance)**	Implementer of the practice does not provide official information. No data or information is publicly available.	Implementer of the practice provides information upon request. It may be hard to know whom to contact, or data is exclusive (e.g., mailing list).	Implementer of the practice provides occasional information, via a dedicated public channel (e.g., media, website).	Implementer of the practice does all of the following: – Produces and shares relevant information and data publicly ahead of decisions with sufficient time to consult constituencies and opportunity to react. – Produces and shares information on practice progress jointly with relevant stakeholders and explains how differing views are being dealt with.

	CRITERIA	Level 0	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
		INCREASING INTENSITY			
Participation	**4. Influence in decision-making**	Implementer of the practice does not involve stakeholders at any point of decision-making processes.	Implementer of the practice asks stakeholders for comments occasionally and *ad hoc*.	Implementer of the practice consults stakeholders regularly. Some elements of co-creation exist; however, stakeholders do not actively participate in all or most decision-making processes and it is unclear how inputs influence overall decision-making.	Implementer of the practice does all of the following: – Has mechanisms that allow for partnership and co-creation with stakeholders in agenda-setting and decision-making processes. – Explains how inputs that have been received have been used and have impacted outcomes. – Power imbalances between stakeholders are addressed, e.g., differing numbers of seats, capacity development.
Accountability	**5. Transparency (information about process)**	Implementer of the practice does not share any public information on process, including timelines, stakeholders involved and institutions responsible.	Implementer of the practice provides only some information on the process publicly or upon request, but it is difficult to know whom to contact; only some stakeholders are provided full information.	Information on the process is provided publicly and is being followed.	Implementer of the practice does all of the following: – Makes information on the process widely available, so that stakeholders, parliament and media are informed. – Follows the process. – Explains how diverging views/inputs are being dealt with.
	6. Responsive-ness	Implementer of the practice does not offer stakeholders the possibility to provide feedback on how the process reflects the principles of inclusion, participation and accountability. No mechanism exists to redress weaknesses.	Implementer of the practice receives feedback on the process.	Implementer of the practice receives feedback on the process from stakeholders and promises to redress weaknesses.	Implementer of the practice does all of the following: – Provides a robust mechanism to encourage stakeholders to present feedback and grievances on how the process reflects the principles of inclusion, participation and accountability. – Redresses weaknesses of the processes with relevant stakeholders.

4.2 Key Findings from Testing the Framework

The analytical framework was tested[13] by selecting[14] and reviewing a small sample of seven practices from five countries (see Table 1).

It is important to note that the **purpose of the testing** was not to comprehensively analyse these practices, but rather to **illustrate how the framework can be applied**, for instance

- to diverse **mechanisms** for stakeholder engagement;
- at different **stages** of the SDG-cycle, such as policy formulation, implementation, monitoring, reporting and follow-up;
- to assess the **quality** of engagement practices as well as identify **lessons learned** and **recommendations** to improve practices.

The exercise to test the framework yielded insights on the usability of the framework and on the kind of information that it can help produce.

Table 1: Country Practices that the framework was tested with

Practice	Country	Description
Co-development of consultation framework	Benin	Benin established a framework for consultation with civil society organizations to create a dialogue on the implementation and monitoring of the 2030 Agenda.
Local coordination mechanism		Benin set up a technical SDG commission within the National Association of Municipalities of Benin to involve mayors and officials in the national coordination of the SDGs.
Multi-stakeholder operational tool	Finland	Finland developed an operational tool – Society's Commitment to Sustainable Development – in order to promote multi-stakeholder engagement towards the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.
Stakeholder engagement strategy	Jordan	Jordan's Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation prepared a stakeholder engagement strategy to ensure wide participation from stakeholders in the drafting of the 2017 VNR.
Coordination		Jordan's Higher National Committee for Sustainable Development was formed to provide guidance and is responsible for following up on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda
Accountability	Jamaica	Jamaica's Auditor General's Department audited the government's preparedness to implement the 2030 Agenda.
Consultation	Timor-Leste	Timor-Leste established several multi-stakeholder engagement mechanisms and a community consultation process to ensure representation and inclusion of stakeholders at risk of being left behind.

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13   The testing was commissioned by UNDESA and undertaken by Cooperation Canada, with the support of a grant from the European Commission.

14   See Section 3 for details on the selection process.

Key results of the testing included the following:

Non-discrimination: The practices scoring high (level 3) demonstrated all aspects of this level in the framework. For example, one country's multi-stakeholder operational tool engaged a wide variety of non-state members, including representatives of groups generally left behind. On the other hand, one practice scored low (level 0) as there was no evidence of efforts to engage a diverse range of sectors and actors.

Accessibility: Most practices failed to properly address all accessibility issues. For example, in one case, although the responsible authority's website included the ability to listen to what was written on a webpage through a general audio option, it was unclear what steps were taken to ensure that engagement activities were accessible for relevant stakeholders.

> The reviewed practice from **Finland** scored 3 on "accessibility" as it conducted consultations to identify accessibility needs, reduced barriers by sharing resources in different languages and with images, and created ownership by providing different stakeholders with access and space to collaborate.

Access to information: In one practice, occasional information was provided on the substance, but it was not clear whether such information was made publicly available ahead of decisions and with enough time for reactions. There were also no explanations on how differing views were dealt with. In another practice, information was usually exclusive to people and organizations who already had contacts in the government, which, in turn, undermines transparency and accessibility.

> The practice in **Jamaica** scored 3 on "access to information" as information was shared publicly through official means (e.g., websites, VNR), citizen awareness campaigns (e.g., video presentations, school visits, trade fairs, brochures, townhall meetings) and interactions by email and telephone, which afforded stakeholders across different sectors the opportunity to contribute and react.

Influence in decision-making: In one case, there were regular consultations with different stakeholders (e.g., mayors from all of the country's municipalities or representatives from civil society organizations and other non-state actors), but it was unclear to what extent the inputs were actually able to influence outcomes.

Transparency: No practice scored extremely low (level 0), indicating that some information around the process (e.g., on the stakeholders involved or on institutions responsible) was publicly shared. However, several practices scored level 1, showing that the information shared is insufficient for stakeholders to know whether the envisaged process is being followed.

> The practice in **Timor-Leste** scored 3 on "transparency" as information on the process is extensive in official government means (e.g., websites) and mention consultation with several stakeholders. Civil society websites and reports confirm how the process was developed and state that it was followed.

Responsiveness: Several practices scored lowest (level 0), suggesting that the practices' implementers may not provide appropriate feedback to stakeholders and that there were no mechanisms for ongoing monitoring and/or to flag grievances. The two practices scoring high (level 3) had very clear ways for stakeholders to provide feedback such as surveys or open channels, including dedicated website spaces, social media and staff contacts.

Overall,

- The dimensions related to **Inclusion** (i.e., non-discrimination and accessibility) were the ones with the largest number of practices scoring high (level 3). This may be considered a positive finding, as it might show that non-discrimination and accessibility are addressed in these countries' engagement practices. It is also possible, however, that it is simply easier for implementers to demonstrate inclusion in line with the 2030 Agenda commitments in comparison to other dimensions of quality stakeholder engagement.
- The dimensions related to **Participation** had the most uneven results: Practices spanned all four score levels of the framework (0 to 3) in both access to substantive information and influence in decision-making sections. This high level of variation could suggest that it is not so clear to implementers what needs to be made available to stakeholders to ensure their effective, informed and timely engagement. The review also showed that implementers are not always able to address all the elements that allow for actual influence in decision-making processes: co-creation, impact of inputs in the outcomes and power imbalances.
- The dimensions related to **Accountability** scored the lowest, specifically on 'responsiveness'. The research team was often unable to find any evidence of mechanisms to ensure responsiveness. Information that was accessible often consisted in reports from stakeholders who criticized actions or omissions by the practice' implementers, e.g., the lack of a structured mechanism for feedback and to address grievances. Lastly, the review also revealed that implementers find it more difficult to determine how to receive feedback from stakeholders, give feedback to stakeholders on how their inputs and contributions have been used, and to address grievances in an inclusive way.

For practitioners interested in using the framework, the testing also illustrated what the framework can offer and what users need to ensure when using it:

What the Framework Can Do:

- It helps identify **challenges and opportunities** of different types of stakeholder engagement.
- It can be used by national actors in **diverse country settings**.
- It can be used by national governments, **stakeholders** or **external actors** to analyse the quality of their engagement practices.
- It can be used to analyse practices of stakeholder engagement in the context of the **2030 Agenda and beyond**, including around policy formulation, implementation, monitoring and reporting.
- It can help demonstrate to external stakeholders the **credibility and legitimacy** of a practice.
- It helps ensure **diverse views** on the quality of a stakeholder engagement practice.
- It offers a **structured way to reflect among different actors** involved in a practice.

- Its **structure provides a straightforward, efficient and convenient guide** to conduct desk-based analyses as well as interviews with stakeholders.

What Users Need to Do:

- **Consult with different sources** to diminish the risk of presenting an analysis and conclusions that are biased by any one view. The framework helps present information from various sources and offers space to articulate divergent opinions, but it does require the user of the framework to make a final decision regarding the scoring of a stakeholder engagement practice based on the information at hand.
- **Apply the framework regularly,** or at least when major changes occur, to see how engagement practices and their quality evolve over time. Users should therefore be mindful of the history of the practice and ensure that the analysis is rooted in the most up-to-date materials and perspectives.
- **Check how the quality of stakeholder engagement practices adapts to changes and crisis situations.** In the face of the global Covid-19 pandemic, some practices' overall quality diminished, some remained the same and some actually improved (e.g., because virtual exchanges became more common). It is thus important to keep an open mind as to how a crisis affects a practice.
- **Document how actors and initiatives make use of the tool.** It will be especially important to understand how stakeholder practices change as a result of the analysis and to identify lessons and recommendations to facilitate learning across countries.

The above findings have informed the User Guide provided in the next section.

5. THE USER GUIDE
– HOW TO APPLY THE FRAMEWORK

The purpose of the present analytical framework is to enable governments, stakeholders, development partners and other stakeholders to **examine and strengthen the quality of their stakeholder engagement practices – ideally jointly**. The framework uses a matrix format that allows one to analyse and score a practice against different aspects that determine the quality of stakeholder engagement. This simple matrix format allows one to visualize which aspects of a practice are stronger and which are weaker so that the latter can be properly addressed. This section offers guidance on how to use the framework, including who should use it, when, and on the basis of what and how.

Application during the Covid-19 pandemic or other crises:

A crisis such as the Covid-19 pandemic changes the context for both implementers and stakeholders of engagement practices. In particular, stakeholder engagement may seem more difficult or less of a priority. On the other hand, mobilizing stakeholders to support the implementation of the SDGs becomes even more important in crises in order to inform the provision of public services, maintain social cohesion and avoid conflict. In these situations, government actors and stakeholders themselves as well as partners such as the UN should stress the **NEED** to analyse and improve the quality of stakeholder engagement, e.g., by

- Highlighting with government partners (e.g., implementers of a previous engagement practice or any government agency in charge of outreach, coordination or monitoring related to the SDGs) that it is essential to seek people's views on how inclusive, participatory and accountable response and recovery actions are. The engagement with stakeholders helps **inform priorities and strategies** to deliver critical services, **build trust and maintain social cohesion**. Stakeholders can also be critical partners in raising awareness and communication among different parts of society.

- Highlight with stakeholders the importance of engaging in a dialogue with the government on what inclusive, participatory and accountable government actions to tackle the crisis can look like. During a crisis, governments are forced to act quickly and with much less preparation time, so sharing suggestions on how to do better provides government agencies with **practical options and makes them accountable to adopt them**.

The purpose of the present analytical framework is to enable governments, stakeholders, development partners and other stakeholders to examine and strengthen the quality of their stakeholder engagement practices – ideally jointly

5.1 General Guidance

The framework can be used to develop a new practice (ex ante) or to review an existing practice (ex post)

1) **WHAT**: To reduce the risk of bias in the analysis, it is essential to **draw on a broad spectrum of sources** when gathering information on a given practice. **Interviews** are an excellent source of information that might either corroborate or challenge what can be found in **written materials**. Moreover, interviews are useful to fill gaps found in the documentation, thereby elucidating points that cannot be clarified only by desk-based research. Information should be as up-to-date as possible.

2) **WHEN**: Analysing a stakeholder engagement practice, especially when carried out collectively (see below), can take place at different times, e.g., to develop a new practice (*ex ante*) or to review an existing practice in order to learn from and improve on it (*ex post*). It is also important to note that stakeholder engagement practices are not static and that, when they evolve, their quality can increase or decrease. It is thus recommended to use the framework **regularly** or at least at **key points in time**, e.g., when major changes to a practice occur or when the situation changes significantly, such as with the Covid-19 pandemic.

3) **WHO**: The framework can be used by different actors, collectively or unilaterally. The most common modalities to use the framework may be collective analysis, self-assessment and external analysis:

The framework can be used by different actors, collectively or unilaterally. The most common modalities to use the framework may be collective analysis, self-assessment and external analysis

— **Collective Analysis** (recommended): Ideally, implementers and stakeholders will use the framework together to analyse the quality of an engagement practice that they are jointly involved in. This way, the framework can serve as a tool to set a baseline in terms of quality, to share perceptions and expectations, and to generate dialogue and trust among key actors. In this modality, the process of review can be as important as its result and may go half-way toward improving the practice already.

— **Unilateral Analysis**: Alternatively, the tool can be used by one actor alone: either one who is directly involved in the practice or one who has an external perspective.

» **Self-assessment:** For *implementers* of stakeholder engagement practices, i.e., the party that organizes and coordinates the engagement, the framework can be a tool to quickly but systematically assess their own effort, be it to plan for future or to review existing engagement. This can be useful to pre-empt critique and to mitigate weaknesses pro-actively. Since the implementer will generally be a state entity, such systematic analysis also helps them fulfil their responsibilities as human rights duty-bearers. For *stakeholders* themselves, the framework provides a tool to look beyond personal experiences and examine strengths and weaknesses of a practice in a systematic manner. This allows them to present recommendations to the implementer that are structured, constructive and thus more convincing.

» **External analysis:** Lastly, researchers and oversight institutions that are not themselves involved in the engagement practice may find the framework useful as a simple but comprehensive methodology to analyse the quality of a practice empirically, e.g., via interviews with actors involved in the

engagement practice. As the framework builds on concepts that are well-explored in the literature, such empirical research can be easily linked to secondary research findings.

Application during the Covid-19 pandemic or other crises:

In crisis times, there may be a different need as well as fewer resources and less attention for stakeholder engagement (see above). As a result, it is important to consider carefully a suitable **OPTION** to use the analytical framework:

- In some situations, government agencies may want to run a **desk exercise** to swiftly analyse feedback that they have received on response or recovery actions and to see how stakeholder engagement in these actions can be improved or where more in-depth data may be needed (e.g., from National Statistical Offices, see Praia Group, Guidance Note, 2020). See for this: User Guide on Self-Assessments.

- In other situations, the government may want to use the tool to conduct **quick, virtual focus groups or dialogue sessions** to engage with key stakeholders directly. See for this: User Guide on Collective Analysis.

- Alternatively, stakeholders themselves may want to **systematically review challenges** that they are observing with the engagement of stakeholders during the crisis and **present these to government partners constructively and convincingly**. Researchers may be interested in documenting and observing dynamics in society during crisis and can use the framework for **baseline and follow-up research**. See for this: User Guide on External Analysis.

5.2 Key Steps

The following steps are recommended, depending on whether the analytical framework is used for Collective Analysis or Unilateral Analysis. Please, check Annex 2 for a user-friendly version of the analytical framework, which is also available here for download.

COLLECTIVE ANALYSIS

As a pre-step, those who propose the joint exercise, whether implementer or interested stakeholders, need to assign a person or team to coordinate and lead on the following steps:

1) **Collect INFORMATION about the engagement practice**
   a. Collect background **information on each element** in the framework, using diverse sources that can be referenced, e.g., official government documents (VNRs, government websites, etc.), information from civil society actors and National Human Rights Institutions, Terms of Reference, media reports, reports prepared by United Nations entities, the human rights mechanisms and regional commissions.

b. Consider whether the collected **information is inclusive** of all groups and people affected by the practice. If there are **gaps** and no reports exist, explore alternative avenues for understanding these actors' perceptions, e.g., via storytelling, visual data, interviews.

c. Prepare a **short description** of the practice for the first section in the country/context analysis sheet (see <u>Annex 2</u>). At this stage, provide information but do not include any analysis yet.

2) **ORGANIZE the collective review**

a. **Identify stakeholders:** If the exercise takes place *ex ante*, conduct a stakeholder mapping. If the exercise happens *ex post*, identify a diverse range of stakeholders that have been involved in the practice.

b. Invite stakeholders, propose the **objective** of the exercise (e.g., design a new practice, improve an existing practice, mutual learning on a concluded practice) and agree on one or more objectives.

c. Explain the steps and share key **documents** with those participating in the analysis (the analytical framework, the country analysis sheet and the list of definitions).

d. Discuss ways to deal with **diverging views** about the practice.

e. Ask participants to use a practice analysis sheet each to **score the practice** against the six different aspects and levels of the framework based on their experience with the practice (section 2 of the practice analysis sheet). In the column "evidence confirming the chosen level", participants provide their rationale for the level selected. Where structural constraints to an enabling environment for stakeholder engagement are identified, this should also be noted.

f. Ask participants to share how they feel they have impacted **outcomes** as a result of engaging in the practice (section 4 of the analysis sheet).

g. Ask participants to highlight **lessons learned and recommendations** from their experience (section 5 of the practice analysis sheet).

3) **ANALYSE inputs and identify NEXT STEPS**

a. **Aggregate** information from the analysis sheets and **present** it to participants involved in the practices for validation.

b. Decide how to address **diverging views** (e.g., by clarifying and reconciling or by retaining different views).

c. **Discuss results** with participants and/or other interested stakeholders (e.g., UN entities) and identify next steps, including timeline for implementation and responsible partners.

d. **Debrief** with participants on how they experienced the collective analysis (document it in section 4 of the practice analysis sheet).

e. **Finalize** results (in one analysis sheet). If useful, highlight for each dimension the square of the framework that represents the rating in the relevant **colour**. For example, if non-discrimination has mostly been rated 3, highlight that square green. Agree with participants on whether the results of the analysis should be published. If so, include a short description of the practice that provides the reader with enough information on scope and scale of the practice (section 1 of the analysis sheet) without precluding the analysis.

Tips

- Make sure a **diverse set of stakeholders** involved in the practice is included in the analysis.
- Decide the **format** of the dialogue, e.g., whether steps 2 and 3 take place virtually or in-person. Consider health and safety implications when taking this decision.
- Consider trying to reduce **barriers** to participation (e.g., accessibility, capacity).
- Check whether participants are fine to have specific statements attributed to them and (even if anonymous) get **authorization** from all participants to publish information they provide.

Application during the Covid-19 pandemic or other crises:

During a crisis, it may be necessary to **ADAPT** the analytical framework:

- As there will be tendency to have interactions take place virtually, it is important to make a special effort to seek input from stakeholders that have less **internet connectivity**, e.g., by use of SMS, radio announcements, conversations in local languages or including questions in ongoing interactions with stakeholder groups (e.g., where service delivery continues around health care or food security).

- Given the time sensitivity and, often, more limited availability of resources, compromises may have to be made as to the **numbers** of stakeholders to engage in the analysis. For example, collective analysis could happen in the form of small focus groups.

- Users of the framework may want to **prioritize** some questions. For example, considering that vulnerable groups also tend to be first and most affected by a crisis, users could decide to focus on the 2030 Agenda's commitment of 'Leaving No One Behind' and focus on the questions that the framework provides on inclusion, i.e., non-discrimination and accessibility.

UNILATERAL ANALYSIS (Self-Assessments or External Analyses)

1) **Collect INFORMATION**
   a. **Collect information on each element** in the framework, using diverse sources that can be referenced, e.g., official government documents (VNRs, government websites, etc.), civil society reports, Terms of Reference, media reports, reports prepared by United Nations entities, the human rights mechanisms and regional commissions. Where structural constraints to an enabling environment for stakeholder engagement are identified, this should also be noted.
   b. Identify information **gaps**. For example, consider whether the collected information is inclusive of all groups and people affected by the practice. If there are gaps and no reports exist, explore alternative avenues for understanding these actors' perceptions, e.g., via storytelling, visual data, interviews.
   c. **Include** the information collected in one practice analysis sheet.

Tips

- Whenever possible, collect information in local **languages**.
- Conduct **interviews** to fill gaps found in written documentation.
- Document **references** throughout the data collection process to ensure no sources are lost.
- Use networks of those involved in the practice to find **contacts** who will be well positioned to provide information about the practice.
- Make a special effort to conduct interviews with **actors** from both government (generally, the implementer of the practice) and civil society actors and/or other stakeholder groups.
- Make sure interviewees are well **informed** about the project and your intentions of applying the framework. Prepare a **consent** form to use the information (e.g., name, organization) and get interviewees' consent. Also ask their permission if audio/video recording the interview.

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4) **ANALYSE inputs**
   a. Prepare a **short description** of the practice that provides the reader with enough information on scope and scale of the practice without precluding the analysis (section 1 of practice analysis sheet).
   b. **Scoring** (section 2 of analysis sheet)
      » Based on available information, choose in section 3 the **level** (0-3) and level description that best describes the practice for each element.
      » In the description of evidence, identify the **source** from which evidence was derived.
      » If useful, highlight for each dimension the square of the framework that represents the rating in the relevant **colour**. For example, if non-discrimination has been rated 3, highlight that square green.
   c. Describe the **quality** of the information collected. Note gaps, limitations and inconsistencies (section 3 of analysis sheet).

d. Provide an overview of how stakeholders feel they have impacted **outcomes** as a result of engaging in the practice (section 4 of analysis sheet). If no stakeholders have been interviewed, this section remains blank.

e. Highlight **lessons learned and recommendations** from those involved in the practice (section 5 of the analysis sheet). This includes information from written documentation as well as interviews.

f. Include the **references** of all written sources consulted (section 6 of analysis sheet).

g. Provide stakeholders consulted with an opportunity to **validate** the findings.

Tips

- When providing the evidence to choose the level, be clear on what **sources** you are deriving information from (e.g., "according to the government representative interviewee").

- Indicate where viewpoints diverge and state clearly when/whether a particular piece of information is unavailable and what **choices** you made **to manage these challenges**.

- When inserting data in the framework, note the **difference** between criteria 3 (Access to Information - about the substance) and 5 (Transparency - information about the process).

- In section 5 of the analysis sheet (lessons and recommendations the involved would like to share), be mindful to include the **stakeholders' views**, not your own.

- When presenting results publicly, e.g., in discussions or publications, be clear about your **sources** (respecting anonymity as required), **diverging views and gaps**.

ANNEX 1.
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ANNEX 2.
ANALYSIS SHEET FOR STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT PRACTICES

An editable version of this Annex can be found <u>here</u>.

COUNTRY/CONTEXT:
Contact/s for more information (ideally a government and a non-governmental contact):

1. Brief description of the practice. Please include information on who leads the process, objectives of the practice, whether it relates to specific or all aspects of the 2030 Agenda and at which level (national, regional, local, other) the engagement practice takes place.

2. To what extent is the engagement inclusive, participatory and accountable? For each dimension, please analyse and summarize the evidence and select a level.

Principle	Dimension	Level (0 to 3)	Criteria required for Level 3: The Implementer…	Summary of Evidence
Inclusion	1. Non-Discrimination		• Identifies diverse sectors and actors left behind, based on regular disaggregated data and mapping. • Includes stakeholders that have selected their own representation. • Includes diverse actors and those most left behind in the design of the process. • Allocates sufficient resources for those left furthest behind in the design process.	
	2. Accessibility		• Has a system to identify accessibility requirements on an ongoing basis in consultation with stakeholders. • Uses information regarding accessibility to design the engagement process alongside stakeholders. • Makes resources available to reduce barriers to the maximum extent possible.	
Participation	3. Access to Information		• Produces and shares relevant information and data publicly ahead of decisions with sufficient time to consult constituencies and opportunity to react. • Produces and shares information on practice progress jointly with relevant stakeholders and explains how differing views are being dealt with.	
	4. Influence in decision-making		• Has mechanisms that allow for partnership and co-creation with stakeholders in decision-making processes. • Explains how inputs that have been received have impacted outcomes. • Addresses power imbalances between stakeholders, e.g., differing numbers of seats, capacity development.	

| Accountability | 5. Transparency | | • Makes information on the process widely available, so that stakeholders, parliament and media are informed.
• The process is followed in an efficient way. | |
| | 6. Responsiveness | | • Provides stakeholders with feedback on how their inputs (monitoring results/measurable targets/ disaggregated data) will be used before decisions are made.
• Provides a robust mechanism to encourage stakeholders to present their own feedback and grievances.
• Resolution of grievances is managed alongside relevant stakeholders. | |

3. How did the analysis go? Please, highlight information gaps, process challenges or success factors, substantive consensus or divergence and how this was dealt with.

4. Do those involved feel that the engagement has affected outcomes in any way?

5. What lessons and recommendations would those involved like to share?

6. Information used for the analysis. Please, provide a list of references, e.g., publications and interview partners.
- Government:
  …
  …

- UN Agencies:
  …
  …

- CSOs and other stakeholders:
  …
  …

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