



**GOVERNMENT OF SIERRA LEONE  
CABINET SECRETARIAT**

# **Stakeholder Engagement in Preparing Cabinet Memoranda**



## **National Guide for Ministries**

**‘Supporting inclusive, evidence-informed decisions’**



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**National Guide for Ministries**

**Government of Sierra Leone  
CABINET SECRETARIAT**

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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It has benefitted especially from the participation of four pilot Ministries: the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food Security, the Ministry of Mines and Mineral Resources, the Ministry of Sports and the Ministry of Youth Affairs. Other Ministries participated in a validation workshop on 2<sup>nd</sup> March, 2017.

The Sierra Leone Cabinet Secretariat gratefully acknowledges the support of the Australian Government and the ACGN, including its Executive Director, Dr Mark Johnston, as well as the valuable input from all participating Ministries. We especially thank Mr Steven Keifala, the Project Facilitator.



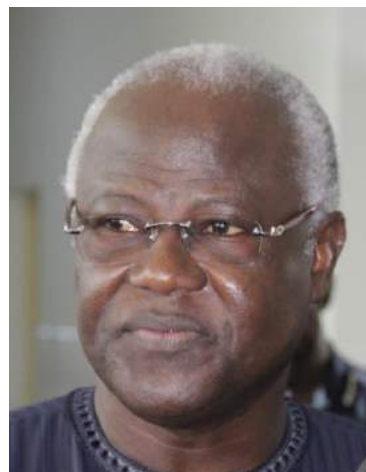
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<sup>1</sup> For information on ACGN, see <http://www.CabinetGovernment.net>

<sup>2</sup> See <http://dfat.gov.au/people-to-people/direct-aid-program/Pages/direct-aid-program.aspx>.

## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

In March 2015 my Government approved new Cabinet procedures to govern decision-making by this critical institution in our Constitutional system. In particular, these Cabinet procedures require that major decisions by the Government, whether draft laws for consideration by the Parliament or proposed Executive action, should be informed by evidence and analysis, not just wishful thinking and good intentions.



The previous Cabinet Manual had continued largely unchanged for more than 50 years. I hope that the 2015 Manual continues to benefit the nation and people of Sierra Leone for many decades, to be used and improved by future administrations.

This Guide complements the 2015 Cabinet Manual by helping Ministries to ensure that evidence from stakeholders is taken into account in Government decision-making and, more fundamentally, that key stakeholders participate in developing and implementing new policies.

We need to learn from our nation's success in fighting the Ebola virus, which resulted not only from international assistance and technical advice from experts, but also from the mobilisation and participation of communities and other stakeholders across the country.

In fact, the effective implementation of most policies, laws and programmes requires action and cooperation by stakeholders. This is critical for public health initiatives, where success depends on local behaviour, such as ensuring that children are vaccinated or local health workers and communities avoid risky practices. But it is also critical for something as simple as traffic laws, which depend on changing the behaviour of drivers and pedestrians and ensuring that local police can and will enforce them. Similarly, the success of investment incentives relies on the responses of potential investors to create employment opportunities for our young people.

My government is therefore committed to strong decision-making processes that are owned and informed by affected communities and other groups.

## Stakeholder Engagement Guide

The requirements and guidance in this document will help Ministries to work collaboratively with stakeholders for better informed decisions that respond to community concerns and expectations: decisions that draw on the ideas and experience of those on the ground; decisions that can, and will, be implemented effectively.

I urge all Ministers and Ministries to comply with the principles contained in this Guide and to take into account the helpful advice it contains. I look forward to seeing the results of this reflected in the proposals being submitted for consideration by the Cabinet.



**His Excellency Dr. Ernest Bai Koroma**  
**President of the Republic of Sierra Leone**

## PREFACE

As noted by His Excellency the President, Dr Ernest Bai Koroma, the Cabinet Manual requires Ministries to ensure that their proposals are informed by evidence. This Guide highlights that often the most important evidence is from communities and other stakeholders: their views and ideas; their needs and priorities; the roles they can play in implementation; and the information they can provide on capabilities and opportunities in their communities and industries.



It is essential that Ministries go on the front foot to engage actively, to listen and take account of stakeholder views. And to take advantage of stakeholder input to craft better policies and programmes and to build partnerships to implement policies to address the challenges and opportunities the nation faces.

This Guide sets out good practice for Government Ministries, Departments and Agencies when preparing Cabinet Proposals, drawing on previous practices and experiences of Ministries as well as the latest thinking and practices of our development partners and other institutions. These are reflected, firstly, in eight broad principles that must be followed wherever relevant when developing proposals for Cabinet. Secondly, the Guide also contains ideas on how these principles might be followed in specific contexts, advice which needs to be adapted and selectively applied by Ministries depending on the nature of the proposal being developed, the relevant stakeholders and the resources available.

Building trust is a key objective of this Guide, probably the most important. It underlies most of the principles, such as treating stakeholders with integrity and respect, using appropriate language, and always providing feedback. And building trust lies behind many of the specific procedures, for example, developing active listening skills, keeping commitments and arranging the furniture to encourage participants to speak out.

The Guide explains how stakeholder engagement can be increased without compromising Cabinet confidentiality and Cabinet solidarity, which are important principles of our system of Cabinet government, as explained in the Cabinet Manual. These should NOT be excuses for failure to engage effectively with external stakeholders to develop and implement effective policies.

## Stakeholder Engagement Guide

As Head of the Civil Service, I want to ensure that the Civil Service is willing and able to support Ministers to engage with external stakeholders. We need to change the culture in the Civil Service. Too many Civil Servants in Sierra Leone see themselves in powerful positions to make decisions over people's lives, requiring them to maintain authority and communicate rules and regulations. Too few see themselves as true public servants – servants of the public – requiring active engagement and responsiveness.

I understand the resource constraints facing Ministries and the Government as a whole. Stakeholder engagement needs to be strategically targeted and balanced – to avoid wasting resources on talking that could be better spent on action. But we must also avoid wasting resources trying to implement policies and programmes that fail to address real needs or achieve desired results because there was too little listening.

Undoubtedly, much of what is presented here is not entirely new for some Ministries, but I encourage you to take some time to review the current state of your relationships with each of your key stakeholder groups and to identify ways in which you might build upon what you have in place, or remove existing blockages. And I look forward to your help in the coming months and years to deepen the engagement of stakeholders in the development of policies for our nation.



**Dr. Ernest Surrur**  
**Secretary to the Cabinet and Head of the Civil Service**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Guide is based on eight major principles that must be followed to ensure effective engagement with external stakeholders in the development of policy and programme proposals for consideration by Cabinet:

1. The purpose and scope of any engagement with external stakeholders must be clear, and must be clearly communicated to those who are participating.
2. The choice of stakeholders must be inclusive and appropriate for the issues being considered, especially to ensure that powerful and well-resourced interest groups do not drown out the voices of the disadvantaged or those whose interests are less strongly held. Inclusiveness does not usually mean that all relevant stakeholders are invited to participate, but it is important to ensure that stakeholder input is balanced in terms of the range of interests and opinions of all stakeholders.
3. The role of individual participants should be clarified at the outset, to ensure that participants understand and accept the rules of the process. This includes clarification of whether they are being invited as individuals, to bring their own experience, views and expertise, or as representatives of their organisations or the broader interests they speak for.
4. The way the engagement is conducted must be appropriate for the purpose of the engagement and the stakeholders themselves. For example, there is no point trying to communicate through email to those without effective internet access, or through a meeting in Freetown for those unable to travel from other parts of Sierra Leone. It is also important to use accessible language, and a range of communication options should be considered, including social media, public and private meetings, phone-in radio programmes, opinion polls or formal user surveys. The choice of venue and the layout of the furniture in a meeting room can also be important.
5. Ministries must always engage with integrity and respect. While the mechanisms and communication methods will vary greatly, there is a common requirement to always treat stakeholders with integrity and respect. Ministry officials should always avoid 'talking down' to the

stakeholders they engage with. Respecting stakeholders includes transparency in the engagement process itself, so participants know what to expect and when to expect it. Ministries should demonstrate through their actions, as well as their words, a genuine desire to hear what stakeholders have to say and to value their views, even if they are motivated by partisan or personal interests.

6. Always provide appropriate feedback on input provided by stakeholders, to avoid stakeholders feeling their input has disappeared into a 'black hole'. The extent to which the feedback needs to address the detailed views presented by stakeholders will vary, depending on whether the final decision is aligned to those views, on the scale of the issue and the strength of views. In all cases the feedback needs to be in a form and in language that is appropriate for the specific stakeholders.
7. Do not pre-empt Cabinet's decision-making or embarrass the Government by disclosing Cabinet's confidential agendas, documents or discussions. Prior consultation on a Cabinet proposal should not lead to Cabinet's decision being pre-empted or colleagues being 'stampeded' by building up external support for a specific option. Confidentiality and the primacy of Cabinet as the decision-making body will be preserved if stakeholder engagement prior to initial Cabinet consideration is focused on problem identification and situation analysis, rather than seeking views on any specific proposed solution or options. If appropriate, Ministers may bring forward an initial memorandum, seeking Cabinet authority to then consult the public or specific external stakeholders on detailed policy options.
8. Finally, each engagement should be carefully planned, taking all the previous principles into account, ensuring that the plan is proportionate to the policy proposal being considered and is cost-effective. There is neither time nor funding to consult every stakeholder on every decision being taken by Cabinet. Money and time spent on consultation may be better spent on implementation and service delivery. Ministries are encouraged to include stakeholder engagement costs in their budget proposals and the costs of involving stakeholders should be seen as an essential component of the cost of developing and implementing major policies. However, tough decisions will be needed to ensure that available resources are directed to issues and policy proposals where stakeholder engagement will have the greatest impact, for the Government and for stakeholders themselves.

In following these principles, Ministries need to take account of the nature of the proposal being considered, its importance and urgency, the needs of stakeholders and the political context.

Practical steps to ensure the effectiveness of stakeholder engagement include:

- Development of an engagement plan that clarifies its purpose and scope, as well as appropriate targeting;
- Stakeholder analysis, to help identify relevant stakeholders, to ensure coverage of major stakeholder views and to understand where they are coming from;
- Consideration of a wider range of methods of engagement, including public hearings, phone-in radio, social media or internet (where stakeholders have access) and user or needs surveys;
- Developing effective messages to communicate to stakeholders before and during the engagement process;
- Improving active listening skills to ensure that stakeholder input is obtained and to demonstrate that the Ministry (and the Government) genuinely wants to hear views and ideas and to take them into account in developing policies;
- Conducting effective meetings including, for example, appropriate venue and furniture layout, clarifying roles and agendas; and
- Analysing and reporting on engagement outcomes and providing feedback.



Stakeholder workshop organised by the Ministry of Sports

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Purpose

This Guide to Stakeholder engagement and evidence stems from Government's commitment to working collaboratively with stakeholders for better informed decision-making that takes account of community concerns and expectations.<sup>3</sup> The Guide is designed to help Ministries engage effectively with external stakeholders when developing policy and programme proposals for Cabinet, in response to the Government's aim to promote active stakeholder participation and ownership.

The Guide explains the contribution stakeholders can make at each stage of the policy cycle, ranging from allowing selected stakeholders to have their say to encouraging them to participate actively in decision-making and working together to make a change. To ensure effective engagement of citizens and other stakeholders, practical steps must be taken to encourage and facilitate the involvement of stakeholders. To be effective, many proposed policies require trust between government and affected parties, with a sense of ownership and partnership.

### 1.2 Background

In August 2016, the Office of the Chief of Staff Office of the President and UNICEF Sierra Leone jointly organised Sierra Leone's first National Conference on Community Engagement. In his keynote address, His Excellency the President, Dr Ernest Bai Koroma, emphasised the importance of community participation in the development process:

*It is very important to make sure we recover from the economic challenges we are facing now. All the seven priority sectors within the recovery process are challenging and the implementation and monitoring of them is very important. This is why you, the communities must work together to make sure we all succeed and leave no one behind. The bottom-top approach was very successful in winning the Ebola fight and we must continue to use that approach throughout the recovery process.*

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<sup>3</sup> See for example: Keynote Address by His Excellency, Dr Ernest Bi Koroma, at the Conference on Community Engagement, Bintumani Hotel, Aberdeen, 30<sup>th</sup> August 2016.

Meaningful stakeholder engagement results in better-informed and more effective policies, projects, programmes and services. Developing genuine community participation and ownership continues to be core to the Government decision-making processes. In 2016, the Government's appointment of Community Engagement Officers (CEO) within each district was widely welcomed by local government representatives and donor partners as a demonstration of the Government's commitment to transparency and accountability.

In the past stakeholders were not adequately engaged in the development of most proposals being submitted for consideration by Cabinet. The Cabinet Secretariat of Sierra Leone, with support from the Africa Cabinet Government Network (ACGN), conducted a survey of all 45 written proposals considered by Cabinet during May-September 2013, which found that only 11% of proposals provided any evidence of external consultation having been conducted and only 2% mentioned any future consultation; on the other hand, 56% of the proposals would have benefitted from engagement with communities or other stakeholders in their preparation.

Since then the new Sierra Leone Cabinet Manual has been approved by Cabinet on 25 March 2015, encouraging Ministers to seek input and participation from external stakeholders. This National Guide complements Section 4.6 of the Cabinet Manual dealing with external stakeholder engagement, which highlights the importance of stakeholder engagement consistent with the principles underlying Cabinet Government in Sierra Leone:<sup>4</sup>

*When preparing major proposals for Cabinet, Ministers are encouraged to seek information from external stakeholders, such as industry or community groups likely to be affected. It is also important to obtain evidence on current problems through consultation or research, such as opinion polls or user surveys. This is an important part of preparing an evidence-informed proposal for Cabinet.*

*However, this should not be done in a way that might breach Cabinet confidentiality by publicly disclosing proposals to be submitted to Cabinet. Prior consultation on a Cabinet proposal should not lead to Cabinet's decision being pre-empted or colleagues being 'stampeded' by building up external support for a specific option.*

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<sup>4</sup> Section 4.5 of the Cabinet Manual deals with consultation with other Ministries within the Government, which has improved considerably following the approval of the Cabinet Manual in 2015. This Guide does not deal with consultation between government Ministries and agencies, although some of the principles and practical advice contained here is relevant.

*Confidentiality and the primacy of Cabinet as the decision-making body will be preserved if consultation prior to initial Cabinet consideration is focused on problem identification and situation analysis, rather than seeking views on any specific proposed solution or options. If appropriate, Ministers may bring forward an initial memorandum with options, seeking Cabinet authority to then consult the public or external stakeholders on those options. For major proposals that are complex and politically sensitive, the Cabinet may agree to publication of a discussion paper that analyses a problem and outlines options in order to promote public discussion prior to a final Cabinet decision. Another alternative is to hold public hearings or workshops on a problem to explore possible solutions.*

*In summary, while widespread consultation and participation is encouraged for many major proposals, Ministers should seek Cabinet's agreement in advance if there is any risk that Cabinet's decision-making might be pre-empted.*

Some Ministries already have substantial capacity in external engagement, with a proven track record in conducting workshops, community meetings, stakeholder surveys, public hearings etc. For these Ministries this Guide will build on their own experiences and hopefully improve their performance. However, the abovementioned survey by the Cabinet Secretariat highlighted that many Ministries have often failed to engage with external stakeholders effectively in developing proposals for Cabinet, whether because they were unaware of the requirements or had limited capacity and resources to meet them.

### **1.3 About the Guide**

The Guide is designed primarily to assist line Ministry staff working on specific policy proposals for Cabinet consideration, helping them to plan and conduct activities for external stakeholders to provide inputs and where appropriate participate during the design of new policy and programs being considered by Cabinet. In particular, it provides advice to Government Ministries in engaging with interest groups on a specific policy proposal through the conduct of effective public hearings, town and village meetings, workshops, interviews, focus groups, surveys and other good stakeholder engagement practices.

The Guide applies also to Government Departments and Agencies working on behalf of Ministries in developing proposals or planning the implementation of Cabinet



decisions. Most references to Ministries in this document should be read to include Departments and Agencies.

Section 2 explains what is meant by ‘stakeholder engagement’, especially the key question: ‘who are our stakeholders?’

Section 3 outlines the benefits of engaging with external stakeholders in policy development, for those not yet convinced.

Section 4 sets out the principles that should govern all stakeholder engagement intended to lead to proposals for Cabinet consideration. While detailed steps will vary greatly for specific proposals, decisions on the extent and nature of engagement on each proposal must follow these principles. The principles, and the Guide as a whole, aim to increase the input and participation of relevant community and other stakeholder groups when Ministries are preparing policy proposals for Cabinet consideration, in order to ensure that Government decisions are better informed and more likely to have positive results.

At the same time, the principles emphasise the need for stakeholder engagement to be appropriate and cost-effective. There is neither time nor resources to consult extensively on every Cabinet proposal, so priorities must be determined. More fundamentally, the Government has been elected to govern, accountable to the Parliament and electors. Stakeholder engagement needs to support these democratic processes.

Beyond the core principles specified in Section 4, most of the information and advice contained in Sections 5-6 are suggested procedures and processes for guidance, to be applied and adapted selectively by Ministries in each specific context as appropriate.

Section 5 of the Guide then explores practical strategies to involve stakeholders, especially early in the development of policies or programs, and a wide range of options for taking into account community views and perceptions to ensure a successful outcome of Government decisions. Following these strategies may help Ministries to broaden the range of policy options being considered, and to develop productive stakeholder relationships that will continue over time, enabling Ministries to be responsive and transparent to those individuals and groups most affected by their operations.

Section 6 provides detailed advice on how Ministries can engage effectively with external stakeholders, while Section 7 discussed some of the key challenges to effective engagement.

## 2. KEY CONCEPTS AND TERMS

This section clarifies some core concepts that are generally applicable, as well as some key terms.

### 2.1 What is Stakeholder Engagement?

The term 'stakeholder engagement' implies an inclusive and organised form of interaction, such as between a Ministry and key groups that might be affected by its policies or programmes. These groups may include specific towns or villages, business groups, youth organisations, advocacy or professional groups or industrial workers.

Stakeholder engagement involves the sharing of information, the giving and receiving of reasons, and the voicing of values. It is one of the key transparency instruments used to improve decision-making and performance, coordination, integration and quality of policy proposals. Stakeholder engagement is not usually (or preferably) a single event or activity; it often needs to be an ongoing process or conversation that builds mutual trust and relationships.

Stakeholder engagement can take many forms, such as public meetings, focus groups, workshops, one-on-one interviews, telephone interviews, and the use of questionnaires, e-mail, or websites to obtain input.

The purpose of engaging with external stakeholders can vary greatly depending on the nature and priority of the issue being addressed, as well as the stage in the development cycle for complex policies. These purposes are often mingled and overlapping, but it is important to clarify the purposes, and the terminology, at the outset:

**'Notification':** involves the timely communication of information on Government or Ministry decisions to stakeholders. It is essentially a one-way communication process in which the stakeholders play a passive role. Notification does not, itself, constitute consultation or participation, but can be a first step, for example prior notification of the Government's desire to engage, allowing stakeholders to prepare themselves for upcoming consultations.

**'Consultation':** involves actively seeking the opinions of interested and potentially affected stakeholders. It is a two-way flow of information, which may occur at any stage of the policy development process, from problem identification to evaluation of an existing policy or project. It may be a one-step process or, as it is increasingly the case, a continuing dialogue. External

consultation is often aimed at gathering information, for example on problems, needs and/or views, in order to facilitate the drafting of higher quality policy proposals.

**‘Participation’**: is the active involvement of interest groups in drafting policy or programme documents or deciding on proposed details before consideration by Cabinet. Ministries may offer stakeholders a role in policy development, implementation and/or enforcement where they wish to increase ownership of, or commitment to, the decision; or where government cannot alone undertake the programme and needs to work with external stakeholders to take action.

**‘Partnership’**: involves a more formal relationship with stakeholders to develop and/or implement a policy and programme. Ministries may, for example, establish partnerships with international development organisations, local communities, and business groups, industry workers, local government, and other government departments and agencies. Partnership agreements may provide a means of obtaining significant contributions and inputs from external stakeholders who are very interested in a particular issue. Such agreements may be either formal or informal and are often based on shared commitment to work collaboratively to build synergies and foster opportunities for possible policy options.

## 2.2 Forms of Stakeholder Engagement

Various strategies for engaging with stakeholders are discussed in Section 5 of this Guide, but it is useful to clarify a couple of these at this stage:

**‘Public hearings’**: are public meetings on particular issues or policy proposals at which interested stakeholder groups can come together to participate. Public hearings are, by definition, open to the general public, although actual participation will depend on how widely invitations are circulated and the location and timing of the hearings. Public hearings provide face-to-face contact in which discussion can take place between government and a wide range of affected stakeholders and also between interest groups themselves. Such hearings often follow quite formal procedures, usually with specific individuals or groups invited to make a presentation or submission on the issue in turn, followed by questions and discussion.

**‘Advisory bodies’**: are ongoing boards or committees, with fixed membership, that provide advice to the Ministry on relevant proposals it is preparing or on other specific issues that arise. The use of advisory bodies as a means of

stakeholder engagement is becoming more common for large Ministries and Departments. Advisory bodies are sometimes involved at various stages of the policy-making process to assist in defining the problems and options. Advisory bodies can allow selected stakeholders to exert great influence over final proposals, but by definition their membership is relatively narrow, usually confined to well-established groups and/or individuals with expertise. There are many different types of advisory bodies under many titles, such as councils, committees, commissions, and working groups. Their common features are that they have a defined mandate and membership and they include members from outside the government administration.

### 2.3 Who are ‘Stakeholders’?

For the purposes of this Guide, stakeholders can be any individual, community or industry group likely to be affected by a proposal, or able to affect its achievement.

The word ‘stakeholder’ in this context means a person or organised group that has a legitimate interest in a programme or policy proposal. In decision-making processes anyone with an interest (or stake) in the policy decision is potentially a stakeholder. For the purposes of this Guide, stakeholders also include those who are needed to help implement the proposed policy or can play a role in facilitating its implementation. Most policies have large numbers of potential stakeholders (including taxpayers where a policy is to be funded from the Government budget); so in practice some judgement is needed to identify those with a significant interest or role in implementation.

**Table 1: Examples of Stakeholders**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community groups</li> <li>• Research organizations</li> <li>• Health and social services groups</li> <li>• Youth development organizations</li> <li>• Business community</li> <li>• Union members or other workers</li> <li>• Advocacy organizations</li> <li>• Other Ministries, Departments and Agencies of Government (MDAs)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local villagers</li> <li>• Traditional leaders</li> <li>• Religious leaders</li> <li>• Student groups</li> <li>• Faith-based organizations</li> <li>• Professional groups (eg teachers; doctors)</li> <li>• Civil society organisations</li> <li>• Labour groups</li> <li>• Industry groups</li> <li>• Vulnerable groups.</li> </ul>
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### 3. BENEFITS OF EFFECTIVE ENGAGEMENT

#### 3.1 Benefits for Ministries

Stakeholder engagement in developing policy proposals often focuses on gathering evidence on stakeholder needs and opinions in order to use this information in supporting a Ministry's proposal to Cabinet. However, there are potentially greater benefits for the Ministry and the Government as a whole, which include:

1. **Anticipating the likely reaction of stakeholders once the policy or programme is implemented:** Almost all Government initiatives require action by external stakeholders in order to be implemented effectively – for example: investment incentives require businesses to apply; health services require patients to access them; taxes require taxpayers to comply; traffic laws require drivers to comply and police to enforce; and tourism policies require cooperation from the hospitality industry and foreign travel agents. And, of course, proposed legislation requires consideration of the likely reaction in the Parliament and potential political criticism from those who believe they will be adversely affected.
2. **Feedback on the effectiveness of current programmes:** New policy proposals are rarely developed in a vacuum, usually building on the experience of previous programmes. Where these programmes have not been formally evaluated, stakeholders are often in a good position to inform the Ministry what has worked and what has not worked well. Such feedback is frequently easier to obtain than comments on hypothetical proposals.
3. **Building understanding and ownership of the proposed policy or programme:** Involving key stakeholders in the development of the proposal, especially where some of their comments and suggestions are taken on board, can build external support for a Minister's proposal, which may help to obtain Government and Parliamentary approval or assist in getting stakeholders' cooperation in implementation.
4. **Facilitating innovation:** External stakeholders are sometimes able to suggest new options to address a problem, especially options that build on local capacities or understanding of local practices. For example, a proposal for a child vaccination programme may benefit from local ideas on how to ensure that parents bring their children to be vaccinated, such as promotion by traditional and religious leaders or linking to local events involving parents and children.

5. **Improved risk management:** Even where some stakeholders oppose a proposal, understanding the reasons why and their specific concerns may help the Ministry to fine-tune the proposal to minimise criticism or to design a communications strategy to counter the criticism if Cabinet agrees to proceed with the proposed intervention. For example, anticipating the criticism from some groups may prompt the Ministry and the Government to arrange public support from other groups expecting to benefit. And advice from stakeholders may also alert the Ministry to potential implementation risks, enabling adjustments to reduce those risks and/or to have contingency plans in place if the problems arise.
6. **Building a foundation for future engagement:** The trust and goodwill that results from a successful engagement process can make it easier to engage next time, whether through ongoing advisory bodies or more ad hoc engagement processes.
7. **Increasing support from development partners:** Most of the international organisations supporting projects in Sierra Leone put a high priority on effective stakeholder engagement. A Ministry that demonstrates its willingness and capacity to do so on one issue is often more likely to attract support from donors on other issues.

### 3.2 Benefits for Stakeholders

Engaging stakeholders needs to meet their expectations, or at least provide sufficient benefits to justify their time and effort. These benefits can include opportunities to contribute directly to policy and program development. Stakeholders often expect to make a difference to the proposal, not just provide data or express support. Engagement processes that make room for this, for example by leaving some details for stakeholders to lead on, are likely to leave stakeholders feeling better about the process and the resulting policy. Stakeholders are also often looking to get their needs and priorities on the agenda. Even where this is outside the scope of the specific consultation or the consulting Ministry, careful note of these needs and priorities, together with an undertaking to follow up with the relevant authority, may reinforce the current process.

Many of the other benefits for stakeholders mirror those for Ministries. For example, building trust and collaboration on one issue may benefit stakeholders when other issues arise in future. And being able to put forward options that may result in proposals that are more in tune with stakeholders' interests.

Above all, the most important benefits for both the Government and the stakeholders will be improved proposals to Cabinet, resulting in public services that are more

effectively delivered and that meet the priority needs of communities, businesses and the nation as a whole.

Understanding these potential benefits for Ministries and stakeholders themselves can not only help to motivate greater engagement, but also help in planning and conducting the engagement, as discussed in Sections 5 and 6.

## 4. PRINCIPLES FOR STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

This Guide is based on eight major principles that underpin effective engagement with external stakeholders in the development of policy and programme proposals. These are based on the priority given to engagement by His Excellency, the President, input from selected Ministries and international good practice.

While most of the procedures and processes described in the Guide are advisory, to be selectively applied and adapted by Ministries in each specific context as appropriate, these eight principles **must** be followed by Ministries in developing all proposals for consideration by Cabinet.

Although the principles apply mainly to Ministries (including Ministers), who prepare most proposals for Cabinet, they also apply when specific Departments or Agencies engage with stakeholders on behalf of a Minister or Ministry in developing a proposal or planning the implementation of a Cabinet decision.

The principles are:

- 1. The purpose and scope of any engagement with external stakeholders must be clear, and must be clearly communicated to those who are participating.**

For example, a Ministry must decide, and inform stakeholders, whether the purpose of the engagement is to:

- Inform stakeholders about a policy decision already taken (perhaps with an opportunity to provide input on how it can be best implemented);
- Seek input on the likely feasibility or impact of a specific proposed policy or set of options already developed;
- Seek broader information and views on how to address a problem or opportunity;
- Seek information and views on needs and priorities across a broad field (e.g. child and maternal health);
- Share and learn about experiences in addressing a specific problem with stakeholders active in the field; or
- Establish a partnership with selected stakeholders to develop a new policy or programme (e.g. by forming a working party or task force).

Too often problems arise when stakeholders believe they are being given an opportunity to influence a decision that has, in fact, already been taken.

The scope of the engagement should also be clarified. What problem or problems does it address, and what possible options are 'on the table' for discussion.



Particular care is needed where issues are likely to arise affecting other Ministries, which is frequent given the complexity of many problems and the fact that stakeholders tend not to constrain their thinking within bureaucratic boundaries. Where it is likely that stakeholders will want to discuss policies or programme belonging to other Ministries, or such issues arise unforeseen in the course of engagement, then the relevant Ministry (or Ministries) should be consulted as early as possible. Options for handling this situation include joint engagement, where the overlap is significant, or agreement to pass on views to the other relevant Ministries.

Where strong stakeholder views arise during engagement that are outside the stated purpose and scope of the engagement, it is important to listen to those concerns and record them, with an undertaking to pass them on to the Minister or other appropriate authority. However, this should not be allowed to hijack the main purpose of the engagement and inhibit other stakeholders from providing their input, unless the views are so strong and so widely held that the whole engagement process needs to be redesigned.

**2. The choice of stakeholders must be inclusive and appropriate for the issues being considered, especially to ensure that powerful and well-resourced interest groups do not drown out the voices of the disadvantaged or those whose interests are less strongly held.**

Inclusiveness does not usually mean that all relevant stakeholders are invited to participate (see principle 8 below). But it is important to ensure that stakeholder input is balanced in terms of the range of interests and opinions of all stakeholders. For example, the views of larger businesses should not be assumed to be the same as small or micro businesses. And views and priorities in Freetown should not be assumed to apply up-country.

Particular attention is needed where a proposal is likely to have a major negative impact on a relatively small, concentrated and well-organised group (e.g. a specific industry), but would benefit a much larger number of less organised stakeholders (e.g. consumers). Or the opposite: where a proposal likely to have concentrated benefits for a small group will impose costs for a much broader and diverse group.

Ministries should also recognise where a proposal is likely to have an impact beyond the sector-specific stakeholders they usually consult (e.g. where a health proposal has implications for patients or local communities, as well as health professionals and managers). In some cases these may be stakeholders in other sectors who are working with the Government through other Ministries. Part of

the consultation process with other Ministries (not dealt with in this Guide) should identify any significant stakeholders in other sectors that should be consulted on a proposal.

### **3. The role of individual participants should be clarified at the outset.**

Some engagement processes will be open, with public invitations being issued to allow any interested stakeholders to participate, for example by attending a public meeting or submitting views through social media or calling a phone-in radio programme. Other engagement will be much less public, with only a limited number of organisations or individuals invited to provide input on a proposal.

In some cases the engagement may need to be entirely confidential, for example where there are national security or law enforcement issues, acute political considerations or where early news of consideration of a policy could affect markets (e.g. consideration of changes to the exchange rate regime could undermine the national currency or confidence in the financial system).

However, whether the engagement is open and public or confidential, it is essential for participants to understand and accept the rules of the process. In particular, it needs to be clear whether persons involved in stakeholder engagement are being invited as individuals, to bring their own experience and views and expertise, or as representatives of their organisations or the broader interests they speak for. For example, there needs to be clarity and agreement on whether they will be asked to make commitments on behalf of their organisations, or to express views that will be subsequently made public.

This is especially relevant for confidential discussions, but also affects more open engagement processes. If Ministries are engaging with formal or informal representatives of stakeholder organisations, the engagement process needs to recognise the representatives' need to consult with their own constituents (e.g. circulation of papers in advance of meetings and the confidentiality of those papers). Representatives may agree to keep papers and discussions confidential, but that will often affect the final reaction to a policy decision if constituent groups have not been brought on-board during the engagement process. Whenever Ministries engage with representatives, it is critical to consider how well these individuals represent their organisations, and how well the selected organisations represent wider interest groups.

It is often easy to find representatives or organisations that can be convinced on a specific proposal, but the critical questions are whether they can speak for

their constituents and other groups, whether their information and views are typical and whether, at the end of the day, the policy will be more acceptable to the wider interest group as a result of the input from the representatives.

**4. The way the engagement is conducted must be appropriate for the purpose of the engagement and the stakeholders themselves.**

For example, there is no point communicating in writing to illiterate stakeholders, or through email to those without effective internet access, or through a meeting in Freetown for those unable to travel from other parts of Sierra Leone. It is also important to use accessible language, both a language in which stakeholders are comfortable and avoiding jargon they are not all likely to understand.

For each engagement, a range of communication options should be considered, including social media, public and private meetings, phone-in radio programmes, opinion polls or formal user surveys. The choice between these depends not just on cost, but also on what is most appropriate for the stakeholders on a specific issue.

The choice of venue and the layout of the furniture for a meeting can also be important. For highly contentious issues, there may be advantages in choosing a neutral location or a local venue where stakeholders feel comfortable, rather than a government office. And where stakeholders (and Ministry personnel) are being encouraged to share views and information, a more egalitarian arrangement of a meeting room may be more effective (e.g. meeting around a large conference table and avoiding using a stage or high table).

In some cases it may be appropriate to establish a permanent advisory board or panel, with key stakeholder representatives, to help build relationships and trust in the longer term and to provide a means of engaging quickly and efficiently with the major sector stakeholders on future proposals. However, Ministries still need to ensure that their engagement on new policy proposals is balanced, not biased towards the major stakeholders represented on the advisory board. Sometimes supplementary sources of advice and data may be required to ensure that all views and perspectives are equally represented.

**5. Ministries must always engage with integrity and respect.**

While the mechanisms and communication methods will vary greatly, there is a common requirement to always treat stakeholders with integrity and respect.

Ministry officials should always avoid ‘talking down’ to the stakeholders they engage with.

Respecting stakeholders includes transparency in the engagement process itself, so participants know what to expect and when to expect it (see principles 1 and 3 above). Any confidentiality of information provided by stakeholders must be respected, and commitments (e.g. on the timing of the next meeting) honoured wherever possible, with explanations provided where it is not possible.

More fundamentally, Ministries should demonstrate through their actions, as well as their words, a genuine desire to hear what stakeholders have to say and to value their views, even if those views are motivated by partisan or personal interests. And even where Ministries are unable to accept views because they are not feasible or are contrary to Government priorities. Where necessary relevant Ministry officials should receive training in communication skills, especially listening and seeking information.

When commencing any engagement event, Ministries should make an explicit commitment to listen, and should also ask stakeholders to respect the position of the Ministry. In particular, stakeholders should understand that the Ministry personnel undertaking consultations with stakeholders are working within broader Government policies, always willing to listen and pass on relevant views and information, but not always able to agree with the views stated by stakeholders. The personal views of Ministry staff are not relevant, especially on major issues that will be decided by Cabinet. However, those staff must demonstrate that they are listening (e.g. using simple techniques such as note taking and repeating major points back to stakeholders to ensure full understanding) and will take the views and evidence into account in preparing proposals within the Ministry.

## **6. Always provide appropriate feedback on input provided by stakeholders**

One important way of demonstrating respect for the views and information provided by stakeholders is to always provide appropriate feedback to them on the outcome of the engagement. This step is most often forgotten (at the international level as well as within Sierra Leone), leaving stakeholders feeling their input has disappeared into a ‘black hole’.

In some cases it will be possible to provide stakeholders with details of the final policy decision announced by the Government. In other cases it may be necessary to provide interim feedback, for example where decision-making has

been delayed (e.g. a short message to say “development of the policy has been delayed because of ..... but a decision is expected to be announced by ....”).

The extent to which the feedback needs to address the detailed views presented by stakeholders will vary, depending on whether the final decision is aligned to those views, on the scale of the issue and the strength of views. In many cases, the Government’s announcement of its decision will (or should) explain its reasoning and at least implicitly address the major concerns or issues raised during the engagement with stakeholders.

And in all cases, the feedback needs to be in a form and in language that is appropriate for the specific stakeholders. For example, through phone-in radio programmes or social media, if that is how the stakeholder input was collected, or through a public meeting or a written report.

**7. Do not pre-empt Cabinet’s decision-making or embarrass the Government by disclosing Cabinet’s confidential agendas, documents or discussions.**

Section 4.6 of the Cabinet Manual encourages Ministers to seek information from external stakeholders when preparing major proposals for Cabinet. However, this section of the Cabinet Manual also emphasises that this should not be done in a way that might breach Cabinet confidentiality by publicly disclosing proposals to be submitted to Cabinet. Prior consultation on a Cabinet proposal should not lead to Cabinet’s decision being pre-empted or colleagues being ‘stampeded’ by building up external support for a specific option.

As explained in Section 2.4 of the Cabinet Manual, discussions in Cabinet and the documents on which they are based are strictly confidential. This is to facilitate frank and honest discussion within the Cabinet’s meetings and to minimise the fear of potential disclosure of the position taken by individual Ministers in discussion of sensitive plans being considered by the Government. While the governance of Sierra Leone is based on a strong principle of transparency, the high stakes and interests involved in many decisions require the Government to have private space to determine its priorities, resolve internal differences and question itself before facing public scrutiny and accountability. Whilst in Cabinet, Ministers are able to discuss a wide variety of matters openly with the full knowledge that they are working towards a collective decision.

The Cabinet Manual compares this confidentiality principle with the professional privilege that protects the discussions between lawyers and their clients, noting that Cabinets around the world have adopted similar procedures

to protect their capacity to make decisions based on honest advice from advisers and robust, together with internal discussion of the full range of options before announcing a new policy or submitting draft laws to the Parliament.

Under the Cabinet principle of collective responsibility, all Ministers are expected to publicly support the decisions of Cabinet, or at least avoid public criticism, even if they opposed the decision in the Cabinet room. (See Section 2.1 of the Cabinet Manual.) This can be compromised if the positions taken by individual Ministers in the Cabinet meeting are made public.

The Cabinet procedures also ensure that Cabinet's decisions are not pre-empted by disclosure of options before the meeting. Ministers should therefore refrain from making public statements or commenting on policy proposals that they or other Ministers intend to bring to Cabinet. Similarly, Ministers should not accept invitations to speak or comment publicly on matters outside their Ministerial portfolios without first obtaining clearance from the relevant Minister.

Confidentiality and the primacy of Cabinet as the decision-making body will be preserved if stakeholder engagement prior to initial Cabinet consideration is focused on problem identification and situation analysis, rather than seeking views on any specific proposed solution or options. If appropriate, Ministers may bring forward an initial memorandum, seeking Cabinet authority to then consult the public or specific external stakeholders on specific policy options. For major proposals that are complex and politically sensitive, the Cabinet may agree to publication of a discussion paper that analyses a problem and outlines options in order to promote public discussion prior to a final Cabinet decision.

In summary, while widespread consultation and participation is encouraged for many major proposals, Ministers should seek Cabinet's agreement in advance if there is any risk that Cabinet's decision-making might be pre-empted.

It is also important to ensure that feedback provided to stakeholders (see principle 7 above) does not breach Cabinet secrecy. Ministries should not disclose the position taken by any individual Minister, for example by saying "our Minister pushed hard for this in Cabinet but was opposed by the Minister for ...". Where stakeholder views have been over-ruled within the Ministry or by Cabinet, it is important to provide a brief explanation of the reasons (for example, the budget problems facing the Government) without disclosing the views on any individuals.

Any questions regarding the confidentiality of Cabinet deliberations and documents should be directed to the Secretary to the Cabinet.

**8. Finally, each engagement should be carefully planned, taking all the previous principles into account, ensuring that the plan is proportionate to the policy proposal being considered and cost effective.**

There is neither time nor available funding to consult every stakeholder on every decision being taken by Cabinet. Intensive engagement is costly, both financially and in terms of the time of government representatives and stakeholders themselves. Money and time spent on consultation may be better spent on implementation and service delivery.

The overriding purposes of external stakeholder engagement are to help the Government to develop more effective policies and programmes, that will equitably meet the needs of all the relevant stakeholders, and will be sufficiently 'owned' by those for whom the policies and programmes are intended to benefit and by those needed to help implement them.

Stakeholder engagement is not intended to substitute for or duplicate normal Parliamentary processes that require major policies to be approved through legislation and the Government to be held accountable for executive action. And stakeholder engagement may not be required to decide on a policy for which the Government has a strong electoral mandate, although it may be required to decide **how** that policy should be implemented.

The need for stakeholder engagement depends on the:

- a) scale of the problem and its priority for the Government and for stakeholders;
- b) nature of the likely impact of the proposed intervention;
- c) novelty of the proposal, for example whether it has been successfully implemented previously or in other similar countries;
- d) degree of consensus about the problem and the proposed policy;
- e) reliability and robustness of the data and evidence already available to the Government on the feasibility and likely impact of the proposal;
- f) likelihood of political opposition; and
- g) urgency of the problem and the time available to undertake extensive engagement.

The extent to which stakeholders should be engaged in developing a specific policy requires considerable judgement in applying these criteria. For any major policy or programme proposal the need for and the nature of stakeholder engagement should be discussed with the Minister, who may seek the views of

State House or other Ministers through the relevant Cabinet Standing Committee.

And for especially sensitive issues, a Cabinet memorandum should be submitted **before** any policy options are publicly discussed, to give Cabinet members, including His Excellency the President, an opportunity to consider the broader strategic and political implications of opening up public discussion on such issues.

The costs of engaging widely should also be taken into account when developing an engagement plan. Seeking Cabinet endorsement to engage extensively with stakeholders may help the Ministry to obtain government funding for the engagement. Many donors are also keen to support participation by stakeholders, although often only with the opportunity to influence policy design. And, whoever is providing the funds, the Ministry should play a central, high-profile role in the engagement, if necessary with help from consultants to build its capacity to do so; stakeholder engagement should not be simply contracted out to private consultants or international advisers.

For proposals affecting the major stakeholder groups in a sector, it may be quicker and cheaper to engage through a permanent advisory board, as mentioned in principle 4, or through other ongoing stakeholder engagement mechanisms (e.g. a regular survey of users or industry sector), as long as balanced input from stakeholder interests can be ensured.

For the future, Ministries are encouraged to include stakeholder engagement costs in their budget proposals. The costs of involving stakeholders should be seen as an essential component of the cost of developing and implementing major policies.

But, whatever funding for engagement is available from the Government and international partners, tough decisions will be needed to ensure that available resources are directed to issues and policy proposals where stakeholder engagement will have the greatest impact, for the Government and for stakeholders themselves.



## 5. PLANNING STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

This section provides advice and practical steps in planning engagements before actually contacting external stakeholders. As mentioned already, the information in this part (and the following one) are for the guidance of Ministries, which can selectively adopt and apply them consistent with the principles in the previous section, including the requirements of the Cabinet Manual. If in doubt, Ministries should consult the Cabinet Secretary or the Cabinet Policy Review Unit (CPRU).

### 5.1 Stakeholder Engagement Options

International experience suggests four major options for engagement that can be considered when developing an engagement plan:

1. **Full Public Engagement:** attempts to involve all stakeholders through a transparent process open to all stakeholders, even if they do not take up the opportunity. The Ministry needs to communicate the details of the engagement process to enable all of those interested to participate.
2. **Targeted Engagement:** tries to limit the engagement to only the most affected stakeholders or to a representative sample of them, taking into account the importance of the issue and the cost. Targeted engagement must be strategic in identifying the key stakeholders carefully to ensure all needs, views and perspectives are captured, to avoid leaving out key groups. Targeted engagement can be done publicly but the focus will be centred on the selected target groups.
3. **Confidential Engagement:** is appropriate for very sensitive proposals, for example those that involve security issues, the potential for political instability or where premature disclosure would have adverse economic consequences. This type of engagement is always targeted, usually on a smaller number of individuals or groups that can be trusted. As noted Section 4, a decision to engage confidentiality can significantly compromise some of the potential benefits of engagement given the inability of participants to consult with the groups they represent.
4. **Post Decision Engagement:** focuses on the implementation of the policy or programme, including setting timeframes and implementation planning. To avoid criticism the Government needs to have convincing reasons for not involving stakeholders in the policy-making stages, for example where it already

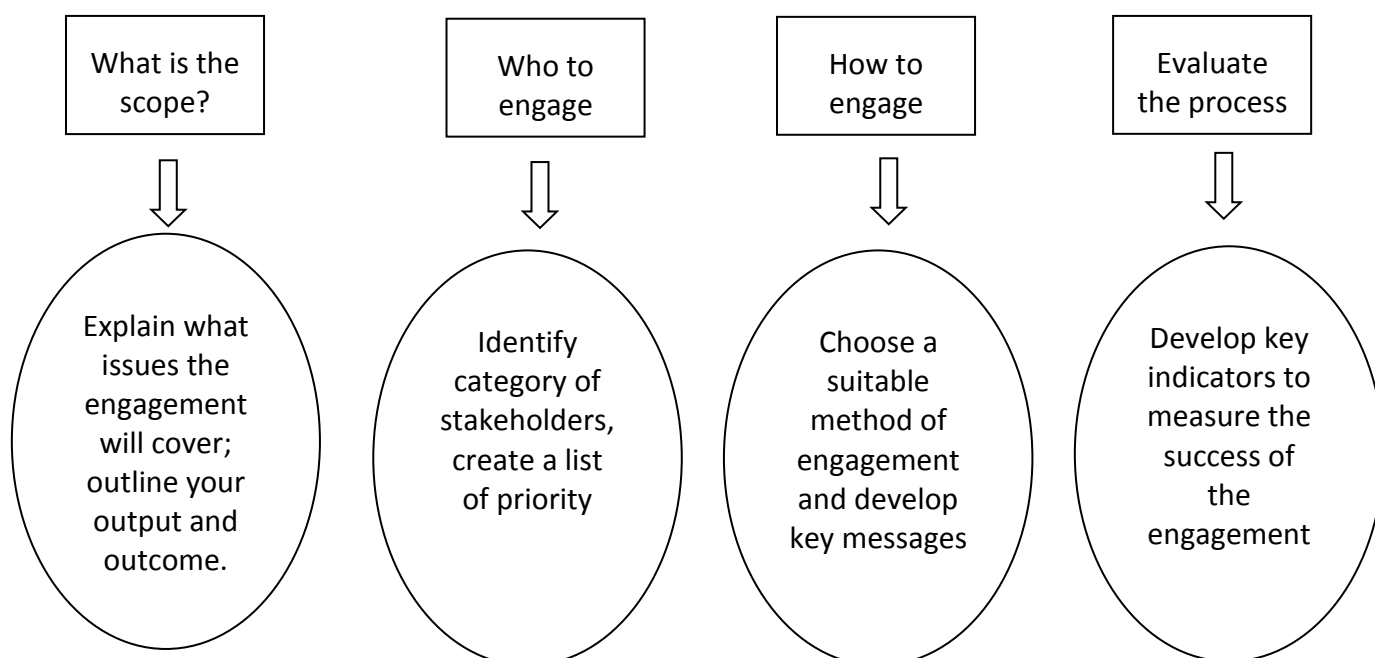
has the mandate or urgent action is required. Or where consultation before the policy decision would undermine its effectiveness.

## 5.2 Designing the Stakeholder Engagement Process

There is no one ‘right’ way to conduct stakeholder engagement: the process should be designed to meet the particular objectives and to ensure that it is proportionate (see Section 4 of this Guide).

The figure below highlights the key decisions to be taken in designing stakeholder engagement.

**Figure 1: Engagement Process**



## 5.3 Developing a Stakeholder Engagement Plan

Preparation of an engagement plan can help to clarify the purpose of contacting stakeholders, the timetable and the resources required. The detail in the plan will depend on the complexity of the issue, the engagement option selected (see above) and the stakeholders being consulted. Table 1 provides a simple template which prompts for key decisions required in planning an engagement.

**Table 2: Engagement Plan**

Title of Engagement			
Objective of the engagement	Why engage	Expected output	Expected outcome

**Issues to consider**

<b>Scope</b>	What the engagement will cover <b>(Identify out-of-scope issues that might arise)</b>	
<b>Who</b>	Define Stakeholder <b>(State categories of Stakeholders -list):</b>	
<b>How</b>	Level of engagement	
	Proposed Methods of engagement	
	Timing and deadlines	
	Resources <b>(What are the resources you will need to conduct the consultation?)</b>	
	Responsibility <b>(Who will be responsible to conduct or facilitate the consultation?)</b>	
	Key messages to communicate	
	Key questions to ask stakeholders	
<b>Managing risk</b>	Risks associated with the engagement? <b>(Anticipate risks and how to manage them)</b>	
<b>Evaluation</b>	Evaluation of the consultation process <b>(Design set evaluation questions on the engagement process)</b>	
<b>Report</b>	Data collection and communicating participants input	
<b>Feedback</b>	How the results of the engagement will be fed back to stakeholders	

## 5.4 Stakeholder Identification and Analysis

An important step is to understand **who** key stakeholders are, **where** they come from, and **what** they are looking for. To be effective, this process should be driven by the engagement strategy. Figure 2 provides a useful framework for identifying relevant stakeholders.

Figure 2: Stakeholder Identification Process



The final list of stakeholders to be consulted will depend on your strategy, its impacts, and your current engagement objectives. As a result it should not remain fixed, but should be updated as the issues evolve and as stakeholders make decisions or change their opinions.

**Stakeholder mapping** is a process for identifying the external stakeholders who may have important knowledge about or standpoint on the issues. It can include classification of stakeholders in terms of their current or potential role, their power or opportunity to influence implementation of the policy or programme and perhaps also their current level of awareness.

## 5.5 Analysing Stakeholders

Once you have identified a list of stakeholder categories, it is useful to analyse their relevance and the perspectives they are likely to offer, to understand their relationship to the issue(s) and each other, and to prioritise based on their relative usefulness for

this engagement. Table 3 provides a useful list of criteria to help you analyse each identified stakeholder group.

**Table 3: Stakeholder Analysis**

Criterion	Description	Ratings (high; medium; low)		
		Group A	Group B	Group C .....
<b>Stakeholder Contribution:</b>	Does the stakeholder have information, advice, or expertise on the issue that could be helpful to your engagement?			
<b>Stakeholder Legitimacy:</b>	Does the stakeholder have legal or political claim for engagement?			
<b>Stakeholder Willingness to engage:</b>	How willing is the stakeholder to engage?			
<b>Stakeholder Influence:</b>	How much influence does the stakeholder have about the issue?			
<b>Stakeholder Necessity of involvement</b>	Does the stakeholder have the potential to derail or delegitimise the process if they were not included in the engagement?			

### 5.6 Prioritising Stakeholders

The ratings in Table 3 can help to prioritise stakeholders to engage. It is not practical and usually not necessary to engage with all stakeholder groups to the same extent. Being strategic and clear about whom you are engaging with, and why, is most important. Look closely at each of the stakeholder criteria and ratings in Table 3. By working through the rating process you will have created a robust, relevant, prioritised stakeholder list for your engagement activities.

## 5.7 Developing Effective Messages

Before implementing your engagement plan, you should determine the key messages to be communicated to stakeholders, including the promises you are making to take account of their input and the expectations you are creating.

The integrity and effectiveness of stakeholder engagement relies on the Ministry making sound decisions about what information is provided to stakeholders, what key messages are to be provided and what background information is to be developed to guide the process. Most importantly, be clear about the purpose of the engagement:

- Are you seeking data, information, advice, and feedback from stakeholders to help design the programmes or policy proposal to Cabinet?
- What relationships or previous engagement has the Government had with these stakeholders? Will you be commencing with a degree of trust and goodwill or will you receive a hostile reaction?
- What will the engagement process be? And how have stakeholders been selected? How will you ensure that the engagement is inclusive and transparent, at least for those involved in the engagement?
- What could change as result of the engagement?
- What are the likely benefits of the engagement to stakeholders?

## 5.8 Reviewing Ministry Engagement Plans

For sensitive proposals or where a Ministry is unsure of its engagement planning, it may be useful to consult with the Cabinet Policy Review Unit (CPRU). CPRU can advise on what it considers as good practice, although it is ultimately up to line Ministries to decide which engagement methods are used. In reviewing whether an engagement plan is appropriate, CPRU may ask:

- Does your engagement plan explain the appropriate option, purpose and objectives of engagement?
- Does it use appropriate methods for engaging those likely to be affected by the proposed policy?
- Does it demonstrate that the views of affected stakeholder groups will be considered?

## 6. INTERACTING WITH STAKEHOLDERS

### 6.1 Active Listening Skills

As highlighted in Section 4, Ministries should demonstrate through their actions, as well as their words, a genuine desire to hear what stakeholders have to say and to value their views, even where those views are motivated by partisan or personal interests.

This should be an explicit commitment made to stakeholders when commencing any engagement event, and stakeholders should be asked to respect the position of the Ministry personnel, recognising that they are working within broader Government policies. Ministry staff should always listen and pass on relevant views and information, even where they do not agree with the views stated by stakeholders. Especially because the stakeholder engagements covered by this Guide are leading towards proposals for Cabinet consideration, the personal views of Ministry staff are not relevant. They must not imply that they are speaking on behalf of Cabinet or the Government as a whole. The staff must, however, demonstrate that they are listening and will take views and evidence into account in preparing proposals within the Ministry.

**Table 4: Active Listening Skills and Techniques**

- Asking questions rather than always making statements.
- Taking notes of points made by stakeholders.
- Maintaining frequent eye contact, focused attention, remaining un-distracted, positive body language.
- Repeating key messages from stakeholders to demonstrate you are listening and to ensure accurate understanding, especially when views are confused or unclear: “Let me be sure I understand what you are saying. I understand you to be saying that .....
- Giving people time and space to clarify and express their thoughts.
- Letting people know their opinions are valued.
- Helping people to ‘own’ the issues they talk about, in terms of using words like ‘us’ and ‘them’, so they can take responsibility and contribute to better solutions.

- Dealing sensitively with issues that are outside the scope of the meeting. If a participant finds it hard to be brief or to remain on topic, their views can be referred to a ‘parking space’ to enable the discussion to move on but avoid letting the participant feel you disapprove of his or her views. The ‘parking space’ could be a separate box on a whiteboard or a special notebook of issues to be drawn to the attention of the relevant authorities.
- Empathising with the group and getting a sense for how the group is feeling as you discuss with them. Always try to let the stakeholders believe the issue and their views matter to your Ministry.
- Make an effort to consciously keep smiling where appropriate, and maintain a positive and energised tone of voice and pace.

## 6.2 Good Practice Engagement

Stakeholder engagement is a process that involves patience and attention, and is usually not a one-time event. It starts with identification of the issues and deeper reflection.

While the process will vary greatly depending on the issue and the stakeholders, Table 5 summarises some good practices:

**Table 5: Good Engagement Practices**

<p><b>Clarifying scope</b></p>	<p>Having determined the scope of the engagement as part of your planning process, it is important to communicate it to your stakeholders. Some may question the boundaries of the engagement, which can be handled through a ‘parking space’ as described in Table 4.</p>
<p><b>Focusing on solutions</b></p>	<p>Because part of the reason for the engagement is often to identify innovative options, it is important to be open to diverse ways of addressing the problems driving your policy proposal. Stakeholders should be encouraged to focus on solutions, being constructive rather than simply making complaints or highlighting problems.</p>



<p><b>Sharing information</b></p>	<p>Sharing information can help to highlight that stakeholders' input is valued and to build trust. Information should not be presented always as fact or non-negotiable, but put on the table for discussion. For example: "This is what we have found, or been told elsewhere. What do you think?" Always acknowledge uncertainty and seek information from the stakeholders.</p>
<p><b>Capacity building</b></p>	<p>Sometimes it is necessary to build the capacity of stakeholders to understand a proposed strategy or policy framework. At the heart of some consultation is the need to educate parties on emerging issues and encourage their input.</p>
<p><b>Spirit of partnership and collaboration</b></p>	<p>The Ministry should exhibit its commitment to building partnership and intensifying collaboration with stakeholders. Where relevant, create a shared understanding that can form the basis of partnership to address the problem.</p>
<p><b>Involving other sectors</b></p>	<p>As highlighted in the Cabinet Manual, it is essential that Ministries consult with other Ministries when preparing policy proposals for Cabinet consideration. This extends to engagement with external stakeholders. Because stakeholders are affected by many Government policies and programmes, there will be substantial overlap in the stakeholders relevant for Ministries. And your proposals may affect the primary stakeholders for another Ministry. It is therefore important to keep other relevant Ministries informed of your engagement plans.</p>

### 6.3 How to Plan a Stakeholder Meeting

Planning and holding stakeholder meetings is an important part of implementing a stakeholder engagement strategy. Meetings can be held on-site or at a neutral location, depending on your local relationships and needs.

When planning a meeting, consider the timing of the meeting and the amount of time to be allocated to it. For major meetings (e.g. public hearings), it may be worthwhile to consult stakeholder organisations or community leaders on the proposed arrangements for the meeting, to get their views and bring them on-side, especially if the meeting is discussing contentious issues.

Your office (or an intermediary, if appropriate) should invite stakeholders to participate in meetings well in advance and provide necessary background information, including the scope and objectives of the meeting.

The following steps will be helpful for planning:

**Table 6: Meeting preparation and invitations**

1. Determine objective of meeting and desired outcome
2. Identify potential participants
3. Set meeting date and venue
4. Send invitations
5. Follow up with invitees
6. Determine expectations of participants
7. Prepare materials for use prior to the meeting
8. Check venue and any equipment (e.g. AV equipment or flip charts) before the meeting.

Once your Ministry has planned a stakeholder meeting, you'll want to ensure appropriate roles and expectations are agreed upon, and also that stakeholder participants value the process.

**Table 7: Determine roles in conducting the meeting**

- Designate a person to chair the meeting
- Designate someone to facilitate the meeting, if required
- Determine other Ministry staff to participate in the meeting
- Designate a person to take notes and record stakeholders' input, which will be useful for determining which stakeholder feedback to include in your report.

## 6.4 Choice of Venue and Room Layout

Careful consideration should be given to the venue for a stakeholder meeting, including whether it should be held in government premises, stakeholders' territory or some 'neutral' location. This often sends a signal about the Ministry's willingness to listen and compromise and can influence the willingness of stakeholders to speak up. Particular care is needed where the premises belongs to one stakeholder group, which

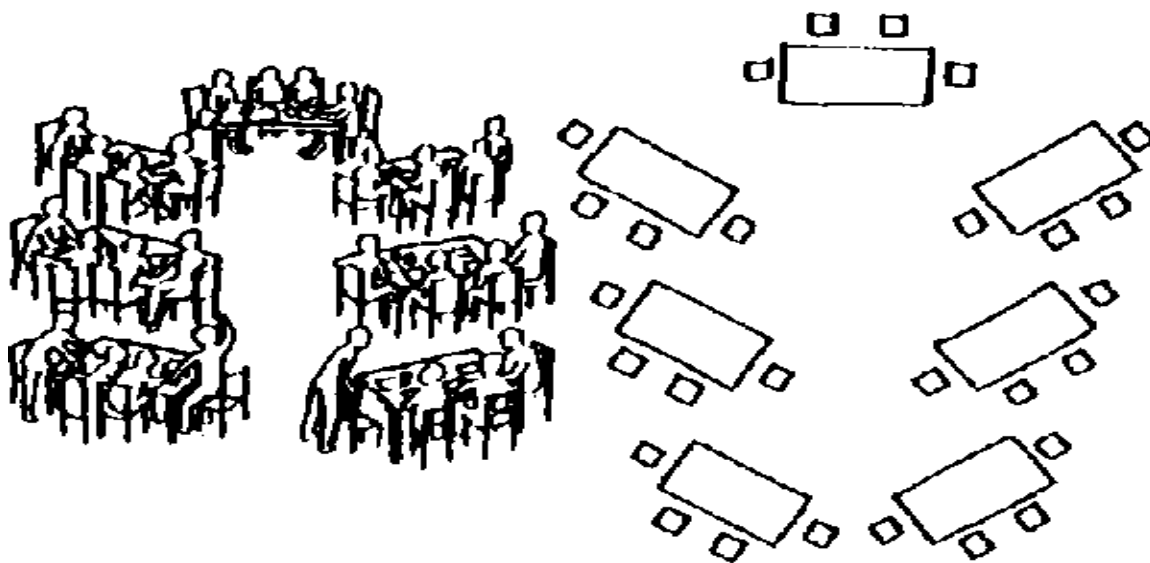
may lead other stakeholders with differing views to feel that the ‘host’ organisation is being given privileged status or is convening the meeting.

The layout of the room can also be important. Most stakeholder meetings are designed to encourage stakeholder views and to emphasise the Ministry’s willingness to listen to their views, which is usually not facilitated by the normal auditorium or classroom layout, with high table and rows of seats.

If numbers of participants are relatively small, then a ‘roundtable’ arrangement can be used, with all participants sitting around the one table (whether round or square), emphasising that all opinions are equally welcome. If there are to be Power Point presentations, then a U-shaped arrangement may be needed, unless two projectors can be set up to simultaneously show the presentations so all can see them.

Another option is ‘café style’, where participants sit in groups at a number of tables spread around the room (see Figure 3). This makes it easy (and quick) for participants to conduct group discussions.

**Figure 3: Café Style Seating**



## 6.5 How to Hold a Stakeholder Meeting

Below is a sample agenda that can help you achieve the specific meeting objectives.

**Table 8: Sample Agenda**

1. Welcome participants, based on the attendance list; let stakeholders know the importance of the meeting
2. Invite participants to introduce themselves and summarise their interest in the problem/proposal being discussed
3. Review the expectations of participants, inviting them to provide them individually or in groups (depending on numbers and diversity of stakeholders)
4. Describe the broader engagement process and the roles during the meeting
5. Consider giving an overview of key information (including future goals) in a brief presentation
6. Allot time for questions and answers
7. Provide time for key stakeholders to make statements or presentations
8. If appropriate break into groups to discussed key issues; groups to be mixed/random if part of the aim is to build consensus on the issues (e.g. 4 random groups can be formed quickly by asking each participate to number 1 to 4)
9. Reporting back by groups, leaving plenty of time for clarification and discussion
10. Meeting summary by facilitator
11. Discuss how the department plans to review and respond to input provided
12. Review next steps and set timeline for future action, including timetable and arrangements for feedback to stakeholders
13. Thank participants for their time.

## **6.6 Facilitating a Stakeholder Meeting**

- Ensure full participation by the designated stakeholders
- Try to start on time, once a minimum number of participants are present (this should be notified in the invitation to make it clear that late-comers will miss some of the meeting)
- Never push your personal opinions or ideas
- Always try to be neutral
- Encourage shared learning and understanding (e.g. use language that all understand and avoid unnecessary jargon; ask others to explain what they mean if some participants show they do not understand)

- Promote participatory solutions to issues
- Summarise key points back to the group to check they have been understood correctly, or bringing a particular line of discussion to a close to help keep the process on track.

## 6.7 Tips for Successful Stakeholder Engagement

The following tips summarise some of the key steps required for successful engagement:

### I. Structure the Engagement Process

Reflect on identifying and prioritising all potential stakeholders, and have an orderly way of collecting and organising their inputs. Agree on the ground rules, identify stakeholder roles, and be ready to respond to comments.

### II. Maintain Commitments

Invite the right stakeholders to participate and if possible ask them to agree upon key aspects of the proposed policy, or at least the problem it is trying to address. Accept differences of opinion between your Ministry and stakeholders, or between stakeholders, accepting that it is not necessary to agree on everything. Maintain a transparent and accountable manner while respecting the confidentiality of the views and contribution from stakeholders.

### III. Attentive and Focused

Assign adequate time, attention and resources for the meeting, taking into account the need to inform and educate some stakeholders on complex issues. Identify both the short-term and long-term objectives as well as values and objectives of the engagement. Pay attention to the need to address issues of different mindsets, skills and cultural practices.

## 6.8 Analysing Information

Once you have collected feedback through various methods (such as workshops, interviews, surveys, community meetings, public hearings etc.), the results need to be reviewed to analyse the range of opinions, views, and data provided and to consider their implications for the Ministry's policy proposal.

The structure of this analysis will depend on the proposal being considered, but the sections in the standard Cabinet memo template (Annex A of the Cabinet Manual) provide a useful framework to organise the various inputs and views from stakeholders where there has been widespread consultation, as shown in table 9.

**Table 9: Possible Framework for Analysing Stakeholder Views and Input**

1. Major changes in the proposed policy recommended by stakeholders, including recommendations not to proceed.
2. Input that challenges or comments on the purpose of the policy.
3. Questions and comments regarding its strategic relevance and urgency.
4. Expected benefits and target beneficiaries.
5. Other likely impacts, including groups likely to be adversely affected.
6. Input on the need for the proposed policy and whether it is likely to have the desired effect.
7. Other options or ideas put forward by stakeholders.
8. Potential impact on other sectors, which might affect other Ministries.
9. Comments on the cost of the proposal or possible funding sources.
10. Any input on legal issues.
11. Implementation risks.
12. Proposals for further consultation.

Please note that this framework is only one possible way of reviewing the stakeholder input you receive. You do not have to report on input from stakeholders in all these sections of the final Cabinet memo: only where they are especially relevant and critical for Cabinet's consideration of the proposal.

A summary report is usually needed to inform the Minister, and possibly Cabinet, of the results of the engagement. This report can often be brief, focused on the key issues raised. The template in Table 10 may be useful in preparing the report for the Minister and possibly to attach to the Cabinet memo.

Photographs of the engagement can also help to demonstrate to the Minister and Cabinet the engagement that has been undertaken by the Ministry.

**Table 10: Report Template**

Objective and scope	
Type of engagement (option)	
Dates	
Locations	
Categories of stakeholders consulted	
Stakeholder selection criteria	
Total number of stakeholders Involved (attach list of names if less than 100)	
Summary of main stakeholder positions, highlighting significant inputs in terms of the above framework in Table 9	
Agreed and disagreed views	
Description of Ministry response (including amendments to original draft proposal).	

## 6.9 Providing Feedback to Stakeholders

As emphasised in Section 4, it is essential to provide feedback to the stakeholders consulted in the course of developing a proposal. Remember that stakeholders are curious to know whether their feedback was captured and considered. All feedback should be clearly stated and communicated in a way that is appropriate for the particular stakeholders, preferably using the same media that were used in the consultation. There is no point providing a long written report in English to local villages, for example. Understanding the expectations of the stakeholders will help to frame the feedback. In some cases an intermediary may be able to deliver the feedback.

## 6.10 Evaluating the Effectiveness of Stakeholder Engagement

It is recommended that, at key stages of an engagement process, you review its effectiveness, in particular, how well you have responded to stakeholder feedback within the context of your policy preparation efforts and plan. This can include updating your stakeholder identification, evaluating your engagement strategy and methods, and perhaps even its objectives, and scope.

At the completion of a specific engagement process such an evaluation, if possible with input from the stakeholders, will help you capture and integrate lessons learned, and also drive continuous improvement in future engagement processes.

**Table 11: Key questions in evaluating stakeholder engagement processes**

- Was the planning process effective?
- What techniques worked well and what did not?
- Did you deliver the intended outputs of the engagement? In particular, did you obtain relevant input from stakeholders?
- How did stakeholders feel at the conclusion of the engagement?
- Was there an increase in trust between the Ministry and stakeholders?
- Was there an increase in ownership of the Government decision, or at least greater acceptance.



## **7. CHALLENGES TO STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT**

This section discusses some key challenges that can undermine effective stakeholder engagement, including limited time and resources, conflicting opinions, managing different audiences and conflicting interests, and stakeholders' own reluctance or capacities.

### **7.1 Timing**

As well as resources (see 7.5 below), stakeholder engagement takes time. This may be difficult if Ministers are keen to respond quickly to problems or to take advantage of immediate opportunities (e.g. for donor support). The Government's timetable therefore needs to be taken into account in deciding to undertake a major engagement of stakeholders. It is therefore important to discuss stakeholder engagement plans with the Minister, and in some cases Cabinet, before embarking on a lengthy process. It would be quite counter-productive to begin engaging with stakeholders, making promises on a consultation timetable, only to have the process cut short by the Minister wanting to submit the proposal to Cabinet more quickly. At times it may be useful to remind Ministers of the risks of proceeding without stakeholder inputs.

Time is also an important consideration for many stakeholders. The timetabling of meetings and the notice given need to take into account their other commitments, as well as local cultural or religious events, such as Ramadan. Starting and finishing times of meetings also need to recognise local constraints such as transport.

### **7.2 Conflicting Views**

Rarely are stakeholder views homogeneous. On many issues there are often two or more strongly held views, reflecting who is likely to win and who is likely to lose from the proposed policy. Or at least differing perceptions of how the policy is likely to impact them.

Ministries are encouraged to seek a range of inputs, reflecting the main stakeholder groups expected to be affected and to report on the range of opinions and interested in the proposal prepared for Cabinet.

Particular care is required when planning stakeholder meetings, to decide whether to bring potentially conflicting parties together in the same room. This can serve the purpose of demonstrating the range of opinions and pressures the Government is

facing on a contentious issue and, with skilful facilitation, may help to reach compromise or consensus positions.

On the other hand, bringing hostile groups together in the same room may derail the whole process and leave no-one satisfied that their views have been taken into account. Bringing such views together at the outset may also prevent attempts at 'shuttle diplomacy'. This is a process whereby the Ministry (or a facilitator) meets separately with the different parties to try to understand their underlying priorities, to identify common ground and to explore possible compromises while emphasising the specific benefits to each party in accepting the compromise.

### **7.3 Stakeholder Reluctance**

While on many issues stakeholders are enthusiastic to have their say, there are times when key stakeholders are reluctant to speak out or to contribute to the development of policies. This may be because on previous occasions they felt their views or interests were ignored, because of lack of trust in the Ministry or because of political loyalties or alignments. "Why bother, because they never listen to us!" While it is often impossible to control or predict how stakeholders are likely to react, experience has shown that external stakeholder engagement during policy preparation is best realised when stakeholders are involved from the beginning.

One option may be to engage through a neutral party or trusted intermediary. Another is to build trust by beginning with an issue where the interests of the Ministry and a stakeholder group are aligned.

A related problem is low turnout at stakeholder meetings. While this may reflect deeper factors, it often just results from competing pressures for the time of stakeholders, or they feel their views on the issue do not justify investing the time and effort of meeting with the Ministry. Or that: "others will say the same thing, so why should I bother?" To ensure that the loudest voices do not drown out more widespread views, it is important for a Ministry to facilitate input from a wide variety of interests, making it convenient for groups to have their say through the choice of medium, timing and location. For example, it may be useful to commission or conduct a sample survey of users or other stakeholders, as a way of reaching out to those who might not otherwise participate. Such surveys can be conducted by the Ministry itself, or contracted to academics, NGOs or private firms, or included in surveys by Statistics Sierra Leone.

## 7.4 Cultural and Traditional Barriers

Ministries have reported problems arising from social and cultural barriers that sometimes prevent full engagement by some stakeholders. For example, women may be reluctant, or unable, to speak out when brought together in the same room as men. Similarly, community members may feel reluctant to speak when traditional leaders are present in meetings

In a situation where language is a barrier for stakeholders to make input, it may be necessary to engage an interpreter to translate information and views, but the involvement of an interpreter may create new challenges if he or she is not acceptable to the stakeholders, has limited understanding of the issues and is seen to be biased.

## 7.5 Resource Availability

Perhaps the greatest impediment to greater stakeholder engagement is lack of financial resources to undertake it. Pursuing stakeholder engagement involves financial implications, including travel, meeting and printing costs. These costs should be taken into account when developing an engagement plan, to ensure that the Ministry does not generate expectations beyond its capacity to deliver.

There are a number of strategies to find more resources for engagement with stakeholders:

- i. Trying to include an allocation for stakeholder engagement in annual Ministry budgets. Although this is difficult at a time of austerity, it may be possible for major proposals that, if accepted by relevant stakeholders, will help to address fiscal and economic problems. The costs of involving stakeholders should be seen as an essential component of the cost of developing and implementing major policies.
- ii. Seeking Cabinet endorsement to engage extensively with stakeholders. As noted in Section 4, this may help the Ministry to obtain government funding for the engagement.
- iii. Attracting donor support. Many donors support participation by stakeholders, although often only with the opportunity to influence policy design.
- iv. User-pays approaches, where stakeholders pay for themselves, including their transportation and a contribution to meeting costs such as for venue and refreshments. This can work where stakeholders themselves are well resourced

and eager to influence decision-making, although there is obviously a risk that disadvantaged or less resourced stakeholders are not heard.

- v. Engaging through existing permanent advisory boards or similar arrangements. This can be very cost-effective for proposals affecting the major stakeholder groups in a sector, or through other ongoing stakeholder engagement mechanisms (e.g. a regular survey of users or industry sector), as long as balanced input from stakeholders' interests can be ensured.

There is no simple response to this challenge. In some cases a combination of these strategies may be required.

But, as noted in Section 4, whatever funding for engagement is available from the Government and international partners, tough decisions will be needed to ensure that available resources are directed to issues and policy proposals where stakeholder engagement will have the greatest impact, for the Government and for stakeholders themselves.

## ANNEX A: STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT PLAN FORMAT

The Stakeholder engagement plan gives you an idea of how to collect evidence from stakeholders and communicating their input into a report for cabinet consideration.

<b>Vision:</b>			
<b>Objective of Engagement</b>	<b>Why Engage?</b>	<b>Output:</b>	<b>Outcome:</b>
<b>Who</b> (define the stakeholders)			
<b>Stake the category of stakeholder</b> (state names on the list)			
<b>How</b>	<b>Level of engagement:</b>  (Describe Level)		
	<b>Proposed methods of engagement:</b>  (What method of engagement will you used?)		
	<b>Time:</b>  (What is the timing or requirement of the engagement?)		
	<b>Resource:</b>  (What are the resources will you need to conduct the engagement?)		

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	<p><b>Responsibility:</b> (Who will be responsible to conduct or facilitate the engagement?)</p>
	<p><b>Key messages:</b> (What are the key messages?)</p>
<p><b>Managing Risk</b> (What are the threats associated with the engagement and strategies to manage them?)</p>	
<p><b>Evaluation:</b> (Evaluate the engagement process)</p>	
<p><b>Report:</b> (Record all data and input from all stakeholders)</p>	

## ANNEX B: STAKEHOLDER MAPPING WORKSHEET

The Stakeholder Mapping Worksheet can support you in understanding and analyzing your interaction with stakeholders. You have to fill the table as indicated before engaging the stakeholders, to determine the stakeholder and kind of messages you take to the stakeholder and feedback to get:

Criterion	Description	Ratings (high; medium; low)				
		Group A	Group B	Group C	Group D	Group E
<b>Stakeholder Contribution:</b>	Does the stakeholder have information, advice, or expertise on the issue that could be helpful to your engagement?					
<b>Stakeholder Legitimacy:</b>	Does the stakeholder have legal or political claim for engagement?					

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Criterion	Description	Ratings (high; medium; low)				
		Group A	Group B	Group C	Group D	Group E
<b>Stakeholder Willingness to engage:</b>	How willing is the stakeholder to engage?					
<b>Stakeholder Influence:</b>	How much influence does the stakeholder have about the issue?					
<b>Stakeholder Necessity of involvement</b>	Does the stakeholder have the potential to derail or delegitimise the process if they were not included in the engagement?					



## USEFUL REFERENCES AND LINKS

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