Stakeholder Participation Guidance for the Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency

Checklist

Stakeholder Participation Guidance for the Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency: Checklist
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The Stakeholder Participation Guidance for the Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency consists of the following three volumes:

- Main Document (550032007)
- Checklist (550032006)
- Practitioner's Manual (550032009)

A Dutch edition is also available.

You can download the publication from the website www.mnp.nl/en or request your copy via email (reports@mnp.nl). Be sure to include the MNP publication number.

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The Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency (MNP) functions as the interface between science and policy, producing independent assessments on the quality of the environment for people, plants and animals to advise national and international policy-makers.

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Notes on the use of the Checklist

This is the Checklist to accompany the Stakeholder Participation Guidance. The Stakeholder Participation Guidance is intended to support and guide project leaders at the Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency (MNP) in their choices in the area of participation. The Checklist takes you quickly through the Guidance, drawing your attention to the most important choices to be made.

Participation and how to organise it is highly dependent on context. MNP projects vary in terms, for instance, of their policy context, type of assessment and time scale, so participation can be used in a number of different ways in MNP assessments. Nevertheless, the Stakeholder Participation Guidance and this Checklist should help project leaders to think about stakeholder participation in a purposeful way.

The Checklist is organised around a number of guiding questions:

1. **Why** do you want participation?
2. **What** should the participation be about?
3. **Who** do you want to involve?
4. **How much** participation do you want?
5. **What form** are you choosing?

The background to these questions is explained in the Stakeholder Participation Guidance itself. This Checklist contains a number of tables to assist you to answer the questions. It is important to realise that there is no one right answer. It is about making deliberate and consistent choices taking account of the circumstances.

One of the most important things when organising participation is to formulate clear aims. Participation is not an end in itself for the MNP, which is why the Guidance addresses the ‘why’ question first (question 1).

Only then can we look at the assessment itself: ‘what’ should participation actually be about? Should it be about knowledge, methods, scientific uncertainties, policy options or interests? The substance and organisation of participation depends on the purpose of the assessment. Question 2 deals with this.

This prepares the ground for the next question: ‘who’ exactly should participate? The choice of participants is very dependent on the chosen issues and aims. Question 3 offers tools to help you choose.

How much participation do you actually want? What matches your aspirations and aims but also the resources available to you? Question 4 about the ‘scale of participation’ can help you with these issues.

Dependence on context is an even more important factor when it comes to the choice of participation method: not all methods are suitable for all purposes. This is why methods are left until last, because the answers to all the other questions must be clear first. ‘What forms’ are suitable and precisely how participation will be organised in the project is dealt with in question 5.

1 Why do you want participation?

For a more in-depth analysis, consult chapter 2 of the Main Document

What contribution can participation make to the project?
What are your reasons for organising participation in this project?

Table 1 Aims for participation

Possible aims for participation	**How important are the following participation aims for my project?**		
	Very important	**Quite important**	**Not very important**
To acquire knowledge			
To analyse and structure problems			
To explore different perspectives			
To increase stakeholders' knowledge			
To create a network			
To generate support for the report			
Other, i.e.			

Remember that one aim (e.g. generating support) may operate at the expense of another (exploring relevant perspectives). That is why you have to choose your aims carefully.

- What are your most important aims?

2 What should the participation be about?

For a more in-depth analysis, consult chapter 3 of the Main Document

Once you are clear about the purpose of the participation exercise, it is useful to think about defining the content. Which parts of the project do you want to use stakeholder participation for, and are there other parts for which you certainly do not want to use it?

Two aspects deserve to be given particular consideration:

- the purpose of the assessment and the context of the project (political context, geographical and administrative scale, measure of freedom);

- the complexity (need for knowledge and social controversy).

2.1 Which forms of assessment play a role in the project?

Table 2 on page 8 shows the consequences of the type of assessment for the use of participation and points you should pay particular attention to.

Table 2 Use of participation

Type of assessment	**Participation *mainly* used during…**	**Extra points to consider**
Ex-post evaluation	Problem definition, Knowledge-gathering, Review	• Generate as much support as possible for the research. Remember to communicate clearly with stakeholders about the progress of the research. Present research questions, methods and conclusions to them as much as possible • When gathering knowledge, look especially at the implementation of the policy and planned and unintended effects • Concentrate on analysing interests and preventing conflicts
Ex-ante evaluation/ Development of policy options	Problem definition, Knowledge-gathering, Development of policy options	• When gathering knowledge, focus especially on the implementation of the policy and planned and unintended effects • Look closely at the research perspective: what effects are included, what factors are being looked at? The focus determines the choice of stakeholders, but the choice of stakeholders also determines the focus!
Outlooks	Knowledge-gathering, Phrasing of normative questions, Scenario development	• Create a project environment which allows scope for creativity. Invite 'outsiders' and encourage free thinking outside the safe paths • Be clear about your own aims: do you just want to discuss different perspectives or do you also want to reach some degree of consensus about likely developments?
Expert assessments to produce a second opinion	Start phase, Knowledge-gathering and review	• Attract as broad a spectrum of stakeholders as possible into the process • Bring in external experts to organise the process. In this way you can prevent the MNP itself becoming the subject of political arguments
Ad hoc advice	Difficult because of short time available	• Create sustainable structures, networks of actors, in good time, to allow participation in short-term projects. Consider feedback groups, panels or internet forums that can be set up quickly
Strategic research (e.g. developing models or methods)	All phases	• Involve not only fellow scientists but other groups. Ask potential users what questions the model should be able to answer.
Other, i.e.	……	

Using this table, answer for yourself the following questions:

- Which forms of assessment play a role in the project?
- What is the thing that you most want to talk to stakeholders about?

Think about the focus of the content, project design, methodological issues, dealing with uncertainty, et cetera.

2.2 Complexity

For a more in-depth analysis, consult the detailed Guidance for Uncertainty Assessment and Communication, p.11 (MNP/UU, 2003)

The Guidance for Uncertainty Assessment and Communication (MNP/UU, 2003) deals at length with the analysis of uncertainty. Here we will merely report briefly on how the complexity of a problem relates to the need for participation and the contribution it can make.

Hisschemöller and Hoppe (1996) classified policy problems with the aid of two axes. According to their model, a problem can be complex for two reasons: either because there is little information available or the available information is very uncertain; or because there is disagreement about the relevant norms and values.

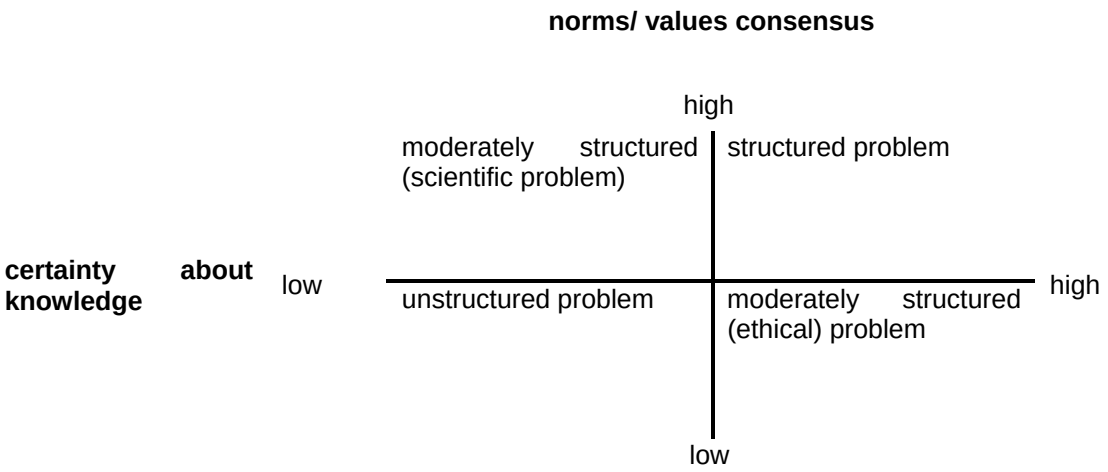

Figure 1 Types of policy problems (Hisschemöller and Hoppe 1996)

Structured problem (e.g. ozone layer and CFCs)
If the necessary scientific knowledge is well established and there is also reasonable consensus about the norms and values at issue, there is little need for participation. Unfortunately this situation rarely occurs. It may be that we are sure about what knowledge is needed, but that knowledge may not be available. In that case participation can be used to gather information.

- Ask yourself whether participation is the most suitable approach. Bear in mind that stakeholder participation takes a lot of time and effort.
- Investigate whether the necessary knowledge cannot be gathered by other methods, such as research, and whether these other methods would produce better results.

Moderately structured scientific problem (e.g. problem of particulates in the air)
If there is no well-established knowledge (or there is uncertainty about what knowledge is needed), but there is a large measure of consensus on norms and values, the emphasis in the project will be on knowledge production. Participation is an important resource for this.

- Treat knowledge providers as your most important target group. These may be ‘hands-on’ experts and scientists.
- Ensure guaranteed quality of the science by including an extensive review phase in the project.
- Consult the MNP Guidance for Uncertainty Assessment and Communication.

Moderately structured ethical problem (e.g. maximum tolerable risk for carcinogenic substances)
If the necessary scientific knowledge is well established but there is little or no consensus on norms and values, participation is extremely useful, but this raises the question: how should the MNP deal with these conflicting values? Project leaders have to make

judgments on this based on the task they have been given to do and the specific context.

- Formulate a clear position about the purpose of the participation. Consult the commissioning body.
- Involve stakeholders at an early stage in planning the participation.

Unstructured problem (e.g. climate change)
If there is little consensus about norms and values and there is no well-established knowledge (or there is uncertainty about what knowledge is needed), you are dealing with an unstructured problem. Participation is an important aid in this situation. Knowledge-gathering is closely linked with assumptions (including normative assumptions) in this case.

- Make the process as reflective as possible. Do that by alternating phases of research and phases of participation. Be clear about the role(s) of participation in the project.
- Involve as broad a spectrum of participants in the process as possible.
- Arrange professional guidance and make sure you have a good conflict management strategy.

- Where would you place your project in Figure 1? What do you think the consequences of that will be for the organisation of participation?

- What (if any) underlying conflicts of values are there in the project? How will they be dealt with in the assessment?

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3 Who do you want to involve in the assessment?

For a more in-depth analysis, consult chapter 4 of the Main Document

'How do I choose the right stakeholders to involve in an MNP project?' In order to answer this question, you must first of all be clear about what can and will actually be expected of the stakeholders.

3.1 Who are the most important stakeholders in the problem?

Table 3 Identification of the main stakeholders in the problem

Identify the most important	**What are the stakeholders' views on the problem? (They may have different views.)**

stakeholders in this problem ↓	Normative view	View on the actual situation
❑ Cabinet and ministries (national)		
❑ Parliament (national)		
❑ Advisory bodies (e.g. Advisory Council of the Ministry of Housing, Planning & Environment, Socio-Economic Council, Natural and Environmental Research Council, Health Council)		
❑ Other public bodies (local/regional/international)		
❑ Other planning offices (CPB, SCP, RPB)		
❑ Research institutes/consultancies		
❑ Scientists/universities		
❑ Sector-specific stakeholders/actors (e.g. from agriculture, transport, industry)		
❑ Cross-sector interest groups (e.g. the employers' organisation, the VNO)		
❑ Environmental and consumers organisations		
❑ Unorganised stakeholders, citizens		
❑ Media		
❑ Others, i.e.		

Decide how involved you want the various stakeholders to be and explain your decision briefly. Indicate also which phase of the assessment they should be involved in.

- What value will their involvement in the assessment add?

3.2 What characteristics should participants have?

What are the most important characteristics that participants in your project should have? Consider:

- the extent of their influence on the political debate
- level of knowledge
- multiformity of perspectives
- enthusiasm and communication skills
- how well they know each other
- integrity
- other, i.e.…

- Which characteristics are important for your project?

3.3 Managing expectations

Participants invest time and effort in participation, and they do not do that for no reason. They have certain expectations about their participation. Make sure they remain motivated by taking their expectations into account.

Which stakeholders' expectations can be met?

Table 4 Managing stakeholder expectations

Expectations	**In the project stakeholders can**		
	Fully	Partially	Hardly
Contribute expertise			
Exercise influence			
Network			
Enjoy themselves			
Gain knowledge			
Represent their organisations			

- Which expectations held by the stakeholders can you and do you want to fulfil?

How do you expect the participants to behave in this process? Participants are usually enthusiastic and keen to make a contribution, but experience has taught us that some have a less positive attitude to the participation process, if, for instance, there are major economic interests at stake.

Do you anticipate any obstructive behaviour (delaying the process, lack of openness et cetera) and how do you think you would respond to that?

- What expectations do you have about the stakeholders?

Communicate with participants about what they can and cannot expect.

- How will you incorporate the results of the participation process in the reports?

4 How much participation do you want?

For a more in-depth analysis, consult section 3.2 of the Main Document

Table 5 shows the forms of participation that fit particular aspired levels of participation. Each rung of the ladder stands for a specific aspired level of participation. For each rung, an arrow shows what each participation level means for the direction of communication (is dialogue taking place?); which forms of participation could be considered; and the advantages and potential pitfalls associated with these.

For Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency, different degrees of stakeholder participation may be appropriate depending on your aims, the context of the problem and available resources. It is not a matter of ‘the more participation, the better’, as each form participation has certain implications, and they are not always desirable and/or achievable.

Look at Table 5 on page 16.

- On which rung of the participation ladder do you want to place the participation exercise in your project?

Table 5. Implications of participation for the MNP

	Aspired level of participation	Direction of communication	Forms of participation	Advantages	Disadvantages/pitfalls
Interactive	Help decide	MNP ⟷ SH	• Not very common in practice • Examples: joint management of nature databases and participation in IPCC working groups • The main target group is fellow scientists	• Optimal use of participants' resources • Fulfils democratic motives	• In extreme cases the stakeholders determine the content of MNP reports • MNP risks losing control
	Co-produce	MNP ⟷ SH	• Interactive scenario-development • Alternation of research and participation; research-led participation process • Use of participatory procedures (see Practice Guide)	• Increases commitment of participants • Reflective approach to co-production can make a major contribution to the production of knowledge • Ideally, generates support *and* produces knowledge	• Demands open-mindedness from the MNP • MNP has to commit to results to some extent, which is only possible if everyone is open to this. • Intensive process. • Participants' choice and quality of the facilitator are key factors for success
	Take advice Consult	MNP ⟵ SH	• Interactive workshops for: - defining the problem - research design - conclusions • Bilateral sessions • Review of project design and conclusions - written reports - workshops • Themed workshops for knowledge production	• Can result in new perspectives. • Highly goal-oriented approach. Can be put into action at key moments in a project	• Less easy for the MNP to steer the process; process can produce unintended results • Stakeholders may disagree with the framing; can lead to unrest • Difficult to guarantee transparency
	Listen	MNP ⟵ SH	• Set up feedback channels • Keep an eye on the media • Receive complaints, protest and criticism	• MNP gets answers to questions it did not ask: prevents tunnel vision • MNP is able to draw attention to problems at an early stage	• Difficult to draw a line between where listening brings benefits and where it does not • Can be very time-consuming

Non-interactive	Study	MNP ⟵ SH	• Surveys • Interviews • Focus groups	• Large numbers of stakeholders can be reached with relatively little effort • Information can be collected in a very targeted way	• A strong framing effect may occur: other factors which were not asked about may be relevant
	Inform	MNP ⟶ SH	• Presentations	• Takes relatively little time and effort	• Can cause dissatisfaction among stakeholders • No opportunity to make a contribution, no 'real' participation
	Use no participation	MNP SH	None	• Project receives little attention. Under certain circumstances, this may be desirable	• No feedback, no utilisation of external sources of information, no legitimisation

*SH = stakeholders

5 Which form of participation are you going to choose?

For a more in-depth analysis, consult chapter 5 of the Main Document and the Practice Guide

How will the participation in the project be organised?

- How much time is there for preparation and do you think this is enough?
- What results do you expect from the participation?
- How will the participation process affect the products? How will the results be incorporated in the reports?
- What problems do you anticipate in the process and how will you deal with them?
- How will the participation be evaluated?
- Are external facilitators needed? Why/why not?
- When will stakeholders be involved in the project?

  a. the preparatory phase
  b. problem-analysis and structuring
  c. knowledge acquisition
  d. conclusions
  e. reporting
  f. …….

- How will feedback be given to the participants?
- How much scope is there for reflection and changing course during the process?

6 References

Hisschemöller, M. and Hoppe, R. (1996), Coping with intractable controversies: the case for problem structuring in policy design and analysis. Knowledge and Policy: The International Journal of Knowledge Transfer and Utilization 8(4): 40-60.

MNP/UU (2003), Guidance for Uncertainty Assessment and Communication. Bilthoven and Utrecht: Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency and University of Utrecht.