TOOLKIT

FOR DEVELOPING A STAKEHOLDER AND KNOWLEDGE HOLDER ENGAGEMENT PLAN FOR NATIONAL ECOSYSTEM ASSESSMENTS

UN environment programme WCMC
NATIONAL ECOSYSTEM ASSESSMENT INITIATIVE

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INTRODUCTION

What is the purpose of this toolkit?

This toolkit has been developed for in-country assessment teams undertaking national ecosystem assessments in partnership with the National Ecosystem Assessment Initiative. The purpose of this toolkit is to offer practical guidance on engaging with knowledge holders and a range of stakeholders throughout the national ecosystem assessment process. Inclusive and meaningful engagement of multiple stakeholders and knowledge holders is the core principle that underpins the legitimacy of national ecosystem assessments. Recognising that stakeholder contexts are unique in each assessment country, this toolkit is designed to be adaptable to a range of stakeholder engagement needs and scenarios. The toolkit includes practical guidance, top tips, case studies, links to additional guidance materials, and templates to support stakeholder and knowledge holder engagement activities for national ecosystem assessments.

Drawing on best practice guidelines on stakeholder engagement[1], the steps outlined in this toolkit will support the user to develop an overall Stakeholder and Knowledge Holder Engagement Plan. Similar to the way that a Scoping Report serves as a blueprint to guide the assessment process, a Stakeholder and Knowledge Holder Engagement Plan is designed to help assessment teams to identify and plan engagement activities that will best contribute to the overall aims and impact of the assessment. The process of developing a Stakeholder and Knowledge Holder Engagement Plan takes the user through a series of necessary steps to be able to identify the most valuable moments and methods for engaging different stakeholders and knowledge holders in the assessment. Having a clear and strategic plan about when and how to engage stakeholder and knowledge holders in the assessment is particularly important when time and resources for engaging with stakeholders is limited. Each section of the toolkit covers an essential activity for developing a Stakeholder and Knowledge Holder Engagement Plan and following this toolkit as a step-by-step guide is the best way to ensure that the Stakeholder and Knowledge Holder Engagement Plan is as comprehensive and robust as possible.

Communicating effectively is one critical aspect of engaging with stakeholders. For this reason, it is highly recommended to align your Stakeholder and Knowledge Holder Engagement Plan with the assessment's Communications Plan. This will help to ensure that the relevant knowledge holders, stakeholders and target audiences have been identified in these respective plans, and that your approaches for communicating and engaging with them are streamlined and complimentary to one another. In addition, making sure that your Stakeholder and Knowledge Holder Engagement Plan and Communications Plan align with one another can make it easier to allocate time and resources more effectively, whilst avoiding duplication.

Look out for these icons throughout the toolkit for tips on how to align your Communications Plan with your Stakeholder and Knowledge Holder Engagement Plan https://www.ecosystemassessments.net/content/uploads/2023/11/BESNet-NEA-Toolkit-V5.pdf.

[1] See in particular the BiodivERsA Stakeholder Engagement Handbook

What is stakeholder and knowledge holder engagement in a national ecosystem assessment?

In the context of conducting a national ecosystem assessment, **stakeholders** refer to individuals and groups who have the power to affect the outcomes of a national ecosystem assessment and/or are directly or indirectly impacted by a national ecosystem assessment and its findings. Importantly, astakeholder does not necessarily need to be involved in writing the assessment or be a "user of the assessment findings", to be impacted by the assessment and its outcomes. Stakeholders who have an interest or a "stake" in national ecosystem assessments can often include government ministries, academic and research institutions, Indigenous Peoples and local communities[2], non-governmental organisations and civil society organisations, media, and private sector bodies, among others.

On the other hand, **knowledge holders** refer to individuals, groups and entities who possess knowledge that is relevant to the assessment. Knowledge holders may be from different disciplines and knowledge systems and could include scientists, researchers, experts, professionals, practitioners, and Indigenous and local knowledge holders. It is common for some participants/institutions to have dual roles, meaning that they may be considered both stakeholders and knowledge holders or represent more than one knowledge system.

The wide range of stakeholders who are directly or indirectly affected by the assessment and its outcomes leads to the adoption of a **multi-stakeholder** approach to engagement. In this approach, the emphasis is placed on engaging various stakeholders who have a vested interest in the assessment and its findings. Following a multi-stakeholder approach is highly beneficial to the assessment because it brings a broader range of knowledge and perspectives to light, ensuring that more evidence is available to make informed decisions which achieve longer-lasting effects. Acknowledging that a multi-stakeholder approach and multiple knowledge sources could foster constructive collaboration, knowledge sharing, and inclusive decision-making processes by considering a wide range of perspectives, insights, interests, expertise and knowledge, we deliberately use the phrase "stakeholder and knowledge holder engagement" to place a strong emphasis on the engagement of Indigenous Peoples and local communities as rights-holders and knowledge holders in the assessment process.

Engagement refers to the different forms of interaction that take place with stakeholders and knowledge holders throughout the assessment. Stakeholder engagement can vary in terms of depth or level of involvement, depending on the specific context and objectives of the engagement process (more on this in section 4). In this guidance, we use the term "stakeholder engagement **approach**" to describe the combination of timing, level, and methods of engagement used with stakeholders and knowledge holders.

Why is it important to engage stakeholders and knowledge holders in national ecosystem assessments?

National ecosystem assessments are inherently participatory, consultative and inclusive processes that seeks to mobilise available knowledge on biodiversity and ecosystem services, to foster long-lasting collaborative relationships across research disciplines, diverse stakeholders, knowledge holder groups, and decision-making sectors, and build national capacity at the science-policy-practice interface. Bringing together diverse and multidisciplinary forms of knowledge and engaging relevant stakeholders and knowledge holders sets the foundation for an assessment's credibility, legitimacy and relevance. Further, it helps to ensure that all available information, knowledge, and data are harnessed through the assessment to support decision-making.

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[2] Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPs and LCs) might be considered stakeholders and/or knowledge-holders in relation to a national ecosystem assessment for the reasons that i) the assessment and its findings will directly and indirectly influence their lives and livelihoods, ii) IPs and/or LCs may influence the national ecosystem assessment by contributing their knowledge, needs and perspectives towards the assessment.

What are the benefits of engaging stakeholders and knowledge holders in national ecosystem assessments?

- Helps to ensure a strong and robust assessment with more accurate findings
- Strengthens the assessments' quality, credibility and legitimacy
- Ensures the assessment is relevant and useful to diverse stakeholders and rights-holders
- Helps to uncover diverse perspectives and innovative solutions to complex challenges
- Builds trust and strengthens collaboration and dialogue between science, policy, practice, and society
- Increases ownership and investment in the assessment among stakeholders and knowledge holders, boosting support and buy-in to the assessment and ultimately increasing its impact
- Strengthens stakeholder networks and communities of practice around biodiversity, ecosystem services and human wellbeing
- Creates opportunities for mutual learning and capacity building at the science-policy-practice interface

Box 1 Key principles to always consider for stakeholder engagement

Equality and non-discrimination: Ensure that it is possible for all stakeholders, including local communities, diverse knowledge holders, and policymakers to be included in the assessment process and are not prevented from participating due to their race, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity or other aspects of their identity.

Inclusion and respect of diverse perspectives: Embed recognition of the diverse but equally valuable contributions that can be brought to the assessment by multiple knowledge systems, backgrounds and worldviews of the assessment's stakeholders and knowledge holders. This principle can be realized through application of a multiple evidence-based approach in national ecosystem assessments.

Transparency: Share information, objectives, and progress of the knowledge production process. Encourage two-way communication to listen to stakeholder concerns, feedback, and suggestions actively. Clearly state when and to what extent stakeholders' contributions are likely to be considered in the assessment.

Trust: Foster trust with stakeholders and knowledge holders by exercising integrity, consistent actions and by upholding ethical standards.

Culture of Dialogue: Practice active listening, constructive feedback sharing and openness to encourage cooperation and knowledge exchange and enable the co-creation of knowledge among diverse knowledge holders.

Box 2 Key principles to consider while engaging with Indigenous Peoples and local communities

Indigenous Peoples and local communities are critical stakeholders and knowledge holders in the national ecosystem assessment. Therefore, in addition to the above principles it is important to observe the following essential principles when working with Indigenous Peoples and local communities to ensure meaningful and respectful collaboration in the co-creation of knowledge.

1. **Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) principle and interconnected principles.** The FPIC approach is connected to the human rights-based approach and recognizes the rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities to give consent about use of their knowledge and practices in the assessment, which is further elaborated on the Practical Guidelines on Working with Indigenous and Local Knowledge in National Ecosystem Assessments. The elements of FPIC principle include:
   a. **Free** implies that Indigenous Peoples and local communities are not pressured, intimidated, manipulated or unduly influenced and that their consent is given without coercion.
   b. **Prior** means that research on Indigenous and local knowledge should not be initiated until the consent process has been completed.
   c. **Informed** implies that all relevant information about the assessment has been provided as well as the intended purpose/use of their knowledge.
   d. **Consent** implies the assessment team seek and acquire approval to access and publish Indigenous and local knowledge and community practices in the assessment products. It might be necessary to organize a dedicated review workshop for Indigenous and local knowledge holders to review, validate and approve their captured knowledge.
2. **Cultural Sensitivity:** Apply careful consideration to local and cultural norms, customs, traditions and protocols to ensure engagement is culturally sensitive and to avoid causing cultural harm.

For guidance on engaging with Indigenous Peoples and local communities in the context of a national ecosystem assessment, see Practical Guidelines on Working with Indigenous and Local Knowledge.

DEVELOPING THE STAKEHOLDER AND KNOWLEDGE HOLDER ENGAGEMENT PLAN

A Stakeholder and Knowledge Holder Engagement Plan is a document that helps to frame how the assessment team intends to engage and communicate with its stakeholders throughout a particular initiative or project. It is recommended to develop a Stakeholder and Knowledge Holder Engagement Plan early in the Scoping Stage, alongside the Communications Plan. Developing the plan early in the assessment process allows the assessment team to be better informed and prepared for engaging with stakeholders and knowledge holders from the outset. Importantly, early planning can also help assessment teams to be more resourceful with the allocation of time and resources from the beginning. The following structure is a suggested list of interlinked elements that assessment teams might consider when developing a Stakeholder and Knowledge Holder Engagement Plan, which goes hand in hand with the Communications Plan and will likely share several commonalities.

Template 1 *Stakeholder and Knowledge Holder Engagement Plan*

Purpose and Objectives	Clearly define the broader intention of engaging stakeholders and knowledge holders (the purpose) and the desired outcomes of specific engagement activities (the objectives)
Stakeholder Identification and Analysis	Identify and analyse stakeholders and knowledge holders based on their level of influence, interest, and impact on the assessment. This analysis helps to prioritise engagement efforts and activities accordingly
Timing	Identify at which moments in the assessment to engage with stakeholders and knowledge holders
Level of Engagement	Determine the level of engagement and, as based on this, the specific methods for engaging stakeholders and knowledge holders (see Table 1)
Monitoring and Evaluation	Develop a plan for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the team's engagement activities

Please note that the structure of the Stakeholder and Knowledge Holder Engagement Plan template and the following sections of the toolkit are presented in a simplified format to make them applicable and adaptable to a range of national ecosystem assessment contexts. In practice, the sections of the Stakeholder and Knowledge Holder Engagement Plan can be adapted and expanded and may include additional details, subsections, or information as deemed useful by assessment teams.

STEP 1

DEFINING THE PURPOSE, OBJECTIVES AND DESIRED OUTCOMES OF ENGAGING STAKEHOLDERS IN THE ASSESSMENT

The crucial first step for developing a Stakeholder and Knowledge Holder Engagement Plan for a national ecosystem assessment is to **clarify the purpose** of engaging different stakeholders in the assessment. Having a clear understanding of the purpose will inform all subsequent stages of developing a Stakeholder and Knowledge Holder Engagement Plan, including setting clear objectives for each engagement activity, identifying who the relevant stakeholders and knowledge holders are, and planning the most effective engagement approach.

When clarifying the purpose for engaging stakeholders and knowledge holders, it can be useful to ask: what are our reasons for wanting to engage stakeholders and knowledge holders in the assessment? What outcomes are we hoping to achieve from this? The following questions are designed to guide thinking about the potential purpose and reasons for engaging stakeholders. For each question, think about which stakeholders are linked to your answers:

- What are the short-term and long-term themes, issues and challenges that this assessment is trying to tackle?
- What kind of positive societal change do we want to create by undertaking this assessment?
- What kinds of relationships and networks do we want to strengthen through this assessment?
- Do we want this assessment to change any specific attitudes or behaviors regarding biodiversity, ecosystem services, and its benefits for people?
- Do we hope to influence and/or transform any institutional processes by undertaking this assessment?

TOP TIP Understanding your purpose and objectives for engaging stakeholders in the national ecosystem assessment will support you to plan well-tailored engagement activities. Furthermore, some stakeholders who do not see the immediate benefit of engaging with the assessment might think: why me? Knowing your purpose and objectives for engaging stakeholders will enable you to explain clearly to stakeholders why their engagement is important.

Once you have identified your reasons for wanting to engage stakeholders in the assessment at a general level (purpose), it is then possible to define specific objectives for engaging different types of stakeholders (see examples in **Box 3**). When setting stakeholder engagement objectives, it is helpful to ask: what are the specific outcomes we want to achieve from engaging with this particular stakeholder?

An important step in developing a Communications Plan is to identify the objectives for communicating with stakeholders. To streamline these complementary processes, try comparing your objectives for engaging stakeholders in the assessment with the objectives you set for communicating with stakeholders. Where you identify overlaps, you can streamline your planned approach (timing, level, method of communication) to achieve these mutual objectives.

It is important to be aware that whilst your purpose for engaging stakeholders may largely remain the same throughout the assessment, you may identify a range of different objectives for engaging particular stakeholders and knowledge holders. For example, at the beginning of the assessment you may identify an objective to inform the Office for National Statistics that the assessment is going to take place, but at a later stage of the assessment the objective may be to collect data from them for inclusion in the assessment. Hence, each time you are planning an engagement activity with a specific stakeholder or knowledge holder, it is important to make sure that you have identified clear objective(s) for each interaction.

An important distinction between a **purpose** and **objectives** is that whilst the purpose of stakeholder and knowledge holder engagement lays the foundation and provides a strategic direction for stakeholder engagement activities, objectives are more focused, actionable, dynamic and based on a specific timeframe. Objectives are often SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound) to ensure clarity and effectiveness.

Box 3 **Example - purpose of engaging stakeholders vs objectives of stakeholder engagement**

Purpose 1: to ensure decision-makers are equipped with the most up-to-date and robust knowledge on biodiversity, ecosystem services, and its benefits for people, so that policies for the environment and people are more sustainable.

Objective 1: to collect input from government ministries at the Scoping Stage to ensure the key policy questions are aligned to their policy priorities and will meet their informational needs.

Purpose 2: to raise public awareness about the state of biodiversity and ecosystem services in the country and change attitudes about the value of protecting biodiversity.

Objective 2: Once the assessment is complete, to communicate the most important findings from the assessment to public audiences using suitable media channels.

Purpose 3: to increase interest and awareness among the countries' private sector about the importance of conserving biodiversity and ecosystem services.

Objective 3: to communicate the "business-related risks and opportunities" associated with biodiversity and ecosystem services to commercial industries operating in the country once sufficient assessment findings have been gathered.

STEP2

STAKEHOLDER AND KNOWLEDGE HOLDER IDENTIFICATION AND ANALYSIS

Now that you have identified clear reasons and objectives for engaging stakeholders in the national ecosystem assessment, the next step is to identify **which stakeholders and knowledge holders** should be engaged. There are three important steps in this activity:

1. Identify your potential stakeholders and knowledge holders
2. Map your stakeholders and knowledge holders according to their level of interest, knowledge, and power/influence
3. Consider stakeholders' and knowledge holders' willingness and ability to engage

2.1. Identifying stakeholders and knowledge holders

When identifying which stakeholders and knowledge holders to engage in the assessment process, it is best to begin the exercise with an open mind and to think very broadly about which individuals and groups might i) **benefit** from or be **affected** by the assessment, ii) could have **influence** over the assessment and the uptake of its findings, iii) have **interest** in the assessment and its findings, and iv) have essential **knowledge, data and information** to contribute to the assessment. Keeping an open mind and consulting networks or associations working on a range of environmental initiatives will allow you to identify a broader range of stakeholders and knowledge holders and reduce the chances of only identifying familiar individuals and groups who are frequently engaged in projects of this kind.

Identifying stakeholders, and in particular knowledge holders, who are typically absent or underrepresented in knowledge-sharing processes (such as women, youth, Indigenous Peoples and local communities) is crucial for developing a full and robust assessment which represents the best available knowledge. It is important to ensure gender-inclusive engagement through the assessment process, since, for example, Indigenous and local knowledge is held differently across genders and ages and Indigenous and local women play diverse roles in the preservation and transmission of knowledge. Enabling the active participation of women and youth is vital to ensure their representation in the assessment as well as the inclusion of their diverse knowledge and perspectives.

Identifying representatives or "champions" who are embedded in stakeholder and knowledge holder groups, who are willing to relay information to and from the assessment team, can be an effective and resourceful way to maintain the engagement of large communities and/or groups. This can be particularly important in instances where communication challenges exist due to the geographic location of stakeholders and knowledge holders, or if they to do not have access to internet or communication devices. Furthermore, understanding power imbalances between and among different stakeholders and knowledge holder groups is important to ensure an inclusive and equitable participation process. Where power imbalances, it might be necessary to develop tailored participation processes for underpowered voices by creating safe and accessible spaces for them to freely share their concerns, world views, insights and perspectives. For instance, there may be a need to organize dedicated meetings for Indigenous Peoples and local communities such as Indigenous/community dialogue workshops as elaborated in the Practical Guidelines on Working with Indigenous and Local Knowledge in National Ecosystem Assessment.

Box 4 **Tips for identifying specific stakeholders and knowledge holders**

- Make use of existing groups, associations, and networks who represent a range of society and who may already be involved in environmental initiatives and advocacy e.g. rural women's associations, Indigenous People's networks, business and biodiversity networks, ecotourism initiatives.
- Try using a "snow-ball technique", whereby members of the assessment team and key stakeholders recommend and suggest other stakeholders who may have high interest and/or influence in the assessment.
- Consider conducting public outreach exercises whereby interested stakeholders and knowledge holders are invited to come forwards.
- Rely on members of the assessment team and stakeholders who are already engaged in the assessment to recommend additional groups and individuals who may be interested and/or relevant to the assessment.

See how the National Ecosystem Assessment Initiative's country partners Colombia, Grenada, and Cambodia began their stakeholder identification process in this report on Capturing Lessons Learned on National Ecosystem Assessments: Stages of the Assessment.

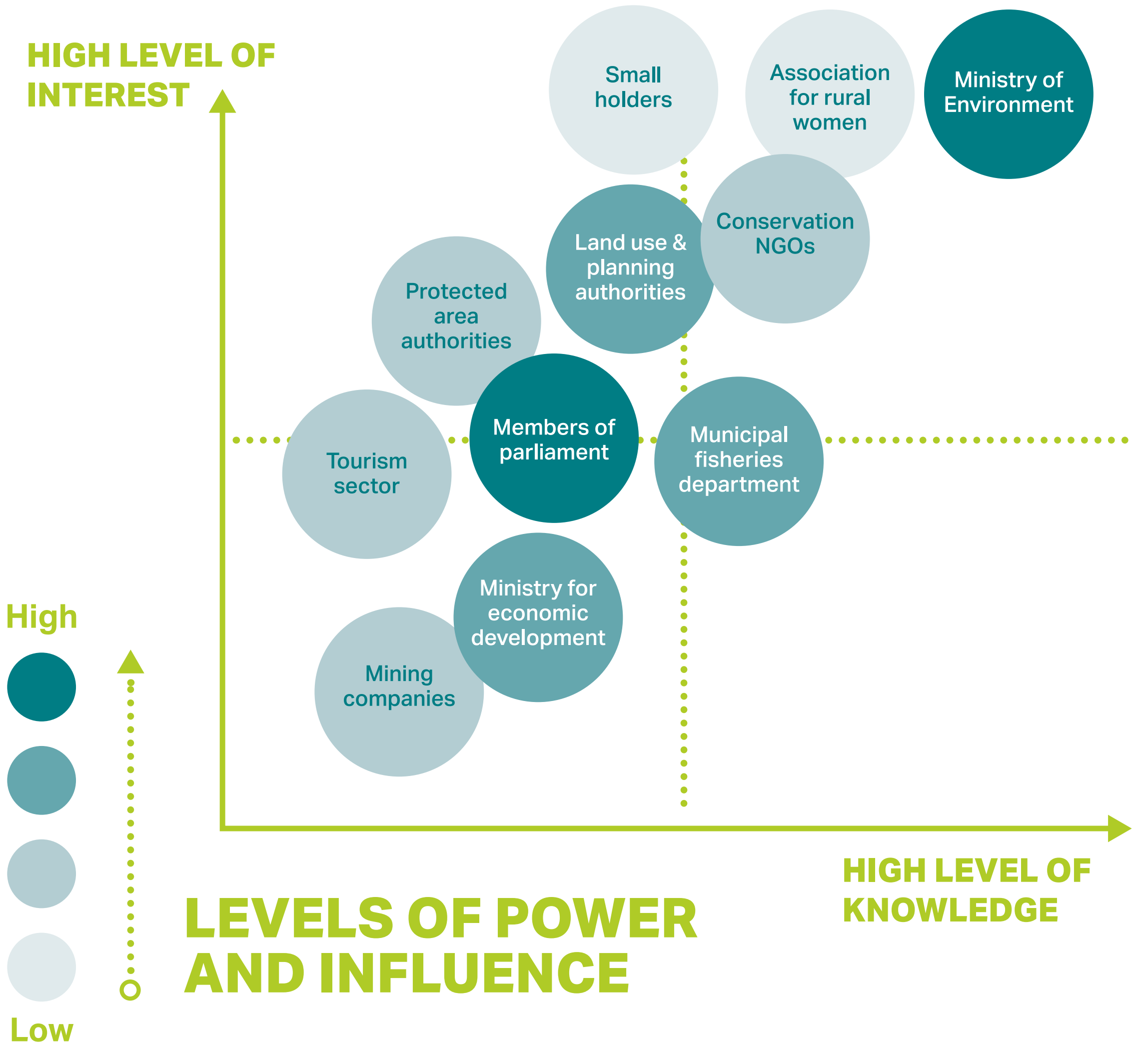
2.2. Mapping the level of interest, knowledge, and influence of stakeholders and knowledge holders

Having already identified the reasons and objectives for engaging different stakeholders and knowledge holders in the assessment, you will have a clearer idea about which stakeholders and knowledge holders are linked to these purposes and objectives. National ecosystem assessments can involve a range of time-related and logistical constraints, meaning that assessment teams must often be resourceful and pragmatic about when and how to engage stakeholders and knowledge holders to ensure each engagement activity directly supports the objectives that the assessment is trying to achieve. Mapping stakeholders and knowledge holders according to their level of interest, influence, and knowledge is a helpful way to prioritise which individuals/groups should be engaged at particular moments in the assessment, to assess which level of engagement might be most appropriate (more on this in section 4), and to identify any barriers that need to be mitigated to ensure stakeholders and knowledge holders can engage fairly and effectively in engagement activities.

Template 2 *Stakeholder and Knowledge Holder Engagement Plan*

The stakeholder and knowledge holder mapping matrix will help you to assess what level of knowledge, interest, and influence stakeholders have in relation to the national ecosystem assessment. At this stage, you may be unsure what their level of interest, knowledge, and power is. Similarly, it can be easy to unknowingly make assumptions about the level of knowledge, power, and influence that we believe stakeholders and knowledge holders to have. To mitigate the risk of making assumptions, conduct informed research about your stakeholders and knowledge holders where possible and follow the principles of fairness and non-discrimination outlined in **Box 2 and 3**. If you later learn that a stakeholder's or knowledge holders' level of interest, knowledge, or power is greater or lesser that you first thought, then you will likely need to revise your approach to better suit their level of interest, knowledge, and influence.

You can create your own stakeholder and knowledge holder matrix using the template below. Add the knowledge holders and stakeholders you identified in step 2.1 to the template according to their level of interest and their knowledge and understanding of the topics that the assessment will cover. Use dark sticky notes to symbolise stakeholders and knowledge holders with high levels of power and greater ability to influence decisions (e.g. Ministry of Environment), and lighter sticky notes for stakeholders with less power to influence decisions (e.g. rural communities).



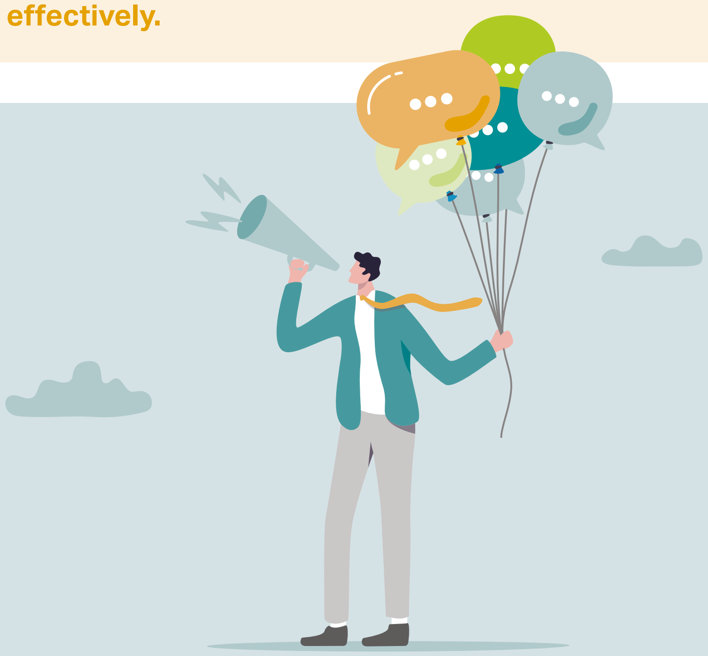
2.3. Consider the willingness and ability of stakeholders and knowledge holders to engage in the assessment

Building on the previous step, the purpose of this exercise is to think in more detail about the specific interests and motivations that may incentivise stakeholders and knowledge holders to engage in the assessment. This will help you to communicate more clearly with stakeholders and knowledge holders about the value, opportunities, and benefits that their participation and engagement in the assessment could have both for them and the assessment. At this point, it's also important to think about any potential dis-incentives and barriers that may prevent the effective participation of stakeholders and knowledge holders, so that you can take necessary actions to mitigate those barriers when planning your engagement activities.

For each of the stakeholder and knowledge holder (individuals and/or groups) you have mapped, consider the following questions in terms of their interest, willingness and ability to engage:

- What are the priority aims and interests of this stakeholder/knowledge holder in their own sphere? Does this assessment link to those aims in any way?
- What benefits might the stakeholder/knowledge holder obtain from participating in the assessment?
- What is the stakeholder's/knowledge holder's past experience of engaging with projects of this nature? Have those experiences been positive or negative?
- What views might the stakeholder/knowledge holder have in relation to the assessment and its intended outcomes, are they likely to be positive or negative?
- Is it possible that conflict may arise between different stakeholder and knowledge holder groups concerning the assessment and its findings?
- What level of time, resource, and capacity does the stakeholder/knowledge holder have to engage in the assessment?
- What barriers or measures could impact the ability of the stakeholder/knowledge holder to participate? E.g., cultural, financial, political, linguistic, geographical, logistical barriers etc.

Much like developing a Stakeholder and Knowledge Holder Engagement Plan, part of developing a Communications Plan involves *identifying your external audiences* and *mapping their attitudes towards the assessment.* This exercise can be combined with your Stakeholder Identification and Analysis to identify which "stakeholders" and "audiences" emerge as a main priority. Prioritising the stakeholders and audiences that are most important to the assessment will help you to decide how to allocate time and resources most effectively.



Box 5 Tips on common barriers to stakeholder and knowledge holder engagement

When developing your Stakeholder and Knowledge Holder Engagement Plan, it's important to identify any barriers that may reduce the ability or willingness of stakeholders and knowledge holders to engage in the assessment and to develop strategies to mitigate those barriers.

There are many reasons why different stakeholder or knowledge holder groups may lack the **(1.) willingness** or **(2.) ability** to engage in a national ecosystem assessment. Here are just a few possible reasons:

1.

- The benefits and opportunities of engaging in the assessment are not clearly communicated to stakeholders/knowledge holders
- The relevance of the assessment to stakeholders' own interests and needs are not clearly communicated to them
- Stakeholders and knowledge holders may have had negative engagement experiences in the past (for example, if their specific needs were not accommodated for, the outcomes of their contributions were never communicated to them, or if they faced judgement and criticism on their inputs)
- Stakeholders and knowledge holders who are frequently engaged in activities of this kind may be experiencing 'stakeholder engagement fatigue'
- Stakeholders and knowledge holders who have been engaged too little or too late in the assessment process may lose the interest and motivation to engage
- If stakeholders/knowledge holders are given unrealistic expectations about the benefits they will receive from participating in the assessment or their level of influence in the assessment, this can lead to disappointment and dissatisfaction for stakeholders/knowledge holders

2.

- During engagement activities involving multiple stakeholder or knowledge holder groups, the presence of unequal power dynamics between these individuals/groups may lead to the dominance of some voices over others
- Logistical factors such as the time and location of engagement activities can be a constraint for some stakeholders/knowledge holders due to conflicting work or social responsibilities
- Stakeholders/knowledge holders may not have been given the necessary guidance, training or instructions to be able to effectively participate in engagement activities, e.g. focus groups discussions, participatory mapping, external review processes.
- Language barriers may make it difficult or impossible for some stakeholders/knowledge holders to meaningfully engage in the assessment
- Engagement activities that take place online may exclude those stakeholders/knowledge holders who do not have access to internet and technological devices

STEP3

WHEN TO ENGAGE STAKEHOLDERS AND KNOWLEDGE HOLDERS

In order to get the best outcomes from the assessment's engagement activities, it is important to think carefully about which moments in the assessment will be most opportune for engaging different stakeholders and knowledge holders, based on the specific objectives you have set and the roles that stakeholders and knowledge holders are expected to play at different moments in the assessment. In reality, some stakeholders and knowledge holders will only be engaged at specific moments in the assessment for very specific purposes (e.g. public media campaign to announce the inception of the national ecosystem assessment), whilst other stakeholders and knowledge holders will be engaged more frequently as part of ongoing interactions as the assessment progresses (for example, Indigenous and local knowledge task forces, or key members of government who play a recurring role throughout). For those stakeholders and knowledge holders who will play an integral role throughout the assessment, there are important benefits of engaging them early in the process, including:

- They can contribute to defining the scope and relevance of the assessment from the beginning, saving time or the need to make changes later on
- They can advise on their specific needs and preferences for engagement from the outset, so the assessment team is better prepared to facilitate this engagement
- It demonstrates that their participation is valued and that significant effort is being made to ensure their needs, knowledge, and perspectives are taken into consideration during the assessment process

Template 3 *Example template for planning when to engage stakeholders and knowledge holders based on the engagement objectives*

Objective	Who?	When?
Gain public sector input to develop Key Policy Questions that are relevant to multiple sectors	Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Tourism, Ministry of Health and Development	Early in the Scoping Stage
Seek information from local communities on the main pressures affecting rural wetland habitats	Local community living beside a key wetland area	During Scoping Stage and the Expert Evaluation Stage
Raise public awareness about the assessment and its findings	General public	- At the Scoping Stage, to communicate the aims, objectives and intended impact of the assessment - When the completed assessment report and Summary for Policy Makers are ready to be launched

Aside from identifying suitable moments in the assessment timeline to engage each stakeholder/ knowledge holder, it is strategic to identify emerging opportunities to engage particular stakeholders when relevant events are happening within their own spheres. For example, if one of the overall purposes for engaging stakeholders in the assessment is to "increase interest and awareness among the countries' private sector on the importance of conserving biodiversity and ecosystem services" then identifying a relevant business-biodiversity event involving private sector participants could be an opportune moment to capture their attention and foster their engagement in the assessment and its findings. Other opportunities might include policy dialogues, public forums, research events, and more.

STEP 4

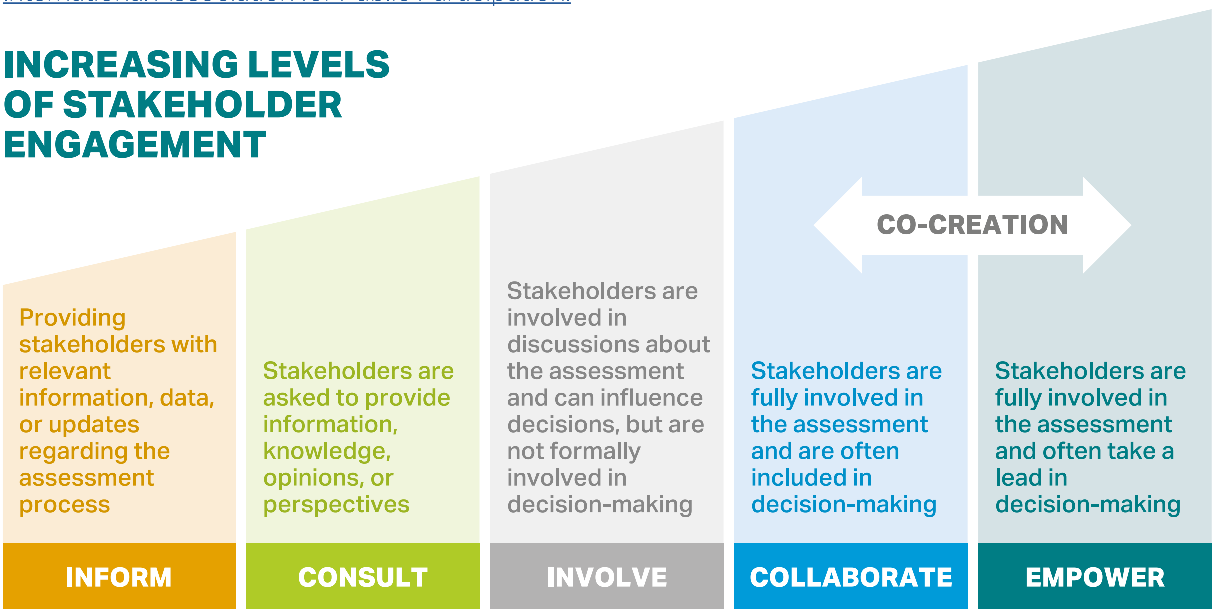
CHOOSING A SUITABLE LEVEL OF ENGAGEMENT

The purpose and objectives for engaging stakeholders and knowledge holders guides the planning on why, who, when, and how stakeholders and knowledge holders should be engaged in the assessment. Experience has proven that it is neither logical nor practical to apply the maximum level of engagement to all stakeholders, or to engage every stakeholder/knowledge holder constantly throughout the assessment. Instead, stakeholder engagement approaches can be most effective and resourceful when the right stakeholders/knowledge holders are prioritised at the right moments, and by applying the most appropriate "level of engagement". It is also recommended to consider important logistical factors such as time, budget and team capacity when identifying and prioritising the level and method for engaging stakeholders and knowledge holders.

> **TOP TIP** Monitoring and evaluating the outcomes of your engagement activities is critical for understanding whether the level of engagement and methods of engagement selected were successful for achieving the objectives set (more on this in section 5).

There are five levels of stakeholder engagement (Figure 1), ranging from initial or basic forms of engagement (e.g. information passed from the assessment team to stakeholders/knowledge holders) to more participatory types of engagement which are collaborative and empowering in nature. Whilst each level of engagement is valid in its own right, choosing the most appropriate level of engagementwill enable you to better achieve the objectives you have set for your planned engagement activities. Importantly, your objectives for engaging stakeholders (as well as the role that stakeholders play in the assessment) may change during the course of the assessment (e.g. a stakeholder may be **involved** in developing the key policy questions, but may only be **consulted** during the validation of the Third Order Draft), so it is important that the "level" of engagement chosen is well suited to the specific objectives that have been set for each engagement activity.

Figure 1: The five levels of stakeholder engagement (adapted from the framework developed by the International Association for Public Participation.



STEP 5

METHODS FOR ENGAGING STAKEHOLDERS AND KNOWLEDGE HOLDERS

This section makes reference to existing information, tools and methodologies to support a range of stakeholder and knowledge holder engagement needs in national ecosystem assessments. Since engagement objectives may change and evolve during the course of the assessment, it will likely be necessary to use a range of methods to achieve different objectives at different moments in the assessment.

As indicated below, each method, tool and mechanism presented here is suited to a particular "level" of engagement, so the method chosen should ideally reflect the intended level of engagement. Drawing on the exercise you undertook to identify possible barriers that could prevent the effective participation of some stakeholders/knowledge holders, this is a critical opportunity in the engagement process to ensure that your strategies for mitigating barriers are integrated into the design and delivery of the engagement activity (see box 5). Also consider that some activities may be more suitable and conducive when engaging with Indigenous Peoples and local communities, for more guidance on this see UNESCO's Practical Guidelines on Working with Indigenous and Local Knowledge.

Whilst this section aims to present a range of engagement methods, these options are by no means exhaustive, and the NEA Initiative's country partners continue to find innovative methods for engaging stakeholders that are suited to national and local contexts. See for example the methods Grenada, the Dominican Republic, and Malawi have used for engaging stakeholders and knowledge holders in their assessments.

Table 1: This table highlights a range of possible methods, tools, and mechanisms for engaging stakeholders and knowledge holders in national ecosystem assessments. The suggestions are non-exhaustive and include options that have proven to be particularly effective for engaging stakeholders and knowledge holders in national ecosystem assessments.

	COMMUNICATION METHOD, TOOL, OR MECHANISM FOR ENGAGING STAKEHOLDERS AND KNOWLEDGE HOLDERS	DESCRIPTION
INFORM	PRESS RELEASE	Arranging press releases at key moments in the assessment can be a good way of raising public awareness about the assessment. Press releases might be particularly effective for communicating and celebrating important milestones in the assessment, such as the assessment inception, stakeholder workshops, and the assessment launch.

SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGNS	Platforms like Facebook, LinkedIn, X (formerly Twitter), and other popular social media platforms can be used to publicise the assessment and its findings. For more ideas and inspiration on digital communications, see the NEA Initiative's Communications Toolkit [insert link when ready].
NEWSLETTERS	Monthly, quarterly, or bi-annual newsletters can be circulated via email, print, and online platforms to share news and updates about the assessment to keep people interested and engaged.
WEBSITES	Websites are a practical means of storing and communicating news, information, and outputs related to a national ecosystem assessment, which people can access easily at any time.
FACT SHEETS AND BRIEFS	Facts sheets and briefs are an effective way to translate complex information into clear, concise and digestible summaries of information. When developing fact sheets and briefs it is useful to consider who your intended audience is, what messages or information you want your audience to know, and how the messages can be best tailored to your audience.
VIDEOS	Sharing information in a visual format can help to convey stories, people, and important messages in an engaging manner. Videos also tend to be a more accessible and digestible format for broader audiences. See for example the video Colombia produced to communicate their experience of translating the IPBES assessment process to the national context to a public, non-expert audience.

	PHOTO EXHIBITION	Photos and images can be a powerful tool for bringing complex information and messages to life. Information and can also be conveyed in the form of images and are a creative way to explore, for example, changes to landscapes over time, anthropogenic activities, or images that visually describe how stakeholders and knowledge holders value and depend on nature.
CONSULT	**CONSULTATION WORKSHOP**	Consultation workshops are good forums for presenting information to stakeholders with the objective of collecting their thoughts and feedback in response to specific and often pre-defined questions. An example might include a stakeholder or knowledge holder workshop to discuss views and on the assessment findings.
	SURVEYS AND INTERVIEWS	Surveys and interviews are useful for collecting specific information in response to pre-identified research questions. Semi-structured interviews involve more open-ended questions that allow for flexibility and spontaneity when discussing topics with interviewees, which is often a more suitable methods when the interviewer wants to gain deeper insight into a complex or unknown topic.
	FRAMING WORKSHOP	Framing workshops provide a space for different stakeholder groups to exchange knowledge, ideas, interests and perspectives on topics related to the assessment. For example, framing workshops have been used in national ecosystem assessments to bring together Indigenous Peoples and local communities, intermediary organisations, and assessment teams to discuss, provide insights and co-identify Indigenous and local knowledge-relevant themes and questions to be addressed by the assessment.

	EXTERNAL REVIEWS	Inviting stakeholders and knowledge holders to externally review the First, Second and Third Order Draft is an important way of meaningfully ensuring their knowledge and perspectives are incorporated into the assessment text.
INVOLVE	**TRIALOGUES**	Trialogues are a highly effective method for getting input and/or co-creating knowledge with stakeholders and knowledge holders. For example, Malawi undertook a Trialogue to discuss and validate their key policy questions (see article here). Find more information about Trialogues in this guidance developed by BES-Net on Trialogues in National Ecosystem Assessments.
	KNOWLEDGE-EXCHANGE WORKSHOPS	Knowledge exchange workshops are particularly effective for enabling the exchange of knowledge between stakeholders and knowledge-holders in the form of open-ended discussions (meaning that discussion is not constrained to a narrow set of closed questions). This method can be particularly effective for uncovering new knowledge and perspectives.
	INDIGENOUS AND LOCAL KNOWLEDGE (ILK) DIALOGUE WORKSHOP	An ILK dialogue workshop provides a platform for knowledge exchange between and among ILK holders and assessment authors, often leading to cross-fertilization of knowledge. Some ILK dialogue workshops can be considered under "collaboration and empowerment", such as review workshops in which ILK holders review, validate, and approve ILK content to be captures in the assessment products.

	CREATIVE CAMPAIGNS	Inviting stakeholders and knowledge holders to engage with the assessment by submitting photos, videos, stories, poems, or sound clips which relate to the topics and/or ecosystems covered in the assessment is a fun and creative way to raise awareness, exchange perspectives, and bring new audiences on board to the assessment. For example, hosting a photo competition whereby people submit photos of environments or ecosystem services that are important to them (with a short accompanying description) can help uncover people's diverse values for their environments. To make these audiences feel more involved in the assessment process, the photos could be exhibited on the assessment website, during stakeholder workshops, or other public platforms.
COLLABORATE & EMPOWER	**NATIONAL BIODIVERSITY PLATFORM MEETINGS**	National biodiversity platforms provide the opportunity to give stakeholders and knowledge holders an equal seat at the table to share knowledge and raise ideas and concerns on the assessment and national policies on biodiversity and sustainable development more broadly. It is also an important mechanism for building the capacities of a broad range of stakeholders to engage at the science-policy interface. Find out more in our Guidance on National Biodiversity Platforms.

PARTICIPATORY 3D MODELLING & WALKING WORKSHOP	The assessment provides opportunities to conduct Indigenous-led research in collaboration with the assessment team to co-create knowledge. Some of the collaborative approaches include participatory 3D modelling (P3DM) and walking workshops. P3DM is a participatory mapping technique that integrates ILK spatial knowledge with data on elevation on land and depth of the sea. P3DM can ensure the participation of Indigenous Peoples and local communities and enhance the documentation of spatial ILK. The walking workshop is an interactive in-situ approach that involves walking across the landscape(s) in small groups to discuss one or more relevant theme(s) of the assessment. The hosts, from an Indigenous/local community, are the experts who guide and decide where to walk.
TASK FORCE/STEERING GROUP(S)	Inviting key stakeholders or knowledge holders to participate in the assessment Task Force(s) or Steering Group(s) (e.g. Indigenous and Local Knowledge Task Force) is a way of empowering stakeholders and knowledge holders to meaningfully contribute to the assessment process i.e. their knowledge and perspectives help to shape the assessment and its outcomes.
TRIALOGUE	Trialogues can serve to foster collaborative processes in the conception, co-design and co-creation of assessment activities.

If one of your objectives is to keep stakeholders informed about the progress and/or outcomes of the assessment, it is recommended to think carefully about how best to *tailor your message* to different audiences and select the most suitable *channel of communication* to reach them. This can be achieved by critically assessing the needs and characteristics of your audience. For more guidance on understanding your audience, tailoring your messages and choosing the most appropriate channels of communication, refer to the NEA Initiative's Communications Toolkit https://www.ecosystemassessments.net/content/uploads/2023/11/BESNet-NEA-Toolkit-V5.pdf.

Box 6 Tips for mitigating barriers to ensure the fair and effective participation of stakeholders and knowledge holders

Inclusive engagement is a fundamental principle of effective stakeholder engagement. If stakeholder and knowledge holder engagement processes are not inclusive, they can exacerbate exclusion of some individuals/groups and prevent less powerful actors from participating in the assessment. To ensure the effective participation of different stakeholder and knowledge holder groups, it is necessary to take informed actions to remove these barriers. Here are some possible considerations to take into account when planning your stakeholder and knowledge holder engagement activities:

- Does the stakeholder/knowledge holder group require specific training and capacity building to be able to understand elements of the assessment and participate in specific engagement activities? E.g. Trialogues, framing workshops, focus groups etc.
- Do your engagement methods accommodate the cultural and language preferences of different stakeholder and knowledge holder groups? E.g. it may be necessary to identify a suitable local intermediary and/or translator to facilitate interpersonal and verbal interaction.
- What work and/or social responsibilities do your stakeholders/knowledge holders have that could determine when and where they are able to participate in engagement activities? For example, women with work and childcare responsibilities may not be able to travel long distances and/or are unavailable at certain times in the day, university staff may lack time and availability during exam seasons, people with agricultural livelihoods may need to carry out their work at certain times in the day.
- Do you need to use a variety of communications methods to contact harder to reach groups and/or to overcome communication challenges? Such as for example, rural communities with little or no internet access. How will you need to adapt your communication methods in the face of unforeseen events? E.g. travel disruptions, severe weather, Covid-19 pandemic.

Taking adequate measures to reduce barriers and ensure the effective participation of stakeholders and knowledge holder is particularly important for ensuring the participation of those individuals and groups who are often underrepresented in these processes, such as Indigenous Peoples and local communities, women, youth, the elderly, and other marginalised groups. There are many practical tools and methods available to support the participation of underrepresented stakeholders and knowledge holders in a respectful and conducive manner, see for example the NEA Initiative's guidance on Gender considerations and gender balance in national ecosystem assessments and UNESCO's Practical guidelines on working with ILK in national ecosystem assessments.

STEP 6

MONITORING AND EVALUATING THE OUTCOMES OF YOUR STAKEHOLDER AND KNOWLEDGE HOLDER ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

Monitoring and evaluating the outcomes and impacts of your stakeholder and knowledge holder engagement is a critical part of the engagement process, as it is the only way of understanding whether your engagement activities are successfully achieving the purpose and objectives you set. There are two key reasons for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness and outcomes of your stakeholder engagement activities:

1. It helps to assess whether the engagement approaches you are using (including the timing, level, and method of engagement) are achieving the desired outcomes, or whether the approaches need to be adapted to better achieve the desired outcomes in the future.
2. It creates a record of information to show stakeholders and knowledge holders how their contributions have been incorporated into the assessment. Feeding this information back to stakeholders/knowledge holders is important for showing appreciation and recognition to their contributions, which in turn fosters positive relationships and encourages further engagement in future.

There are a range of options for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of your engagement activities, but it is certainly recommended that, where appropriate and feasible, the effectiveness of your engagement is analysed using direct feedback from stakeholders/knowledge holders and measured against the engagement objectives that you set. One method for collecting feedback from stakeholders and knowledge holders is through event evaluation forms distributed after in-person or online events. It is recommended to tailor the questions in the event evaluation form to the objectives that you set for each engagement activity, as in the examples below.

Example 1 *evaluation form for stakeholder and knowledge holder engagement events*

Objective of the engagement activity: ***webinar*** to increase stakeholders' understanding about the purpose and aims of the national ecosystem assessment.

Question 1: Did the event help to increase your understanding about the aims and purpose of the national ecosystem assessment?	***Question 2:*** What parts of the event helped to increase your understanding about the aims and purpose of the national ecosystem assessment?	***Question 3:*** Do you have other suggestions for how this event could have been improved?
O Yes O Partially O No If you selected "partially" or "no", please state why below.		

Example 2 *evaluation form for stakeholder and knowledge holder engagement events*

Objective of the engagement activity: ***knowledge-exchange workshop*** to involve stakeholders and knowledge holders in identifying the main direct and indirect pressures affecting the priority ecosystems.

Question 1: Do you feel that you contributed to the dialogue about the main direct and indirect pressures affecting the priority ecosystems? O Yes O Partially O No If you selected "partially" or "no", please state why below.	***Question 2:*** What could have been done differently to increase your ability to participate in the dialogue during the workshop?	***Question 3:*** Do you have other suggestions for how this event could have been improved?

Template 4 below is designed to help you evaluate how well the objectives of the engagement activity were achieved, whether the approach (time and method) of the engagement was effective for achieving the objectives, and how the engagement approach might be adapted for better outcomes in future. Importantly, the template also provides a space for monitoring how stakeholder and knowledge holder inputs gathered during the engagement activity will be used in the assessment, which can be fed back to stakeholders to demonstrate the value of their participation.

TOP TIP Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) is especially helpful for uncovering assumptions which can be made during the stakeholder and knowledge holder analysis exercise about the level of interest, knowledge, and influence of different stakeholders and knowledge holders, or assumptions made about the best level and/or method for engaging them.

By uncovering these assumptions through M&E, it is possible to adapt and refine your engagement approach to achieve better outcomes in future.

Template 4 *Form for monitoring and evaluating stakeholder and knowledge holder engagement activities*

Using the feedback collected in the post-event evaluation forms, complete the exercise below for each engagement activity to evaluate the effectiveness of your engagement activity and monitor how inputs from stakeholders/knowledge holders are used in the assessment.

Objective of the engagement activity:

Capital Grand Hotel, 23/03/22

Specific objectives(s) of the stakeholder engagement activity:

To collect feedback from stakeholders on the First Order Draft

Do the assessment team feel that the objective(s) was achieved?

Partially

What approach (timing and method) of engagement was used:

Stakeholder consultation workshop after the completion of the First Order Draft

What feedback did stakeholder(s)/knowledge holder(s) have about the engagement activity?

- Some stakeholders stated that they did not understand the type of feedback that was expected from them
- Some stakeholders were confused about why some ecosystems were being included in the assessment and not others
- Some stakeholders from [X] region struggled to participate due to the language barrier

What might be done differently next time to better meet the objective(s) of the engagement activity?

- Host an introductory session at the start of the workshop to present the assessment approach and explain clearly what the objectives of the consultation workshop are i.e. to collect stakeholder feedback on the draft chapters
- Communicate with stakeholders prior to the event to identify whether they have any specific requirements to facilitate their participation and arrange interpretation if necessary

Were any inputs collected from stakeholders or knowledge holders? How will they be used in the assessment?

Comments and feedback from stakeholders will be considered and incorporated into the Second Order Draft by the CLAs and LAs for each chapter

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Trialogue in national ecosystem assessments

Lessons Learned Workshop 2021: Stakeholder Engagement

NEA Initiative Stakeholder Engagement Webinar

Capturing Lessons Learned from the National Ecosystem Assessment: Common Elements

Gender considerations and gender balance in national ecosystem assessments

Practical guidelines on working with ILK in national ecosystem assessments

For additional case studies and guidance, visit the National Ecosystem Assessment Initiative Website

CREDITS

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NATIONAL ECOSYSTEM ASSESSMENT **INITIATIVE**

UN environment programme WCMC

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