

BiodivERsA

STAKEHOLDER
ENGAGEMENT
HANDBOOK

Digest



**BEST PRACTICE GUIDELINES FOR
STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT
IN RESEARCH PROJECTS**

Research on biodiversity and ecosystem services is often very complex, due to the breadth of subjects it incorporates. It often has to look beyond environmental science, and consider, for example, economics, politics, sociology, human health, and food and energy security. This can make stakeholder engagement all the more necessary, but also more complicated, as stakeholders with very different interests may possess different values and views which need to be identified and taken into account.

The BiodivERsA Stakeholder Engagement Handbook was published in September 2014, and provides a practical, non-prescriptive guide for researchers in planning engagement with stakeholders.

It consists of eight sections, as well as a series of annexes containing details on different tools and methods available for undertaking stakeholder engagement activities and dealing with conflict management. It also provides a number of templates that can be adopted or adapted for use by project teams. The *Handbook* draws upon existing literature and includes several case studies.

It is anticipated that the *Handbook* will encourage more and better-designed stakeholder engagement, particularly within BiodivERsA-funded projects, leading to better-informed research, which should result in improved protection, management and sustainable use of biodiversity and ecosystems, and more effective solutions for tackling key environmental and societal issues.

As well as being of use to BiodivERsA-funded projects, the *Handbook* has been designed to meet the needs of a much wider remit, beyond biodiversity research, and can be of use to other environmental science researchers.

■ WHAT CAN ENGAGEMENT ACHIEVE?

Stakeholder engagement can provide a number of benefits, not only for research and researchers, but also for stakeholders and wider society. These benefits include:

- * Increased empowerment;
- * Improved links and partnerships;
- * Access to additional resources or information;
- * Endorsement for an approach or decision;
- * Better communication, awareness, trust and support;
- * Improved learning through sharing of experiences.

Additionally, engagement can assist in managing risks and reducing conflict by identifying barriers, limitations and potential negative outcomes before they occur. Well-managed engagement activities can facilitate learning, build trust between participants and help mediate conflicts.

Ultimately, successful stakeholder engagement can assist in making research more credible, relevant and legitimate, therefore improving its impact, and leading to better outcomes for both biodiversity and society.

■ THE PURPOSE OF THE HANDBOOK

The 'best practice' presented in the *Handbook* is designed to **support those planning and carrying out biodiversity research by helping them to identify stakeholders relevant to their work** (including non-governmental organisations, natural resource managers, businesses, the wider public, and policy makers), and to plan how to engage with them effectively.

Where relevant, stakeholder engagement should be undertaken throughout the whole research process, from project design through to dissemination of results, and BiodivERsA promotes this method of working. Early stakeholder engagement in the project cycle can often help identify opportunities and risks early on, and make the process more inclusive.

However, it is important to note that there is no single approach that can be taken to ensure successful stakeholder engagement, as every project will be different and therefore requires its own approach, tailored to the needs of the research and the stakeholders. In addition, not all stakeholders will need to be engaged all of the time, or in the same way. Exactly which stakeholders, how many, and the most successful methods of engaging with them will depend on the project and the aims and objectives of the engagement.

The *Handbook* provides information to **assist researchers in identifying which stakeholders to involve, why to involve them, and how and when to engage with them.**

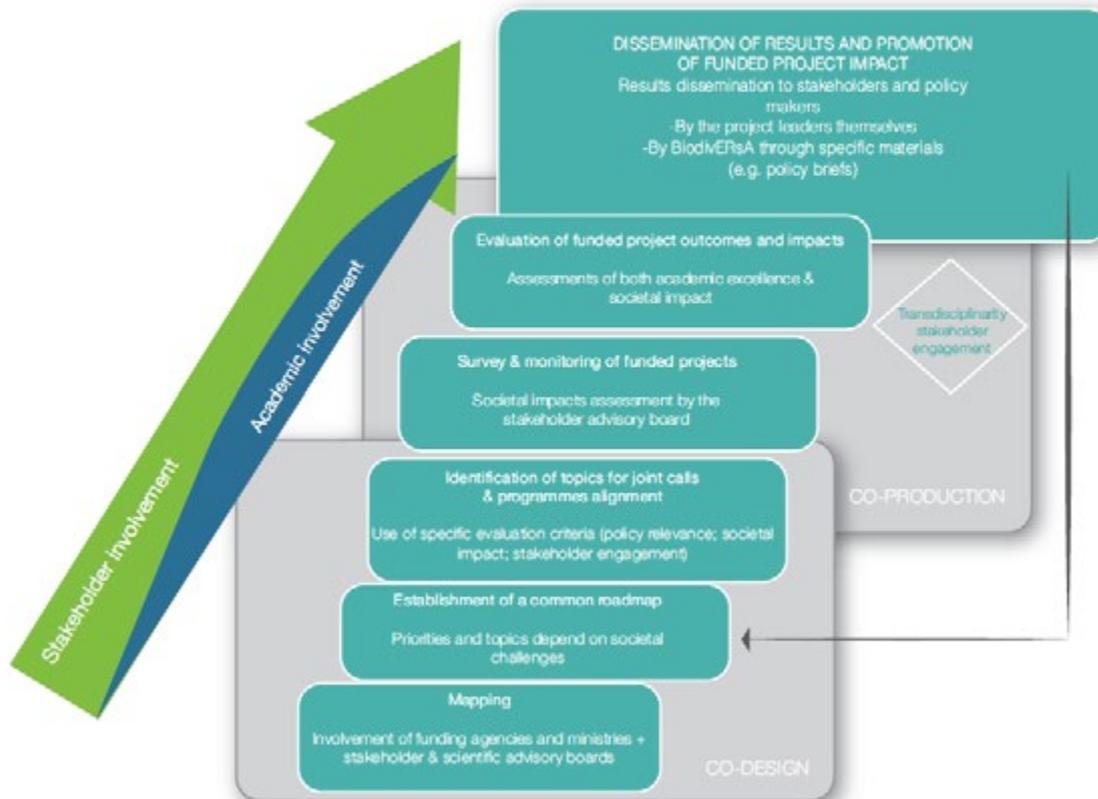


Figure 1. Approach and methodology used to engage stakeholders and promote the science-policy and science-society dialogue in BiodivERSA throughout the research (development) process. While academic excellence is a major criterion for evaluating research to be supported in BiodivERSA, innovative approaches are used (from co-design of programmes to promotion of research results) to increase the societal impact of the funded research. Figure modified from Mauser et al. 2013

■ HOW DOES THE HANDBOOK WORK?

The *Handbook* demonstrates that, when projects undertake stakeholder engagement, it is important to consider, at a minimum:

- * the aims and objectives of the engagement;
- * the expectations of the stakeholders regarding the outcomes of the engagement;
- * the available resources (in particular time and money).

The *Handbook* aims to address these requirements by providing clear, simple guidance, which considers ‘why’, ‘who’, ‘when’ and ‘how’ to engage, as well as detail on planning engagement activities, managing conflict, and monitoring outcomes, presented in the following sections:

- * Defining the outcomes desired from the engagement (why).
- * Identifying the stakeholders to be involved (who), including assessing, analysing, prioritising and understanding their motivations.
- * Identifying the best times to engage with stakeholders (when).
- * Choosing the best methods for engagement (how), including information on the most frequently used approaches.
- * Planning the detail of the engagement process.
- * Dealing with and managing stakeholder conflict.
- * Reviewing and assessing the process to demonstrate achievements and to identify lessons learned for informing future engagement exercises.

The *Handbook* provides a framework and selection of tools so the user can determine which types of stakeholder engagement may be most beneficial to their research project. The sections can be used either in sequence to provide a comprehensive methodology for engaging with stakeholders, or separately, depending on the requirements of the project and the experience of the researchers.

■ ADDITIONAL TOOLS AND PRACTICAL METHODS

In addition to the chapters outlined above, the *Handbook* also includes several online practical method notes for undertaking and facilitating stakeholder engagement activities. These include:

1. Interviewing stakeholders
2. Organising stakeholder workshops
3. Participatory Mapping
4. How to write a policy brief
5. Scenario Analysis
6. Co-development of research outputs with stakeholders
7. Commissioning and working with video
8. Delphi method
9. Enabling stakeholders to monitor research outcomes and generate data
10. Social Media
11. Multi-Criteria Decision Analysis
12. Facilitating stakeholder workshops

Authors and Reference

The development of the Handbook has been led for BiodivERsA by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC), one of the UK partners in BiodivERsA and an established authority in the field of stakeholder engagement practices. It should be cited as:

Durham E., Baker H., Smith M., Moore E. & Morgan V. (2014). The BiodivERsA Stakeholder Engagement Handbook. BiodivERsA, Paris (108 pp.)

The Handbook, templates and Annexes can be downloaded from:
<http://www.biodiversa.org/stakeholderengagement>

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