

SDG 6.5.1 2020 Reporting under COVID-19: Guidance note on strengthening online stakeholder consultation processes.

Introduction

We recognise the many and varied challenges placed on professional and personal circumstances due to the growing spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. While the situation in each country is different, in large parts of the world there are restrictions on movement and social distancing measures, making in-person stakeholder meetings and consultations in many countries unviable for the immediate future, with no clarity on when they may be feasible. In the meantime, we recognise that some work continues, though perhaps at a slower pace, and with different priorities and means of interaction.

Given the uncertainties of the global pandemic, we cannot continue under a business-as-usual scenario, waiting for face-to-face stakeholder consultations to become viable again. Meanwhile, the use of online platforms can be an important means of engaging stakeholders in the consultation. Online consultation clearly differs from in-person gatherings, and requires careful consideration to ensure the effectiveness of such means of consultation. We are therefore sharing this guidance note on making use of and strengthening online stakeholder consultation processes, to provide support to countries in how they may move towards a more online approach. This may be as an alternative or a complement to in-person gatherings, if and when these are feasible.

Summary of SDG 6.5.1 reporting in 1st quarter 2020

6.5.1 2020 original reporting plan: 6.5.1 reporting materials were rolled out to the first countries in early January 2020, with a reporting deadline of 15 May 2020. The [6.5.1 Monitoring Guide](#) encouraged in-person stakeholder consultations, as feasible and appropriate in each country context.

Reporting status 1st Quarter 2020: As of 31st March 2020, 6.5.1 reporting materials had been rolled out to 175 countries, with various rates of progress in each country. Approximately 45 countries have requested support through the [SDG 6 IWRM Support Programme](#), jointly implemented between UNEP, UNEP-DHI, GWP and UNDP Cap-Net. 1 country had submitted the completed survey.

Suggestions for online consultation processes

A range of suggestions are provided below, to make use of a more online stakeholder consultation process. We recognise each country, government and other stakeholders will have different capacities and cultural norms for online working. This list is by no means prescriptive or exhaustive, but merely meant to inspire action that may be feasible in the national context.

- 1. Establish a small coordination group:** As many countries would have done in any case without COVID-19 restrictions, a core team may design and implement the stakeholder consultation process.
- 2. Identify stakeholders and likely means of receiving inputs:** Identifying stakeholders would always have been part of the process, but now there is an extra dimension in working out the best means of communicating with them and receiving inputs to the survey instrument. This will include working out how to include certain groups of stakeholders that may find it technologically, materially or culturally difficult to actively participate in an online process.
- 3. Orientation workshop(s):** An informative online webinar could be held to share the objectives of the reporting process, the country's baseline, and to describe the process to be followed. That would ensure a common understanding among a broader number of stakeholders. That is typically a one-to-many approach, which should take on board clarifying questions from participants.
- 4. Emailed inputs:** this may involve asking various stakeholders to complete either the whole survey, or certain sections or questions in the survey, depending on relevance. They may either be sent a pre-filled (drafted) survey for review/comment, or a blank survey. Considerations: need to provide context and guidance (e.g. through orientation workshop, in writing, and/or with documents attached or through links, e.g. providing Survey Instrument, Monitoring Guide, 2017 baseline

survey and summary where available). Various inputs would need to be collated and discussed (e.g. within the core group, and/or through a follow-up process).

5. **Focus groups:** Smaller online stakeholder group workshops could be set up to discuss aspects of the survey, or individual questions. For example, question 2.1d on “Private sector participation in water resources development, management and use” could take place with a combination of representatives of the private sector and water resources managers. This might be a short, focused session, or a series of sessions, aiming to consolidate understanding and move towards consensus.
6. **Semi-structured inter-personal consultations:** For more direct contact, targeted interviews with a handful of key individuals for given questions may be facilitated, to get a broader understanding of where a country’s opportunities and challenges lie on any particular question.
7. **Discussion fora:** Key questions can be put to consultation by a larger but still selected public, perhaps through a pre-registration process. This can allow a much deeper dive into key aspects that can foster a shared understanding between a larger number of participants.
8. **Online surveys:** As a possible complement to deeper analyses, quantitative and qualitative feedback from a larger group may be possible through online survey platforms.
9. **(Final) Online workshop(s):** Up to a certain number of participants (e.g. 20-30), it may be possible to run online workshops in a similar way to what may have been planned for in-person workshops. Ideally, it would build on inputs provided through various mechanisms listed above. The aim of the workshop(s) should be to reach consensus on the scores and free text responses for each of the questions. Workshops could be broken up over consecutive days, for example focusing on 1 or 2 sections of the survey at a time. If circumstances and national/local health guidelines allow it, it may be possible for some people to participate in-person, while others may participate online.

Possible online meeting platforms and tools

A brief list of possible communication platforms and tools are provided below. Government departments and individuals are likely to have their preferred platforms, and there is no need to adopt new platforms if effective or known systems are already in place. For larger consultations, involvement of facilitators specializing in use of such tools might be beneficial. Examples of online tools:

- 2 people or small groups: e.g. telephone, Skype, Whatsapp, Zoom, Facetime, Duo, etc.
- Online meetings/workshops (with or without video): e.g. MS Teams, WebEx, GoToMeeting, Skype for Business, Zoom, Google Hangouts.
- Online surveys: e.g. Survey Monkey, Google Forms, Kahoot or FormStack
- Discussion fora: e.g. FaceBook, LinkedIn.

Level of expectation on extent of stakeholder consultation

As an overriding principle, “Don’t let ‘perfect’ be the enemy of ‘good’”. The principles of broad stakeholder consultation still apply, even in an online format. However, it is recognised that online consultations may result in a different quality and quantity of discussions as would be possible through in-person workshops, and it may take more effort to gather inputs from certain stakeholder groups. It is hoped that national SDG 6.5.1 Focal Points and colleagues will do their best given the circumstances. Given the various ways and means of stakeholder consultation that are likely to occur in 2020, it becomes even more important to fill out Annex E (Country reporting process form), both for transparency, and to facilitate learning in the future.

Revised timeline

The deadline is extended from 15th May to July 31st 2020.

Ongoing review of the situation

UNEP will continually monitor the situation, globally and on a country-by-country basis, with a view to further adjusting our guidance as required. If you have any concerns or questions, please contact the indicator 6.5.1 Help Desk: iwrmsdg651@un.org