Tailored stakeholder engagement essential for future sustainability

Figure 1. Field visit in Kisumu, Kenya

Climate change will continue to be a major concern of this century impacting stakeholders within transboundary basins. As future initiatives, projects or programmes are developed, stakeholders affected should have a voice in the design and implementation, as initiatives, projects or programmes ultimately influence their planning to address climate change impacts.

The Flood and Drought Management Tools (FDMT) project (http://fdmt.iwlearn.org/) is unique in that it has been specifically designed to support the Global Environment Facility (GEF) International Waters (IW) develop technical tools to incorporate impacts of climatic variability and change into planning across scales from transboundary to local planning with, for example, basin authorities and water utilities.

Developing a global technical tool, as part of the FDMT project, came with many potential challenges, for example:

- Stakeholders with differing technical capacities interpreting outputs differently.
- Language barriers limiting effective engagement between stakeholders and project facilitators.
- Pilot basins engaging on a voluntary basis can limit their engagement and buy-in.
- Different histories of transboundary water management and implementation of climate adaptation measures could impact capacity, interest and local relevance.

The engagement of stakeholders during the implementation of projects helped to address these critical challenges. This approach should be the cornerstone for all funded projects within the water sector to ensure sustainability of project outcomes. This is particularly relevant when developing a decision support system (DSS), as uptake and integration into planning and management tends to be low across most environmental DSS (Sandink et al., 2016), although water management DSSs are quite common, such as

in Australia (Delfau, 2017) or Spain (Zhang et al., 2013). Lessons learned from the FDMT project will be useful for the development of future DSS platforms as well as their application.

Through offering greater supporting resources; triggering local champions and experimenting with different engagement strategies the project has ensured outputs are interpreted properly, engagement is productive and the needs and interests of the different stakeholders are considered. The project has had some success at meeting these challenges through a process of:

- Engaging stakeholders though regular consultations and integration of their feedback in informing the design of the methodology and technical tools.
- Engaging stakeholder though technical trainings, awareness events & learning resources
- Providing the required resources to support wider uptake of FDMT within, but also beyond, the pilot basins

Figure 2. Training with Chao Phraya Basin stakeholders

A tailored approach to engagement is essential from the initial project scoping stage and has shaped the entire development of the FDMT project. It is important to develop a strategy to prompt interest from target organisations and establish relevance for the use of the technical applications early on. Basin organisations have an established interest in IWRM and transboundary water management issues, so this becomes the key attractive feature for how the applications can be integrated in their work. Whereas, the point of engagement for gaining the interest of water utilities has been through supporting Water Safety Planning, which has become the predominant risk management approach for water utilities to ensure drinking water quality.

To read the full experience note on tailored stakeholder engagement as experienced through the FDMT project, visit: http://fdmt.iwlearn.org/resources/experiencenote.

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About the Flood and Drought Management Tools project

The Flood and Drought Management Tools (FDMT) project funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) International Waters (IW) and implemented by UN Environment (UNEP), with DHI and the International Water Association (IWA) as the executing agencies. The project is developing online technical applications to support planning from the transboundary basin to water utility level by including better information on floods and droughts. The project is being implemented from 2014 – 2018, with 3 pilot basins (Volta, Lake Victoria and Chao Phraya) participating in development and testing of the methodology and technical applications.

For more information on the Flood and Drought Management Tools project, visit: http://fdmt.iwlearn.org/