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Stakeholder analysis

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IN A NUTSHELL:

Stakeholder analysis consists in identifying and mapping the individuals, groups or organisations that have a stake or interest in, or are affected by, projects, programmes or policies. Stakeholder analysis can be used for the design and implementation of a programme or project, or for the implementation of evaluation recommendations. The first case is relevant for formative forms of evaluation, such as process evaluation. The second case is referred to as participatory evaluation (PE) and evaluation use.

Keywords: Stakeholder analysis, stakeholder map, mapping, formative evaluation, evaluation use, network, cooperation system, key/primary/secondary stakeholders, veto players.

I. What does this approach consist of?

Stakeholders are individuals, groups or organisations that have a stake or interest in, or are affected by, projects, programmes or policies. Their interest derives from their position. Stakeholders may have decision-making power over funding or design. This group may include funders, policymakers, senior project managers or the advisory board. Stakeholders may also have direct responsibility for a project or programme. These include programme managers and others who are needed as service providers for implementation. Another group of stakeholders are the target groups of programmes, be they individuals, families or communities. Finally, stakeholders are those who are negatively affected by a programme. Taxpayers, civil society, journalists or even the general public can also be counted as stakeholders, as they are also affected by programmes or want information about them.

Stakeholder analysis can be either retrospective or prospective. Retrospective stakeholder analysis identifies the role of stakeholders in the process cycle of a programme or project and is therefore usually part of formative evaluation and qualitative forms of summative evaluation. Prospective stakeholder analysis refers to the use of evaluation results for future policy formulation by stakeholders and falls under the term 'evaluation use'. It is based on the results of summative evaluation, i.e. the evaluation of the impact of a programme. The group of stakeholders is not necessarily static and may well change over the course of the implementation or programme. It should be adapted accordingly, especially in the case of formative evaluation. For evaluation use the stakeholders are given and do not change.

In practice, stakeholder analysis is carried out in a participatory manner in one or more successive workshops. The aim of 'evaluation use' is to identify the key stakeholders in the evaluation, to understand their interests, resources and commitments, and to involve them in the implementation of evaluation recommendations. In the context of formative and developmental evaluation, i.e. the evaluation of policy formulation and implementation, the aim is to identify different stakeholders at different stages of programmes or projects whose involvement is essential for their success. The circle of stakeholders is potentially very large, but this does not mean that all stakeholders can or should be involved. For formative and developmental evaluation, different stakeholder groups are considered, such as key stakeholders, primary stakeholders, secondary stakeholders and veto players.

Stakeholder analysis involves a number of steps: Identifying the stakeholders, determining their interests in the evaluation, their power resources and influence, determining their roles for the evaluation or implementation process, and determining the resources for each stakeholder to implement the evaluation recommendations. The first step of stakeholder identification is usually carried out by the evaluators. However, in a participatory workshop, another group of participants then attempts to map the position of each stakeholder as accurately as possible, in terms of their centrality and relationships with each other. The stakeholder map shown in Figure 1 is an appropriate tool for this.

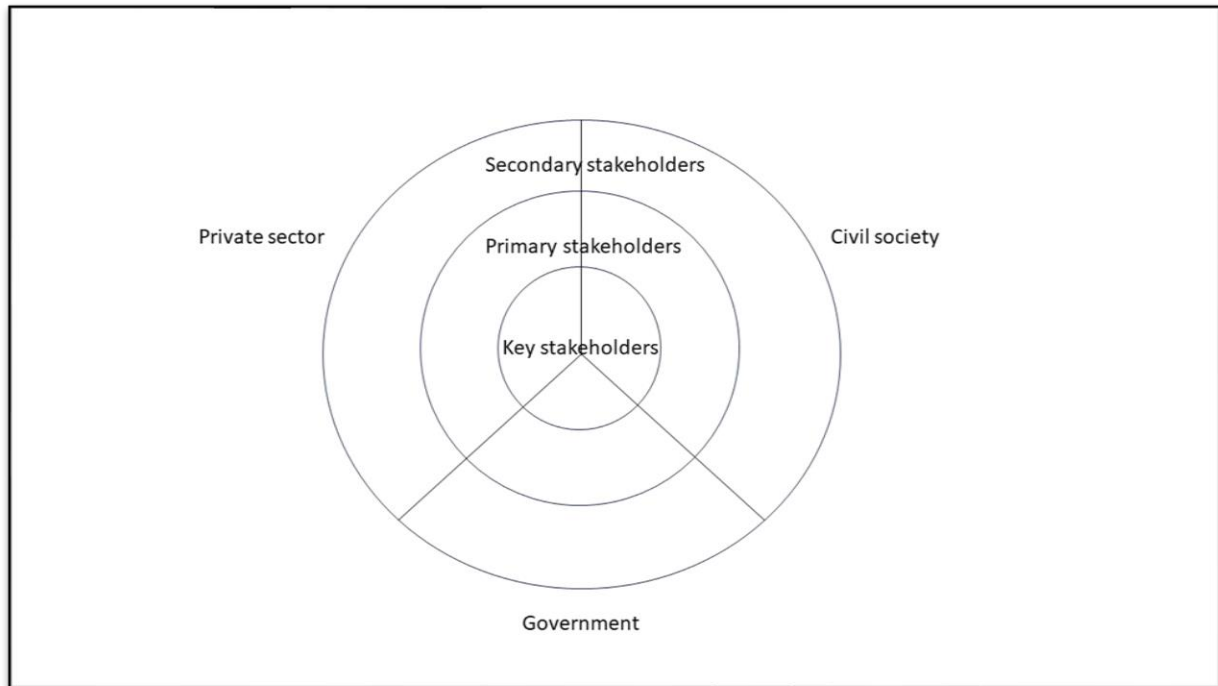


Figure 1: Stakeholder mapping

(Source: Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (2015: 131))

Stakeholders can be added to the stakeholder map according to their position. Key stakeholders can significantly influence a project due to their position, knowledge and skills. Primary stakeholders are directly affected by a project, either positively or negatively. Secondary stakeholders are peripheral or temporary, e.g. service providers. Veto actors are those stakeholders without whose support the project or program outcomes cannot be achieved. If the aim is to identify stakeholders for evaluation purposes, it is necessary to identify the stakeholders who are the primary intended users of the evaluation.

A stakeholder map provides an overview of the relevant actors and existing networks in a specific phase of implementation or over the entire duration of the project. Depending on the phase of the project, different stakeholder maps can be produced. If the stakeholders are identified for evaluation purposes, i.e. for the final assessment and evaluation of the implementation, a single map is usually sufficient. On this map, the relevant stakeholders from government, civil society and business are plotted. The segments are not rigid, but can be adapted according to the specific needs of the evaluation. It is important to note that the position of stakeholders may change during the course of a formative evaluation; key stakeholders may become primary stakeholders, secondary stakeholders may become veto players for certain phases. If the aim is to identify key stakeholders for the evaluation use, then they will remain key stakeholders throughout the evaluation and the implementation of the results.

In addition, arrows on this map can be used to show which actors form a network and which form a cooperation system. Cooperation systems differ from networks in that they have clearer boundaries and follow common rules about the distribution of roles. Networks are much more open and flexible; stakeholders can join or leave more easily. Cooperation systems are particularly advantageous when stakeholders share responsibility for the long-term achievement of goals. This is the case, for example, in evaluation use. Networks, on the other hand, tend to form around specific functions and are designed for a shorter duration, as may be the case in the various stages of a formative evaluation.

Once the stakeholder map has been created, the stakeholders are analysed according to their respective characteristics. The characteristics are used to determine the respective roles and contributions of the stakeholders. Various lists of characteristics have been provided in the literature, but these should be used flexibly and adapted to the specific context. As part of a formative evaluation, it is useful to characterise stakeholders in terms of their power, interest, position, leadership, knowledge, alliances and attitudes. Legitimacy, influence or motivation may also be added. The length of the list is flexible. Key stakeholders who have an interest in the evaluation, but who are also able to contribute resources and commitment, can be considered for evaluation use.

The respective characteristics can be plotted in four-field matrices. For example, the degree of interest in an evaluation can be plotted against the degree of power of a stakeholder. This allows interested and powerful stakeholders to be distinguished from disinterested and less powerful stakeholders. Other combinations are possible, such as stakeholders' commitment vs. resources, support for recommendations vs. stakeholders' stake in an evaluation, or implementation capacity vs. attractiveness of the policy for stakeholders. The aim is always to identify stakeholders with a view to their participation in cooperation systems or networks.

II. How is this approach useful for policy evaluation?

Public policies can no longer be evaluated without an understanding of the stakeholders involved, their preferences and influences, and their interactions. The problems that policy interventions seek to address are often complex, involving multiple levels of decision-making nested within each other. It is therefore less possible than ever to trace decision-making and influence structures back to one or a few stakeholders. Effective systems of cooperation are a prerequisite for policy success. Studies of policy failures show that ignoring key stakeholders, their interests, resources and information often leads to failure to achieve objectives. Stakeholder analysis therefore plays a central role in formative evaluation.

However, evaluations are only meaningful and successful if their findings and recommendations are acted upon. Evaluation use is therefore a central component of the evaluation, the recommendations of which can only be implemented by the stakeholders involved. It is therefore important to understand, from the outset of an evaluation, what interests stakeholders have in an evaluation as such, what specific recommendations are suitable for them, and what resources they have to implement them.

The aim is to build the capacity of stakeholders to contribute to and carry out the evaluation. The involvement of stakeholders in the actual evaluation is necessary to obtain relevant information, to assess perspectives, to gain commitment, but also to ensure the legitimacy and accountability of the evaluation. The context of the evaluation, political challenges or cultural particularities can usually only be communicated by stakeholders. As it is particularly important to ensure that the target groups benefit from the intervention in the intended way, they should be involved as stakeholders in the evaluation and evaluation use process. If it is not possible to involve appropriate stakeholders, the likelihood of evaluation use is reduced.

III. Two examples of stakeholder analysis: climate change adaptation and domestic violence

In two case studies on climate change adaptation in Gothenburg and Stockholm, André et al. (2012) show how stakeholder identification is implemented in practice. Adaptation to climate change falls into the category of complex problems, as the problem cannot be localised geographically, cuts across different policy areas and therefore involves a number of potential stakeholders that is difficult to narrow down. In

their study, they therefore identify stakeholders who play a role in climate change adaptation around water issues.

As a first step, they identify possible stakeholders according to their function in the adaptation process (including municipalities, energy and housing, insurance companies, citizens), geographical location (including vulnerable groups, property owners, local businesses, local river groups), knowledge and skills (including consultants, citizens, trade and interest organisations) and hierarchical level (including national authorities, municipalities, individuals). In a second step, they identify the possible roles of potential stakeholders. For possible stakeholder roles, they use an established list that categorises stakeholders as advocates, providers, disseminators, funders, experts, implementers, coordinators, decision-makers, regulators and affected parties. In the third step they select the stakeholder on the basis of these criteria. The concrete selection of stakeholders was initially based on suggestions from the participating researchers. After contacting potential stakeholders by e-mail or telephone, further stakeholders were identified using the snowball method and 10 pilot interviews. The fourth and fifth steps involve assigning specific roles to concrete stakeholders and analysing their influence and interests. To do this, brainstorming sessions and focus groups were used to identify relevant stakeholder groups, which were then plotted on a stakeholder map and their relationships visualised using lines.

Adams, Nnawulezi, und Vandenberg (2015) use an evaluation of a large domestic violence shelter programme to show how to organise a stakeholder process for evaluation use. They work with the 'Expectations to Change' approach they have developed. This process has six stages. First, the 'expectations' of the evaluation are defined, i.e. the standards and benchmarks by which participants judge whether 'change' has been achieved based on the evaluation. The results are then evaluated against the 'expectations'. In the third step, the key findings are identified by the stakeholders and interpreted in the fourth step. In the fifth step, recommendations are developed. The final step is to develop a plan for change. This process is designed to involve the stakeholders in a participatory way and to ensure that the results of the evaluation are implemented.

For the actual implementation, they assembled a stakeholder group of 15 participants and held a three-hour workshop in a local public library. To counteract negative group dynamics, ground rules for the workshop were established at the beginning, such as full participation, equal voice for everyone, open-mindedness, mutual respect, one person at a time, and acceptance of the results presented as valid. The last point is particularly important, as it is intended to prevent stakeholders from explaining away results that are negative for them on the basis of alleged errors in the study. At the beginning, each stakeholder was given a folder with the evaluation results and these were explained. The 'expectations for change' (step 1) were then clarified. After discussing the results, the stakeholders were asked to identify 3 to 5 findings that did not meet their expectations and the findings were prioritised by colour coding. After discussing the significance of the findings, smaller groups were formed to develop further recommendations based on the findings, which were then translated into concrete action plans in the panel. A follow-up survey one year later showed that the evaluation results had been used by the stakeholders involved.

IV. What are the criteria for judging the quality of the mobilisation of this method?

A first type of measurement of the quality of stakeholder analysis is indirect and refers to the fact that all consulted stakeholders agree on the stakeholder analysis. In the course of formative evaluation, stakeholders and their positions may be reassessed. Successful stakeholder analysis is likely to favour the success of the programme in the case of formative evaluation, or the implementation of the evaluation recommendations in the case of evaluation use, even though it cannot in itself guarantee these outcomes. It is not easy to judge whether a stakeholder analysis has been successful, as it is often not clear whether

certain stakeholders have been overlooked or whether their characteristics have been correctly assessed. It is therefore advisable to select as wide a range of stakeholders as possible in order to cover as wide a spectrum as possible. It may also be useful to take a deductive approach to creating the characteristics, i.e. to work with existing lists of relevant stakeholder characteristics rather than deriving them solely on the basis of the selected stakeholders. This should minimise the risk of overlooking certain characteristics.

In order to assess the quality of a stakeholder analysis, it is important to document the procedure in evaluation reports and scientific publications. Too often, it is simply stated that a stakeholder analysis has been carried out or that work has been carried out with stakeholders. The selection and consultation procedure remains unclear. Reporting standards should include the stakeholder selection process, the creation of characteristics, the conceptualisation and operationalisation of characteristics, the design and conduct of workshops, and the aggregation procedures used to aggregate different opinions.

V. What are the strengths and limitations of this method?

There are different variations of stakeholder analysis depending on its use in the context of formative evaluation or to promote evaluation use. The strength of stakeholder analysis lies in its ability to identify non-obvious stakeholders and to map their roles and interests. In addition, the stakeholder analysis tool can be used flexibly at all stages of the evaluation process. At the planning stage, the list of stakeholders can be defined and their roles, influence and interests analysed. In the evaluation design phase, the degree of involvement of each stakeholder can be determined. In the data collection phase it is possible to check how stakeholders react to the design and measurement methods. In the analysis phase, the role of each stakeholder can be analysed retrospectively. Prospectively, it can be analysed which evaluation recommendations are supported by the stakeholders and to what extent the stakeholders can actively support the implementation with resources and capacities. In the final implementation phase, action plans can then be tailored to the interests and resources of the stakeholders.

In practice, however, stakeholder analysis has specific limitations. The conceptualisation of characteristics such as power, interests, resources or position is challenging. There is no single conceptualisation that can be used in all evaluation contexts. Care must therefore be taken to operationalise indicators of these characteristics. If this is not done, incorrect conceptualisation will lead to misleading stakeholder analysis. For example, power can be operationalised with the indicators 'capacity to design policies' and 'capacity to finance policies'. However, depending on the context, these indicators can also be combined into 'leadership'. If stakeholder position is initially operationalised as 'degree of support for a policy', 'concrete actions to support' may be the more appropriate indicator in a further step. The degree of 'stakeholder participation' is subject to similar measurement problems and requires calibration according to the situation. Which conceptualisation is appropriate in each case involves effort and is a potential limitation of stakeholder analysis.

The participatory process of stakeholder analysis can be subject to group dynamics. Even if there is consensus on the conceptualisation of stakeholder characteristics and their operationalisation, there may be a lack of clarity on which category a stakeholder should be assigned to. The process of aggregating the individual opinions involved should not be subject to group dynamics in which a perceived consensus is brought about by dominant actors. It is not necessarily clear that divergent opinions are rooted in the issue at hand and are not also driven by internal group factors. To avoid this limitation, anonymised or multi-stage procedures such as the Delphi method can be used to aggregate individual opinions after deliberation.

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