Participation

The term “participation” of citizens or stakeholders is often used without attention to the requisite of distributing citizens’ or communities’ power in relation to decision-making authorities. Non-participation is the way of power holders claiming inclusion of people without any real objective of enabling stakeholder participation.

The need to redistribute decision-making power through a participatory model led Susan Arnstein to propose a ladder of participation with eight levels of citizen/stakeholder engagement. Added here is also the level of Exclusion, which is the absence strategy, method, mechanism or practice of engaging stakeholders concerned or affected by official decisions, plans, programmes and projects. Taking levels 1 through 8 as progressive steps, they redistribute decision-making power more equitably and, thereby, operationalize the principle of greater participation = greater dignity for all parties.

In the context of UN Habitat planning and operations or SDG and NUA implementation, monitoring and evaluation, often political and ideological agendas may operate, even when not immediately apparent. Sensitivities between and among parties make it important to understand the motives of power holders and include stakeholders in genuine participation in order to succeed in executing the complex tasks and commitments set out in global policy frameworks.

Methodology for Measuring UN Habitat-Stakeholder Engagement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholder participation</th>
<th>Tokenism</th>
<th>Nonparticipation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stakeholders are able to negotiate with decision makers and have real influence on planning, policies and programmes.</td>
<td>Stakeholders are allowed to access information and express their views, however, without any guarantee that the voice of concerned parties will be considered in the plans.</td>
<td>Stakeholders have no substantive role or formal channel in influencing decisions or corresponding actions that affect them.</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Democratic control:</td>
<td>5. Placation:</td>
<td>2. Therapy:</td>
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<td>Stakeholders have the final decision-making power over planning not the officials.</td>
<td>Concerned parties are included in planning by having representatives on planning committees. Positive results are achieved when adequate technical assistance and community coherence are present to advocate properly. However, the final right to decision making over plans, policies and programmes remains at the official level.</td>
<td>Participation is transferred to group therapy, taking the focus away from important matters related to community and stakeholder planning.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Powerholders negotiate with stakeholders, not the other way around. Sometimes in hostile environments, parallel community groups can be formed with veto rights and negotiation between the groups facilitated.</td>
<td>Sounding out concerned parties, as through surveys, meetings and public hearings, is crucial for planning, but is combined with other forms of participation to ensure that the information gathered truly reflects the needs and priorities of stakeholders and is used in the decision making.</td>
<td>Concerned parties are placed in forums such as advisory committees to “prove people’s involvement in a programme,” but without any real power to influence.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Partnership:</td>
<td>3. Informing:</td>
<td>0. Exclusion:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power is distributed between powerholders and stakeholders by negotiation through structures such as joint policy boards, advisory councils and planning committees. Power structures inside the community of concerned parties is transparent and well-functioning, and communities are supported with economic means for leaders to cover the expenses of the community’s own agents and representatives (technicians, lawyers, and community organizers and leaders).</td>
<td>Knowledge sharing with stakeholders on rights, responsibilities and options enables participatory planning, but is not limited to merely producing and publishing information. Instead, dissemination becomes a channel of interaction and negotiation in an early planning stage when stakeholders still have the possibility to influence decisions and outcomes.</td>
<td>The absence of a strategy, mechanism or facility for stakeholder engagement or participation.</td>
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Charting UN Habitat-Stakeholder Engagement

Habitat International Coalition
Milestones in UN-Habitat History of Partner Engagement

1. **1976** | Habitat I Conference, Habitat NGO Forum, Vancouver
2. **1978–92** | Habitat International Coalition (HIC), major NGO partner of UN Habitat
3. **1994–6** | Habitat II PrepCom declares Habitat II “conference of partners”. Habitat II landmark action plan declares local authorities and civil society “Habitat Agenda Partners.”
4. **1997** | Commission on Human Settlements (CHS) rejects new ILO-style tripartite governance structure
5. **1998** | UN Habitat declines, restructuring begins
6. **1999–2000** | UN Habitat launches around two inclusive “campaigns”, UN Advisory Committee of Local Authorities (UNACLA) founded
7. **Feb 2001** | CHS rejects draft World Charter of Local Self-Government (WCLSG); UN Habitat blocks entry of LAs and NGOs to plenary, civil society and local authority participation in CHS meetings declines
8. **Dec 2001** | UN GA upgrades UN Habitat and endorses UN World Urban Forum (WUF) as partner platform of experts
9. **2002** | First WUF, its report influences outcome of Rio +20
10. **2003** | Habitat’s new Governing Council opens up to civil society and local authorities in groundbreaking move
11. **2005** | Advisory Group on Forced Evictions suspends, some key NGOs cease work with UN Habitat
12. **2006** | Fourth WUF (2008) leads GC to endorse Youth Advisory Board (2009). Youth and Women’s Assemblies established
13. **2010** | World Urban Campaign launched at WUF 5 in Rio
14. **2011** | By 2011 external advisory boards on women and youth functioning at UN Habitat
15. **2008–09** | Second WUF (2009) and Habitat III PrepCom lead to Youth Advisory Board (2009) and Women’s Assemblies established
16. **2010** | World Urban Campaign launched at WUF 5 in Rio
17. **2011** | By 2011 external advisory boards on women and youth functioning at UN Habitat
18. **2012** | WUF sessions stop issuing reports with recommendations
19. **2013** | Organized policy dialogue with partners declines as Habitat focuses on operational activities
20. **2014** | Habitat III preparations lead to partial re-engagement in General Assembly of Partners (GAP), but not as a channel of substantive input and without a normative framework
21. **2015** | Habitat II Conference Quito; no roadmap for partner engagement in the New Urban Agenda (NUA)
22. **2016** | Habitat III Conference, no roadmap for partner engagement in the New Urban Agenda (NUA)
23. **Dec 2017–Jan 2018** | UN GA requests Habitat CPR to draft action framework for NUA in close collaboration with Habitat Partners; Habitat announces work on Stakeholder Engagement Policy (SEP)
24. **June 2018** | Habitat CPR proposes new Habitat Assembly and Executive Board without consultations with partners
25. **Oct 2018** | Habitat Assembly and Executive Board without consultations with partners
26. **Dec 2018** | Habitat announces completion of SEP but not made public. UN GA approves new governance structure of Habitat; Resolution makes no mention of partners and stakeholders
27. **Jan 2019** | Habitat management asks key staff to recommend members of new Stakeholder Advisory Board without consultation with partners
28. **Feb 2019** | Habitat Committee of Permanent Representatives (CPR) begins work on rules of procedure for new Habitat Assembly; no consultation with partners
29. **Mar 2019** | Draft rules of procedure for Assembly and Board ready for review; in sum they downgrade partner representation
30. **May 2019** | First session of Habitat Assembly to be preceded by one-day Stakeholder Forum as decided by Habitat management without proper consultations or agreed agenda