

Citizen Engagement and Stakeholder Consultations during COVID-19

Governments across the world are facing extraordinary decision-making challenges about the health, safety, and well-being of their people. [Engaging citizens](#) is especially important during the COVID-19 pandemic; it can provide insight into how the crisis affects communities and can enable real-time course correction where needed. This pandemic has also exposed deep inequalities that demand a more inclusive approach so that response and recovery efforts consider everybody, regardless of ethnicity, income, geography, gender, disability, religion, or sexual orientation. As the World Bank targets resources to address the pandemic, we seek input from those most affected, including the most marginalized. With the benefit of timely ideas and feedback from citizens, responses to the crisis will be more effective and better informed about the rapidly evolving situation in each country.

To ensure that the voices of the poorest and most vulnerable are being heard, the World Bank and its client countries have been navigating the challenges posed by the pandemic. Even though many projects are now on a fast track, we still work with governments so that operations are informed by consultations with key stakeholders. And we continue to establish new modalities for citizens to express their views at a time when public gatherings and travel face widespread restrictions aimed at reducing the spread of the virus.

Ensuring stakeholder consultations as part of the Environmental and Social Framework

The World Bank has worked closely with client countries to rapidly design, approve, and launch a first round of projects to help countries implement emergency health operations, protect the poorest households, save jobs and businesses, and get money to people who need it most.

Stakeholder Engagement Plans are required as part of preparation for each project under the World Bank's [Environment and Social Framework](#) (ESF). These are critical to ensure that stakeholder engagement takes place, either during the design phase or in the implementation period.

We are in constant dialogue with ministries and their project implementation units to identify the most appropriate channels to consult stakeholders. Given the operational challenges during the pandemic, we are helping our borrowers identify different ways to perform, monitor and supervise stakeholder engagement as well as manage environmental and social risks, taking advantage of the technologies and channels available to them.

Some projects have begun to incorporate electronic platforms for communication into their design. In the Kyrgyz Republic, for example, a comprehensive online platform is being rolled-out to enable outreach and real-time community engagement during social distancing and travel restrictions, as part of the [CASA-1000 Community Support Project](#) and Additional Financing for the Third Village Investment, Project, which aim to support communities to rebuild livelihoods in 437 subdistricts.

We are in regular contact with civil society to hear their views on consultations.

Maintaining space for citizen engagement

While restrictions on face-to-face gatherings limit some of the usual fora for public dialogue, the World Bank is working with clients to keep lines of communication open. As lockdowns and social distancing

precautions began to be applied across the world, project teams used their communication networks to distribute information on health and safety, as well as safety equipment and even food.

In Afghanistan, for example, the [Citizen Charter Afghanistan Project \(CCAP\)](#) has used its national networks to convey key coronavirus prevention messages to Community Development Councils through mobile phone applications like WhatsApp and Telegram. These communication channels are two-way, allowing citizens not only to receive support, but to share information on the changing situations in their communities, as well as their own needs and challenges, so that this information can be translated into targeted responses.

We are also engaging with communities in Ghana to provide important information about COVID-19 at the national, regional, and district level. Recent surveys indicated successful dissemination, where 83 percent of Ghanaians felt they had adequate information about the pandemic and high trust in information originating from the government. Similarly, in Cambodia, our support to CSOs who are implementing the national, Social Accountability Framework has enabled Community Accountability Facilitators to inform poor and vulnerable households of ways to protect themselves through improved sanitation and hygiene and of public services that they can reach out to such as health clinics, primary schools, and local administrative centers.

Through our [Global Partnership for Social Accountability \(GPSA\)](#), a World Bank trust fund, we are leveraging lessons to support civil society oversight. For example, we are exchanging lessons learned with [SEND Ghana](#), a former GPSA grantee that helps hundreds of NGOs across the country monitor the government's pandemic-related interventions and provide real-time feedback. Over the next five months, SEND Ghana will also monitor how the government uses the funds allocated for COVID-19 response.

Unwavering commitment

The World Bank remains fully committed to stakeholder consultation and citizen engagement, and this means continuing to work towards our target that 100% of our projects include mechanisms for receiving and acting on beneficiary feedback. The COVID-19 rapid response projects are no exception. For any projects that may not have fully incorporated citizen engagement mechanisms into their initial design due to the rapid speed of preparation, targeted support will now ensure that these important activities are put in place and actively applied throughout the project life cycle.

It is crucial that citizens have a say in the support they are receiving. The World Bank will continue working to ensure that civil society organizations can help facilitate governments' accountability to citizens, that consultation mechanisms are effectively implemented, and that emerging opportunities for citizen engagement are used to strengthen the response and recovery in our client countries.