INITIAL FINDINGS OF OECD QUESTIONNAIRE ON 'OPEN AND INCLUSIVE POLICY MAKING'

36th session of the Public Governance Committee
16-17 October 2007
Château de la Muette, Paris

For further information, please contact Christian Vergez. Email: christian.vergez@oecd.org; Tel: + 33 1 45 24 90 44
INITIAL FINDINGS OF OECD QUESTIONNAIRE ON ‘OPEN AND INCLUSIVE POLICY MAKING’

Background
The cross-cutting project on ‘open and inclusive policy making’ was launched as a result of the Ministerial meeting of the Public Governance Committee in Rotterdam in November 2005 where ‘open and inclusive policy making’ was identified as one of the four themes of particular interest for countries.

Steering group
A steering group consisting of government experts from 10 OECD countries was established to provide guidance, support and oversight to the OECD Secretariat throughout the project. The steering group convened in February 2007 in Helsinki and will convene again on 15 October 2007 in Paris.

Methodology
The data collection undertaken throughout this project will serve both to answer the key questions regarding open and inclusive policy making as well as to feed into the OECD ‘Government at a glance’, work on indicators that is currently underway. The research methods used include:

- **Questionnaires**: in the spring of 2007 two different types of questionnaire were launched: one for governments and a shorter one for civil society organisations. The responses received so far are indicated in the table below.
- **Case studies**: a case study of open and inclusive policy making will be conducted in each of the fields of the Public Governance Directorate: one on participatory budgeting, one on citizen engagement in regional development, one on citizen engagement in regulation as well as one on online citizen engagement.
- **Literature review**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country responses to questionnaire for governments (25)</th>
<th>Country responses to questionnaire for CSOs (12)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Germany</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>Hungary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czech Republic</td>
<td>Ireland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>Japan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>Italy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Scope and key terms
**Policy making** includes all stages of the policy cycle: agenda setting, policy preparation, decision making, implementation and evaluation.

**Open** refers to **transparency, accessibility and responsiveness** in the policy making process.

**Inclusive** indicates that all citizens must have equal opportunities to exert influence during the entire policy making process. Two groups of not-included citizens can be discerned:

- ‘**people who are willing, but unable**’: those who face barriers of entry to citizen engagement, e.g. cultural, physical, socio-economic barriers
- ‘**people who are able, but unwilling**’: those who face barriers of a more personal nature, e.g. a lack of interest in politics or a disbelief that their opinion will be taken into account.

Open and inclusive policy making is

- **policy making that is transparent, accessible and responsive to all citizens.**

---

1 Governments were requested to select approx. five different civil society organisations and to forward the questionnaire to them: governments were not obliged to do so.

2 Switzerland has not responded to the questionnaire for CSOs, but has provided a recent research undertaken among CSOs that covers similar questions.
Session 1 - Why should governments engage citizens in service delivery and policy making?

Measuring the benefits of citizen engagement
Involving citizens in policy making and service delivery may provide better policy outcomes, a more efficient use of public funds, as well as higher compliance with policy or an increased legitimacy thereof; even contribute to increasing citizens’ trust in government. This, at least, is what most of the literature on citizen participation claims as the major benefits of broader engagement of citizens in policy making processes. Empirical proof of these claims is relatively absent so far, which is not surprising given the difficulties of measuring such variables as legitimacy, trust in government and the impact of citizen engagement on these variables.

Top goals and achievement of goals according to countries
In the questionnaire, governments were asked to indicate what goals they are trying to achieve with open and inclusive policy making, as well as to what extent these goals have been achieved in reality.

Figure 1. Governments’ goals of open and inclusive policy making very important and important

Figure 2. Achievement of goals very important and important
Some countries mention additional, other goals of engaging citizens in policy making, including sustainable development (Austria), openness and inclusiveness as a part of active, modern democracy (Norway) or a way to encourage innovation in government (Netherlands), or improving performance of the economy, identification side-effects and hidden costs of policy development (Ireland).

Observations from figure 1 and 2

- A discrepancy between the importance of goals and achievements regarding ‘increasing citizens’ trust in government’, which is considered the most important goal (60.9%) but only the third most important achievement (43.5%).
- A discrepancy between the importance of goals and achievements regarding ‘improved efficiency’, which is considered a relatively important goal (39.1%) but a relatively unimportant achievement (13%).
- A polarisation between countries on the importance awarded to ‘increasing social cohesion’ as a goal or achievement of citizen engagement: which is considered a very important or important goal by an important number of countries (34.8%), but is awarded very low or no importance at all by an even larger group of countries (52.2%).

Modest progress in last 5 years

Governments indicated that modest progress has been made in citizen engagement over the last five years: 41.7% of countries indicate a lot of progress was made, 58.3% of countries indicate a bit of progress was made. No government said there was no progress or a demise thereof.

In the separate questionnaire for civil society organisations (CSOs), a similar question was asked. The CSOs evaluation of their government’s progress seems to mirror the moderately positive responses given by government, but there are some exceptions where some countries’ CSOs seem more critical of progress than their governments are. The number of CSOs responding per country is too low however to draw any definite conclusions: also, so far only 12 countries have provided responses from their civil society organisations.

Goals of citizen engagement are shifting

70% of countries indicate they have made changes or additions to the goals envisaged with open and inclusive policy making over the last 5 years. For example, the USA aims to improve programme performance by collecting and publicizing performance-based information. The UK added a criterion to their code of conduct on written consultation, referring to regulatory impact assessment if appropriate. Italy has changed its constitution to call for the State to promote the autonomous initiative of citizens in activities of general interest.

Questions for discussion:

- What is the correlation between citizens’ trust, legitimacy of the government, and transparency and accountability? How to interpret the low importance given by countries to ‘increasing government legitimacy’ as a goal of citizen engagement?
- How can the level of citizen engagement be measured more in-depth? How can the impact of citizen engagement be measured in terms of outcomes?
- What can explain the poor level of improved efficiency as a result of citizen engagement, given the fact that governments see increased efficiency as an important goal?

---

3 Figure 1 and 2 are based on questionnaire responses received from 23 OECD countries: the EU Commission was not included in these totals.

4 Only Poland and Sweden did not mention ‘increasing citizens trust’ at all as an envisaged goal of citizen engagement.

5 Austria, France, Hungary, Ireland, Korea, Luxembourg, The Netherlands.

6 Australia, Germany, Finland, Italy, Poland, Slovak Republic, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the UK, the US.
Session 2 - What barriers do governments encounter when implementing citizen engagement, and why?

Application of principles of citizen engagement: some progress, some setbacks

In 2001 OECD countries identified a set of 10 guiding principles for information, consultation and active participation (see annex 1). The main message was that if one or more of these principles are not adequately addressed, the results of citizen engagement will be significantly less satisfactory than expected. In other words, not meeting a principle equals a barrier to successful citizen engagement. In the 2007 questionnaire an attempt was made to provide a benchmark of progress in OECD countries with regard to these guiding principles.

Figure 3. Principles with most progress achieved over last 5 years

- 56.5% of countries see providing rights to citizens as the principle that has seen most progress over the last 5 years. This self-report is corroborated by the fact that all countries (except Luxembourg) now have legislation in place to guarantee access to government information.
- A polarisation between countries over the principle of ‘active citizenship’, where some countries state it is one of the most difficult principles to meet, and other countries indicate no or few problems in this area. The extent to which countries have an active civil society differs widely and depends for example on their historical and cultural background.
- A discrepancy between countries in the sense that progress made in ensuring commitment from higher administrative levels as well as from the political level is relatively high (26.1%), but other countries state that commitment is the most important principle to meet (18.2%), among them Austria, The Netherlands, Norway and the UK.

Figure 4. Principles most difficult to meet over last 5 years

Observations from figure 3 and 4

- 56.5% of countries see providing rights to citizens as the principle that has seen most progress over the last 5 years. This self-report is corroborated by the fact that all countries (except Luxembourg) now have legislation in place to guarantee access to government information.
- A polarisation between countries over the principle of ‘active citizenship’, where some countries state it is one of the most difficult principles to meet, and other countries indicate no or few problems in this area. The extent to which countries have an active civil society differs widely and depends for example on their historical and cultural background.
- A discrepancy between countries in the sense that progress made in ensuring commitment from higher administrative levels as well as from the political level is relatively high (26.1%), but other countries state that commitment is the most important principle to meet (18.2%), among them Austria, The Netherlands, Norway and the UK.

7 Citizens as partners’ OECD 2001
Costs and risks of citizen engagement
Most countries seem to have a rather limited view on what the costs and risks\(^8\) of citizen engagement really are.

**Figure 5. What are acknowledged as typical direct ‘costs’ for government**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% of countries indicating this as a (very) important cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>government expenditure on communication and logistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>time spent by government officials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>government expenditure to reimburse citizens for the costs incurred in engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>training of government officials’ skills in engaging citizens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>training of citizens’ skills in engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>government expenditure to reward participants for their engagement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 6. What are acknowledged as typical ‘risks’ for government**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% of countries indicating this as a (very) important risk</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Delays in policy implementation or decision making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflicts with or an unclear role of politicians / representative democracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hijacking by special interest groups / outcome not representative of entire population’s views</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher administrative burdens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Consultation fatigue’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflicts between (groups or organisations of) participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflicts with current laws, regulations or principles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diminished citizens’ trust in government</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Observations from figure 5 and 6**

- Few countries see training of both civil servants and citizens skills as costs, whereas training is paramount to good citizen engagement processes. This can mean that either countries are not training staff or citizens or they are not putting the costs of training into the budget for citizen engagement.
- Over a third of countries indicated that delays in policy making, conflicts with politicians and hijacking of the process by special interest groups are very important risks.
- Countries seemed incapable however of naming other risks than the ones proposed in the questionnaire (the category ‘other’ was left unanswered by all countries), which could indicate that the concept of ‘risks’ in citizen engagement is relatively new to most countries.

\(^8\) Risks are non-monetary costs of engaging citizens: a good example is the possibility that a policy making process is delayed when citizens are engaged in the process.
Questions for discussion

- Governments indicate that the most important barriers they are meeting are a lack of time, resources, and coordination. How can these barriers be overcome?
- Countries indicate great progress and no problems with the provision of rights to engagement to citizens. May we conclude that ‘rights’ is no longer an issue?
- Are countries sufficiently aware of the costs and risks of citizen engagement? How can they balance the costs and mitigate the risks of citizen engagement, seeing its benefits?
- How can representative democracy be reinforced, rather than undermined, by citizen engagement?

Session 3. Why should governments move from being open to being inclusive, and how?

Openness is necessary, but not sufficient

The many recent experiences of open policy making have shown one similar weakness: open policy making processes, however cleverly designed, are not attracting all citizens: they are not even attracting ‘average’ citizens. The archetypical participant in open policy making processes tends to be male and in his forties or fifties, with an above-average level of education and an above-average interest in politics. In order to be able to put more weight on the results of open policy making processes, these processes need to be inclusive, meaning they need to try to engage as wide a variety of citizens as possible.

People who are currently unengaged can be described as:

1. ‘People who are willing, but unable’: they face barriers of entry to participation in policy making: these barriers may be cultural (e.g. language barriers), socio-economic (e.g. illiteracy) or physical (e.g. people with disabilities).
2. ‘People who are able, but unwilling’: they face barriers of a more personal nature: although these people are generally perfectly equipped to exert influence on the policy making process, they lack the interest or motivation or may feel that they have no influence over policy.

Barriers to engagement for the willing but unable, and how to lower them

Observations from figure 7

- Cultural barriers by far the most important (77.3%). When asked to elaborate on the nature of these cultural barriers, a large majority of countries mention ‘language problems’, oftentimes referring to recent immigrants’ insufficient language skills.
- Other cultural barriers mentioned are ‘ethnic affiliation’ (Slovenia), the position of indigenous groups (Chile), different traditions, values and/or beliefs (Norway, UK), and even a culture of confidentiality in civil servants (Turkey).
GOV/PGC(2007)12

**Figure 8. Willing but unable: government efforts to ensure inclusion….**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In information</th>
<th>In consultation and participation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Provide information in different languages (70.8%)</td>
<td>Provide large-letter information, wheelchair access (75%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide concise and/or simplified information (70.8%)</td>
<td>Provide opportunities close to home or office (75%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use trusted intermediaries (58.3%)</td>
<td>Open door policies, consultation hours etc (65%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide large-letter information, wheelchair access (45.8%)</td>
<td>Provide activities geared towards specific groups (65%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other effort (41.7%)</td>
<td>Use trusted intermediaries (55%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Observations from figure 8*

- Many of the efforts to ensure inclusion do not cater specifically to the disenfranchised groups, but actually simplify engagement for **all** citizens.
- Other efforts to ensure that information, consultation and active participation include the introduction of political subjects in education, starting at elementary school level (Austria) and the use of new technologies especially for information targeted at youth, often carrying non-government branding (UK, EU Commission).

**Reasons for non-engagement for the able but unwilling, and how to tackle them**

**Figure 9. Able but unwilling: reasons why not to engage**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low interest in policy and/or politics</td>
<td>77.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low trust in the use government makes of citizens’ input</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of time / other priorities</td>
<td>36.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>See no personal gain of engagement</td>
<td>22.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convinced their interest will be protected by others</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content with current policies</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsatisfied with tools available for consultation or participation</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Observations from figure 9*

- By far the most important reason for the ‘able but unwilling’ not to engage in policy making is a low interest in policy and politics (77.3%).
- A polarization between countries on ‘low trust in the use governments will make of the citizens’ input’ 50% of countries see this as a very important reason, whereas 40.9% of countries see it as of no or very low importance.

**Figure 10. Able but unwilling – government efforts to ensure inclusion….**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In information</th>
<th>In consultation and participation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Provide information in alternative venues (pharmacy, tv etc)</td>
<td>Support organisations with high support under the unengaged (47.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(68,2%)</td>
<td>Design activities in an interesting and ‘fun’ way (47.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use trusted intermediaries (68,2%)</td>
<td>Design participation in a way that citizens can gain skills from it (26,1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide information in convenient format (podcasts etc) (63,6%)</td>
<td>No efforts (26,1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Packaging information with other services (45,5%)</td>
<td>Other effort (8,7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other effort (45,5%)</td>
<td>Reward participants financially or with non-monetary benefits (4,4%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Observations from figure 10*

- Six countries indicated they are not doing anything to ensure inclusion of the ‘able but unwilling’ in consultation and active participation processes, and one country did not respond to this question at all.
• Other efforts to ensure inclusion of the ‘able but unwilling’ include educational programmes in school to promote interest in politics (Austria).
• Reaching the ‘able but unwilling’ means that engagement needs to be easier and more attractive for them.

**Questions for discussion**

- Is the distinction between ‘able but unwilling’ and ‘willing but unable’ pertinent, as compared to the distinction between typical groups of unengaged (e.g. youth, indigenous peoples, disabled people, senior citizens)?
- How can the barriers (cultural, socio-economical, physical) to engagement be lowered further for the people that are willing, but unable?
- Should governments make more efforts to engage the able, but unwilling? If so, how can the appeal of engagement be strengthened for the ‘able but unwilling’?
ANNEX 1
10 GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR SUCCESSFUL INFORMATION, CONSULTATION AND ACTIVE PARTICIPATION OF CITIZENS IN POLICY MAKING

1. Commitment
Leadership and strong commitment to information, consultation and active participation in policy-making is needed at all levels – from politicians, senior managers and public officials.

2. Rights
Citizens' rights to access information, provide feedback, be consulted and actively participate in policy-making must be firmly grounded in law or policy. Government obligations to respond to citizens when exercising their rights must also be clearly stated. Independent institutions for oversight, or their equivalent, are essential to enforcing these rights.

3. Clarity
Objectives for, and limits to, information, consultation and active participation during policy-making should be well defined from the outset. The respective roles and responsibilities of citizens (in providing input) and government (in making decisions for which they are accountable) must be clear to all.

4. Time
Public consultation and active participation should be undertaken as early in the policy process as possible to allow a greater range of policy solutions to emerge and to raise the chances of successful implementation. Adequate time must be available for consultation and participation to be effective. Information is needed at all stages of the policy cycle.

5. Objectivity
Information provided by government during policy-making should be objective, complete and accessible. All citizens should have equal treatment when exercising their rights of access to information and participation.

6. Resources
Adequate financial, human and technical resources are needed if public information, consultation and active participation in policy-making are to be effective. Government officials must have access to appropriate skills, guidance and training as well as an organisational culture that supports their efforts.

7. Co-ordination
Initiatives to inform, request feedback from and consult citizens should be co-ordinated across government units to enhance knowledge management, ensure policy coherence, avoid duplication and reduce the risk of “consultation fatigue” among citizens and civil society organisations. Co-ordination efforts should not reduce the capacity of government units to ensure innovation and flexibility.

8. Accountability
Governments have an obligation to account for the use they make of citizens’ inputs received through feedback, public consultation and active participation. Measures to ensure that the policy-making process is open, transparent and amenable to external scrutiny and review are crucial to increasing government accountability overall.
9. Evaluation
Governments need the tools, information and capacity to evaluate their performance in providing information, conducting consultation and engaging citizens, in order to adapt to new requirements and changing conditions for policy-making.

10. Active citizenship
Governments benefit from active citizens and a dynamic civil society, and can take concrete actions to facilitate access to information and participation, raise awareness, strengthen citizens’ civic education and skills, as well as to support capacity-building among civil society organisations.