

# Tools for keeping IWRM strategic planning on track

How do you ensure that the process of formulating your Integrated Water Resources Management plan or strategy<sup>1</sup> moves forward smoothly and includes all the steps needed to pave the way for successful implementation and, ultimately, to catalyze positive change? The following brief describes how two project management tools—indicators and checklists—can help. The brief builds on the basic steps introduced in the Process section of *Catalyzing Change: A Handbook for Developing Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) and Water Efficiency Strategies* (pp. 26 – 37).

This brief is intended to help those responsible for formulating IWRM and water efficiency strategies to define useful indicators and checklists in order to assess and guide their activities.

Ideally indicators should be defined before actual strategy formulation begins and included in the terms of reference (ToR) or project guidelines, but they can be usefully introduced at almost any stage of the process.

<sup>1</sup> We use the term "strategy" as shorthand for all IWRM strategies and plans.

## Different types of indicators to meet different needs

This brief describes how to define indicators and checklists for monitoring the strategy formulation process. This is quite a different task from defining indicators to be used for monitoring and evaluating outcomes and impacts of strategy implementation. Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) indicators for implementation are addressed in a separate brief (technical brief #3). Below are some of the differences between the type of indicators discussed here and the type of indicators used in M&E during the implementation phase of the strategy.

Indicators for project management during strategy formulation	Indicators for M&E during implementation
Short-term	Short-, medium- and long-term
Defined by those directly involved in formulating the strategy	Defined through participation of a range of stakeholders
Measures progress against the formulation team's ToR or project guidelines	Measures progress against objectives and goals defined in the strategy
Aim is to ensure that the strategy formulation process moves forward smoothly and includes all the necessary elements for successful implementation	Aim is to ensure that the strategy has the desired outcomes and impacts on the ground
Used to refine the process of formulating the strategy	Used to refine the strategy itself

## How to define indicators to support strategy formulation

To develop appropriate indicators, the first question to ask is: What are the key steps in formulating the strategy? Box 8 of *Catalyzing Change* (p. 33), “The foundations of a successful strategy”, can serve as a useful starting point in answering this question:

- Agreeing on goals and targets.
- Laying down a framework for better decision-making on an on-going basis.
- Linking to broader development goals and national development planning processes.
- Anticipating capacity needs and making adequate investments in capacity building.
- Involving and gaining the support stakeholders, including women and the poor.
- Allocating sufficient human and financial resources to the process.
- Setting a timetable for implementation with milestones and targets.
- Putting into place monitoring and evaluation mechanisms that will feed back into the process.

The idea is to define indicators or checklists for those steps that the team sees as crucial to the success of the strategy, not for each and every step in the process. Deciding what needs to be monitored and how, means first determining what is important and useful to know. Another question to ask when making this determination is: Where are the potential stumbling blocks? Here, the chapter in *Catalyzing Change* on addressing stumbling blocks (pp. 34–37) and the recommendations for avoiding non-action offered in the final section of the handbook (pp. 40–41) can provide some guidance.

Once the team has identified the key steps in the process that merit monitoring, the next question is: How do you verify that these steps have been performed adequately? Answering this question involves two parts: (1) defining the actual indicator/checklist item and (2) identifying the source(s) of verification. For example, the checklist item for agreeing on goals and targets might be defined as agreement by the steering committee and management team on a logical framework. The source of verification might be minutes from meetings of these two groups.

### Indicators or checklists: Whatever gets the job done

Indicators should be as simple and easy to apply as possible. In some cases a well-defined checklist can be enough, as long as the points on the list are specific enough to ensure that minimum quality criteria are met. For example, “Stakeholders meaningfully involved” is obviously not specific enough to be of much value. To be useful, this checklist item (or indicator) would need to define who the stakeholders are, at what stages in the strategy formulation process they need to be involved, and what qualifies as “meaningfully”. By forcing the project team to define terms and wrestle with quality control issues up front, the exercise of defining indicators/checklists in and of itself makes for a better and more efficient strategy formulation process.

When deciding between checklists and indicators, consider the minimum amount of information the team needs to do its job well. A checklist item is in essence a question to which the answer is either yes or no. Indicators provide more nuanced information and hence demand some degree of analysis. Is it enough to know that a step took place? If so, a checklist is the appropriate tool. Or is it necessary to measure more specifically what was achieved—how much, to what degree—in which case, an indicator is called for.

Indicators can be quantitative or qualitative—again, the choice should depend on the type of information needed. Traditionally there has been a bias in favour of quantitative

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indicators, but in some cases a qualitative indicator may be more useful. In the example given above, the question was how to measure “meaningful” stakeholder involvement. One way would be to measure the number of stakeholder forums held and the number of participants from different stakeholder groups and compare to set targets—here “meaningful” would be defined in terms of numbers (quantitative). Another way would be to survey stakeholder groups to gauge whether they *perceived* their involvement as meaningful—that

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### Sample set of indicators to support strategy formulation

The table offers a hypothetical set of indicators to support strategy formulation. It is intended as an example, not as a recommendation. The stages chosen for monitoring and the types of indicators/checklists selected should depend on the particular

circumstances of the country—its priorities, strategy process, resources and limitations.

In addition to defining indicators, the table specifies sources of verification and when the indicator should be applied. To

STEPS IDENTIFIED AS CRITICAL TO STRATEGY SUCCESS	INDICATORS/CHECKLIST ITEMS
1. High-level political support secured	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Memorandum of Understanding or letter of commitment from government in place</li> </ul>
2. Political awareness of water as an indispensable element for economic & social development raised	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Briefing on value of strategy process attended by high-level government representatives from key ministries (finance, environment, tourism, agriculture, energy, health, industry)</li> </ul>
3. Stakeholder concerns & priorities incorporated into strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“Satisfactory” rating from stakeholder representatives on adequacy of stakeholder participation</li> </ul>
4. Capacity building/institutional strengthening needs identified	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>National capacity inventory &amp; institutional assessments performed</li> </ul>
5. Appropriate plan formulated	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Appropriate capacity-building/institutional strengthening plan incorporated into strategy</li> </ul>
6. Knowledge base established to feed into strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Baseline assessment of physical water resources by basin performed</li> <li>Baseline assessment of water decision-making processes performed.</li> </ul>
7. Financing secured for first 5 years of implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Agreement from Ministry of Finance on budget allocation</li> </ul>
8. Financing plan for next 5 years in place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Potential funding sources identified</li> </ul>
9. M & E system developed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Appropriate indicators defined for key strategy goals &amp; objectives</li> </ul>
10. Links to broader development goals & plans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strategy linked to Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP), National Sustainable Development Plan (NSDP) &amp; National Biodiversity Action Plan (NBAP)</li> </ul>
11. Lays groundwork for better decision-making on an on-going basis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strategy defines medium &amp; long-term goals towards sustainable development, management &amp; use</li> </ul>
12. Feasibility check	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Match between objectives, goals &amp; resources</li> </ul>

their concerns were heard and issues adequately addressed through the strategy formulation process (qualitative). This would take more time and thought, but in the end may be a worthwhile investment given the importance of stakeholder buy-in for successful implementation.

present a complete picture of how these indicators function within the formulation process, it would also need to define targets, specify time frames, and state who is responsible, how the

information collected will be used, by whom, and in what form they will receive it (graph, written or verbal report, etc.). Notice that this set contains a mix of qualitative indicators and checklist items.

SOURCE OF VERIFICATION	WHEN TO APPLY
Official government record	Before formulation process begins
Minutes from briefing	Beginning of process
Survey of stakeholder representatives	After initial draft completed
Report	Beginning of process
Evaluation of plan by external expert	After initial draft completed & if changes made, again before strategy is finalized
Database	Beginning of process
Report	
Official government record	After initial draft completed
Strategy financing plan	After initial draft completed
Evaluation of M & E plan by external expert	After initial draft completed & if changes made, again before strategy is finalized
Agreement (evaluation of strategy draft) by chairs of PRSP, NSDP and NBAP	After initial draft completed
Strategy document	After initial draft completed & if changes made, again before strategy is finalized
Strategy logframe	After initial draft completed & if changes made, again before strategy is finalized

## Putting indicators and checklists into action

To be effective, indicators and checklists must be included in the project plan. This means deciding at what point in the process the indicator or checklist should come into play. At a specific stage? At regular intervals? When the initial formulation of the strategy is complete?

Also it needs to be clear who will be responsible for applying the indicator or checklist and who will act on the resulting information—will it be an individual, a group, or the whole team? In general, information should be collected and acted upon by the lowest possible level and only reported to higher levels as necessary. However, in the case of small project teams, having the whole team review the results from priority indicators and agree on what action to take is one way of building in accountability. In addition, the ensuing dialogue among team members can lead to better use of the information and more creative problem solving.

### The challenges of self-monitoring: Ensuring accuracy and action

Ensuring that problems are reported and that information is acted upon are the two biggest challenges of this type of self-monitoring. Good indicators and checklists should have built in accountability mechanisms. There are several ways to build in accountability:

- Incorporate the agreed upon indicators and checklists into the team's ToR and have it approved by the steering committee or higher authority.
- Make the team responsible as a body for reviewing the results from key indicators and for deciding how to act.
- Ensure that the individual or group responsible for applying the indicator has a vested interest in accurate reporting (or at least not a vested interest in inaccurate reporting).
- Build in some degree of redundancy by having more than one person responsible for applying the same indicator.
- Schedule periodic reporting to a higher authority or representative stakeholder group on key issues being monitored.
- Involve an appropriate expert from outside the process in the application of key indicators (see items 2, 4, 7, and 8 of the Table).
- Foster an environment where team members are rewarded for identifying and solving problems as well as achieving targets.

A complementary mix of the above measures is likely to yield the best results.

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## Key lessons

- Define indicators to monitor crucial steps in the process or avoid potential problems. It is not desirable to develop an indicator for everything.
- Ensure the time and resources devoted to the application of an indicator make sense in relation to the importance of what it is being monitored.
- Keep indicators as simple as possible. In some cases a checklist may be just as good if not better.
- Agree on indicators at the outset of the process, with buy-in from all relevant members of the formulation team and approval from a higher authority to ensure accountability.
- Make clear who is responsible for applying the indicator and how the resulting information will be used in the process—who needs it when.
- Try to avoid vague or highly subjective terms when defining indicators or checklist items.

Indicators and checklists, as described here, can make for a more efficient strategy formulation process and help lay the groundwork for successful implementation, BUT teams should beware of focusing too much attention on the tools to the detriment of the end result. It can be easy to get caught up in the details of the process and lose sight of the ultimate goal—to catalyze a move towards more sustainable and integrated approaches to water resources development, management and use.

## Resources and further reading

Dalal-Clayton and Bass (2002). *Sustainable Development Strategies – A Resource Book*. [www.nssd.net/res\\_book.html](http://www.nssd.net/res_book.html)

OECD (2001). *The DAC Guidelines: Strategies for Sustainable Development*. [www.oecd.org/dataoecd/34/10/2669958.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/34/10/2669958.pdf)

Swanson, Pintér, et al. (2002). *National Strategies for Sustainable Development Challenges, Approaches and Innovations in Strategic and Co-ordinated Action Based on a 19-country Analysis*. [www.iisd.org/publications/pub.aspx?id=640](http://www.iisd.org/publications/pub.aspx?id=640)

UN DESA (2002). *Guidance in preparing a national sustainable development strategy: managing sustainable development in the new millennium*. [www.un.org/esa/sustdev/publications/nsds\\_guidance.pdf](http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/publications/nsds_guidance.pdf)

### About the Catalyzing Change Series

The brief is part of a series of policy and technical briefs designed to help countries accelerate their efforts to achieve the action target for the preparation of IWRM and water efficiency strategies and plans set by the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) and reinforced by the 2005 World Summit. The series tackles key issues and potential stumbling blocks and attempts to give countries at the beginning of the process the benefit of lessons learned from those further down the path.

The series complements *Catalyzing Change: A Handbook for Developing Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) and Water Efficiency Strategies*. The handbook and all associated briefs can be downloaded from [www.gwpforum.org](http://www.gwpforum.org) or hard copies can be requested from [gwp@gwpforum.org](mailto:gwp@gwpforum.org).

The briefs in this series are intended to be dynamic rather than static documents. We will continue to update and improve them based on your input. Please send comments and questions to Christie Walkuski at [walkuski@iri.columbia.edu](mailto:walkuski@iri.columbia.edu).