	2A
EFFECTIVENESS	**Principle 5. Clear roles and responsibilities**

Target group / Relevant stakeholder: National Policy-Makers, Municipal Governments, Regulators, Urban Water Utilities, Medium Water Utilities, Rural Service Providers, Watershed or River Basin Organisations, User Groups, Networks or Platforms, and/or Private Sector

DESCRIPTION

Clearly allocate and distinguish roles and responsibilities for water policy making, policy implementation, operational management and regulation, and foster coordination across these responsible authorities (OECD, 2024, 20).

EXPECTED RESULTS

Outputs:
- Specifications on the allocation of roles and responsibilities, across all levels of government and water-related institutions in regard to water (OECD, 2024, 20):
    - Policy making, especially priority setting and strategic planning.
    - Policy implementation especially financing and budgeting, data and information, stakeholder engagement, capacity development and evaluation.
    - Operational management, especially service delivery, infrastructure operation and investment.
    - Regulation and enforcement, especially tariff setting, standards, licensing, monitoring and supervision, control and audit, and conflict management.
- Identification and address of gaps, overlaps and conflicts of interest through effective coordination at and across all levels of government (OECD, 2024, 20).

CONDITIONS FOR SUCCESS

- Clear legal and policy frameworks outlining the rights and responsibilities of various actors in water governance, including functions such as accountability that require collaboration beyond individual institutions.
- Transparent and accessible knowledge systems.
- Inclusive participatory processes engaging diverse stakeholders.
- Robust institutional arrangements that define authority and rules, while allowing flexibility to adapt to changing conditions.
- Adequate resources to support stakeholders' functions.
- Strong connectivity between institutional levels and upstream regions.
- Enhanced capacity of actors to implement effective measures.

BARRIERS

- Lack of shared commitment and understanding of roles and risks, contested definitions, and governance frameworks, alongside insufficient political will to enact roles.
- Complexity of water governance challenges and limited understanding of the political nature of water issues.
- Ambiguous authority structures, with inconsistencies or contradictions in role definitions that dominant stakeholders may exploit, exacerbating conflicts among local water actors.
- Over-reliance on technocratic bureaucracy.
- Limited transparency and stakeholder involvement.
- Economic and financial constraints.
- Capacity and skills limitation: Insufficiently trained staff may hinder the effective fulfilment of roles and responsibilities.
- Cultural values and norms, patronage patterns, and deeply entrenched power imbalances.

- Limited experience and expectations: Lack of awareness regarding the roles and responsibilities of state and non-state actors in water governance.
- Increasing decentralisation in many countries complicates the recognition of respective responsibilities and revenue sources for national and sub-national governments.
- Misaligned donor support leading to overlapping mandates and responsibilities.

SOLUTIONS

- Strengthened institutional capacity and processes while respecting the inherent dynamics of the governance system.
- Whole-of-government approach can maximise policy and institutional coherence across roles and responsibilities: Water governance operates as a system involving a wide range of actors, institutions, information flows, and patterns of influence and incentives.
- Coordination among stakeholders.
- Equitable participation in water governance decision-making processes.
- Enhanced accountability.
- Clarification of the institutional accountability framework.
- Investment in political economy and governance analysis to better understand the diverse perspectives of water stakeholders.
- Informing citizens of their rights and responsibilities regarding water as a public good and in service delivery.

EXAMPLES

"You Write Water, You Read Democracy": The Role of Citizen Engagement in Spain's Public Water Management

SDGs linked

6 CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION | 10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES | 11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES | 12 RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION | 17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS

Water risks

The Water Observatory of Terrassa (OAT) emerged as a citizen-led initiative advocating for the municipalisation of water services as the city's private concession neared expiration. More than securing public management, the initiative sought to embed citizen participation into water governance and move toward the co-production of public policy. These efforts led to the creation of the public utility Taigua in 2018 and the formalisation of OAT as a participatory body. Today, OAT plays a key role in monitoring service performance, advising on policy, and promoting transparency. While the initiative is widely seen as a unique and innovative example of democratic water governance, it remains a work in progress, marked by ongoing efforts to influence strategic decision-making and deepen citizen involvement. Through its inclusive governance structure and sustained mobilisation, OAT continues to push the boundaries of participatory public service management.

Linkages to Governance Principles

Clear roles and responsibilities were established between the city council, Taigua, and OAT, creating a well-defined structure for public oversight. Integrated strategies and local empowerment have strengthened citizens' roles as key actors in water governance. Data and information have been essential in shaping a compelling narrative and mobilising public support. Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms ensure accountability in water services, while participatory processes enhance integrity and transparency by enabling citizens to oversee water management decisions.

REFERENCES

OECD (2024) *A handbook of what works*. OECD iLibrary. https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/urban-rural-and-regional-development/a-handbook-of-what-works_bf54627e-en