



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon EUROPE research and innovation program under grant agreement No. 101086512.



This project was funded by UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) under the UK government's Horizon Europe funding guarantee [grant number 10066637].

**Call: HORIZON-CL6-2022-GOVERNANCE-01**  
**Project 101086512**



**INN WATER**

Promoting social innovation to renew  
multi-level and cross sector water governance

# D6.10: Policy Brief – year 2

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Delivery date: 31/01/2025

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## Document information

<b>Programme</b>	HORIZON Research and Innovation Action - HORIZON-CL6-2022-GOVERNANCE-01-06
<b>Grant Agreement N°</b>	101086512
<b>Project Acronym</b>	<b>InnWater</b>
<b>Project full name</b>	Promoting social INNnovation to renew multi-level and cross sector WATER governance
<b>Start of the project</b>	1 March 2023
<b>Duration</b>	36 months
<b>Project coordination</b>	Natacha Amorsi, Office International de l'Eau , OiEau
<b>Deliverable</b>	<b>D6.10: Policy Brief – year 2</b>
<b>Work Package</b>	<b>WP6: Impact maximisation</b>
<b>Task</b>	<b>Task 6.4: Policy &amp; regulation recommendations</b>
<b>Lead Beneficiary</b>	Stockholm International Water Institute (SIWI)
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<b>Planned Delivery Date</b>	31/12/2024
<b>Actual Delivery Date</b>	31/01/2025
<b>Citation</b>	Jaraiseh ,A., (2024): <i>Policy Brief – year 2</i> , Deliverable D6.10, Public, EU Horizon InnWater Project, Grant agreement No. 101086512
<b>Dissemination Level</b>	<b>Public</b>

## Revision history

Version	Date	Author(s)/Contributor(s)	Comments
<b>V0</b>	12/11/2024	Alice JARAISEH (SIWI)	Outline approved by OiEau
<b>V1</b>	16/12/2024	Alice JARAISEH (SIWI)	First version submitted for review
<b>V2</b>	18/12/2024	Chiara Natalie FOCACCI (EUI)	Review
<b>V3</b>	14/01/2025	Julie MAGNIER (OiEau)	Review
<b>FV</b>	31/01/2025	Alice JARAISEH (SIWI)	Last version

## Related deliverables

This deliverable is primarily building on the deliverables in Work Package 3 Quintuple Helix Trust & Engagement and more specifically:

D3.1 Citizen Engagement in Europe in the 21st Century – explaining the Quintuple Helix and the importance of a nexus approach to inclusive citizen engagement.

D3.2 InnWater Citizen Engagement Methodology A practical guidance tool and analysis framework for the creation of River Basin Water Forums – presenting the road map for a contextualised process at the local level building on the framework of the ladder of engagement and applying an accountability approach.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This policy brief aims to disseminate relevant findings from the InnWater project in its second year of implementation to policymakers at local, national, and EU levels. As part of the broader objective to foster sustainable multi-level and cross-sectoral water governance through social innovation and tailored governance tools, this deliverable seeks to provide targeted policy recommendations for inclusive citizen engagement and social innovation in water governance embedded in the EU [Water Framework Directive](#).

The policy brief builds on earlier InnWater deliverables, specifically leveraging Deliverables 3.1 Citizen Engagement in the 21st Century<sup>1</sup> and the D3.2 The InnWater Citizen Engagement Methodology A practical guidance tool and analysis framework for the creation of River Basin Water Forums<sup>2</sup>. Additionally, insights from Task 2.2 “Identification and characterization of effective governance practice and solutions”, informed the content of this policy brief. An analysis of how citizen engagement can help achieve the Sustainable Development Goals also complemented project deliverables.

The policy brief presents recommendations for policymakers at all levels that would enable effective citizen engagement strategies. It emphasizes the importance of distinguishing citizen engagement activities from the stakeholder engagement process. Moreover, it reinforces the need for decision makers to provide an enabling environment for the citizens to get involved in decision making processes, ensure the sharing of necessary information with them to make well-founded decisions, and building trust by creating a power dynamic where citizens can influence the decisions on what is important for them. By doing so, it provides a foundation for practical application of Article 14 in the Water Framework Directive.

The policy brief aligns with the broader objectives of the InnWater project to foster replicable and sustainable water governance informed by local contexts, through fostering social innovation and tailored tools.

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<sup>1</sup>[Elelman, R. \(2023\): Citizen Engagement in the 21st Century, Deliverable D3.1, Public, EU Horizon InnWater Project, Grant agreement No. 101086512](#)

<sup>2</sup>[Díaz-Pont, J., Jaraiseh, A. \(2024\): The InnWater Citizen Engagement Methodology A practical guidance tool and analysis framework for the creation of River Basin Water Forums #V1. D3.2, Public EU Horizon InnWater Project, Grant agreement No. 101086512](#)

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## ACRONYMS

<b>EC</b>	European Commission
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>OECD</b>	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
<b>PB</b>	Policy Brief
<b>PS</b>	Pilot sites
<b>RBWF</b>	River Basin Water Forums
<b>SDG</b>	Sustainable Development Goal
<b>WFD</b>	Water Framework Directive
<b>WP</b>	Work Package

# THE POLICY BRIEF



Citizen engagement  
# 2.  
➤ Policy Brief

## CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT AND STAKEHOLDERS PARTICIPATION

The conceptualization of InnWater citizen engagement differentiates between stakeholder and citizen engagement [1]. At times, it seems that the expressions “citizen engagement” and “public participation” are used in a commutable way by the water community, mainly because both processes have the same goal: to increase collaboration between citizens and government so as to improve public services and policy programmes. However, there is a distinction between the two concepts as engagement requires an active, intentional dialogue between residents and public decision-makers often initiated in a top-down process by the government, whereas participation is more often a bottom-up approach initiated by the interest groups.

Some of the **main challenges with citizen engagement** are:

- To identify what is most important for the citizens to motivate them to engage,
- To offer the information in a comprehensive way, facilitating the ground to make well-founded decisions.

## POLITICAL FRAMEWORK

The primary legislation of relevance to citizen engagement in water at the EU level is the **Water Framework Directive** [2]. It establishes a framework for Community action in the field of water policy. Article 14 states that the success of this Directive relies on close cooperation and coherent action at Community, Member State, and local level as well as on information, consultation, and involvement of the public, including users.

This can be illustrated by the World Bank’s accountability framework which distinguishes between the long route of accountability and the short route (Figure 1). **Accountability is viewed as the democratic principle whereby elected officials and those in charge of providing access to water account for their actions and answer to those they serve** [3].

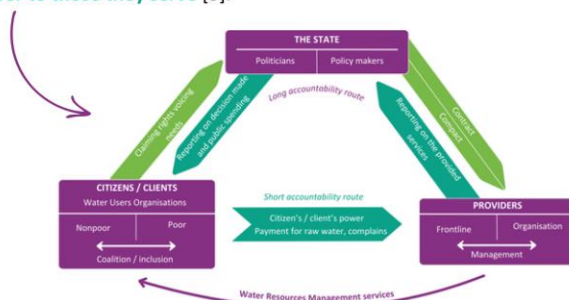


Figure 1 : Graphic representation of the accountability triangle

The overall objective of InnWater Policy Brief is to highlight how InnWater solutions can support water related policies implementation and formulate recommendations for their update. This document presents the highlights of the full version of the Policy Brief #2.

Three Policy Briefs will be delivered over the course of the project with different focuses:

- #1 Water governance challenges overview, Europe at a fork in the River A changing water context, with a general approach to set the water governance scene.
- #2 Effective citizen engagement strategies, addressing international policies (this one).
- #3 Synthesis of policy relevant learnings from the all the project’s results, focussing on European water related policies.

### Box #1

#### Definition of concepts

**Citizen engagement**

Processes aimed at decision making, as well as agenda setting and policy making that base their activities on the consultation and involvement of individuals, regardless of their age, gender, sexual orientation, religious, and political affiliations.

**Public participation**

All processes in which any interested and/or affected party, including institutions and organisations, whether governmental or non-governmental, from civil society, academia, the media, or the private sector, can be involved in the policy cycle and in service design and delivery.

The **OECD Principles on Water Governance** set the standards for more effective, efficient, and inclusive design and implementation of water policies and address issues of trust and inclusion.

Principle 10 speaks of the importance of **paying special attention to underrepresented categories, including but not limited to youth, the poor, women, indigenous people, and domestic users**, and Principle 11 highlights the need of **promoting non-discriminatory participation in decision making across people, especially vulnerable groups and people living in remote areas**. The enhanced Water governance Assessment Framework developed by the InnWater project further emphasizes the importance of integrated strategies and local empowerment and the engagement of vulnerable categories as main building blocks for sustainability and resilience.



Figure 2 : Enhanced governance framework with building blocks promoting citizen engagement.

**Trust and engagement** are of particular importance [4]. Successful policy making demands existence of continuity and public trust to nourish this continuity. Trust has also been identified by the OECD as a prerequisite to achieving the **Sustainable Development Goals** (SDGs).

As the SDGs represent a major systemic change, achieving them requires support and participation from citizens and other stakeholders at local, national and global levels. **Communication** is also important to raise awareness, build trust by demonstrating value, and inspire solidarity, and collective action.

## INN WATER ROAD MAP

InnWater has delivered a road map to citizen engagement at the local level. It outlines a step-by-step process for citizen engagement building **on the framework of the ladder of citizen participation where engagement is linked to citizen control and power in relation to decision-making** [4]. (Figure 3).



A citizen engagement process is composed of a combination of tools and methods from the different levels of participation depending on the local context and the objectives of the process. In the InnWater project, the citizen engagement methodology builds on answering the questions : why, what for, who and how to involve citizens in local water planning and decision making.



## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

InnWater work on citizen engagement points at a full spectrum of issues that have policy implications at different levels and reinforce that a **nexus approach** is recommended as stakeholders from other sectors play a key role in relation to water governance. Citizen engagement is highly context-dependent and therefore it is important to fit **'policies to places'** for their successful application.

**Gender equality and social inclusion** should be at the heart of citizen engagement too, with special effort targeted towards underrepresented categories such as women and the youth, but also marginalised and vulnerable groups such as ethnic minorities and people with disabilities.

## EU LEVEL

The WFD as the primary legislation of relevance to citizen engagement in water at the EU level, is not only dealing with water as an essential resource for human consumption but also considers its pivotal role in maintaining environmental health, sustaining food production, and powering energy generation. To this end it is recommended that:

- **Decisions** at EU level including these concerning **environmental health, food production and energy** generation must address **water resources as well**.
- **Farmers and landowners** are focal groups of citizens and important stakeholders of the socio-political helix. This requires that all decisions involving farmers and landowners, such as the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy, should also consider the repercussions on water resources.
- Water is a vital resource for achieving the Green Deal targets. Efforts that address **water-related climate challenges and ecosystem degradation** should therefore be **highlighted and communicated widely** to raise awareness and foster cross-sector collaboration.

## NATIONAL LEGISLATION

The enhanced water governance framework of InnWater establishes engagement of vulnerable categories as well as integrated strategies and local empowerment as important aspects for sustainability and resilience. Political will and leadership at the national level would help to drive **inclusive processes**:

- National legislation recognises the **importance of community involvement** in water and land management efforts, to enable structured and inclusive citizen engagement.
- An institution with a clear mandate that focusses on **both the natural environment and the surrounding socio-economic context** and with sufficient funding allocated to sustain engagement processes, including logistical expenses.
- Free and open **access to information** including objective and reliable data provided by independent and trustworthy experts. Employment of **digital communication** tools for continuity, dissemination and outreach.

## LOCAL LEVEL

Citizen engagement is only successful when applied within the local context, ensuring that projects are **inclusive and accessible** to all members of the community. This is critical for fostering a strong sense of **ownership and responsibility**. Recommendations include:

- Adapting the engagement processes to the local context in terms of language, culture, and socio-political idiosyncrasies and tailor awareness raising initiatives to generate interest of citizens to become involved. Clear information on how citizen engagement will be used in the decision-making process and the implementation activities.
- Identifying key stakeholders and involve affected parties when initiating the process, establishing a balance between autonomy and elected representative entities to ensure completion of the citizen engagement process. Also eliminating barriers to engagement and participation for all vulnerable groups which could open doors to new partnerships and help to motivate political commitment and foster leadership for social inclusion.
- Use necessary tools and procedures to deal with conflict of interest and avoid "capture" of certain groups and lobbies.

## Box #2 ERSAR's regulatory model and citizen engagement

ERSAR is the regulator of the water and waste services and the competent authority for drinking water quality in Portugal. ERSAR's regulatory model is based on levelling the asymmetries of information between operators and consumers by collecting, validating and treating a set of information and making it available to any interested party in a way that is intelligible and understandable.

By making information publicly available and transparent, ERSAR contributes for stakeholders' engagement and knowledge to empower them to demand for better and more efficient services. Anyone can access this information in different formats: written reports, online information, infographics, mobile app, excel files, awareness booklets, among other.





ERSAR receives every complaint primary placed on the complaints book of the operator. When receiving these complaints, ERSAR checks initially how the operator has handled the complaint and confirms with the consumer if the solution was the one referred by the operator. Then, ERSAR issues an opinion on each individual complaint, sending it both to the operator and the consumer and asking the operator to adapt its procedure to that opinion.

ERSAR also follows the best practices regarding public consultation in each decision, regulation and recommendation. After finalising the technical documents, it is mandatory for ERSAR to perform a public consultation where anyone is allowed and invited to participate. In the end of the public consultation, ERSAR analyses every opinion received and issues a final analysis report, identifying areas that have been incorporated in the new version of the document.

### Realisation

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- Graphic design: Ananda Rohn & Elisa Bezier (OiEau)
- Date: January 2025

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### About InnWater

InnWater aims to foster sustainable multi-level and cross sector water governance through social innovation. To this end, InnWater is developing a set of tools and services adapted to local needs for the benefit of water stakeholders, including a governance assessment matrix, guidance for stakeholders' engagement, as well as simulations linking water resources management and economic activities. To achieve its goals, InnWater engages with pilot site communities, co-developing tools to address specific water challenges like pricing policies, water quality, and infrastructure investment.



- Pilot Site #1: France, La Réunion Island  
Economic focus
- Pilot Site #2: Italy, Middle Brenta Basin  
Ecosystem services & Drinking water sector focuses
- Pilot Site #3: Spain, Figueres  
Water scarcity focus
- Pilot Site #4: United Kingdom, West Country

Figure 4 : InnWater pilot sites maps

InnWater is coordinated by the International Office for Water and run from 2023 to 2026.

### References

- [1] Elelman, R, (2023): Citizen Engagement in the 21st Century, Deliverable D3.1, Public, EU Horizon InnWater Project, Grant agreement No. 10108651
- [2] DIRECTIVE 2000/60/EC OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 23 October 2000 establishing a framework for Community action in the field of water policy
- [3] UNDP-SIWI Water Governance Facility & UNICEF (2015). WASH and Accountability: Explaining the Concept. Accountability for Sustainability Partnership: UNDP-SIWI Water Governance Facility and UNICEF. Stockholm and New York: SIWI and UNICEF
- [4] Díaz-Pont, J., Jaraiseh, A. (2024): The InnWater Citizen Engagement Methodology A practical guidance tool and analysis framework for the creation of River Basin Water Forums #V1. D3.2, Public EU Horizon InnWater Project, Grant agreement No. 101086512



## ANNEXES

### 1. ANNEX 1: BACKGROUND INFORMATION

#### 1.1 InnWater in brief

InnWater aims to foster sustainable multi-level and cross sector water governance through social innovation. To this end, InnWater is developing a set of tools and services adapted to local needs for the benefit of water stakeholders, including a governance assessment matrix, guidance for stakeholders' engagement, as well as simulations linking water resources management and economic activities. To achieve its goals, InnWater engages with 5 pilot site communities in diverse EU regions (see figure 1), co-developing tools to address specific water challenges like pricing policies, water quality, and infrastructure investment. The effort is supported by EU's Horizon Europe program and aims to create replicable water governance models, with outcomes informing policy at various scales.

Figure 1: InnWater Pilot Sites map



#### 1.2 The context of the Policy Brief

This policy brief (PB) is the second of three deliverables under Task T6.4 Policy & Regulation Recommendations Regulation in Work Package (WP) 6 – Impact Maximization of the InnWater project. As part of this, three PBs (deliverables D6.9, D6.10 and 6.11) will be produced to disseminate the results of InnWater project, one in each year of activity. The PBs synthesize relevant findings from each year of the project and target policymakers at the local, national, and EU levels. Taken together, the PBs will provide targeted policy and regulatory pathways and

recommendations for improvements and innovations in water governance to achieve EU policy objectives and elaborate ways to mainstream and expand applications of the water governance toolbox and platforms developed within the InnWater project.

The first PB focused on specific water policy challenges as experienced over the Pilot Sites (PS) and their changing nature due to shifting local and global water priorities. It also provided policy relevant applications for the tools and models developed in InnWater, thereby allowing local governance actors elsewhere in Europe to replicate the suite of InnWater solutions for their specific context.

This second PB aims to disseminate relevant findings and specific recommendations on citizen engagement to policymakers at local, national, and EU levels.

This deliverable contains a 4-pages compressed format of the Policy Brief for dissemination, and an in-depth synthesis framing the results that led to the policy recommendations detailed in the Annexes. Annex 1 presents the context, while Annex 2 contains the detailed report including the background to citizen engagement and stakeholder participation in water management followed by the findings of InnWater’s Deliverable 3.1 *Citizen Engagement in the 21st Century*<sup>3</sup> and the D3.2 ‘*The InnWater Citizen Engagement Methodology: A practical guidance tool and analysis framework for the creation of River Basin Water Forums*’<sup>4</sup>, and informed by Task 2.2 “Identification and characterization of effective governance practice and solutions”, and how they translate into concrete policy recommendations. It concludes with a short description of anticipated content of the third and final PB. This deliverable as well as a standalone 4-pages Policy Brief will be available on the InnWater website<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> [Elelman, R. \(2023\): Citizen Engagement in the 21st Century, Deliverable D3.1, Public, EU Horizon InnWater Project, Grant agreement No. 101086512](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Díaz-Pont, J., Jaraiseh, A. \(2024\): The InnWater Citizen Engagement Methodology A practical guidance tool and analysis framework for the creation of River Basin Water Forums #V1. D3.2, Public EU Horizon InnWater Project, Grant agreement No. 101086512](#)

<sup>5</sup> [www.innwater.eu](http://www.innwater.eu)

## 2. ANNEX 2: DETAILED REPORT

### 2.1 Citizen Engagement in Water

#### 2.1.1 Citizen Engagement and Stakeholder Participation

The conceptualization of InnWater citizen engagement differentiates between stakeholder and citizen engagement in the Quintuple Helix presented in D3.1<sup>3</sup>. At times, it seems that the expressions “citizen engagement” and “public participation” are used in a commutable way by the water community, mainly because both processes have the same goal: to increase collaboration between citizens and government to improve public services and policy programmes. However, there is a distinction between the two concepts as engagement requires an active, intentional dialogue between residents and public decision-makers often initiated in a top-down process by the government, whereas participation is more often a bottom-up approach initiated by the interest groups. Citizen engagement is more formal in its structure as the responsibility lies on the government to provide citizens with the necessary tools to get involved in decision-making throughout the project cycle. By doing so, the government also shows a willingness to transfer some of the decision-making power to the citizens to build up trust and ownership among the end-users and ensure longevity of the engagement.

Table 1: Public participation versus citizen engagement

Concept	Definition
Citizen engagement	Processes aimed at decision making, as well as agenda setting and policy making that base their activities on the consultation and involvement of individuals, regardless of their age, gender, sexual orientation, religious, and political affiliations.
Public participation	All processes in which any interested and/or affected party, including institutions and organisations, whether governmental or non-governmental, from civil society, academia, the media, or the private sector, can be involved in the policy cycle and in service design and delivery

Some of the **main challenges with citizen engagement** are:

- To identify what is most important for the citizens to motivate them to engage, and
- Offering the information in a comprehensive way, facilitating the ground to make well-founded decisions.

#### 2.1.2 Political framework

The primary legislation of relevance to citizen engagement in water at the EU level is the Water Framework Directive (WFD, 2000/60/EC)<sup>6</sup>. The main objective of the WFD is to achieve good surface and groundwater water status. The WFD establishes a framework for Community action in the field of water policy. It is stated in Article 14 that the success of this Directive relies on

<sup>6</sup> DIRECTIVE 2000/60/EC OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 23 October 2000 establishing a framework for Community action in the field of water policy

close cooperation and coherent action at Community, Member State, and local level as well as on information, consultation, and involvement of the public, including users. This Article reinforces the need for engaging citizens at user level and enacting policies that ensure government agencies as duty bearers fulfil their obligations to the citizens, the rights holders. The water sector regulatory framework includes the fundamental role of the service providers, which can overlap between the roles of the state and the citizens', especially in the management of water for agriculture where water use is connected to land use and most often interlinked with ownership. The World Bank's accountability framework distinguishes between the long route of accountability and the short route (Figure 1). This is important as **accountability is viewed as the democratic principle whereby elected officials and those in charge of providing access to water account for their actions and answer to those they serve** (UNDP-SIWI, 2015)<sup>7</sup>. In a democracy, citizens provide their political leadership with the authority to govern and expect in return effective governance and public services. This process is usually referred to as the "social contract". Policy makers in the positions of leadership derive their legitimacy from the citizens' acceptance of their authority. Through citizen engagement, they aggregate preferences of citizens and make decisions to meet the citizens' expectations. Policymakers are also largely accountable to citizens for the implications resulting from their decisions. This is called "political accountability". Service providers implement the strategic direction provided by the government and deliver services to the end users. They are accountable directly to the political leadership and only indirectly to the users. However, users may engage with service providers, and exact accountability directly from them. This is the short route of accountability which is referred to as "social accountability".

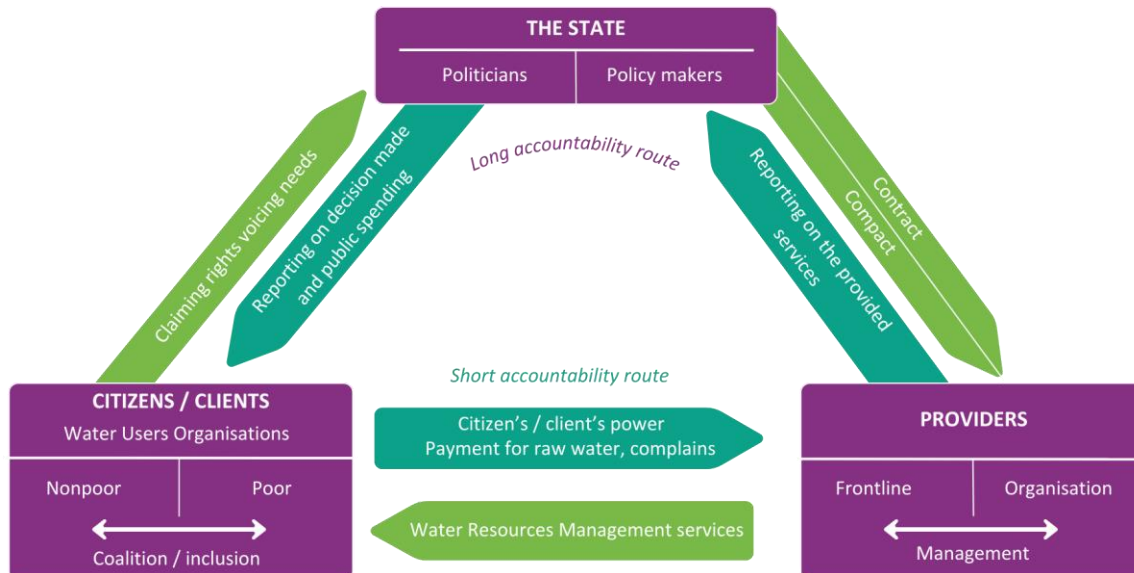


Figure 2 : Accountability triangle

<sup>7</sup> UNDP-SIWI Water Governance Facility & UNICEF (2015). WASH and Accountability: Explaining the Concept. Accountability for Sustainability Partnership: UNDP-SIWI Water Governance Facility and UNICEF. Stockholm and New York: SIWI and UNICEF

### Box 1. ERSAR's regulatory model and citizen engagement

ERSAR is the regulator of the water and waste services and the competent authority for drinking water quality in Portugal. ERSAR's regulatory model is based on levelling the asymmetries of information between operators and consumers by collecting, validating and treating a set of information and making it available to any interested party in a way that is intelligible and understandable. By making information publicly available and transparent, ERSAR contributes for stakeholders' engagement and knowledge to empower them to demand for better and more efficient services. Anyone can access this information in different formats: written reports, online information, infographics, mobile app, excel files, awareness booklets, among other. ERSAR receives every complaint primary placed on the complaints book of the operator. When receiving these complaints, ERSAR checks initially how the operator has handled the complaint and confirms with the consumer if the solution was the one referred by the operator. Then, ERSAR issues an opinion on each individual complaint, sending it both to the operator and the consumer and asking the operator to adapt its procedure to that opinion. ERSAR also follows the best practices regarding public consultation in each decision, regulation and recommendation. After finalising the technical documents, it is mandatory for ERSAR to perform a public consultation where anyone is allowed and invited to participate. In the end of the public consultation, ERSAR analyses every opinion received and issues a final analysis report, identifying areas that have been incorporated in the new version of the document

Citizen engagement is thereby about increasing citizen empowerment and not limited to information sharing. It is a mutual balance of rights and responsibilities. It goes beyond consultation as it gives the citizen an equal standing in shaping the dialogue and is ultimately an opportunity for meaningful influence and contribution. It empowers the citizens and increases their level of control. The OECD Recommendation of the Council on Open Government<sup>8</sup> defines three different levels of citizen involvement in which it describes citizen engagement as the third pillar of citizen participation, after information as the first pillar, and consultation as the second pillar.

The OECD Principles on Water Governance set the standards for more effective, efficient, and inclusive design and implementation of water policies and include a building block of stakeholder engagement (Principle 10). Other building blocks that also reference stakeholder engagement and inclusion are:

- Principle 1. Clear roles and responsibilities
- Principle 2. Appropriate scales within basin systems
- Principle 5. Data and information
- Principle 11. Manage trade-offs

Principle 10 speaks of the importance of **paying special attention to underrepresented categories, including but not limited to youth, the poor, women, indigenous people, and domestic users**, and Principle 11 highlights the need of **promoting non-discriminatory participation in decision making across people, especially vulnerable groups and people living**

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<sup>8</sup> OECD, Recommendation of the Council on Open Government, OECD/LEGAL/0438

**in remote areas.** The enhanced Water governance Assessment Framework developed by the InnWater project further emphasizes the importance of integrated strategies and local empowerment and the engagement of vulnerable categories as main building blocks for sustainability and resilience.

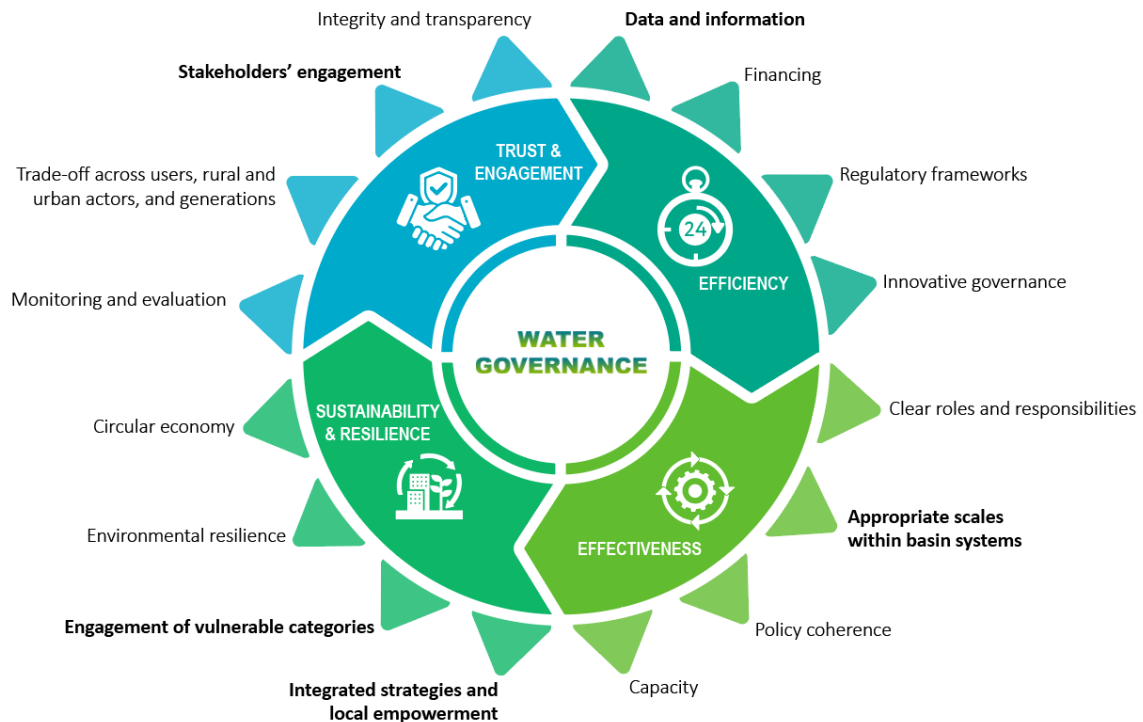


Figure 3 : Enhanced governance framework with building blocks promoting citizen engagement.

Trust and engagement are also of particular importance as has been demonstrated in D3.1<sup>3</sup> where it is concluded that successful policy making demands existence of continuity and public trust to nourish this continuity. Trust has also been identified by the OECD as a prerequisite to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). As the SDGs represent a major systemic change, achieving them requires support and participation from citizens and other stakeholders at local, national and global levels. This can only be achieved if there is trust in multilateralism and international development co-operation. Communication will be important to raise awareness, build trust by demonstrating value, and inspire solidarity, and collective action.

### 2.1.3 Road map to River Basin Water Forums

InnWater has delivered a road map to citizen engagement at the local level<sup>2</sup>. It outlines a step-by-step process for citizen engagement building on **the framework of the ladder of citizen participation where engagement is linked to citizen control and power in relation to decision-making** (Figure 3)<sup>9</sup>. The basic level of engagement is information sharing, giving the citizens accurate and relevant insights about government actions, policies, services, and resources to provide them with the necessary information to hold authorities accountable. The next level of engagement is consultation, which allows the citizens to provide inputs and opinions, without

<sup>9</sup> Arnstein, S (1969). A Ladder Of Citizen Participation, Journal of the American Institute of Planners, 35:4, 216-224, DOI: 10.1080/01944366908977225



any commitment on the government side to consider the outcome of the consultation nor integrate it in the decision-making process. The third level is when the government is committed to consider the feedback from the consultation, so that citizens contribute to the development and implementation of policies, programs, and projects within their communities. The highest level of engagement is co-creation when power and legitimacy are recognised and acknowledged between all actors, so that decisions are made collectively.

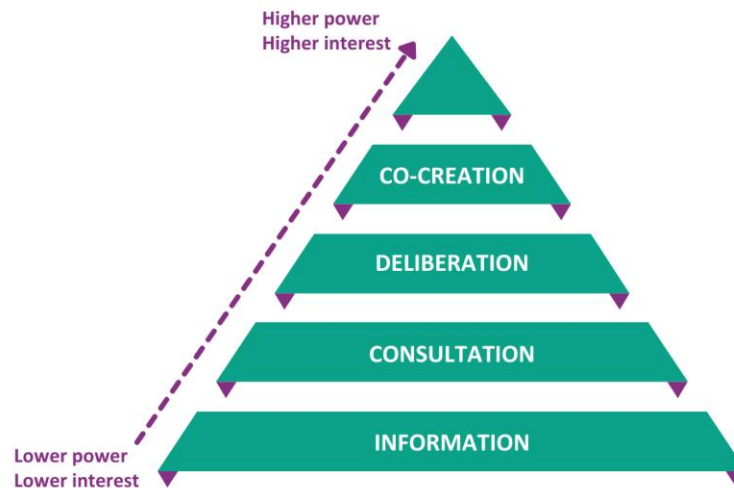


Figure 3: Ladder of engagement

A citizen engagement process will be composed of a combination of tools and methods from the different levels of participation depending on the objectives of the process. The InnWater citizen engagement methodology conceptualises why, what for, who and how to involve citizens in local water planning and decision making. It also focuses on preparing a **Citizen Engagement Roadmap that begins with problem characterization and envisions the creation of a River Basin Water Forum (RBWF)**. The RBWF is here understood as a strategic goal or consolidation of pre-existing structures rather than the formal constitution of an entity. It refers to a power delegation process to harness the knowledge and concerns of citizens and the local community, as well as other organised interests. Finally, it considers the specificities of the diverse Pilot Sites of the project.

#### **2.1.4 Citizen engagement at InnWater Pilot Sites**

The five Pilot Sites of the InnWater project have initiated the application of the methodology for citizen engagement (Figure 4). The internal assessments have identified the main challenges related to empowering citizen engagement locally. Based on these challenges citizen engagement has been framed within the contexts of trust, inclusion and co-creation. A vision of a RBWF is being created and a set of actions will be identified to reach out to the groups to engage. Together with the stakeholders involved in each pilot site, the most appropriate approach will be selected and the implementation of the plan, as well as the monitoring and evaluation mechanisms will be based on the local context.

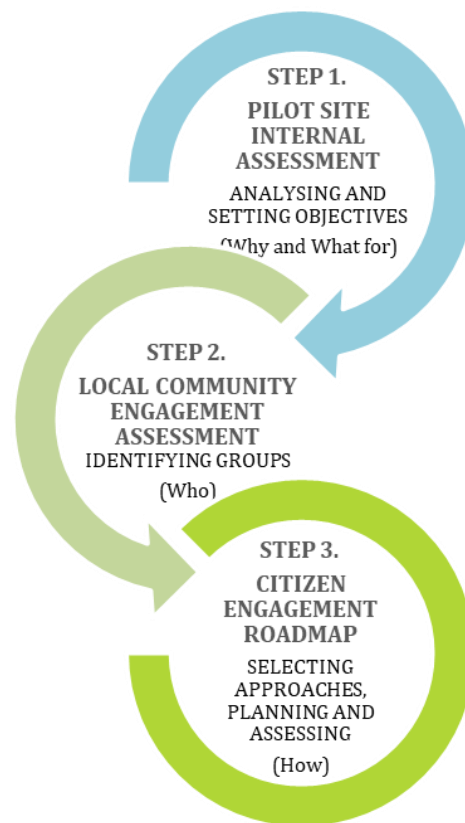


Figure 4: InnWater methodology for Citizen engagement Roadmap

## 2.2 Policy recommendations

InnWater work on citizen engagement and stakeholder participation point at a full spectrum of issues that have policy implications at different levels and reinforce that a nexus approach is recommended as stakeholders from other sectors play a key role in relation to water governance. Farmers, for instance, are a key group since the transformation of the agricultural sector is a crucial factor related to water resilience to climate change. It is also emphasised that citizen engagement is highly context-dependent and therefore **it is important to fit policies to places** for their successful application. Gender equality and social inclusion should be at the heart of citizen engagement, with special efforts targeted towards underrepresented categories such as women and youth, but also marginalised and vulnerable groups such as ethnic minorities and people with disabilities.

### 2.2.1 EU level

The WFD as the primary legislation of relevance to citizen engagement in water at the EU level, is not only dealing with water as an essential resource for human consumption but also considers its pivotal role in maintaining environmental health, sustaining food production, and powering energy generation. To this end it is recommended that:

- Decisions at EU level including these concerning environmental health, food production and energy generation must address water resources as well.

- Farmers and landowners are focal groups of citizens and important stakeholders of the socio-political helix. This requires that all decisions involving farmers and landowners, such as the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy, should also consider the repercussions on water resources.
- As acknowledged during COP 29 in Baku, water plays an important role in climate action. It is therefore also a vital resource for achieving the Green Deal targets. Efforts that address water-related climate challenges and ecosystem degradation should therefore be highlighted and communicated widely to raise awareness and foster cross-sector collaboration.

### **2.2.2 National legislation**

The enhanced water governance framework of InnWater establishes engagement of vulnerable categories as well as integrated strategies and local empowerment as important aspects for sustainability and resilience. Political will and leadership at the national level would help to drive inclusive processes:

- National legislation that recognises the importance of community involvement in water and land management efforts, will enable structured and inclusive citizen engagement.
- An institution with a clear mandate that focusses on both the natural environment and the surrounding socio-economic context and with the sufficient resources also in relation to time and expertise will build up trust and ensure continuity.
- Sufficient funding allocated to sustain engagement processes, including logistical expenses.
- Free and open access to information including objective and reliable data provided by independent and trustworthy experts.
- Employment of digital communication tools for continuity, dissemination and outreach.

### **2.2.3 Local level**

Citizen engagement is only successful when applied within the local context, ensuring that projects are inclusive and accessible to all members of the community. This is critical for fostering a strong sense of ownership and responsibility. Recommendations include:

- Identifying key stakeholders and involve affected parties when initiating the process, establishing a balance between autonomy and elected representative entities to ensure completion of the citizen engagement process.
- Adapting the engagement processes to the local context in terms of language, culture, and socio-political idiosyncrasies and tailor awareness raising initiatives to generate interest of citizens to become involved.
- Clear information on how citizen engagement will be used in the decision-making process and the implementation activities.
- Use necessary tools and procedures to deal with conflict of interest and avoid “capture” of certain groups and lobbies.
- Eliminating barriers to engagement and participation for all vulnerable groups is a key issue and should be prioritised at the local level. Engaging with these groups could open doors to

new partnerships and help to motivate political commitment and foster leadership for inclusive river basin water forums.

## Box 2. Case Study from Reference Guide for Programming

Torre Flavia is one of Italy's most recognized areas for biodiversity and community engagement and is ranked 42nd out of 600 protected sites in Italy. Torre Flavia is a small wetland area located in the outskirts of Rome, Italy, faced significant environmental degradation due to urbanization, which caused the silting up of the marsh and reduced water flow to the area. The area was considered abandoned and in poor condition. Starting in 1997, a multi-stakeholder initiative started raising awareness about the recognized need for intervention to improve wetlands especially through engaging the local community. In 2001, the city implemented a series of hydraulic systems to restore water levels, ensuring the health of the ecosystem and providing a sanctuary for migratory water birds. These measures also contributed to social well-being, as local citizens became more involved in managing and preserving the area.

Key to the initiative's success was its participatory approach, which included engaging the local community through conservation activities. The area became a site for educational projects, involving local schools, volunteer groups, and social cooperatives. Children participate in environmental education, learning about the wetland ecosystem, and contribute to activities like beach cleanups and small-scale conservation efforts. This participatory approach led to significant changes in how the community engaged with the wetland, shifting from a previously low awareness of its ecological value to a strong sense of pride and stewardship among residents. Surveys indicated that local citizens began to view their involvement as a mark of social prestige, contributing to the area's overall rejuvenation.

Several factors contributed to the success of the Torre Flavia project. First, the involvement of a wide range of stakeholders, including local citizens, environmental organizations, and academic institutions, ensured that the wetland's management was both sustainable and socially beneficial. Additionally, the project's alignment with European environmental policies, particularly the Habitats Directive and the Nature 2000 network, provided a solid framework for governance, enhancing its credibility and support at national and regional levels.

However, the project faced challenges, including the high resource demands of the citizen-based approach, which required significant time and energy. Despite these challenges, Torre Flavia showcases how to combine environmental conservation with social and economic development.

## 2.3 Conclusion

The recommendations presented in this second PB will help citizens to become more involved in existing governance systems. Citizen engagement will also provide opportunities to strengthen community networks and cross-sector collaboration. It will contribute to achieving the SDGs, by raising awareness, demonstrating value and building trust to inspire solidarity and collective action. By applying a Gender Equality and Social Inclusion approach, citizen engagement will include also underrepresented groups such as women, as well as vulnerable groups, which is one of the priorities of the European Social Protection and Social Inclusion Process.

The final brief will synthesize policy relevant learnings from the entire project at the EU level. It will draw upon the insights gained across the case studies and governance recommendations developed in task 2.3. It will provide targeted policy and regulatory recommendations for improvements and innovations in water governance to achieve EU policy objectives and elaborate ways forward to mainstream and expand applications of the water governance toolbox and platforms developed in WP2, 3, and 4. This will be connected to high-level workshops led by WAREG featuring water sector regulators and relevant EU institutions (e.g. DG ENV, DG CLIMA, EEA, JRC, etc.) to present results and chart ways forward to exploit project results following conclusion of the programme.

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