

Stakeholders

Stakeholder is a relatively new buzzword these days. The word appears extensively in the planning, formulation, declaration and implementation of all public sector or private sector initiatives or programs covering the whole spectrum of specialties from e-government to education to socio-economic development to public sector reform. Stakeholders also exist on committees and councils. The definition of a stakeholder ranges from “a person or entity that holds part of the bets in a game or contest” to “a person or entity that has a share or an interest in the outcome of a game or contest”. This is not to be confused with a partnership where success or failure reflects on all partners.

The behavior of a stakeholder whether a person or an entity depends largely on the declared or often undeclared intentions of that particular stakeholder. Through our involvement in a number of initiatives, programs, councils and committees over the past few years, we have come across many different types of stakeholders. Here are a few examples:

The positive stakeholder, this is the most constructive type with a clearly declared vested interest in the success of an initiative or program. This type can be relied on to work transparently and tirelessly to remove obstacles and achieve objectives. The majority of stakeholders are of this type.

The negative stakeholder, this type exists purely to complicate the process by constantly throwing obstacles in the path of progress. Their typical shortsighted approach completely disregards what is at stake.

The camouflaged stakeholder, this is the worst possible type. The declared intentions of this type are exactly the opposite to those of a well prepared hidden agenda. This type is also known to suddenly switch agendas at various stages.

Initiatives or programs are quite complex and their success depends on many factors and variables; one factor is the correct and timely identification and labeling of stakeholders at a very early stage. There are many examples of initiatives dragging on for years simply due to the incorrect identification and labeling of stakeholders. Being a stakeholder in a program or an initiative is one thing, realizing the importance of what is really at stake is something completely different.