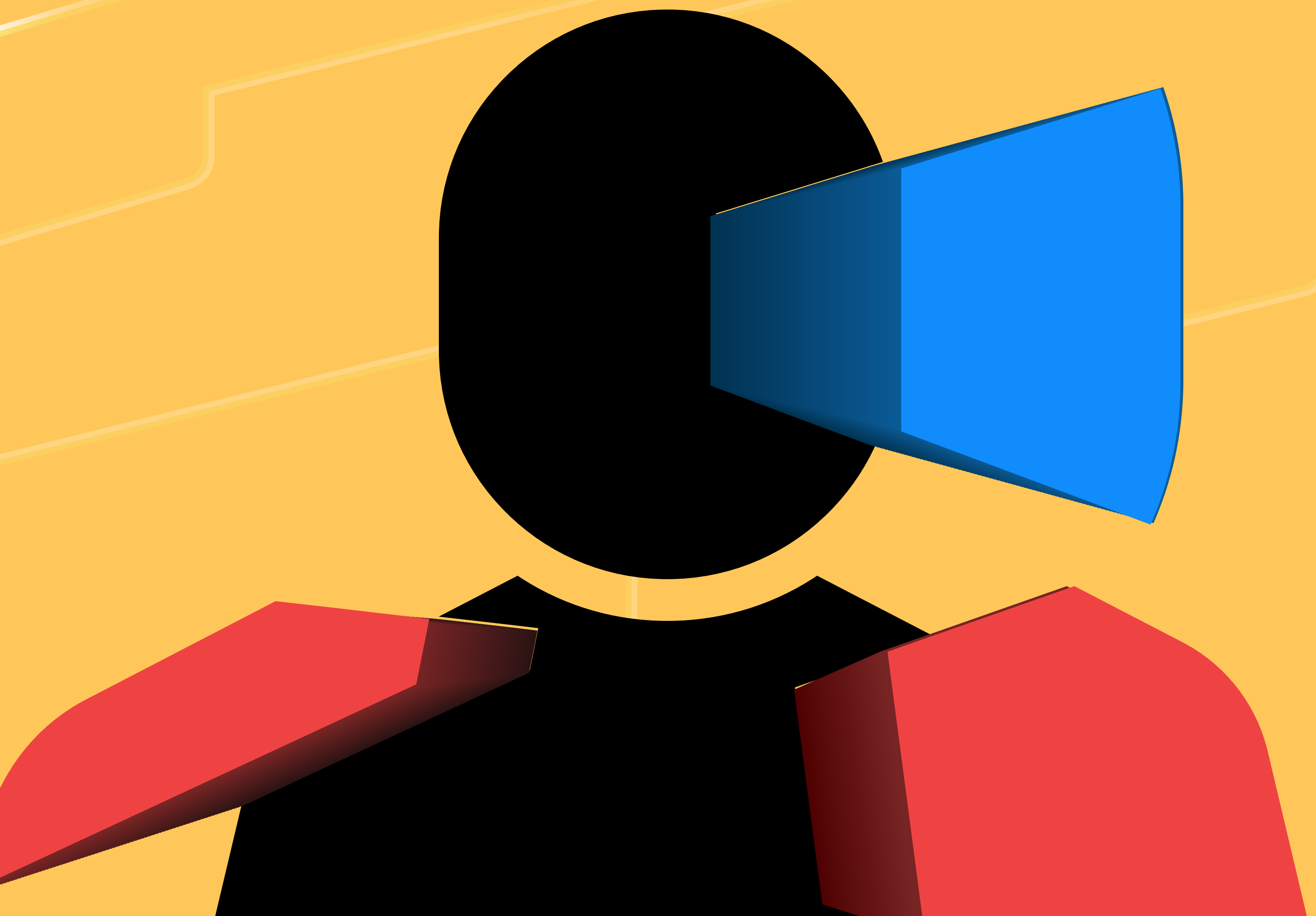
Stakeholder Power & Influence Profiling Tool

A Practical Guide For **Understanding Power, Navigating Influence, And Engaging Government Decision-Makers** With Clarity, Strategy, And Intention.



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INTRODUCTION

Stakeholder Power & Influence Profiling Tool

Systems change initiatives sometimes fail to achieve the desired outcomes not because the issues lack merit, evidence, or urgency but because power is misunderstood.

Governments are not neutral systems. They are made up of individuals who operate within formal rules and informal realities: personal incentives, political loyalties, fears, ambitions, identities, and constraints. Change does not happen simply because the right argument is made; it happens when the right argument reaches the right person, in the right way, at the right moment.

The Stakeholder Power & Influence Profiling Tool is designed to help organisations working on systems change work to move beyond generic engagement with "government" and toward strategic engagement with real people who hold power. It builds on a presentation made by Rakesh Rajani at a learning circle with partners of Co-Impact supported by the Africa Systems Change Community of Practice on the topic "Analysing, Building Power for Systems Change".

What This Tool Is

This tool is a structured method for analysing individual powerholders within government systems, not institutions, and not abstract roles. It helps users systematically understand:

- **Where power actually sits, formally and informally**
- **What motivates or constrains decision-makers**
- **Who influences them and who they are accountable to**
- **How identity, norms, and risk shape their behavior**
- **What messaging, tactics, and messengers are most likely to move them**

The tool transforms scattered knowledge, intuition, and lived experience into shared political intelligence that can guide systems change work.

It is not a one-off questionnaire. It is a living analysis tool that evolves as contexts shift and relationships change.

Why This Tool Is Necessary

Civil society actors frequently face:

- **Closed doors and symbolic consultations**
- **Unpredictable political behavior**
- **Power dynamics that are invisible but decisive**
- **High personal and organisational risk when engaging the government.**

Too often, our systems change strategies rely on assumptions such as:

- **"If the evidence is strong, they will act."**
- **"Government is resistant."**
- **"This official is progressive."**
- **"We just need access."**

This tool responds to a simple but uncomfortable truth:

Power does not respond to facts alone; it responds to incentives, pressure, loyalty, fear, and legitimacy.

These assumptions are costly. They lead to misdirected energy, avoidable backlash, and missed opportunities for influence.

By using this tool, civil society actors can:

- **Avoid treating all powerholders as the same**
- **Identify who can champion change and who will block it**
- **Choose when to persuade, when to pressure, and when to bypass**
- **Reduce risk by anticipating backlash and resistance**
- **Use limited time and resources more strategically**

What Makes This Tool Different

Unlike traditional stakeholder mapping tools, this approach:

- **Focuses on individuals, not categories**
- **Takes emotions, identity, and informal power seriously**
- **Explicitly interrogates risk, loyalty, and self-interest**
- **Forces a clear link between analysis and action**

It recognises that effective systems change work is not only technical, but it is political, relational, and deeply human.

How This Tool Should Be Used

This tool is meant to be used:

- **Collectively, not in isolation**
- **Repeatedly, not once**
- **Strategically, not descriptively**

Its value lies not in perfect information, but in sharper judgment and better decisions.

Used well, it helps civil society actors engage power with clarity, realism, and intention, increasing the chances that change is not only demanded but achieved.

***Find more detailed guidance in the appendix**

PART ONE:

Identifying the Right Stakeholders

Before completing a full Stakeholder Power & Influence Profile, organisations must first determine which individuals are strategically important enough to analyse. Not every actor connected to an issue requires a detailed profile.

This step helps teams move from a broad list of actors to a focused set of individuals whose decisions, influence, or resistance could shape the outcome of your work.

The aim is to ensure that your time and analysis are focused on people who actually hold or shape power.

1. Start with the Decision You Want to Influence

Begin by clarifying the specific decision or change you want to influence.

Then ask three simple questions:

- Who must approve this decision?
- Who could block or delay it?
- Who could quietly influence the outcome?

The people who emerge from these questions are your first candidates for profiling.

2. Create a Long List of Relevant Actors

Next, identify the actors connected to this decision. At this stage, aim for a broad list rather than a perfect one.

Possible categories include:

- Formal decision-makers
- Gatekeepers
- Political influencers
- External influencers

3. Identify Individuals, Not Institutions

This tool focuses on people rather than organisations.

Instead of listing:

- “Ministry of Health”
- “Parliament”
- “Judiciary”

Identify specific individuals, such as:

- Director of Primary Health Services
- Chair of the Parliamentary Health Committee
- Senior Legal Advisor in the Ministry

In many systems, informal influence sits with individuals whose titles may appear less powerful.

4. Prioritise Stakeholders Using Four Key Questions

Once you have a long list, use the following questions to identify which individuals should receive a full stakeholder profile.

- **Decision Power**
  Can this person approve, block, or significantly delay the change?
- **Influence Power**
  Do key decision-makers listen to or rely on this person?
- **Agenda Power**
  Can this person shape whether the issue is discussed or prioritised?
- **Disruption Power**
  If they oppose the change, could they quietly derail it?

If the answer to two or more questions is yes, the stakeholder is likely worth profiling.

5. Focus on High Power and High Relevance Stakeholders

Stakeholders can be grouped using a simple Power Relevance lens.

	HIGH RELEVANCE TO YOUR ISSUE	LOW RELEVANCE
HIGH POWER	Priority stakeholders for full profiling	Monitor
LOW POWER	Potential allies or implementers	Low priority

Focus your detailed profiling on the High Power / High Relevance group. Most advocacy strategies require deep understanding of a small number of actors, rather than superficial knowledge of many.

6. Identify Three Critical Types of Stakeholders

Within your priority group, it is useful to identify at least three types of actors:

- **Decision-Makers**
  Individuals who have the authority to approve or block the change.
- **Influencers**
  People whose views shape the thinking or behaviour of decision-makers.
- **Implementers**
  Officials responsible for translating decisions into policy or practice.

Change is more likely when engagement strategies consider all three roles.

7. Select Stakeholders for Profiling

After this exercise, choose a manageable number of stakeholders for deeper analysis using the profiling tool.

As a guide:

- 3–5 stakeholders for deep strategic profiles
- 5–10 stakeholders for working profiles

Avoids profiling too many actors. The goal is quality of political insight rather than quantity of profiles.

Now you are ready to profile these stake-holders using the tool below:

PART TWO:

The Stakeholder Profile Instrument

Section 1:
Position & Power

This section helps you understand where this stakeholder's power truly comes from. Formal titles often hide informal influence, while people with modest roles may quietly shape outcomes. The aim is to identify what this person can actually decide, block, or influence, and who they include or exclude in the exercise of that power.

1. Formal Role:
- What official position does this person hold?
- What decision-making authority comes with it?

2. Informal Power:
- Beyond their title, how do they actually exert influence (relationships, gatekeeping, expertise, patronage)?

3. Inclusion & Exclusion:
- Who do they actively include in decision-making?
- Who is routinely excluded or marginalised?

4. Sphere of Control:
- What can they realistically change on their own, and what is beyond their control?

Section 2:
Interests & Incentives

Decision-makers act based on what they stand to gain or lose. This section focuses on the personal, political, and reputational incentives that shape the stakeholder's choices. Understanding how change affects their power, status, or risk exposure allows you to predict whether they are likely to resist, support, or stay silent.

1. Personal Stakes:
- What do they stand to gain or lose personally from a proposed change?

2. Power & Reputation:
- Will supporting this issue increase their power, legitimacy, or public standing?
  Could it damage their reputation or expose them to risk?

3. Risk Appetite:
- Are they generally risk averse, cautious, or willing to take bold positions?

4. Status Quo vs Change:

- Who benefits most if nothing changes?
- Who benefits most if change happens?
- Where does this stakeholder sit within that equation?

Section 3:
Influence & Loyalty

No powerholder acts alone. This section examines the relationships, loyalties, and norms that constrain or direct the stakeholder's behaviour. The goal is to identify who they listen to, who they fear disappointing, and what informal rules govern their actions.

1. Key Influencers:

- Who most strongly shapes their views or actions (individuals, institutions, political blocs, donors, family, party leadership)?

2. Loyalty & Norms:

- What loyalties constrain them (party, ideology, culture, religion, patronage networks)?
- What "unwritten rules" do they operate under?

3. Accountability Pressures:

- Who do they answer to, formally or informally?

Section 4:
Identity & Constraints

Power is shaped by identity and structure. This section explores how gender, sexuality, ethnicity, class, or other identities affect the stakeholder's authority, vulnerability, and room to manoeuvre. It also considers institutional, legal, and cultural constraints that may limit their ability to act, even when they are sympathetic.

1. Identity Factors:

- How do gender, ethnicity, class, sexuality, religion, or other identities shape their power, credibility, or vulnerability?

2. Structural Constraints:

- Are there legal, cultural, or institutional barriers that limit their ability to act, even if they want to?

3. Exposure to Risk:

- Would acting on this issue place them at personal, political, or professional risk?

Section 5:
Mindset & Decision Style

People make decisions differently. This section helps you assess how the stakeholder thinks, plans, and prioritises, whether they are strategic or procedural, outcome-driven or activity-focused, short-term or long-term in outlook. This insight supports more realistic expectations and better engagement strategies.

1. Strategic Orientation: Are they more focused on:

- Activities and processes?
- Outcomes and measurable impact?

2. Time Horizon:

- Do they think short-term (quick wins) or long-term (legacy, reform)?

3. Decision Style:

- Do they rely on data, politics, public opinion, intuition, or precedent?

Section 6:
Communication & Engagement

Influence depends on speaking the right language to the right person. This section identifies what framing, evidence, and messengers are most likely to resonate with the stakeholder. It also

assesses their attention span, competing priorities, and capacity to engage meaningfully.

1. **Language of Influence:**
   - What framing resonates most with them (power, legacy, efficiency, justice, stability, votes, international standing)?

2. **Currency of Value:**
   - What do they value most, numbers, stories, endorsements, peer pressure, media visibility, or technical expertise?

3. **Attention & Bandwidth:**
   - How much time and focus can they realistically give to this issue?
   - What competes for their attention?

Section 7:
Emotional Drivers

Emotions often drive decisions more than logic. This section surfaces the fears, anxieties, motivations, and sources of energy that shape how the stakeholder responds to pressure or opportunity. Understanding these drivers helps you anticipate reactions and avoid triggering unnecessary resistance.

1. **Anxieties & Fears:**
   - What worries them most (loss of control, backlash, irrelevance, exposure, failure)?

2. **Sources of Motivation:**
   - What gives them energy, pride, or a sense of purpose?

3. **Triggers:**
   - What situations or messages are likely to shut them down or move them to act?

Section 8:
Advocacy Implications

This final section translates analysis into action. It forces clarity on how to engage the stakeholder, what risks to manage, and what concrete steps to take next. If this section is weak or vague, the entire profile has limited value; this is where strategy is made real.

1. **Best Entry Point:**
   - What is the most effective way to engage them (ally, pressure target, quiet persuader, public champion)?
2. **Do's and Don'ts:**
   - What should advocates absolutely avoid when engaging this person?
3. **Influence Strategy:**
   - Based on this profile, what is the most realistic advocacy approach with this stakeholder?

APPENDIX

Guide to Using This Tool Effectively

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1. Deploy this tool as a Process, Not a Document

If this stays as a form to be filled once, it will fail.

Best practice:
Treat it as a living intelligence process that feeds directly into your decisions on systems change approaches.

Minimum rule:
No engagement, meeting, or campaign decision happens without a stakeholder profile, even a rough one.

2. Use a Three-Tier Version (Not Everyone Needs the Full Tool)

TIER 1: Rapid Profile (15–20 minutes)

Use when:

- A meeting is coming up fast
- You have limited access to information
- You are mapping many actors at once

Covers only:

- Power & role
- Incentives (gain/loss)
- Key influencer
- Risk appetite
- Best messaging angle

This forces clarity without paralysis.

TIER 2: Working Profile (60 - 90 minutes, team-based)

Use when:

- The person is a primary decision-maker
- You plan repeated engagement
- The issue is sensitive or contested

Method:

- 3–5 people in a room
- One facilitator
- One note-taker
- Debate each question until consensus is reached

This is where bias gets corrected.

TIER 3: Strategic Profile (Deep dive, updated quarterly)

Use when:

- The stakeholder can make or block change
- The issue has long-term consequences
- You need to plan escalation or coalition tactics

This version feeds directly into:

- Power maps
- Risk assessments
- Campaign sequencing

3. Integrate It into Existing Advocacy Moments

Don't add work, replace weak practices.

Replace this:

- "Let's request a meeting and see what happens."
- "They are powerful but difficult."
- "Government doesn't care."

With this:

- "Based on their profile, we should lead with X, avoid Y, and bring Z as messenger."

Key integration points:

- Before meetings with officials
- During campaign planning
- When deciding who speaks publicly
- When choosing between pressure vs persuasion

4. Assign Clear Roles (This Is Critical)

Recommended roles:

- **Profile Owner:** Maintains and updates the profile
- **Political Reader:** Tracks shifts in power, alliances, mood
- **Reality Checker:** Challenges assumptions and wishful thinking

Without roles, profiles go stale.

5. Make It Action Oriented with a Final "So What?" Rule

Every profile must end with three mandatory outputs:

1. **One sentence strategy:** "The best way to move this person is..."
2. **Primary risk:** "Engaging them could backfire if..."
3. **Next action:** "Within the next 30 days, we will..."

If a profile doesn't produce action, it's incomplete.

6. Use It for Collective Intelligence, Not Expert Authority

This tool works best when:

- Junior staff contribute observations

Tip:

Run "profile validation sessions" with people who have interacted with the stakeholder.

- Community members validate assumptions
- Lived experience is treated as intelligence

7. Build It into Learning & Reflection Cycles

After any engagement:

- What did we assume that was wrong?

- What did we underestimate?
- What surprised us emotionally or politically?

Update the profile immediately.
This turns the tool into an organisational memory, not a report.

8. Protect Against the Biggest Risk: Over Humanising Power

A hard truth:

Understanding a stakeholder does not mean trusting them.

Use the tool to:

- Anticipate behaviour
- Reduce surprises
- Avoid naive engagement

Not to excuse harm or delay pressure when needed.

9. Train It Through Simulation, Not PowerPoint

Best deployment method:

- Role-play stakeholders using completed profiles
- Simulate negotiation or backlash
- Practice message framing live.

This makes the tool instinctive.

Bottom Line

If deployed well, this tool becomes:

- **A political radar**
- **A risk-reduction mechanism**
- **A strategy accelerator**

If deployed poorly, it becomes paperwork

In the spirit of transparency, artificial intelligence tools were used as a supportive aid in developing this document. The perspectives, values, and accountability reflected here are human-led and grounded in lived experience and contextual knowledge

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