

Social Imprint ©, a toolkit to help project developers deal with social concerns

Mireille Falque

Abstract

To be able to implement its project and maintain its social licence to operate, the project developer has to deal with high expectations on social factors throughout the project life.

To help take social concerns into account, Egis developed a toolkit based on more than a hundred Key Performance Indicators. Monitoring these indicators is a key element for success of the development strategy.

The context: increasing social requirements

Major development projects require the consideration of environmental and social factors throughout their entire life cycle: from design and operation, up to the end of their life (closure).

On one hand, these development projects can bring new opportunities and benefits for local development and the local economy, but on the other hand, they can also lead to traumatic effects within local populations, due to the land expropriation process, or due to pollution for example.

Social impacts of the project have to be avoided, mitigated and compensated to ensure that a project will be accepted favorably. The project developer has to demonstrate that the project design has indeed followed these 3 steps.

The project developers and their consultants are aware of this context, and know that social aspects play an important role in the acceptance of projects. If social aspects are not sufficiently taken into account by the project developers, they can necessitate project design changes, and even cause unscheduled delays to the project. These unscheduled events are expensive for all involved.

Moreover, the societal context in which the project takes place is constantly changing, whether it is related with the project, or not. Conflicting social situations can arise from positions of inequality or non-harmonious development. Economic prosperity, quality of life, social cohesion and cultural identity are three key factors to consider and monitor to ensure the success of a project.

At the beginning of the project, the developer must prepare a development strategy (DS). This strategy will then be translated into an environmental and social management plan (ESMP). Throughout the project life, the ESMP is monitored to ensure compliance with the requirements.

The Sponsor's concerns: maintaining its social licence to operate

In the context described above, it is essential for the project sponsor and the designer to include social and societal dimensions at the heart of the project, and to be able to follow-up and identify social risks at their source.

The main concern of the sponsor is to avoid the risk of losing its social licence to operate.

Early planning implementation, shared objectives and participation of all stakeholders are key points to ensure the project's success and longevity. This culture will assist the project developer in reinforcing a positive public image of its company.

Another concern is to ensure the continuity and coherence of the studies. Indeed, different environmental and social studies are conducted by different authors at different stages of the project. This can lead to inconsistencies between studies. In this situation, it is important for the project proponent or their consultants to implement a tool that will assist with the monitoring of environmental and social management mitigation measures with a reliable and consistent methodology throughout the project life.

In a highly volatile social environment, another concern is to be able to have an instantaneous global vision of social factors, to be able to make the right decisions at the right time.

Finally, it is important to prepare a decommissioning strategy at an early stage in order to anticipate any potential difficulties.

In summary, within the context described above, developers have to deal with strong requirements regarding social and societal aspects, with increasing demand for participation from the stakeholders, who want to participate in the project decisions and design. These high expectations on social factors can raise tensions that can seriously affect the project. The project developers must be able to assess social aspects with an approved methodology, in accordance with the highest standards, throughout the project life, from the development strategy to the implementation of environmental and social management plan.

To deal with these concerns, project developers require a tool to help obtain an instantaneous understanding of the social environment, to be able to make quick decisions.

Social Imprint © toolkit can assist the project developers deal with these concerns at each stage of the project lifetime.

Social Imprint ©: to address the project developer's concerns

The Social Imprint © toolkit global approach consists of placing the stakeholders at the center of the project's concerns, and involving them with different aspects throughout the project life.



Development strategy (DS): from the start of the project, Social Imprint can help the project developer and stakeholders (including impacted populations, civil society, local authorities, national authorities) adopt a common development strategy, with increasing accountability through participation, transparency and feedback. This strategy can be adjusted when necessary, to take into account the evolution of the social environment. The toolkit can help communicate with the host State, local authorities, funding agencies, civil society organizations and local populations, based on relevant indicators and all with a precise methodology.

Environmental and social management plan (ESMP) implementation and follow-up: this stage is very important to ensure the success of the project. Social Imprint methodology can help look for sustainability and foster confidence with impacted populations at an early stage for a balanced social development. Social imprint© can measure the effectiveness of social actions carried out by the developer. Social Imprint © can measure social, societal and economic impacts of these actions and measure changes in living situations of impacted populations to check compliance with requirements. The toolkit can help monitor social and economic impacts through up-to-date information.

Grievance management and action plan (GMAP): Social Imprint © is valuable for designing a specific GMAP to monitor grievances from the stakeholders and note actions taken to meet their requirements.

Early Warning System (EWS): in a volatile social environment, detecting social risks from their roots is a valuable asset to the developer. Social Imprint © can help monitor the social acceptability of a project, and prevent the emergence of conflicting social situations, focusing on the behavior of populations and dynamics. The toolkit allows fast processing of the data, so that regular information on evolving situations can be made known. This is an intelligent way to ensure that social license to operate is retained throughout the project lifetime.

Decision-making: Social Imprint © can assist the developer to take on the right decisions at the right time. Indeed, the toolkit gives an instantaneous vision of the social situation in relation to the project, with geolocalized data.

Empowerment plan for stakeholders (EPS): Social Imprint © will help implement an empowerment plan for stakeholders, in order to ensure and increase their autonomy.

Exit strategy: Social Imprint © will also facilitate long term actions to enhance and strengthen stakeholders autonomy. This helps anticipate future difficulties in exit strategy implementation.

Methodology

Social imprint © is a toolkit based on 117 Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), for measuring objectively verifiable performances, based around three issues: Economic prosperity, Quality of life, Social cohesion and Cultural identity.

Some of these indicators relate to Human Development Indexes given by the United Nations Development Program and take into account sustainable and inclusive development's issues.

Other indicators, focusing on the behavior of populations and dynamics, can highlight changes in society, which is especially useful to assess social risks due to potentially volatile situations (Early Warning System).