

How can digital tools support stakeholder engagement during lockdown?



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Let's go back to Spring 2020...

Many countries in the world are overwhelmed by the first wave of COVID-19.

Extensive and rigorous lockdowns are the most used and useful solution at the time to curb down the spread of the virus and protect health systems.



... however projects did not stop

Despite the challenging times, many projects had to go ahead and schedules did not change. At the time we were working on the preparation of an Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA) study for an offshore O&G exploration project in the Mediterranean.

An important task of for impact assessment is performing stakeholder engagement.

A wide range of activities are usually performed to engage with stakeholders, including **public meetings, one-to-one meetings, focus group discussions, surveys, brochures and leaflets**, etc.

In person meetings usually play a central role in stakeholder engagement.

But how can one perform stakeholder engagement at times of lockdown?

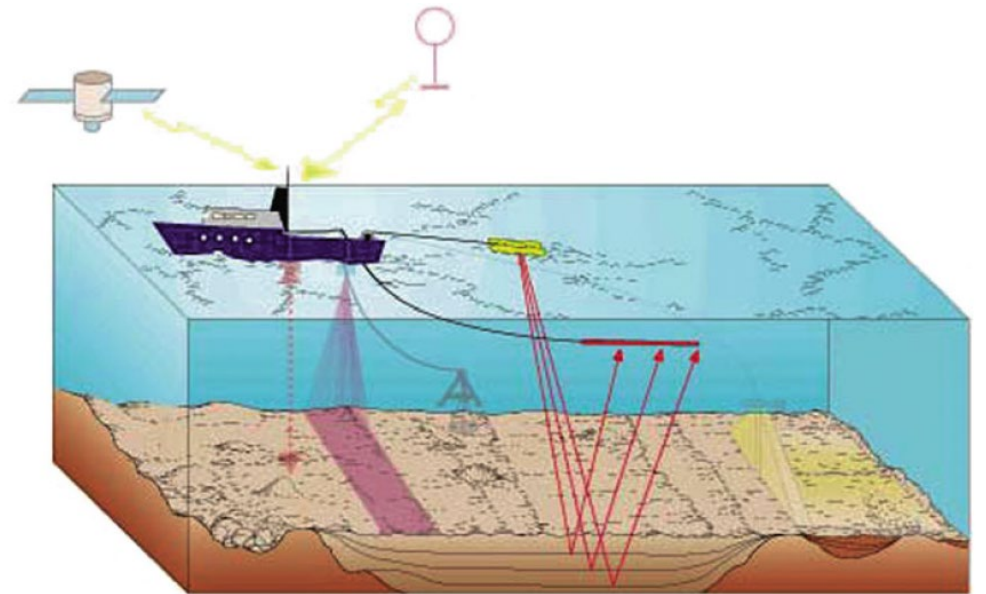
Common forms of stakeholder engagement



Project background

A geophysical survey of the most used methods to explore and characterize the stratigraphy and the presence of hydrocarbon deposits. It is based on the recording of the different times of propagation of the elastic waves in various rocks characterized by different acoustic impedance. Offshore exploration survey method involves the following components:

- An emission system consisting of elastic pulse generators or sources (air gun);
- A detection system made up of floating cables (streamer) accommodating sensors or hydrophones receiving the reflected waves;
- A vessel towing the equipment on board of which equipment control and data acquisition and processing systems are located.



Project context

An offshore project is generally less impacting on local communities than an onshore one.

However stakeholder engagement plays a relevant role, considering the controversy that O&G projects normally generate.

Based on a stakeholder mapping performed, the following categories were identified:

- Authorities
- Fishery sector
- Development agencies
- Tourism sector
- Marine biology experts

The solution – a digital platform

Due to the impossibility to perform in person stakeholder engagement, it was decided to set up a **digital platform**, that would become the system to provide stakeholders with information on the project and to receive feedback from them.

The platform was made of two main components:

A **webpage** detailing the planned Project activities including location and timing, approach for minimising environmental impacts, and objectives of environmental and social studies.



To ensure appropriate dissemination of Project information



A **digital questionnaire** that stakeholders could fill out, providing feedback and comments on the Project.



To ensure stakeholder consultation

The solution – a digital platform

The platform was made available to a **selection of stakeholders**, considered to be more relevant to the project, based on a previous mapping performed.

Once the platform was set up, **stakeholders were invited to access it and to respond to the questionnaire** in writing and through follow up phone calls.

Getting in touch over the phone was considered important to create a more **personal relationship with stakeholders**.

Screenshots from the webpage



Stakeholder Feedback Platform

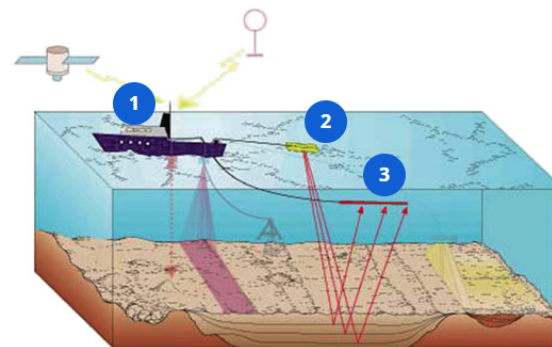
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- 1. Introduction
- 2. **Project description**
- 3. Approach for Minimising Environmental Impacts
- 4. Approach for Stakeholder Engagement
- 5. Environmental and Social studies
- 6. Questionnaires

What will the activities consist in?

Most used geophysical method to characterize the presence of geological structures which could be traps for hydrocarbons consists on releasing a high pressure air bubble through air guns located on a vessel, thus generating acoustic waves. These waves are propagated in the subsoil which is made of various rocks characterized by different acoustic characteristics. The waves are then reflected according to the characteristics of the geologic layers passed through. The reflected waves are hence recorded by a series of dedicated sensors (hydrophones) towed by the vessel.

The Project survey method involves the following components:



A 2D geophysical data acquisition (source: Mondol, 2010)

Screenshots from the webpage



Stakeholder Feedback Platform

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The Operator is strongly committed to engage with its stakeholders in a transparent way from the start of its activities in any host country for establishing a broader and continuous engagement process with the different stakeholders located within the Project area of influence.

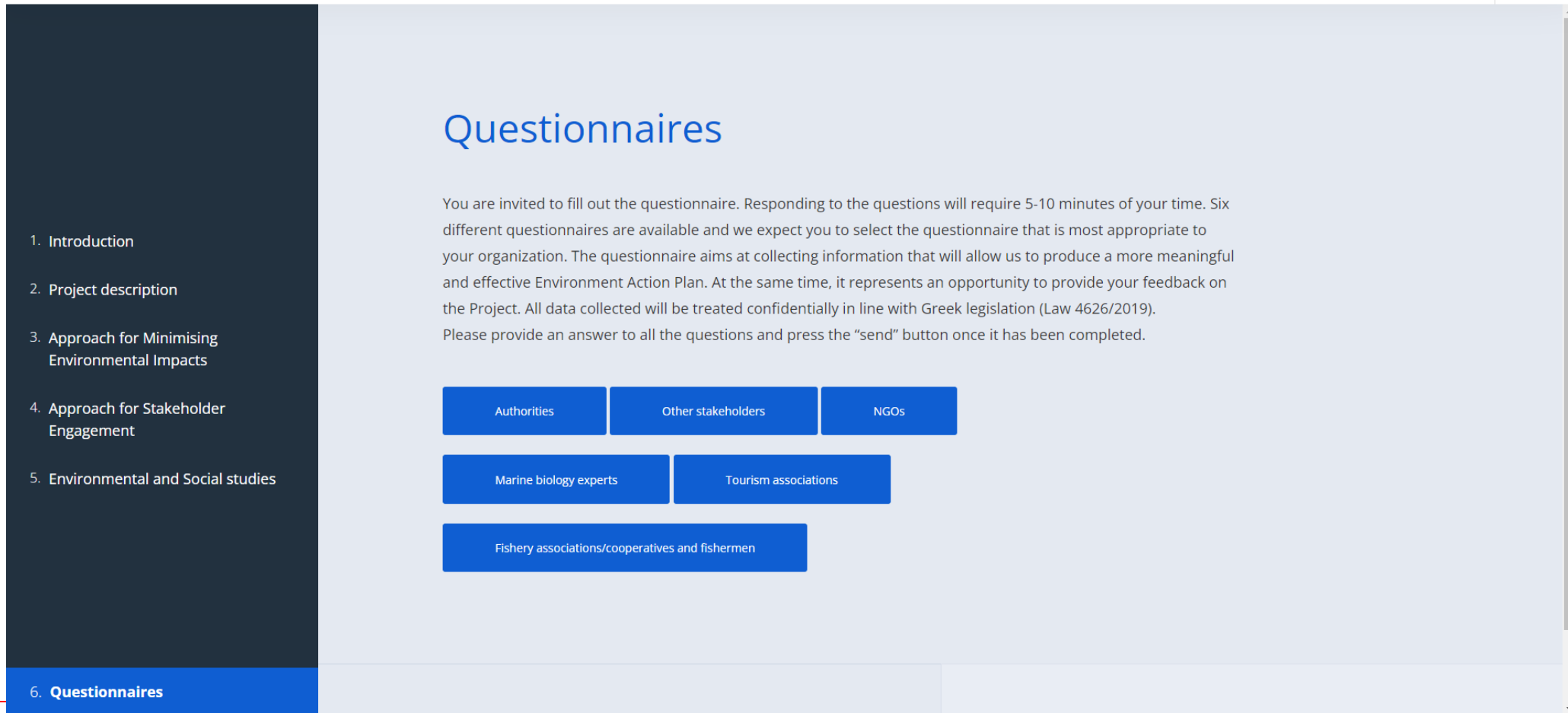
The objectives for stakeholder engagement are:



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Screenshots from the webpage



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6. Questionnaires

Questionnaires

You are invited to fill out the questionnaire. Responding to the questions will require 5-10 minutes of your time. Six different questionnaires are available and we expect you to select the questionnaire that is most appropriate to your organization. The questionnaire aims at collecting information that will allow us to produce a more meaningful and effective Environment Action Plan. At the same time, it represents an opportunity to provide your feedback on the Project. All data collected will be treated confidentially in line with Greek legislation (Law 4626/2019). Please provide an answer to all the questions and press the “send” button once it has been completed.

Authorities Other stakeholders NGOs

Marine biology experts Tourism associations

Fishery associations/cooperatives and fishermen

The questionnaire

The questionnaires included a series of introductory questions before the respondents were asked to provide feedback on the Project. They included both closed and open questions, customized for each category of stakeholders. To ensure confidentiality of the process, access to the digital platform was given through an individualised link sent by email to each targeted stakeholder.

This screenshot shows the introductory page of the questionnaire. It features a blue header with the title "Questionnaire for authorities" and a language dropdown set to "English (United States)". Below the header, there is a paragraph of text explaining that the data will be treated in compliance with Greek legislation (Law 4626/2019) and the EU Regulation (EU) 2016/679 (GDPR). A "Next" button is visible at the bottom of the page, along with a progress indicator showing "Page 1 of 9".

This screenshot displays the second page of the questionnaire, titled "Questionnaire for authorities". The main heading is "Focus on the local community (3/9)". It contains three questions: Question 5 asks for main challenges from a socio-economic perspective (max 3); Question 6 asks for foreseen main opportunities in the future (max 3); and Question 7 asks for the most promising economic sectors within the community. Question 7 includes checkboxes for Tourism, Agriculture, Industry, Natural resources, and Services/Tertiary sector, with an "Other" text input field. A "Next" button and a "Page 3 of 9" progress indicator are at the bottom.

This screenshot shows the third page of the questionnaire, titled "Questionnaire for authorities". It asks "What type of local development projects are ongoing or planned within your community?(4/9)". It includes a list of questions: Question 8 asks for the "Title of the project"; Question 9 asks for the "Objective"; Question 10 asks for "Progress" with radio buttons for "ongoing" and "planned"; Question 11 asks for "Stakeholders involved"; and Question 12 asks "Do you want to add another type of local development projects?" with a "Yes" radio button. A "Next" button and a "Page 3 of 9" progress indicator are at the bottom.

Implementation of the platform

Based on the stakeholder identification and mapping previously performed, it was decided to involve in this engagement phase 40 stakeholders of the different categories and of different geographical areas (local, regional, and national level). The breakdown of stakeholders contacted is provided in the figure.

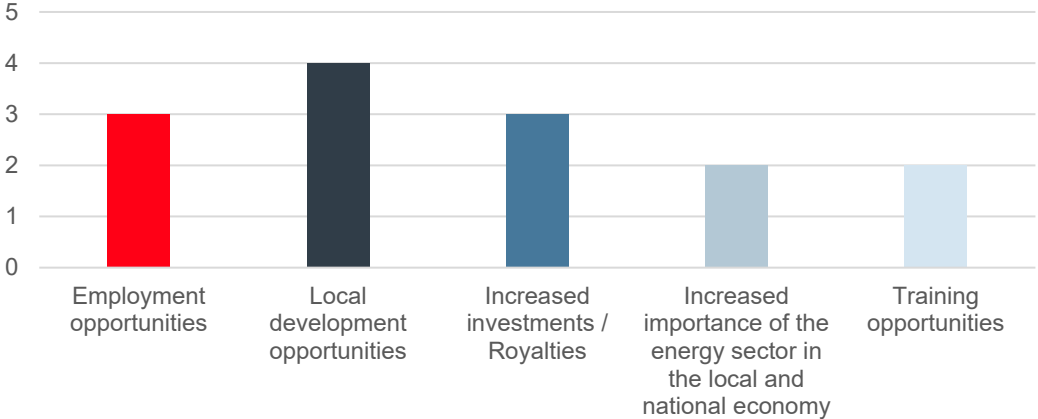


Results

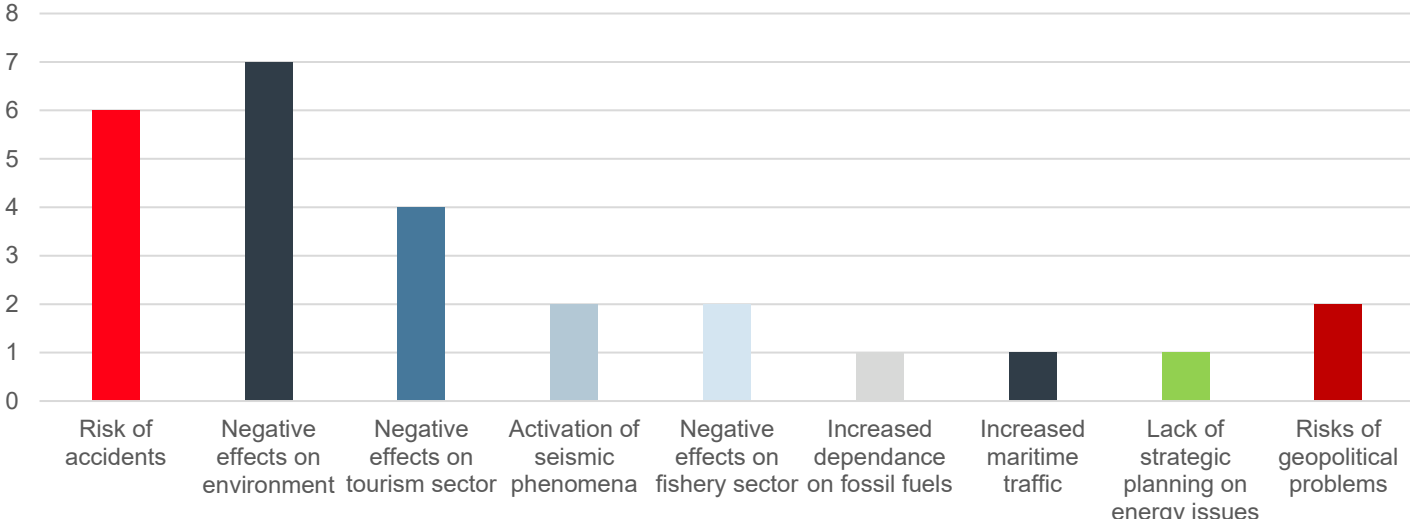
The response rate shows that the most interested stakeholders who take time to respond are authorities, but they were also the bigger targeted group. However, at least one questionnaire was responded from each of the other categories of stakeholders, except for the fishery sector.

Stakeholder category	Number of stakeholders invited to complete the questionnaire	Number of stakeholders who completed the questionnaire
Authorities	26	8
Fishery sector	2	0
Tourism sector	1	3
Marine biology sector	8	1
Development agencies	1	1
Total	40	11

Results



Main expectations mentioned by respondents



Main concerns mentioned by respondents

Results

An updated version of the platform was then produced, incorporating a page describing the results of the activity, and was made available to stakeholders that had been involved.

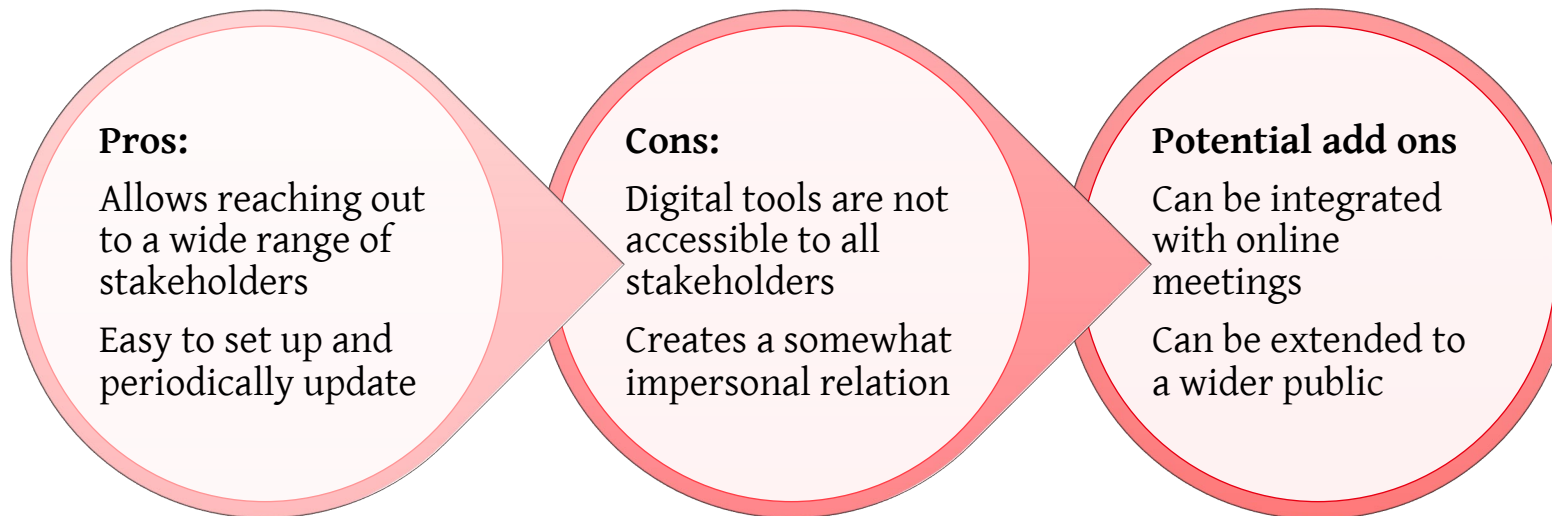
These results of the process provided guidance for future engagements during the Project life. Specific mitigation measures to respond to some of the concerns expressed by stakeholders have been developed and were included in the ESIA report:

- Project activities are planned to be performed in winter months, so to reduce potential interferences with tourism activities, which mainly occur in summer (see mitigation measures D.10);
- A Fisheries Liaison Officers will be appointed and will be present on board of the vessel to assist with fishing issues before, during, and after survey operation (see mitigation measure M.08).

Conclusions

In many fields the COVID pandemic has been an accelerator of changes that were already occurring at a slower pace.

While the approach used in this project cannot fully replace in-person meetings, the use of digital solutions in stakeholder engagement can be a **complementary tool** and can be particularly useful in certain contexts or with specific stakeholder groups.



Let's continue the conversation!

Post questions and comments via chat in the IAIA22 platform.



#iaia22

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