POLICY BRIEF

UsersTCP

Public Engagement for Energy Infrastructure

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How to meaningfully engage the public in energy infrastructure projects

The Public Engagement for Energy Infrastructure Task identifies challenges and drivers for effective public engagement practices and gathers evidence from international case studies on meaningful engagement approaches and formats to increase social acceptance of energy infrastructure projects.

The Task undertook a comprehensive literature review, reviewed 98 case studies of public engagement in energy infrastructure projects and conducted 25 semi-structured expert interviews with policy makers, the energy industry, non-governmental organizations, consultancies and academia, and organized an online expert workshop. The findings are incorporated in user-friendly **interactive engagement guidelines** for developers, policy makers and civil society.

Observations for policy makers

- **Public engagement is critical to secure support and create ownership for energy infrastructure projects,** such as wind farms or electricity grids, and it is needed to progress with rapid and just energy transitions in line with climate and energy targets.
- **Public engagement can take different forms:**

Sharing information, as a one-way communication to raise awareness.

Consultation, as a two-way dialogue to gather views and knowledge.

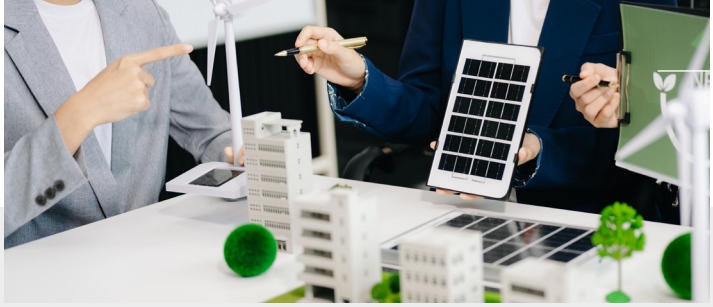
Empowerment, as an engagement that shapes the participation process, its objectives and outcomes.

All forms of participation can be useful, as various types of engagement can achieve goals in certain contexts, and stakeholders may have diverse preferences for participation.

- **Institutions and organizations responsible for energy infrastructure development may lack the capacity and resources** to effectively engage with the public and other stakeholders. Although dedicated stakeholder engagement officers are becoming more prominent in larger companies and public or private institutions, both engineers and regional/local authorities are often facing challenges in designing fair and inclusive engagement processes.
- **Key principles for meaningful public engagement in energy infrastructure are:**

1. **Early and continuous engagement** of the public allows to share their visions about the future energy system and discuss trade-offs of different decarbonization pathways. This means engagement starting with public debates on energy and infrastructure policies, through to the planning and construction of infrastructure projects on the ground, and into the end-of-life phase.
2. **Transparency** about the process and how and at which stage the outcomes of the involved stakeholders' opinions and preferences will be used.
3. **Inclusiveness** of diverse individuals and social groups in the process ensures that different perspectives are considered.
4. **Development of trust** among the stakeholders involved in project development.

Key findings



- Public engagement in **energy infrastructure is driven and, simultaneously, can be challenged by socio-technical, social-economic, psychological, and institutional factors.**

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People are motivated to engage if they are affected, have the mandate to influence decisions, and/or can gain financial or other benefits.

Engagement can be affected by the public's lack of awareness about energy infrastructure projects and their necessity, about financial and other local benefits they can gain, and by lack of trust in developers or authorities.

Key challenges for institutions and developers to engage with the public are insufficient knowledge of the need for and benefits from engagement and deficient skills, insufficient consideration for citizens - citizens values and needs, and incomplete legal frameworks.

- Public engagement can have **(positive) impacts on the project's development processes, their outcomes and involved communities.**
  - Inclusive and early engagement as well as transparency and co-ownership are crucial factors in designing a process that is perceived to be fair for people and communities.
  - Enabling the public to shape and contribute to the decision-making process before and during the project development ensures that local benefits are created and sustained. These benefits include, for example, employment, nature enhancement or community funds that serve social needs. It ensures that the public can influence the final design of the project, such as the type and location of energy infrastructure, and be involved during operation of the project, for example in monitoring noise control.

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Policy recommendations

Communicate about the energy transition and engagement opportunities

Public engagement opportunities and benefits from both engagement processes and energy infrastructure projects must be communicated more effectively to enhance engagement. Policymakers should also create awareness about the need for energy infrastructure, as well as its impacts and benefits.

ACCESS AND EXPLORE OUR INTERACTIVE GUIDELINES ON PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Provide resources for public engagement

Meaningful public engagement requires dedicated resources, but it can also save a lot of time and money that might otherwise be spent on conflict mediation and litigation.

Initiate and support collaborations

Policy makers should initiate multi-level and multi-stakeholder dialogues among different actors to share experiences and knowledge within and across energy technologies, ensuring engagement processes on the ground are inclusive and fair.

Support capacity-building for public engagement

Public engagement requires implementing organizations to have specific skills to facilitate participatory and engagement methods, tools and approaches. Project developers need to have greater awareness and training on the importance of public engagement and good practices to enable rapid and just energy transitions. Supranational, national and subnational must play a more active role in driving and supporting public engagement in projects under their jurisdiction. To this end, authorities should strengthen internal/ organizational capacities.

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MORE INFORMATION: This policy brief summarised findings and policy recommendations from the UsersTCP Task "Public Engagement for Energy Infrastructure". You can find all related publications on the Task website here. **https://doi.org/10.47568/1PB138**

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