

# BUILDING PUBLIC TRUST IN NUCLEAR POWER

Stakeholder involvement is recognized as a crucial process for the success of any nuclear power programme. Failing to effectively engage with stakeholders such as policy- and decision-makers, media, community members, and the public in general can have negative consequences, says Brenda Pagannone, specialist in stakeholder involvement in the IAEA's Nuclear Power Engineering Section. Shaken public trust may lead to delays, and delays are costly for the operator, and the country, and challenging for populations in need of energy.

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IAEA Member States are increasingly requesting IAEA assistance in their efforts to engage stakeholders. The IAEA is responding to these requests by organizing training and developing guidelines to share expertise and experience and by reviewing national communication strategies. In all of these activities, the IAEA strongly encourages Member States to involve stakeholders throughout the lifecycle of the nuclear power programme. Although each country has specific sets of stakeholders with unique needs and concerns, some principles apply widely.

"Openness and transparency, and understanding that the purpose of stakeholder involvement isn't always about gaining complete public acceptance", Pagannone highlighted. "Rather, its aim is to help people understand the rationale behind the competent authorities' decisions."

The IAEA further advocates that countries initiate dialogue with stakeholders as soon as a nuclear power programme is being considered, demonstrating accountability and building trust, as well as reaching out to younger generations.

The complexity of nuclear technology has sometimes led experts to underestimate the importance of communication. "Often, we've heard from experts, 'We know what's best for you. We know it's safe. Trust us,'" Pagannone explains. "Today, the media are ever-present, information is easily available and credibility is based not solely on competence, but also on the ability to explain why a decision was taken."

Sharing complex information in a manner that can be understood by a general audience is just part of the process. The nuclear industry and authorities must hear their stakeholders' concerns. "Listening to them and empathizing with their concerns is important. And then, wherever possible, you need to address those concerns," Pagannone says.

All organizations involved should clearly communicate their role in the nuclear power programme, and the stakeholders' role in the process. "It is very important to clarify the expectations of the stakeholders right away, so they know what type of impact they may have on the programme," Pagannone notes.

To start the process, stakeholders must be identified, including groups with critical concerns about nuclear power. "Stakeholder engagement means being open also to the other side, to the challenge," Pagannone says. "It is by accepting that challenge that you can aim to respect other views."