

Making the case for nuclear power: why stakeholder involvement matters

By Elisabeth Dyck

“Kenya undertook early public opinion polling to identify the main interests and concerns of stakeholders, including the public, regarding nuclear power. The results helped in developing a comprehensive communication strategy, including activities, messages and preferred media.”

— *Basett Buyukah, Director for Publicity and Advocacy, Kenya Nuclear Electricity Board*

One of the biggest challenges that nuclear power programmes face is securing and sustaining the support of key stakeholders, including the public. This is also applicable to countries considering a possible role for nuclear power in their energy mix to ensure energy sustainability and enhance economic and industrial development.

Embarking on a nuclear power programme requires years of preparatory work and long term national commitment throughout the development, construction, operation and, ultimately, decommissioning, of nuclear facilities. To advance a strong case for nuclear power and to gain sustained public acceptance, it is essential to engage all stakeholders at every stage of the planning process and during the life cycle of nuclear facilities.

“Transparent and fact-based communication with the society at large not only contributes to the introduction and acceptance of nuclear power programmes, but also enhances safety and security,” says Mikhail Chudakov, IAEA Deputy Director General and Head of the Department of Nuclear Energy.

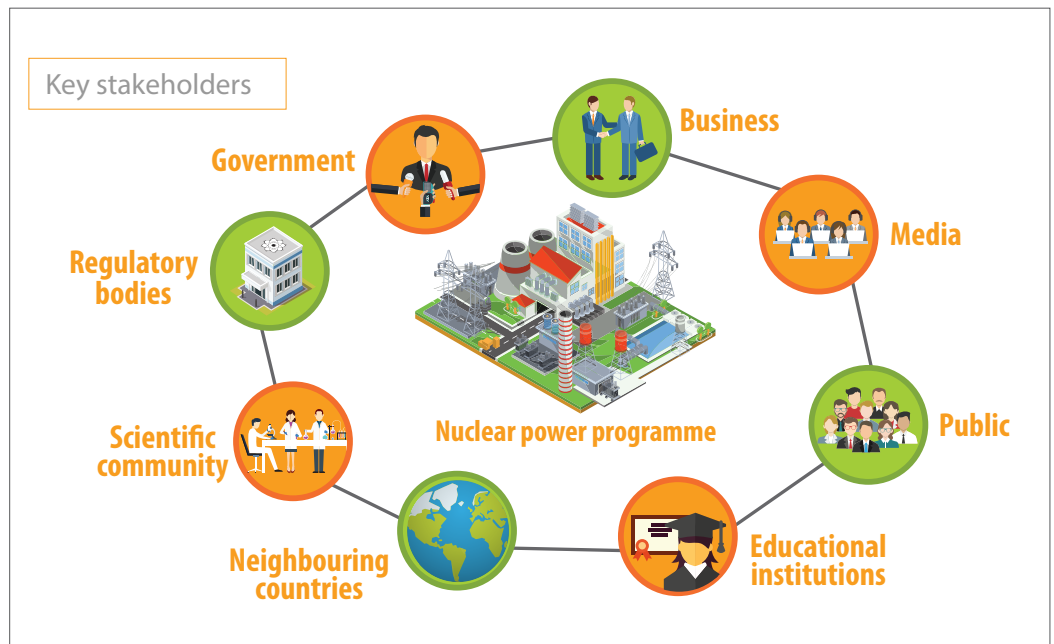
Stakeholder involvement is one of the 19 infrastructure issues covered in the IAEA’s Milestones approach, a structured guidance

document that Member States use for the development of infrastructure for a nuclear power programme. The IAEA publishes guidance documents and organizes discussions on common challenges and good practices to facilitate the exchange of knowledge, experience and best practices on how to communicate with all interested parties.

“Engaging stakeholders is more than promoting the benefits of nuclear power or explaining its risks or complexities,” said Brenda Pagannone, a stakeholder engagement expert who chaired a recent meeting on Stakeholder Involvement and Public Information at the IAEA. “It is about creating dialogue and taking into account the role and inputs of all interested parties in the decision-making process.”

Ghana’s example

Ghana, for instance, is cooperating with the IAEA on developing a national nuclear power programme. It has established a national organization — the Ghana Nuclear Power Programme Organization (GNPPO) — to coordinate all preparatory activities related to nuclear infrastructure development and hosted an IAEA Integrated Nuclear Infrastructure Review.



(Infographic: F. Nassif/IAEA)

“We have recognized that this undertaking is of a national dimension, requiring the buy-in of a wide range of interested parties,” said Ben Nyarko, Deputy Chairman of GNPPO. “We have engaged with stakeholders from the very onset of the programme. This has enabled the GNPPO to effectively communicate the requirements and benefits of the programme to industry, policymakers and the general public.”

Kenya’s case

Kenya, which has also sought IAEA guidance on the development of a nuclear power programme, established the Kenya Nuclear Electricity Board (KNEB) in 2012 to coordinate all preparatory activities related to nuclear infrastructure development.

“Kenya undertook early public opinion polling to identify the main interests and concerns of stakeholders, including the public, regarding nuclear power,” said Basett Buyukah, Director for Publicity and Advocacy at KNEB. “The results of the poll were pivotal for KNEB in developing a comprehensive communication strategy, including activities, messages and preferred media.” KNEB has subsequently rolled out a strong public education programme, including for schools, colleges and universities, and hosted meetings, conferences and workshops for different stakeholders.

Non-stop communication

Stakeholder involvement activities do not stop once a nuclear power plant is in operation. They need to be maintained throughout the life cycle of nuclear facilities,

WOMEN IN NUCLEAR

Myra Liyana Razali

Manager, Stakeholder Engagement, Malaysia Nuclear Power Corporation (MNPC)



Ms. Razali is responsible for stakeholder engagement and corporate communications for the nuclear power programme development in Malaysia. Over recent years she has participated in and contributed to IAEA meetings and expert missions, as she aspires to be among those raising the bar for stakeholder involvement in the nuclear industry. She has worked in the nuclear energy field since 2007, when she joined the Malaysian Nuclear Agency as a publication officer.

“To move forward with the pursuit of nuclear power, we need to address negative perceptions of nuclear etched in the hearts and minds of the public. To do that effectively, trust — as the new currency of stakeholder involvement — is foundational. Trust requires a genuine approach to communication — one that involves deep listening, meaningful dialogue and mutual understanding. As challenging as this may be, we have to find our voice in the midst of the noise and remain committed in order to keep the public engaged.”

including operating reactors, temporary spent fuel storage facilities and final radioactive waste repositories.

“Forging a positive and open relationship with local communities — workers, families, representatives of other industries, leaders, students and teachers — is paramount to maintaining a trustworthy and positive environment,” said Pagannone.



More than 60 participants from 19 newcomer countries to nuclear power and 16 operating countries attended the IAEA Technical Meeting on Stakeholder Involvement and Public Information, held on 13-16 June 2017 in Vienna.

(Photo: A. Evrensel/IAEA)