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SOILPROM

Toolbox for local stakeholders' engagement

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The effective engagement of stakeholders is critical for the success of the SOILPROM project, particularly to ensure that project outcomes are relevant, applicable, and actionable for land users and policymakers. Stakeholder engagement in SOILPROM project serves multiple purposes:

- To ensure alignment of project activities with the real needs of practitioners and policymakers.
- To collect stakeholders' knowledge, preferences, and perceptions to inform project research.
- To support co-design of land-use strategies for pollution reduction.
- To facilitate data collection, scenario development, and recommendations.

Deliverable D5.3 presents the Stakeholder Engagement Toolbox developed under Task 5.2 of Work Package 5. The Toolbox defines tools, methodologies, and protocols to identify, engage, and maintain effective interaction with stakeholders at use-case level throughout the SOILPROM project.
The Toolbox was developed collaboratively, validated in a joint workshop with Work Package 5 leaders and use-case leaders, and provides practical guidance for tailoring stakeholder engagement activities to local contexts. The outcomes of this first stakeholder workshop provided essential feedback for refining the stakeholder engagement toolbox. Participants validated the general approach proposed but emphasized the need for:

- Flexibility and adaptation to local contexts.
- Strong focus on stakeholder benefit and ownership.
- Clear and continuous communication of how stakeholder input shapes project outcomes.
- Use of interactive, participatory, and inclusive methods.

The insights gathered will inform you of the application of the stakeholder engagement toolbox across all SOILPROM use-cases.

I. METHODOLOGY

To collect feedback for the development of the stakeholder engagement toolbox (Deliverable D5.3), Savonia University of Applied Sciences organized a virtual stakeholder consultation workshop. The workshop was held via Microsoft Teams and used the interactive platform Padlet to collect and structure participants' input in real-time. This format allowed participants to reflect and provide written contributions while also engaging in discussion during the meeting.

The workshop was structured into four main thematic blocks, each supported by a set of guiding questions to help participants reflect on key issues related to stakeholder engagement in their specific use-case contexts. The sessions were carefully timed to ensure active participation and focused discussions.

Workshop Structure and Guiding Questions

1. Stakeholder Identification and Profiling (approx. 20 min)

The goal of this session was to identify the relevant stakeholder groups and profile their roles, interests, and engagement levels.

- Who are the key people or groups affected by or influencing your project?
- What are their roles and interests?
- How much influence or power do they have?
- How interested or engaged are they?
- What is the best way to reach or involve them?

2. Understanding Stakeholder Needs and Priorities (approx. 15 min)

This section focused on identifying stakeholder concerns, goals, and information needs.

- What do your stakeholders care most about?
- What kind of support or information do they need (e.g., data, training, funding, policy updates)?
- What outcomes are they expecting from the project?
- What communication channels do they prefer?
- What would help them get more involved or stay engaged?
- What are possible barriers and how can they be addressed?

3. Adapting Methodologies to Local Contexts (approx. 15 min)

This part explored the extent to which the proposed joint methodology needs to be adapted to local conditions.

- What makes your local context different (social, political, economic, environmental factors)?
- Which stakeholders require most adaptation?
- What challenges do you face in applying the joint methodology?
- What elements need to be simplified, localized, or reordered?
- How can local practices or knowledge be integrated into the methodology?

- What adaptations can make the tools more accessible (e.g., translation, visuals, local examples)?

4. Ensuring Stakeholder Engagement (approx. 15 min)

The final part addressed strategies for recruiting and sustaining stakeholder engagement throughout the project.

- Recruiting Stakeholders
- Who are the key stakeholders?
- How can we reach them?
- What value or incentives can we offer them?
- Ensuring Active Participation
- What motivates them to stay engaged?
- What roles can they play?
- How to design interactive engagement?
- Sustaining Engagement Over Time
- How to maintain regular contact?
- How to provide ongoing feedback or recognition?
- How to celebrate milestones and shared achievements?

Workshop Approach

The session was highly interactive, allowing participants to contribute both verbally and in writing. The Padlet board was used as a shared space to collect written input from participants during each thematic block. This allowed for both real-time contributions and the possibility to review and organize input after the meeting for analysis. Participants represented multiple use-cases and provided diverse perspectives based on their ongoing stakeholder engagement activities.

Output of the workshop

The contributions gathered through this structured process formed the basis for the analysis presented in this deliverable, synthesizing stakeholder experiences, challenges, and recommendations into a practical and flexible Stakeholder Engagement Toolbox for the SOILPROM project.

II. PROCESS

The toolbox development followed these steps:

- Review of existing stakeholder engagement methodologies from previous EU projects.
- Adaptation of methods specifically addressing stakeholder identification, profiling, engagement, co-creation, and sustained participation.

- The proposed tools and methods were discussed with all use-case leaders to ensure suitability and adaptability to local contexts.
- Inputs from the workshop were incorporated into the final version of the toolbox.

Validation of the Stakeholder Engagement Toolbox

As part of the development and validation of the Stakeholder Engagement Toolbox, a first workshop was held in 28.05.2025 with participation from WP leaders, use-case leaders, and the coordination team. This workshop served both to test and refine the proposed methodology and to begin engaging local stakeholders as required under Task 5.2.

The workshop led to:

- Confirmation of the adequacy of proposed tools.
- Minor adaptations to address specific use-case needs.
- Agreement on the minimum requirements for stakeholder recruitment and engagement.

Workshop Objectives

The main objectives of the first workshop were to:

- Apply and test the initial stakeholder engagement tools and templates.
- Identify and profile key stakeholders relevant to the use-case.
- Gather preliminary information on stakeholder needs, interests, and priorities.
- Discuss and adapt engagement methodologies to fit the specific local context.
- Foster initial relationships with stakeholders to ensure their sustained engagement throughout the project.

Workshop Agenda and Topics Covered

During the workshop, the following issues were addressed:

Stakeholder Identification and Profiling

- Mapping of key stakeholder groups (policy makers, land managers, industry, civil society, research, advisory services).
- Initial assessment of stakeholder roles, interests, and levels of influence.

Understanding Stakeholder Needs and Priorities

Structured discussions and small groupwork was conducted to collect information on:

- Current challenges related to soil pollution.
- Stakeholders' information needs for decision-making.
- Preferred formats and channels for receiving soil knowledge.
- Perceptions of barriers and opportunities for improving soil management practices.

Adaptation of Methodologies to Local Contexts

Participants evaluated the proposed toolbox tools and suggested adaptations based on:

- Cultural and institutional context.
- Language and terminology preferences.
- Practical constraints (time, resources, accessibility).
- Local governance structures.

Ensuring Stakeholder Engagement

Strategies for maintaining active stakeholder participation throughout the project were discussed, including:

- Periodic communication and updates.
- Use of hybrid formats (online + physical meetings).
- Identification of local champions and multipliers to support sustained engagement.
- Scheduling of follow-up workshops in line with project timeline.

Stakeholder Identification and Profiling – Workshop Findings

During the workshop, participants jointly reviewed and expanded the initial stakeholder mapping for the use-cases. The following key stakeholder groups were identified as relevant to the SOILPROM project:

Stakeholder Category	Identified Actors	Current involvement
Local citizens	General public	Indirect involvement
Local policy makers	Municipal and regional authorities	Some already involved, informed via meeting and emails.

National and Regional Government	National Environmental Agency and other government institutions	Some informed, limited direct involvement
NGO's	Organizations interested in soil health, climate, and restoration activities	Some involved via meetings
Small companies	Local businesses, farmers	Involvement initiated via meetings, emails, calls
Research institutes	Collaborating institutes	Actively involved via personal meetings, email, calls
Scientific organizations	Researchers working with models and management plans	Engaged to shape tools according to their needs
Farmers' organizations	Association of land managers and farmers	Not yet involved; planned for future engagement
Advisory services	Extension and consultancy services	Currently not involved
Authorities responsible for soil and water quality	Various national/regional entities	Partially informed, not always directly involved

Communication Channels Used

Participants reported using a combination of communication methods to reach stakeholders, including:

- Direct emails (widely preferred for invitations and updates)
- Phone calls
- Personal meetings
- Online tools such as Miro (used as a collaborative whiteboard during and after meetings)
- Dedicated workshops and project meetings
- Dedicated meetings were identified as the most effective form of communication for most stakeholder groups.

Barriers Identified

Several barriers to stakeholder engagement were discussed:

- Many stakeholders are already involved in multiple projects and lack incentives (e.g., compensation) to engage actively in additional initiatives.
- Some stakeholders are not willing or can't communicate in English, while certain project team members have limited proficiency in the local language (e.g., Norwegian).
- Difficulty in finding suitable online platforms that support smooth dialogue with diverse stakeholders.

Ongoing Actions

- Several use-cases have already initiated the mapping and cooperation process with a wide range of stakeholders.
- Stakeholder maps soil pollution/degradation are under development to better visualize and understand stakeholder interactions.
- Continued direct contact (personalized emails and phone calls) is seen as the most efficient way to engage stakeholders for the next phases of the project.

General Approach to Understanding Needs

- The needs and priorities of stakeholders strongly depend on the type of stakeholder.
- A combination of face-to-face meetings, field visits, direct consultations, and regular updates was seen as most effective for understanding and responding to stakeholder concerns.
- Engagement must include both scientific information and practical advice tailored to stakeholders' specific contexts.

Stakeholders Group	Needs and Priorities	Preferred Communication Channels
Local Citizens	- Healthy local environment - Health risks of metal pollution and soil contamination - Visible progress in restoration work	- Public events - Newspapers - Social media - Newsletters
Farmers and Farmers' Organizations	- Affordable alternatives to pesticides - Practical examples and role models	- Field visits - Farmer newspapers - Social media - Demonstration farms - Peer learning

	- Clarity on whether environmental measures are effective - Simplified risk communication - Manageable guidance within the complexity of environmental, climate, and production pressures	
Environmental Authorities (National/Regional)	- Successful implementation of restoration activities - Data-based results and models to inform restoration plans - Policy-relevant scientific evidence	- Face-to-face meetings - Scientific reports - Policy briefs
Policy Makers / Regulators	- Clear, scientifically grounded recommendations for policy development and enforcement - Balance between environmental protection and industrial/economic activities - Timely updates on emerging issues (e.g. PFAS contamination)	- Policy briefs - Workshops - Short policy meetings - Scientific reports
NGOs	- Updates on research outcomes - Simplified outcomes for public dissemination - Collaboration with local communities and farmers	- Workshops - Social media - Reports
Research Institutions / Scientists	- Access to project data, models, and outputs - Collaborative research opportunities	- Scientific publications - Dedicated workshops - Research network meetings

	- Publications and peer-reviewed results	
Consultancy Companies / Advisors	- Economic profitability of environmentally friendly practices - Practical guidelines and management recommendations	- Consultancy sessions - Workshops - Thematic maps and management tools

Identified Cross-Cutting Needs

- Access to understandable, regularly updated information — adapted for both scientific and non-scientific audiences.
- Opportunities for dialogue — creating multi-stakeholder platforms to discuss complex challenges and find common ground.
- Positive communication approach — emphasizing success stories and avoiding blame when addressing environmental problems.

Challenges and Bottlenecks

- Farmers face pressure from multiple simultaneous demands (environment, production, climate, regulations), making it difficult to prioritize.
- Communication barriers exist between stakeholder groups (e.g. farmers and local communities may have differing concerns).

Recommendations for Engagement

- Use thematic workshops on specific topics (e.g., PFAS, pesticides, nutrients, waste management).
- Show stakeholders how their inputs are shaping project outcomes, increasing their sense of ownership.
- Maintain continuous two-way communication through various platforms, including web portals, social media, reports, and public events.
- Actively create spaces for mutual learning between farmers, authorities, NGOs, and citizens.

Adaptation of Methodologies to Local Contexts – Workshop Findings

The workshop participants emphasized the importance of adapting the stakeholder engagement methodologies to local contexts, recognizing significant variation across use-cases, stakeholder groups, and cultural backgrounds. Several key factors emerged that must be considered when applying the common toolbox at use-case level.

Time Constraints and Scheduling Challenges

Farmers' availability varies greatly depending on whether they work full-time on the farm or have additional off-farm employment.
Some farmers prefer daytime meetings, while others cannot attend during working hours (8–16) due to external work commitments.
Flexibility in scheduling (evening meetings, online alternatives, asynchronous participation options) is essential to accommodate different stakeholder schedules.

Cultural and Socio-Economic Contexts

In some areas, such as the Spanish use-case, historical pollution (e.g., metal contamination from past mining) has become a normalized part of life for many citizens, which may reduce their perceived urgency to engage.
Scepticism towards government or research initiatives may exist, requiring careful trust-building and transparent communication.
Many farmers cultivate rented land, making long-term investments in costly environmental measures less attractive without financial support.
Subsidies and financial incentives are often necessary to encourage new practices.
Political divisions between authorities at national and regional levels can delay consensus on restoration actions (e.g., in Spain).

Language Barriers

Language was identified as a major barrier in several use-cases:
Some stakeholders do not speak English and prefer communication in local languages.
Foreign researchers may face challenges in establishing contact due to limited language skills.
Even when speaking the same language, translating scientific terminology into simple, accessible language is crucial for meaningful stakeholder engagement.
Use of AI-supported translations was proposed as a possible solution to reduce the burden on researchers while improving accessibility.

Information

Stakeholders are exposed to misleading or conflicting information, particularly in digital spaces.
The project must ensure that clear, evidence-based, and trustworthy information is communicated through reliable channels.

Tools and Materials Adaptations

To address these local challenges, participants proposed several adaptations to engagement tools:

Proposed Adaptations	Description
Farmer discussion groups	Creating informal peer-learning groups for farmers to share experiences and practical knowledge
Visual materials	Use of graphics, videos, and animations to simplify complex topics, making them easier to understand.
Simple explanatory videos	Short videos explaining the use-cases, tailored to local languages and contexts
Media campaigns	Disseminating information through local media channels to reach broader audiences

Showcase farms	Demonstrating successful alternative practices directly in the field to provide practical, relatable examples
Translation efforts	Translating key project materials not only into local languages but also from "research language" into stakeholder-friendly formats.

Adaptation requires flexibility in both methods and timing. Continuous dialogue with stakeholders is needed to refine approaches based on their feedback.
Sensitivity to local culture, economic realities, and trust levels is essential for successful long-term engagement.

Ensuring Stakeholder Engagement

Participants discussed a variety of strategies to ensure long-term, meaningful, and sustained stakeholder engagement throughout the project lifecycle. Several common principles and good practices were identified.

Key Engagement Strategies

Strategy	**Description**
Direct and Personal Invitations	Engaging stakeholders through personal communication (emails, phone calls, face-to-face meetings) remains the most effective way to initiate and sustain involvement
Representation and Diversity	Involving a diverse mix of participants (by age, gender, expertise, interests, and visibility) helps ensure broad representation and more balanced discussions
Use of Existing Networks	Leveraging pre-existing stakeholder networks, organizations, and partnerships can simplify recruitment and increase trust. However, this may require adaptation of engagement formats to fit existing structures.
Clear Benefits for Stakeholders	Stakeholders must feel that participation offers concrete benefits, including gaining new knowledge-Contributing to decision-making processes - Receiving feedback on how their input shapes project outcomes - Networking and informal social interactions
Interactive and Participatory Formats	Moving beyond passive presentations to hands-on sessions, tool testing, real case discussions, and workshops where stakeholders actively contribute and provide feedback
Visibility of Influence	Demonstrating how stakeholders' input directly influences project decisions, models, tools (MPs, DSTs), and policy recommendations
Social Aspects and Informal Dialogue	Including informal sessions such as coffee breaks, meals, and field visits fosters informal

	discussions, trust-building, and stronger relationships
Branding of SOILPROM	Creating a recognizable project identity helps attract and retain stakeholder interest and demonstrates professionalism
Task Rotation and Voice Inclusion	Rotating facilitation roles or tasks in stakeholder meetings to prevent fatigue and ensure that all voices are heard and valued.

Practical Engagement Tools

- Use of indicators to monitor stakeholder engagement levels over time.
- Organizing visits to project sites to visualize progress and foster personal connection to the project outcomes.
- Offer opportunities for stakeholders to test tools and provide feedback before finalization.
- Creating space for open feedback and questions during all meetings.
- Embedding engagement in regular meetings of existing organizations or scientific bodies, while broadening participation.
- Business model development for the SOILPROM project to support ongoing stakeholder participation even beyond the project duration.

III. TOOLBOX FOR THE STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

SOILPROM
Developing sustainable solutions for soil pollution

SoilProm Project – Stakeholder Framework

Effective stakeholder engagement is essential to the success of SoilProm. The project addresses soil contamination and sustainable land management challenges that directly affect local communities, farmers, policymakers, and other key actors. After analyzing the needs and concerns of Case study members of the project we build the framework for the engagement of the stakeholders. The framework will be used as basis for the effective communication plan.

Why Stakeholder Engagement Matters?

Engaging stakeholders ensures:
✓ Practical solutions that meet local needs
✓ Increased awareness and understanding of soil-related risks
✓ Adoption of sustainable practices and restoration measures
✓ Social acceptance and long-term impact of project outcomes

SOILPROM
Developing sustainable solutions for soil pollution

How Do We Engage Them?

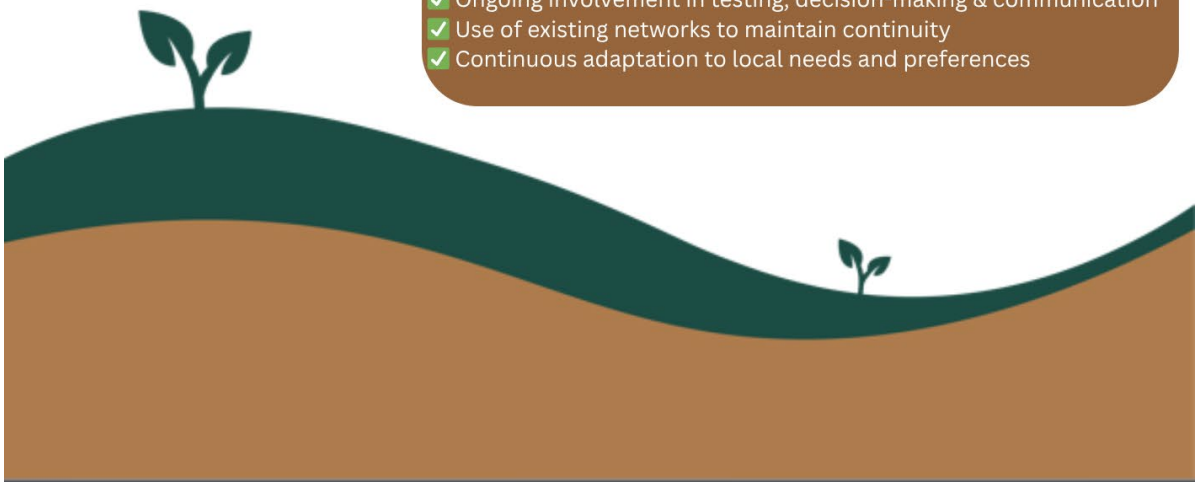
✓ Stakeholder Mapping & Profiling: Identify, understand roles, interests, and influence
✓ Tailored Communication: Use simple language, translations, visual tools
✓ Flexible Engagement Formats:
➔ Field visits & demonstrations
➔ Interactive workshops & co-design sessions
➔ Social media, newsletters, farmer-specific media
➔ Direct invitations through trusted networks
✓ Show Tangible Benefits: Knowledge sharing, visibility, influence on outcomes
✓ Trust Building: Positive messaging, recognition, and transparency
✓ Adaptation to Local Contexts: Respect time constraints, culture, economic realities

Overcoming Engagement Barriers

Challenge	Response
1. Time constraints (farmers)	1. Flexible meeting times, short sessions
2. Language barriers	2. Translations, simplified language, visual materials
3. Political or cultural tensions	3. Neutral facilitation, focus on shared benefits
4. Mistrust or stakeholder fatigue	4. "You said – we did" feedback loops, role rotation, recognition

Sustaining Long-term Engagement

✅ Regular updates via newsletters, social media, WhatsApp groups
✅ Celebrate milestones and shared successes
✅ Ongoing involvement in testing, decision-making & communication
✅ Use of existing networks to maintain continuity
✅ Continuous adaptation to local needs and preferences



APPENDIX 1: REFERENCES AND RELATED DOCUMENTS

Link to Padlet form the meeting: https://padlet.com/ardita_hoxha_jahja/assess-the-identified-standards-against-the-sustainability-c-9d585o7x17rqddag