CASTOR
Project
Evrotas River Conservation

OIKOM ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES

Conservation **A**ctions for **S**upporting the **T**hreatened freshwater fish of Evr**O**tas **R**iver (**CASTOR**)

«Stakeholder Engagement Plan (SEP)»

ATHENS, FEBRUARY 2026

DIMFE
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1. Introduction

The present document constitutes the **Stakeholder Engagement Plan (SEP) 2025–2028** of the project *"CASTOR – Conservation Actions for Supporting the Threatened Freshwater Fish of Evrotas River."*

The CASTOR Project is funded by the **Donors' Initiative for Mediterranean Freshwater Ecosystems (DIMFE)** and is implemented by **OIKOM Environmental Studies Ltd. (Coordinator)** in collaboration with the **Hellenic Centre for Marine Research / Institute of Marine Biological Resources and Inland Waters (HCMR/IMBRIW)** as the scientific lead.

The project's aim is to safeguard the endemic and threatened freshwater fish species *Pelasgus laconicus* and *Squalius keadicus* through a combination of **habitat restoration, population management, invasive species control, and stakeholder engagement actions** within the Evrotas River Basin.

This SEP has been designed as an integral part of the project, ensuring that the voices of local stakeholders, communities, and authorities are taken into account throughout the project's duration.

1.1. Relevance of Implementing the Stakeholder Engagement Plan – Constraints and Opportunities

The **CASTOR Project – Conservation Actions for Supporting the Threatened Freshwater Fish of Evrotas River** involves the design and implementation of conservation and restoration actions that directly affect land uses, water management practices, and human activities within the Evrotas River Basin, an area of high ecological importance and socio-economic significance in the Peloponnese.

A key parameter for the success of the project is the recognition that the conservation of the threatened freshwater species *Pelasgus laconicus* and *Squalius keadicus*, as well as the restoration of their habitats, requires a **combination of protection and management measures**. Each of these measures must be selected not only for their ecological effectiveness but also for their feasibility of implementation. It is important to highlight that a purely regulatory measure which generates strong conflicts and opposition in practice may fail to deliver the expected conservation outcomes. In such cases, it could be replaced or complemented by a combination of management measures and impact mitigation actions, in line with the requirements of Article 6.3 of the Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC), as transposed into Greek law through Law 4014/2011 and the corresponding Special Ecological Assessments.

The applicability of the proposed measures needs to be considered in four dimensions: **administrative, scientific/technical, financial, and social feasibility**. The first three dimensions are addressed within the technical and scientific work packages of the project, while the fourth dimension directly relates to the **Stakeholder Engagement Plan (SEP)**. It concerns the social and political support necessary for successful implementation, achieved through the participation and collaboration of stakeholders, ensuring that different perspectives and potential conflicts are recorded and addressed at the appropriate level and in a timely manner.

In the Evrotas River Basin, due to the strong ties of local communities with the river and the surrounding landscape, effective implementation of CASTOR is **not possible without the direct involvement and cooperation of stakeholders and citizens**. For this reason, the SEP must be understood not as an accessory activity but as a **parallel and equally important process** alongside the scientific and technical implementation of conservation actions.

To address this need, the project foresees the development of a dedicated stakeholder engagement programme led by the project partners, with the support of local and regional authorities, such as the Municipality of Sparta and the Region of Peloponnese.

It must be understood that CASTOR is not only an important project for the **conservation and management of freshwater biodiversity in the Evrotas River**, but also a **development project** in the broader sense, generating benefits for local communities, education, sustainable agriculture, and eco-tourism (see Chapter 2.2).

1.2. Objectives of the Stakeholder Engagement Plan

The present **Stakeholder Engagement Plan (SEP)** provides the framework for the information, consultation, and active participation of stakeholders, users, and citizens of the Evrotas River Basin who hold interests, responsibilities, or competences related to the conservation and management of freshwater ecosystems.

It is conceived as a *"living document"* that will be updated whenever necessary (see Chapter 6).

The objectives of this SEP are to:

- Provide a structured, accessible, and transparent framework for stakeholder consultation throughout the implementation phase of the CASTOR Project.
- Establish constructive and long-term relationships, based on two-way dialogue and communication, with the aim of minimizing negative impacts and maximizing the benefits of collaboration.
- Apply an appropriate framework for the continuous identification, analysis, mapping, and prioritization of stakeholders.
- Ensure communication, cooperation, and the exchange of proposals and different views among stakeholders, users, and citizens of the Evrotas Basin through the establishment of effective mechanisms for information exchange, feedback collection, and participatory dialogue.
- Support the project's implementing partners, the relevant public water authorities, and the management authorities of protected areas in understanding stakeholder expectations.
- Define the roles, responsibilities, and resources required for the implementation of the SEP, including monitoring procedures and the management of stakeholder feedback and reports.
- Identify the needs for the continuation of the stakeholder engagement process beyond the completion of the CASTOR Project, particularly in relation to the implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of conservation and management actions by competent authorities and local stakeholders.

1.3. Methodology

The CASTOR Stakeholder Engagement Plan (SEP) follows the internationally accepted methodology commonly applied in the design of such plans.

- The main elements of the project, its expected benefits and potential impacts, as well as the geographical area of influence, are presented in summary form.

- Stakeholders related to the project are identified and, based on their specific characteristics, influence, and interests in relation to the project, their information and participation needs are assessed, along with the most suitable engagement tools.
- Based on the stakeholder identification and evaluation, appropriate engagement, communication, and dissemination actions are selected, and their detailed implementation is designed.
- For effective collaboration with stakeholders, a suitable mechanism for the submission and management of feedback, proposals, and reports is designed, organized, and established, so that stakeholder input can be fully utilized.
- Finally, the system for SEP implementation is analyzed, including the reporting procedures that will be followed.

Stakeholder Analysis aims to identify people, organizations or groups who may be either positively or negatively affected by the project. In addition to identifying those affected by the particular project, Stakeholder Analysis also seeks to identify those who might affect the ability to complete the project and who generate impacts, either positive or negative, i.e. they may have the power to enable or block the outcomes of the project. The methodology to be applied in order to create a stakeholder analysis and engagement plan, involves the following structured steps:

Step 1: Identify Stakeholders

The first step involves the identification of all possible stakeholders.

During the identification/recording of stakeholders, all parties directly or indirectly related to the project will be investigated, aiming to highlight, among other things, the different viewpoints among the stakeholders. This approach will allow for the identification of potential conflicts between entities and individuals. Attention will also be given to recording the opinions of smaller entities, which are often underrepresented and lack means of participation in decision-making.

Indicatively, based on prior experience, some of the entities included in the list of stakeholders are the following: organizations/groups of farmers (agriculturalists & livestock farmers) and other collective entities in the primary sector active in the study areas, those responsible for the sectors of agricultural development and environmental protection, services of the relevant local authorities of the first and second level of local government, the Natural Environment and Climate Change Organization - Relevant Management Units, the Special Management Service of the Rural Development Program, etc.

The goal is to ensure the representativeness of stakeholders and efforts will be made to involve both organizations with thematic activity and specialization. An additional criterion will be the available time for consultation and the expected outcomes from specific collaborations.

Step 2: Analyze Stakeholders

As part of this process, there will be an assessment of each stakeholder's interest in the project, their influence, and their power that will result in determining which stakeholders are most critical to project success (key players) and they will be ranked based on their criticality and potential impact.

Step 3: Develop Engagement Strategies

The following step is the development of tailored engagement strategies. That involves the development of specific communication strategies for each stakeholder group, based on their attributes and interests.

Accordingly, project's communication scope will be adapted and an efficient messaging for specific target groups will be created with taking the type of their engagement into consideration and plan engagement activities.

As an example, one of the activities of the project is to set up a multiplier programme. Multipliers are those stakeholders, organizations or individuals, who recognize the added value of the project and are motivated to disseminate its benefits further. By clustering the stakeholders based on appropriate criteria, the potential stakeholders qualified to be part of the multiplier programme will be identified. The project team will foster specific collaborative partnership with the relevant stakeholders, associations or networks to maximize the outreach of the project.

The most essential part of this final step of preparation for the Stakeholder Action Plan is to identify the technique/or combination of techniques (for example participation meetings, focus groups, workshops etc.) that matches the engagement approach and level of ambition of the Stakeholder engagement.

Logistics are also a crucial aspect of planning stakeholder engagement. At this point, various organizational issues will be addressed to ensure the proposed actions are effectively implemented.

Step 4: Create the Engagement Plan (Action Plan)

The next step is to compile the engagement strategies into a formal plan. This plan will include clearly defined objectives for each engagement effort, tailored to each stakeholder, to ensure these objectives align with the overall project goals. The action plan will provide insights on potential interventions that can address the needs and issues raised by stakeholders. It will also propose ways to create positive synergies and mitigate potential risks and impacts.

Additionally, the plan will contain detailed stakeholder contact information, engagement methods, communication schedules, and the team members responsible for each task. It will also outline methods for tracking the effectiveness of engagement efforts and using feedback to make necessary adjustments.

The preparation, updating, and evaluation of the present SEP will be carried out through a dedicated digital database application developed by OIKOM Ltd. (eSEP19a), adapted for the needs of the CASTOR Project. Screenshots and samples of this application are presented throughout this document.

Project Team

The implementation of the SEP is undertaken by a specialized Project Team with the following characteristics:

- Scientific and technical expertise in the design of conservation, restoration, and sustainable management projects.
- Proven experience in documenting and implementing projects related to freshwater biodiversity and ecosystem services.
- In-depth knowledge of the Evrotas River Basin and its particular environmental and socio-economic characteristics.
- Prior experience in the design and implementation of Stakeholder Engagement Plans.

2. Project Information

2.1. Project Summary

The project **"Conservation Actions for Supporting the Threatened freshwater fish of EvrOtas River (CASTOR)"** focuses on the conservation and recovery of two endemic and threatened freshwater fish species, *Pelasgus laconicus* and *Squalius keadicus*, within the Evrotas River Basin in Laconia, Greece.

It aims to combine in situ and ex situ conservation actions, habitat restoration, invasive species control, and awareness-raising activities in order to safeguard the long-term survival of these species and improve the ecological integrity of their habitats. The project also seeks to enhance stakeholder engagement and promote Nature-based Solutions (NbS) for freshwater ecosystem restoration.

The project benefits from the support of the **Donors Initiative for Mediterranean Freshwater Ecosystems (DIMFE)** and is implemented by OIKOM Environmental Studies Ltd. with the scientific support of Hellenic Centre for Marine Research / Institute of Marine Biological Resources and Inland Waters (HCMR/IMBRIW).

Project Objectives

- Improve the population status of *Pelasgus laconicus* and *Squalius keadicus* through translocations, ex situ breeding, and restocking.
- Restore critical habitats and improve hydrological connectivity in the Evrotas River Basin.
- Control the invasive *Oncorhynchus mykiss* to reduce competition and predation pressure.
- Increase public awareness and foster community engagement in freshwater biodiversity conservation.
- Strengthen cooperation among competent authorities, local communities, and stakeholders.

Key Actions

- Initial habitat assessments and monitoring.
- In situ translocations and ex situ breeding and stocking.
- Construction of nature-based fish passages and summer pool habitats.
- Modification of existing irrigation barriers and road crossings to improve connectivity.
- Development and implementation of an invasive species removal plan.
- Stakeholder engagement through workshops, consultation events, and educational activities.
- Dissemination through website, social media, brochures, newsletters, and scientific publications.

Project Phases

I. **Project Planning and Initial Assessments:** September 2025 to August 2026

II. **Implementation of Restoration and Conservation Actions:** February 2026 to August 2027

III. **Monitoring and Evaluation:** August 2026 to August 2028

IV. **Community Engagement and Dissemination:** Throughout the 36-month period, with key activities during May 2026 to August 2028.

Project Timeline

- **Start date:** September 2025
- **End date:** August 2028
- **Duration:** 36 months

2.2. Expected Benefits of the Project

The benefits arising from the implementation of the **CASTOR Project** concern both the conservation of freshwater biodiversity in Greece and the broader socio-economic development of the region.

With the completion of the project, significant progress will have been achieved in safeguarding the populations of the two threatened freshwater fish species of the Evrotas River (*Pelasgus laconicus* and *Squalius keadicus*), through a combination of in situ conservation translocations, ex situ breeding and restocking, habitat restoration, and invasive species management. This will contribute directly to halting biodiversity loss and to the recovery of the ecological integrity of freshwater ecosystems in the basin.

At the same time, the project will generate wider benefits:

- **For biodiversity conservation:** Restoration of riverine habitats and improved connectivity will provide long-term ecological resilience, ensuring that species can adapt to environmental changes. The removal of invasive trout populations will reduce pressures on native fish, allowing threatened species to thrive.
- **For environmental governance:** The project will develop and apply concrete conservation measures that are aligned with EU biodiversity policy and the provisions of the Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC), thereby strengthening Greece's compliance with European conservation obligations.
- **For local communities and stakeholders:** Awareness-raising activities, stakeholder consultations, and school-based education programs will build a culture of stewardship, fostering stronger community involvement in freshwater conservation. The development of cooperation agreements with authorities and stakeholders will enhance co-management approaches at the river basin level.
- **For sustainable development:** By improving freshwater ecosystem health, the project will indirectly support sectors that depend on water resources, such as agriculture and ecotourism. Restored rivers and increased biodiversity can contribute to the promotion of eco-friendly products and services, local branding opportunities, and the development of sustainable tourism experiences linked to nature and culture.
- **For long-term financing and capacity building:** The project will create new opportunities for collaboration between public authorities, research institutions, and local actors, strengthening capacities for conservation planning and the uptake of Nature-based Solutions (NbS). These dynamics may open the way for additional funding opportunities and innovative partnerships beyond the project's lifetime.

Overall, the CASTOR Project is expected to deliver tangible conservation results while simultaneously creating positive socio-economic dynamics, particularly in rural areas. Its outcomes will serve as a model for similar freshwater conservation initiatives in the Mediterranean, demonstrating that biodiversity protection can be a driver for sustainable development, resilience, and community well-being.

2.3. Project Reference Area

The **CASTOR Project** focuses on the **Evrotas River Basin**, located in the region of Laconia, Peloponnese, Greece. The Evrotas River is the longest river in the Peloponnese and one of the most important freshwater systems in southern Greece, providing a unique natural habitat for a range of endemic and threatened species.

The reference area of the project includes:

i. **Freshwater habitats of the Evrotas River and its tributaries**

- These habitats constitute the core area for the two endemic and threatened fish species targeted by the project: *Pelasgus laconicus* and *Squalius keadicus*.
- The basin includes a mosaic of lotic and lentic habitats, side channels, pools, and riparian vegetation that support species survival.

ii. **Critical habitats for target species**

- Areas that serve as spawning and nursery grounds for *P. laconicus* and *S. keadicus*.
- Tributaries that retain water during the dry season, offering refugia during critical summer periods.

iii. **Artificial barriers and human-made structures**

- Small irrigation dams, road crossings, and other hydraulic works that currently fragment habitats and limit fish dispersal. These sites are a priority for restoration actions, including fish passages and connectivity measures.

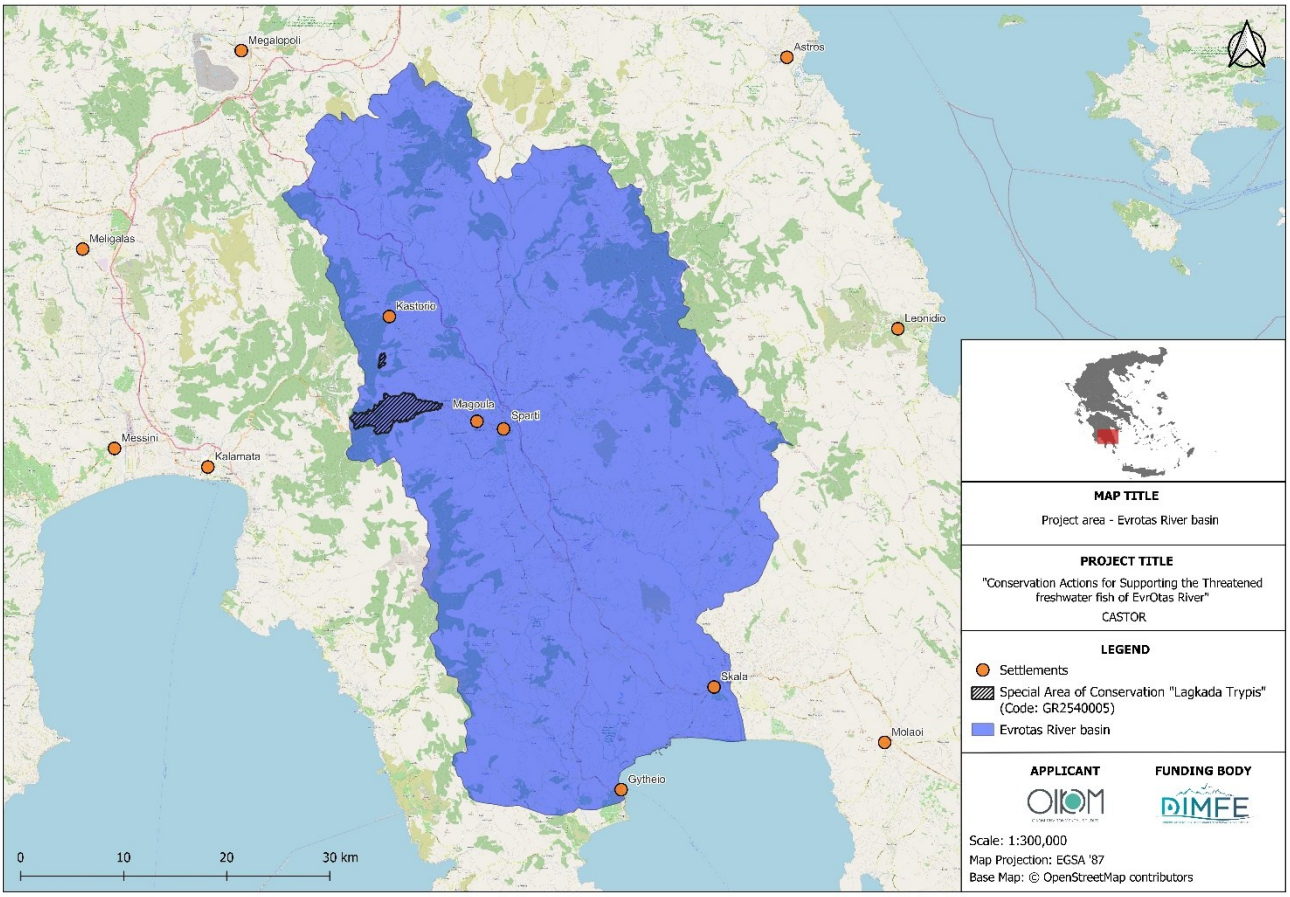
iv. **Natura 2000 Network Sites overlapping with the Evrotas Basin**

- The Evrotas basin partially overlaps with Natura 2000 designated areas, ensuring that conservation actions contribute to EU biodiversity objectives.
- Relevant sites include **GR2540005 – Lagkada Trypis** and adjacent riparian zones.

v. **Surrounding agricultural and community areas**

- Local agricultural lands and water users are directly connected to the ecological integrity of the Evrotas River.
- The project area therefore also extends to the social landscape, where stakeholder engagement will play a vital role in ensuring compatibility between conservation and human activities.

Map 1: Evrotas River Basin and project action areas (to be included).



2.4. Institutional and Regulatory Framework for Public Consultation

2.4.1. Public Consultation

The organized and coherent implementation of consultation activities is crucial, as it facilitates the most effective evaluation of the dialogue outcomes produced within the framework of the project. At the same time, it contributes to a better understanding of the project's proposals and helps prevent potential negative reactions from local communities due to insufficient or inaccurate information.

Public consultation has been adopted by the European Union (COM, 2002/704) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) as a means of improving the quality of public policies, enhancing transparency and accountability, and strengthening public trust in governance. It is widely applied in cases of policy-making processes.

In Greece, public consultation has been formally established under Law 4048/2012 (Official Gazette 34/A/23-02-12) and is also conducted through the dedicated platform of Open Governance (http://www.opengov.gr).

In the context of the CASTOR Project, public consultation is not a legislative obligation in itself but is considered a vital component of project implementation. Through stakeholder engagement workshops, targeted consultations, and public awareness events, the project ensures inclusiveness and

transparency, while creating opportunities for the integration of local perspectives into conservation planning.

Upon completion of the project, the results and experiences gained from the consultation process may also contribute to informing broader policy discussions on freshwater biodiversity conservation, restoration of river ecosystems, and the application of Nature-based Solutions in Greece.

2.4.2. Personal Data

In accordance with the **General Data Protection Regulation**[1] **(GDPR – Regulation (EU) 2016/679)**, during both the implementation and the completion of the Stakeholder Engagement Plan, no further disclosure of personal data collected from participants in the project's activities is foreseen.

To ensure compliance with these provisions, a designated team member has been appointed as responsible for data protection, ensuring that the following principles are applied:

- Data shall be collected only for specified, explicit, and legitimate purposes.
- Data collected shall be relevant and limited to what is necessary for the purposes of the project.
- Data shall be accurate and kept up to date.
- Any data not relevant to the project's purposes shall be deleted or corrected.

Compliance with GDPR principles requires the adoption of specific technical and organizational measures, including:

- Implementation of data protection measures **by design and by default**.
- Maintenance of a record of processing activities.

3. Stakeholders

3.1. Identification and Recording of Stakeholders

The identification of stakeholders has been and will continue to be carried out with the aim of recognizing individuals and organizations that may be directly or indirectly affected (positively or negatively) by the implementation of the CASTOR Project, or that may have any interest in or influence on the project.

Within the framework of the Stakeholder Engagement Plan (SEP), the following elements were taken into consideration for stakeholder identification:

- The type of consultation with stakeholders as defined by the regulatory framework and the project proposal.

[1] *According to the applicable legislation (General Data Protection Regulation – GDPR, Regulation (EU) 2016/679), personal data are defined only as information relating to an identified or – on the basis of certain characteristics – identifiable natural person (data subject).*

- The groups and individuals likely to be directly or indirectly affected within the project's area of influence.
- The groups and individuals likely to support or oppose the commitments, requirements, opportunities, and management actions that will be proposed under the project.

In terms of institutions, stakeholders were selected based on their administrative, institutional, political, economic, or cultural relevance to:

- The management and protection of nature.
- Development in areas of nature protection.
- The monitoring and enforcement of land-use rules, project approvals, and activities within Natura 2000 areas.

The stakeholders identified for the CASTOR Project can be grouped into the following categories:

- **Central Government and other public authorities** (e.g. Ministry of Environment & Energy, Decentralized Administration, Water Directorate).
- **Local Authorities and associated bodies** (Municipalities, Regional Units of Laconia and Peloponnese).
- **Producers' associations, farmers, water users, investors, and resource users in the Evrotas River Basin.**
- **Educational and research institutions** (e.g. Universities, HCMR/IMBRIW, local schools).
- **Media outlets** (local and regional press, radio, and online media).
- **Political entities, associations, and NGOs** (environmental NGOs, cultural associations, local cooperatives).
- **Individual citizens or other entities with specific influence and/or interest** (e.g. landowners, community leaders, private water users).

The stakeholders identified are presented in tabular form (see Chapter 6.4.1). The stakeholder database will be continuously updated throughout the project's lifetime to reflect new entries, feedback, and emerging dynamics.

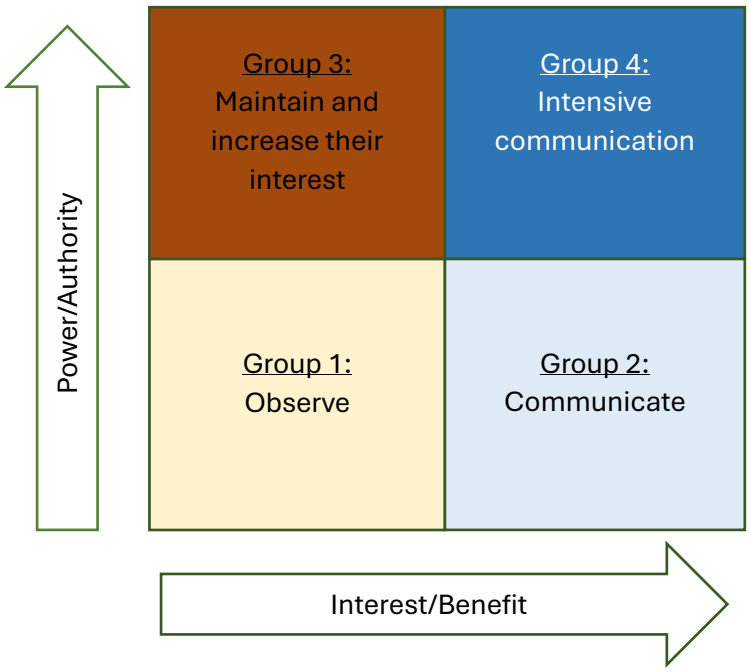
3.2. Stakeholder Relationship with the Project – Power/Interest Analysis

For each stakeholder, a concise analysis is carried out based on the level of power/authority they hold and their degree of interest in or benefit from the project. This analysis considers, where possible, the following aspects:

- The economic or emotional interest/benefit stakeholders may have in relation to the project outcomes (positive or negative).
- The key motivations of stakeholders for participating in the project.
- The role of each stakeholder within the framework of the SEP.
- The degree of involvement of each stakeholder during project implementation.

- The type of information each stakeholder requires and the most effective communication channels for reaching them.
- The current attitude/opinion of stakeholders towards the project and the sources of their existing information.
- The groups or individuals who influence each category of stakeholders and the likelihood that such influencers may themselves be considered additional stakeholders.
- The actions required in cases of a potentially negative stance by a stakeholder, in order to reassess and, if possible, improve their position towards the project.

In this analysis, each stakeholder is classified into a **Group**, which determines the intensity and content of communication and participation to be adopted. The approach is illustrated in the following scheme:



Group 1: Stakeholders with **low Power/Authority and low Interest/Benefit**. They have no major role in project implementation and little influence on its outcome. Communication channels will be established with them, but without priority.

Group 2: Stakeholders with **low Power/Authority** but **high Interest/Benefit**. They are significantly affected by the project (positively or negatively) and will receive frequent updates in line with project progress. Communication with this group is of medium priority but provides important guidance for shaping the SEP.

Group 3: Stakeholders with **high Power/Authority** but **low Interest/Benefit**. They are necessary actors for the success of the project. Sufficient communication is planned with this group to increase their interest and maintain it at desirable levels.

Group 4: Stakeholders with **high Power/Authority and high Interest/Benefit**. This group is of high priority, with members occupying a central role in the SEP. Intensive communication and the establishment of long-term collaboration are foreseen.

Based on this analysis, the following information is recorded for each stakeholder:

Entity	Name of stakeholder organization
Title/Role	Position or role of the stakeholder or individual
Representative/Contact Person	Name and position of the individual contact
Contact Details	Address, phone, email
Mandate/Responsibilities and Mode of Influence	Information on the authority, mandate, and capacities of the stakeholder
Power/Authority	Scale of influence or authority in relation to the project
Interest/Benefit	Scale of interest or benefit in relation to the project
Group	The stakeholder's assigned group according to the initial analysis (Group 1, 2, 3, or 4)

Each stakeholder may belong to only one Group, but their classification may change as the project evolves.

These records are used by the project team to design communication and engagement activities. For reasons of personal data protection, individual stakeholder details are not publicly disclosed.

3.3. Communication Objectives and Tools

During the implementation of this SEP, specific communication actions and measures will be carried out. The approach, tools, scale, and intensity for each stakeholder will be determined based on:

- The **Group** to which they belong (according to the previous analysis),
- Their **Attitude** towards the project (which may be positive, neutral/indifferent, or negative — and may change depending on project progress and the communication objectives set),
- The **specific communication objectives** for each stakeholder (these differ in significance depending on the stakeholder).

3.3.1. Means of Collaboration and Communication

According to international standards for information and consultation in similar SEPs, the following common tools are proposed:

In line with international standards for stakeholder engagement, and adapted to the CASTOR Project context, the following communication tools will be used:

Means	Application/Use in CASTOR
Information Points	• Creation of physical or digital information points (e.g. dedicated project website).
Communication via phone/ email/ social media/ SMS	• Dissemination of project information to authorities, local communities, farmers, and schools. • Invitations to workshops and consultation activities. • Announcements of NbS actions and fish conservation activities. • Responses to stakeholder feedback.

Means	Application/Use in CASTOR
Printed Material	• Production and dissemination of brochures and flyers on freshwater biodiversity and NbS. • Distribution of newsletters with project progress and results to stakeholders.
Mass Media (TV, radio, press, local media)	• Awareness campaigns through local radio and newspapers in Lakonia. • Announcements of workshops, educational activities, and project milestones. • Sharing success stories of fish translocations and habitat restoration.
Briefing meetings/ discussions	• Bilateral meetings with local authorities, irrigation associations, and public agencies. • Direct discussions with farmers and landowners on land-use practices. • Opportunity for confidential exchange of views on sensitive issues.
Public Information Days	• Kick-off event to present CASTOR objectives to the wider community. • Mid-term and final events to share results of translocations, NbS interventions, and invasive species control. • Recording and documentation of discussions among stakeholders.
Workshops	• Targeted workshops for farmers to discuss irrigation practices and NbS for water retention. • Workshops with competent authorities (water agencies, management authority of protected areas).
Educational Activities	• Organization of school workshops and environmental education activities to engage students (≥150 pupils targeted). • Dissemination of educational materials and interactive sessions on freshwater conservation.
Questionnaires/ Surveys	• Collection of stakeholder opinions on NbS, habitat restoration, and conservation actions. • Surveys targeting local community perception and awareness before and after project activities. • Gathering primary information on land-use and irrigation practices.
Presentations and Publications	• Presentations of CASTOR at scientific conferences (≥2 planned). • Publications in peer-reviewed journals (≥1 planned). • Meetings with local media to promote conservation messages and project milestones.

3.3.2. Communication Objectives

The communication objectives established during the design phase, and further developed during the implementation of the SEP, aim to reinforce its key axes. Objectives include:

- presenting project information and results,
- raising interest among stakeholders,
- fostering collaboration and building trust,
- supporting the implementation of SEP actions,
- addressing critical or secondary issues that may affect the project's success,
- encouraging active participation and feedback.

For stakeholders belonging to Groups 2, 3, and 4, the following elements are recorded:

Attitude	The stance towards the project (positive/negative/neutral).
Opinion on the Project	General perception of the project (particularly relevant for Group 4, and in some cases Groups 2 and 3).
Communication/ Participation Objectives	Specific objectives set by the SEP team in engaging with the stakeholder (e.g., awareness raising, consensus building, technical cooperation).
Means of Participation and Information	The communication and engagement tools selected for interaction with the stakeholder.
Description of Means	Detailed directions, priorities, and limitations in the application of these tools (especially for high-priority stakeholders in Group 4).
Other Elements	Additional data or factors that may influence the communication approach or objectives (e.g., past collaboration, institutional mandates, local sensitivities).

This information is used by the project team for the design of communication and engagement actions and, for data protection purposes, is not made publicly available.

4. Analysis of Information and Participation Actions

4.1. Communication via Telephone/Email/Social Media

Telephone Calls: Will be used in cases where other communication channels cannot be applied or when time constraints make them necessary. Direct phone contact will serve mainly for urgent updates and one-to-one engagement with key stakeholders (e.g., irrigation associations, farmers, or public authorities).

Email Communication: Email will serve as a central tool for stakeholder engagement, ensuring record-keeping, simultaneous communication with multiple groups, and rapid dissemination of project updates, meeting invitations, and results of actions.

Social Media (SM): Dedicated social media accounts of the CASTOR Project (LinkedIn) will be used, complemented by project partners' channels. Social media will:

- Disseminate visual and informative material on project actions.
- Share invitations to workshops, training, and consultation events.

- Publish results, photos, and videos of translocation activities, NbS interventions, and educational events.
- Collect feedback and comments from the wider public.

4.2. Printed Material

Two categories of printed material will be produced:

a) Permanent Use / Display Material

- **General Project Leaflet**: Presenting CASTOR objectives, target species, and NbS approach.
- **Thematic Leaflets**: Tailored for local audiences (e.g., farmers, schools, public authorities) highlighting the relevance of CASTOR actions to their activities).
- **Posters and Banners**: To be displayed at local information centers, municipal buildings, schools, and events in the Evrotas Basin.

b) Event-Specific Material

- Printed invitations and agendas for workshops, training sessions, and consultation meetings.
- Thematic fact sheets on issues such as freshwater fish conservation, invasive species control, and habitat restoration.

Digital distribution will be prioritized wherever possible, to minimize the environmental footprint. Printed versions will only be produced when essential for effective communication with the target audience.

4.3. Briefing Meetings/Discussions

These will primarily target stakeholders in Groups 2, 3, and especially Group 4. Their objectives include:

- Generating and maintaining stakeholder interest in CASTOR.
- Addressing reservations and potential conflicts.
- Building trust and long-term collaboration.
- Discussing the feasibility of proposed actions (e.g., NbS fish passages, invasive species removal) and clarifying stakeholder positions.

Priority will be given to meetings with stakeholders of high institutional importance and influence, particularly in Groups 3 and 4, such as:

1. **Local Authorities**: Municipalities of the Evrotas Basin, the Region of Peloponnese (Environment Directorate, Water Directorate), and the Decentralized Administration of Peloponnese (Forestry and Environment Services).
2. **Management Authorities**: The Management Body of Protected Areas of Southern Peloponnese, who oversee Natura 2000 sites relevant to CASTOR.
3. **Farmers' Associations and Irrigation Cooperatives**: As key land and water users in the basin.

4. **Educational and Research Institutions**: Local schools, the University of Peloponnese, and other relevant research centers.
5. **Environmental NGOs**: Local and national organizations involved in freshwater and biodiversity conservation.
6. **Development Agencies**: Local development companies supporting sustainable rural development.

These meetings will be planned throughout the project, starting from the first semester (autumn 2025) and recurring based on project milestones (e.g., after fish translocations, NbS construction works, or invasive species removal campaigns).

Special emphasis will be placed on continuous communication with farmers and local communities, as well as technical discussions with authorities responsible for water management and land use.

Records of all meetings will be kept in dedicated forms and databases, documenting participants, topics, and outcomes, ensuring accountability and traceability of the engagement process.

4.4. Information Days

At least four (4) information days will be organized during the project's implementation.

A total of four (4) information days will be organized during the project's implementation, serving as milestones for communication, transparency, and engagement with stakeholders.

- **Kick-off Information Day (Autumn 2025):** Organized at the beginning of the project to inform competent authorities, local stakeholders, and the general public about the project objectives, expected results, methodology, and timeline.
- **Annual Progress Information Days (2026 & 2027):** Two intermediate events will be held at the end of each year of implementation. These days will focus on presenting the progress of conservation actions, preliminary monitoring results, stakeholder engagement outcomes, and next steps. They will also provide an opportunity for stakeholders to provide feedback and contribute to adaptive management.
- **Final Information Day (2028):** Organized at the conclusion of the project, this event will present the final results of the conservation actions, highlight lessons learned, showcase best practices, and provide recommendations for future replication and scaling up of successful measures.

For each information day, the following will be ensured:

- Graphic design (consistent visual identity for all SEP actions).
- Production of invitations and posters (printed and/or digital).
- Preparation of agendas, presentations, and information material.
- Organization of plenary presentations and open discussions.
- Keeping detailed minutes and recording participation.
- Issuing a press release and engaging with local/regional media.

Detailed records of the information days (participants, topics, outcomes) will be maintained in dedicated forms and archived (see Chapter 6.4.3).

4.5. Presentations and Publications

These activities will not be rigidly predefined, as they will emerge progressively during project implementation, depending on stakeholder engagement and media interest.

Special care will be taken to ensure maximum outreach through local media (radio, newspapers, and online platforms of Lakonia) particularly in the framework of the project's public events.

The following are anticipated:

- Presentations of CASTOR at external events (e.g., scientific conferences, community meetings).
- Scientific publications (≥1 peer-reviewed article).
- Contributions to conferences (≥2 planned).
- Potential radio/TV interviews with project representatives, especially linked to milestones such as fish translocations, NbS habitat restoration, or invasive species removal campaigns.

All presentations and publications will be recorded in a dedicated database (see Chapter 6.4.3).

4.6. Selected Communication Tools for the CASTOR SEP

The selection of tools is aligned with the project's character, scale, context, and the stakeholder profiles identified in Chapter 3. Based on these parameters, the following tools will be applied:

1. **Telephone and Email Communication** – for direct contact with key authorities, farmers' associations, and local actors.
2. **Project Website** – central platform for project updates, background information, and dissemination of results.
3. **Printed Material** – leaflets, posters, and brochures for targeted audiences (farmers, schools, local communities).
4. **Briefing Meetings/Discussions** – bilateral and group meetings with key stakeholders.
5. **Information Days** – kick-off, mid and closing events.
6. **Presentations and Publications** – for wider dissemination to scientific, professional, and public audiences.

CASTOR SEP Communication & Participation Strategy:

Means / Action	Communication Objective	Main Target Audience
Telephone / Email Communication	Ensure direct, efficient, and timely contact; maintain records; follow-up on sensitive issues.	Authorities (local/regional), irrigation associations, key stakeholders.

Means / Action	Communication Objective	Main Target Audience
Project Website	Central hub for information, updates, and results; increase transparency and visibility.	General public, local communities, scientific community, media.
Social Media (LinkedIn)	Raise awareness, promote events, share visuals (photos/videos), engage with community feedback.	Local communities, schools, NGOs, wider public.
Printed Material (Leaflets, Posters, Banners)	Disseminate accessible information; raise awareness of conservation goals and NbS.	Farmers, schools, local authorities, community members.
Briefing Meetings / Discussions	Build trust; clarify technical issues; address concerns; co-develop solutions.	Farmers' associations, municipalities, water authorities, NGOs.
Workshops (Farmers, Authorities, Schools)	Facilitate knowledge sharing, capacity building, and targeted technical discussions.	Farmers, water/land authorities, schoolteachers and students.
Information Days (Kick-off & Closing)	Present project objectives and results; foster dialogue; strengthen stakeholder commitment.	All stakeholders, authorities, local communities, media.
Educational Activities	Raise awareness in young generations; promote stewardship for freshwater ecosystems.	Schools, students (≥150 targeted), teachers.
Presentations / Publications	Disseminate results to the scientific community and broader public; increase credibility.	Researchers, scientific community, media, decision-makers.

5. Mechanism for submission and management of proposals and feedback

5.1. Organization and Operation Process

To ensure effective design and implementation of the project's actions, the CASTOR team will maintain both a physical and a digital presence for collecting comments, proposals, and feedback.

The process will include the following steps:

i. **Collection of proposals and feedback**
Stakeholders will be provided with multiple two-way communication channels to express views, suggestions, or concerns. This ensures that the widest possible audience can contribute. Dedicated tools will be used for this purpose (see section 5.2).

ii. **Evaluation**
All submitted data will be categorized and assessed according to criteria such as the seriousness of the comment/proposal, its relevance, and the source of submission. This

stage will also include the processing of completed online questionnaires, as well as inputs collected from direct meetings.

iii. **Response**
The project team will provide clarifications and respond to requests and questions. Responses will follow the medium of origin (e.g., email comments will receive email replies), or, when relevant to a broader group, will be shared collectively (e.g., via webinars or summary notes).

iv. **Integration**
Valuable inputs are incorporated into project deliverables, monitoring reports, and final recommendations.

5.2. Tools and Mechanisms for Collecting Proposals and Feedback

To ensure smooth communication and transparent management of proposals, the following tools will be used:

- **Email address**: OikoM's official email account will be used to serve as the central hub for incoming and outgoing communication (feedback collection, meeting invitations, project updates, and internal coordination).
- **Project website**: A digital platform will host general information about the project, updates on conservation activities, progress reports, and open calls for feedback from the wider public.
- **Social media accounts**: Used to share updates, announce events, and provide accessible entry points for public comments and interaction.
- **Online meetings**: Designed to facilitate interactive discussions with stakeholders, particularly for those unable to participate in physical meetings.

5.3. Evaluation and Use of Proposals – Stakeholder Feedback

All comments, proposals, and reports will be systematically assessed based on relevance, validity, source, and timing of submission. The evaluation will determine whether and how each proposal will be incorporated into the project's implementation.

- **Transparency**: Evaluation results and responses will be made available to stakeholders through reports, meeting notes, and digital platforms.
- **Follow-up actions**: Comments requiring further review will be shared with relevant stakeholders for additional consultation.
- **Record-keeping**: All statements, proposals, and discussions during online events and meetings will be recorded in the minutes. Audiovisual material may also be archived where appropriate.
- **Integration in reporting**: Stakeholder inputs will be reflected in interim and final project reports, ensuring that the feedback process contributes to adaptive management of the conservation actions.

6. Project implementation and monitoring of SEP application - Reporting

6.1. Implementation Design

The actions foreseen within this SEP will be implemented following the project's overall timeline. Necessary updates will be made to integrate results from each period, evaluate progress, and adapt the design of future activities accordingly. Updates will be included in the final SEP deliverable.

Indicative Timeline:

- **Year 1 (2025–2026):** Kick-off stakeholder engagement, initial workshops, Information Day.
- **Year 2 (2026–2027):** Mid-term stakeholder consultation, thematic workshops (e.g., agriculture, water management), annual Information Day.
- **Year 3 (2027–2028):** Second mid-term stakeholder consultation, school awareness activities, annual Information Day.
- **Year 4 (2028):** Final consultations, Final Information Day presenting results and recommendations.

6.2. Reporting to Competent Authorities

In line with the project requirements, after the implementation of information and consultation activities, a report will be submitted summarizing the results of the SEP actions. Each report will include:

- A list of stakeholders reached, including written feedback received and the project team's responses.
- Documentation of Information Days, including participants, interventions, and questions raised.
- A summary of feedback from online and digital consultations.
- Recommendations and adjustments considered relevant by the project team to improve stakeholder engagement.

Foreseen Deliverables:

1. **Initial SEP Report (early 2026):** Submitted to DIMFE and the coordinating partners – forms the basis for planning consultation actions.
2. **Final SEP Report (2028):** Documents the overall results of the stakeholder engagement, feedback integration, and final recommendations for long-term conservation and management.

6.3. Evaluation of Actions and Procedures

The evaluation of SEP actions and processes will be performed regularly and incorporated into updates. Adjustments and improvements will be made when needed.

Evaluation Criteria:

- **Participation of Stakeholders:** Based on stakeholder registration and attendance, with special emphasis on Groups 2, 3, and 4 (as defined in Section 3.2).

- **Feedback Collected:** Assessment of opinions expressed and potential changes in stakeholder attitudes.
- **Relevance of Comments:** Consideration of whether suggestions and concerns were adequately addressed and integrated into project activities.
- **Effectiveness of Communication Channels:** Evaluation of the efficiency of tools used (email, meetings, workshops, social media).

6.4. Contents of the SEP Report

6.4.1. Stakeholder Register

Stakeholder information will be presented in a consolidated table generated through the project's stakeholder database (CASTOR SEP Register). The table will include categories, names, roles, contact details (where available), and classification in the Power/Interest Matrix (Section 3.2).

6.4.2. Summary of Information / Participation Actions

The summary of information and participation activities (meetings, workshops, information days, etc.) will be presented in tabular format, exported from the stakeholder register system. Each entry will include the type of activity, date, participants, objectives, and key outcomes.

6.4.3. Detailed Presentation of Information / Participation Actions

The detailed presentation of the actions (especially Information Days, workshops, and school activities) will be provided in a dedicated table, including the number and type of participants (indicative lists where applicable), issues discussed, feedback collected, and follow-up actions.

6.4.4. Information and Awareness Material

All communication and awareness-raising material produced and disseminated will be annexed to the final SEP report. This includes:

- Project leaflet (general overview of CASTOR).
- Thematic leaflets (e.g., on fish species, habitat restoration, NbS interventions).
- Posters and banners for Information Days.
- Educational material for schools (booklets, digital presentations).
- Press releases, media articles, and audiovisual material (photos, videos).

7. Analysis of Risks and Challenges in Stakeholder Engagement

The success of the Stakeholder Engagement Plan (SEP) of the CASTOR Project is closely linked to the effective participation of local communities, institutions, and professional groups. However, consultation processes often encounter obstacles that may hinder open dialogue and the formulation of consensus-based solutions. This section analyzes the main risks and challenges, grouped into three

categories: (i) potential reactions from stakeholder groups, (ii) risks related to low participation, and (iii) measures to mitigate these risks and strengthen participation.

7.1. Potential Reactions from Stakeholder Groups

The implementation of conservation actions in the Evrotas River Basin may be perceived differently by various stakeholder groups depending on their professional activities, economic interests, or previous experiences with environmental management initiatives.

- **Farmers and water users**: Agriculture is heavily dependent on water abstraction from the Evrotas River. Farmers may perceive conservation measures as a potential threat to their access to water for irrigation. Possible restrictions on water use, additional obligations for monitoring, or changes in existing irrigation practices may generate resistance. Furthermore, misinformation can fuel fears of excessive bureaucracy or loss of income.
- **Local authorities and institutions**: Municipalities, regional services, and development agencies may express hesitation when new conservation measures imply additional administrative responsibilities, financial obligations, or potential conflicts with development plans. Past experiences where environmental regulations were perceived as "externally imposed" could reinforce defensive attitudes.
- **Environmental NGOs and citizen groups**: Although often positive towards conservation initiatives, such organizations may demand stronger or faster action than what is feasible within the project framework, creating pressure and tension.

7.2. Risks of Low Participation

Even in the absence of open opposition, there is a significant risk that some stakeholder groups may remain passive or disengaged.

- **Limited awareness**: Many stakeholders may not be fully aware of the project's objectives, expected benefits, or opportunities for participation. A lack of accessible information may lead to indifference.
- **Practical obstacles**: Farmers and other professionals often have demanding work schedules. If consultations are not scheduled at convenient times and locations, attendance may be very limited.
- **Skepticism and distrust**: Some stakeholders may doubt whether their opinions will be genuinely considered in decision-making. This skepticism, often rooted in previous consultation processes, can discourage active engagement.
- **Communication barriers**: Technical terminology, lengthy documents, or lack of simple explanations may exclude participants who are not familiar with scientific or administrative language.

7.3. Proposed Mitigation Measures

To prevent or reduce the risks described above, the CASTOR Project will adopt a proactive approach, based on inclusiveness, transparency, and continuous presence in the local communities of the Evrotas River Basin.

- **Targeted workshops and thematic meetings**: Instead of relying solely on large-scale public events, smaller and more focused workshops will be organized. These will bring together specific groups (e.g., farmers' associations, municipal councils) to discuss issues directly relevant to their activities. This targeted approach increases the sense of relevance and ownership.
- **Clear, accessible, and attractive communication**: Information will be provided using simple language and visual tools (maps, diagrams, infographics, videos) that make complex scientific or technical issues easier to understand. Short information sheets will be prepared for distribution through local networks.
- **Strengthened local presence**: Meetings and events will be hosted directly in the Evrotas communities, not only in regional or central offices. The project team will ensure regular visits and face-to-face interaction with stakeholders, demonstrating commitment and building trust.
- **Multiple communication channels**: Feedback will be collected through a combination of tools – information days, dedicated email, social media platforms, and direct phone contact. This ensures that no group is excluded due to lack of access to specific technologies.
- **Highlighting positive impacts**: Communication will place emphasis on tangible benefits for both biodiversity and local communities. For example, healthier river ecosystems may improve water quality for irrigation, reduce flooding risks, and create opportunities for eco-tourism and local branding of agricultural products.
- **Building partnerships with trusted local actors**: Collaboration with local authorities, community leaders, and cooperatives will serve as an entry point for mobilizing wider participation, since these actors often act as "opinion leaders" in the community.

7.4. Expected Benefits of Mitigation Measures

The implementation of these strategies is expected to:

- Increase awareness and engagement of key stakeholder groups.
- Reduce potential opposition by ensuring that concerns are addressed early and transparently.
- Build a culture of trust, where stakeholders feel that their voices matter and are integrated into the project's decision-making process.
- Contribute to the long-term sustainability of conservation measures beyond the project's duration, by fostering genuine local ownership.

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