



Partnership as a tool to green Regional Development Programmes

Experience and Recommendations

February 2006

Greening Regional Development Programmes Network

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Glossary

Gothenburg Strategy	The EU strategy for sustainable development adopted by the European Council in Gothenburg in June 2001.
Lisbon Strategy	Action and development plan for the European Union set out by the European Council in Lisbon on March 2000. It broadly aims at making "the EU the world's most dynamic and competitive economy" by the 2010 deadline.
Managing Authority	With respect to the EU Structural Funds, the legal definition Reg. 1260/1999 (EC) Art.9: "means any public or private authority or body at national, regional or local level designated by the Member State, or the Member State when it is itself carrying out this function, to manage assistance for the purposes of this Regulation". For other regional development programmes, the Managing Authority is any public or private authority tasked with the delivery of relevant policies.
Partner	Organisation or individual interested in or affected by regional development operations in a particular country or region
Partnership	System of joint work of different partners within the programmes life cycle, programming, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. See also the chapter 1: "Partnership definition"
Partnership management plan	Document describing how the joint work of partners on developing a regional development programme is to be organised during the programming phase
Partnership manager	Individual or organisation responsible for managing (organising) the partnership
Partners participation	Involvement of partners into different phases of regional development programmes life cycle
Public consultation	One technique of managing joint work of partners within the partnership, open discussions of individuals representing different partners (also stakeholders) on issues related to regional development programming; to be organised mostly during the programming phase of regional development funds.

List of abbreviations

ENGO	Environmental non governmental organisation
MTE	Mid -term evaluation
NGO	Non governmental organisation
NUTS	Nomenclature of territorial units for statistics
PMC	Programme monitoring committee
PMG	Programme monitoring group
ROP	Regional operational programme
SEA	Strategic environmental assessment
SME	Small and medium enterprise
SOP	Sectoral operational programme
SPD	Single programming document

Introduction

“Too often in the past, the road to participation has been paved with good intentions only to lead to time-consuming and wasteful dead-ends which result in disillusionment and resentment for all concerned.

Participation, like democracy, has meant many things to many people. The opportunities for participation are there to be grasped but only if all those involved have a common understanding and share a common language.”

Brian Batson, Management in the Voluntary Sector Unit, Leeds Metropolitan University, in Wilcox, D: The Guide to Effective Participation, London, 1994, <http://www.partnerships.org.uk/guide/index.htm>

“Greening Regional Development Programmes”

Greening Regional Development Programmes” (GRDP) is a European-wide network funded by the EU that enables the partners to learn from each other about how to develop their regions while minimising the impact on the environment.

As a network, we share practical advice among ourselves and with other organisations involved in economic development and also prove the clear economic benefits in incorporating the environment into economic development programmes.

Our aim is to encourage organisations across Europe to demonstrate commitment to balancing economic prosperity with environmental benefits by signing up to the GRDP charter.

During the whole life of the project we will develop and disseminate tools and guidance to help organisations involved in development programmes to consider and integrate the environment in their work.

Report objectives

This report, developed by the GRDP network, aims to

summarise good practice in managing current EU Structural Funds assistance through partnership, focusing on the involvement of environmental partners in the programmes.

Lessons learned in the current programmes can and should be used in Structural Funds and other national and regional programmes. The recommendations contained in this document can be used by national and regional development agencies to improve programme development and delivery.

The report is aimed at:

- the authorities in charge of regional programming processes, including Structural Funds programmes;
- the management authorities of operational programmes;
- assessment teams that carry out Strategic Environmental Assessments (SEA) or ex-ante studies;
- other organisations using regional development funds, including the Structural Funds and Cohesion Funds.

It outlines a possible approach to the elaboration of operational programmes as defined in the EC regulation on partnerships. The report also tackles the issues of management, monitoring and evaluation of the programmes within partnerships.

It is purely advisory and not interpretative guidance for the transposition of any EC Regulation or Directive.

Structure of the report

The Report is in five parts:

- An attempt to define partnership based on legislation and common practice.
- Partnership in programming – mapping existing practices in partnership in managing Structural Funds in EU-15 and some new Member States; plus giving basic recommendations on how to organise good partnership in this particular phase.
- Partnership in implementation – best practice and recommendations.
- Partnership in monitoring and evaluation – best practice and recommendations.
- An attempt to identify the most significant barriers to organising good partnership.

Related work and publications

This report is built on data gathered through research and interviews carried out in the GRDP project. The basic data is from the GRDP audit report "Green Growth" of May 2005. That report looked at good practices, practical solutions and challenges in integrating the environment into regional development.

Specific research on how partnership in Structural Funds works in the Member States was carried out through questionnaires and phone interviews in August 2005. Environmental Authorities, Managing Authorities, Regional and national organisations and NGOs involved in the programmes were contacted.

These questions were identified as of special interest to the Project:

- Which partners - especially environmental ones - were already involved in the period 2000-2006?
- What were their tasks?
- Who should be involved in future?
- When were the environmental and other partners involved in discussion of the regulation, programming, management and evaluation? When should they be involved in future? Is information already available for the partners on rights and duties?
- Were there internal regulations for the partnership?
- What criteria should be suggested for successful partnerships?
- What problems face partnerships, e.g. in selection of environmental partners and secrecy?

Relevant reports in this field were also used:

- *Delivering Sustainable Development*, Environmental NGOs' common position on European Regional policy after 2006. BirdLife International, CEE Bankwatch Network, CEEWEB, Friends of the Earth Europe, Milieukontakt Oost-Europa and WWF.
- *The Illusion of Inclusion – Access by NGOs to the Structural Funds in the new member states of eastern and central Europe*, Brian Harvey Social Research, July 2004.
- *Partnerships for Sustainable Development – Report on the Structural Funds programming process in Eastern Europe*, Centre for Community organising, Czech Rep; national Society of conservationists, Hungary; Green Liberty, Latvia; European Centre of Sustainable Development, Poland; Centre for Environmental Public Advocacy, Slovakia, Milieukontakt Oost-Europa, The Netherlands, February 2004.

- *Promoting Regional Sustainable Development through European Funding Programmes: The experience of the East of England*, Simon Chubb, June 2005.

How we define "partnership"

Partnership was a general requirement of the 1999 Regulation. In the draft Regulation for 2007-2013, potential partners are described in detail - see "Partnership definition" below. In addition to those explicitly stated in the draft Regulation, other stakeholders can be considered for inclusion at national level.

When working in partnership we may ask: why do we do this? What are the main outcomes, advantages or added value in working within a broad participatory structure? And even, what is a "good partnership"?

The answers are not easy because we often cannot measure precisely how a programme achieved key improvements through working in partnership. No major comparative study with specific outcomes has yet been made, and in any case such a study may not clarify the issues.

Benefits of partnership

The EU Commission insists on working in partnership, and it also does have advantages for programmes:

- **Better quality of programmes:** Partnership in programming means stakeholders can obtain detailed information on the programme content at a very early stage, and influence its development. Partnership in programming results in clear environmental, economic and social aims within the programme, which can be directly translated through programme measures to the outcomes of individual projects. This leads to improved absorption of the funds, and more effective use of taxpayers' money, through better selection of projects according to their quality. Managed properly, partnership improves the democratic political decision-making process.
- **Better programme performance:** Partnership in implementation results in a more integrated approach. It reduces conflicts, criticism and wastage of resources, including money. Transparency, openness and prevention of misuse and corruption in the project selection process support the smooth implementation of the programme. The involvement of stakeholders results in a greater understanding of the actions that a programme plans to support. These stakeholders can then ensure that

information is disseminated to potential project applicants as widely as possible. Better informed applicants mean better delivery of better projects. Partnership strengthens both local sense of ownership of the projects funded, and the legitimacy of economic and social development policy.

- **Better impact of the programme:** Partnership in programming and implementation helps planners and decision-makers design programmes that meet the social-economic needs or specific conditions of a particular territory. The programme's impacts are thus much more predictable. Partnership in monitoring committees, if managed well, provides an insight into the principles of environmentally-sustainable regional development for all participating parties. It secures a mutual exchange of experience and information among different stakeholders. Partnership in monitoring and evaluation is a learning experience for all participating parties at low cost.

One answer to the question of what makes a good partnership is this: You can have a good partnership only when you succeed in delivering all the above-mentioned positive impacts. Thus you can have a good partnership only when you can prove the partners actually influenced the programme content – its priorities, measures and related finances – during its elaboration and implementation. The partners will have had clear roles within the project appraisal process and monitoring, and either sat on key decision-making bodies or had access to their decision-making process.

If stakeholders have influence on – rather than simply information about – the programming, they can input by bringing in the practical aspects of project implementation, as well as their knowledge of the region, and can therefore influence the design of the programme. The programme will then reflect the needs of the area better and the implementation will be smoothed.

The quality of partnership crucially depends on commitment by the responsible public authorities and on the quality of the political culture.

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Partnership definition

There is no generally acknowledged pan-European definition¹ of “partnership”. We have two options in trying to shape a definition:

- research EU and national legislation – in most cases, the framework for regional/local development operation, and at EU level, legislation regulating Structural Funds.
- try to examine the basic principles of partnership in managing development operations at regional and local level. This would probably involve looking at good (some would say “best”) practice in means of communication among planners, responsible authorities, project applicants, experts and public.

Both options are very difficult to do in a brief and an uncomplicated way, but we will try our best.

1.1. Legislative definition

Current EU Legislation on partnership

The Council Regulation (EC) No. 1260/1999 laying down general provisions on the Structural Funds stipulates in its Article 8 that:

“Community actions...shall be drawn up in close consultation, hereinafter referred to as ‘partnership’, between the Commission and the Member State together with the authorities and bodies designated by the Member State within the framework of its national rules and current practices, namely:

- the regional and local authorities and other competent authorities;
- economic and social partners;
- any other relevant competent bodies within this framework.”

Explanatory documents issued by the European Commission demand a partnership system to promote dialogue among the following:

- the European Commission;
- Member States;
- regional and local offices (including environmental offices);
- economic and social partners;
- other relevant organisations (including environmental ones and those lobbying for equal opportunities for men and women).

Future EU Regulation on general provisions for managing structural aid

The draft of Regulation No. COM (2004) 492 laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund and the Cohesion Fund for period 2007-2013 was published by the European Commission on 14 July 2004. It gives a more detailed definition of the principles of partnership for the coming programming period than the Regulation 1260/1999 COM currently in force. The draft might be reformed in negotiations before its approval by the European Council, but we could take the Commission’s text as a very good starting point in exploring likely shifts in views on partnership for the near future.

The changes made in Article 10 of the Draft Regulation are more a small evolution than a revolution. The Commission tries to be more explicit on certain issues:

Article 10 - Partnership

1. The objectives of the funds are pursued in the framework of close co-operation, hereinafter partnership, between the Commission and the Member State. The Member State shall organise, where appropriate and in accordance with current national rules and practices, a partnership with the authorities and bodies [...] such as:

- a) the competent regional, local, urban and other public authorities;
- b) the economic and social partners;
- c) any other appropriate body.

Each Member State shall designate the most representative partners at national, regional and local level and in the economic, [...] social, environmental or other spheres, hereinafter “partners” [...], in accordance with national rules and practices, taking account of the need to promote equality between men and women and sustainable development through the integration of

environmental protection and improvement requirements.

2. The partnership shall be conducted in full compliance with the respective institutional, legal and financial powers of each partner category as defined in paragraph 1.

The partnership shall cover [...] the preparation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the operational programmes. Member States shall involve, where appropriate, each of the relevant partners, and particularly the regions, in the different stages of programming within the time limit set for each stage.

3. Each year the Commission shall consult the organisations representing the economic and social partners at European level on assistance from the Funds.

In the version of 7 December the following recitals² were added:

- (21) Action by the Community should be complementary to that carried out by the Member States or seek to contribute to it. The partnership should be strengthened through arrangements for the participation of various types of partners, in particular the regions, with full regard to the institutional arrangements of the Member States.
- (26) In order to ensure a genuine economic impact, contributions from the Structural Funds may not replace public expenditure by the Member States under the terms of this Regulation. Verification, through partnership, of the principle of additionality should concentrate on the regions under the "Convergence" objective because of the extent of the financial resources allocated to them and may result in a financial correction if additionality is not respected.
- (27) In the context of its effort in favour of economic and social cohesion, the Community promotes the goal of eliminating inequalities and promoting equality between women and men as enshrined in Articles 2 and 3 of the Treaty as well as the prevention of discrimination on the basis of gender, race or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation in all stages of implementing the Funds.

The Article 10 of the Draft Regulation stresses that partnership should be considered at all phases of EU regional policy implementation, i.e. from programming through managing of the programmes to evaluation. Both levels of programming are mentioned: the national strategic reference framework and operational programmes.

There is a broader list of partners who should be involved in the process. It also names non-governmental and civil society organisations;

It stresses regions' role in programming: "Member States shall involve each of the appropriate partners, and particularly the regions..."

It commits itself to consulting economic and social partners on issues of structural aid and regional policy.

So what was not changed – but probably might be?

The Commission is still reluctant to give legislative details (or at least detailed and binding guidelines) of how the partnership is supposed to be organised. Thus the lack of legislative definition continues. The new Article 10 does not throw much more light than the previous Article 8. The content of partnership is left for the Member States to decide. This might cause major problems in countries – and not just the new Member States – where the practice of consultations, involvement and participatory democracy is not much evolved yet. This lack of clarity leaves the discussion to the negotiations between the European Commission and the Member States in the programme approval process. The EU Commission does not provide detailed minimum standards for partners' participation at each stage of the programme cycle, so different opinions about the degree of involvement of partners can lead to delays in the approval process. The EU Commission also stressed the fact that there can be limits to partners' participation at each stage of the structural aid cycle, and these limits should be considered.

Our conclusion is that the draft Regulation is more specific in some matters, such as in the enumeration of bodies and partners to be involved. This will definitely help in enforcing the partnership approach to implementation of EU regional policy, but the changes seen in Article 10 are unfortunately a lot less ambitious than they might have been.

Related Communications of the Commission

The White Paper on governance published in 2002 was followed by Communication No. 704, Toward a reinforced culture of consultation and dialogue - general principles and minimum standards for consultations of interested parties by the Commission.

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Framework guidelines have been in force since 2003 and are used voluntarily by all parts of the EU Commission. They contain basic rules for managing different types of consultations. While the guidelines mainly focus on consultations during drafting of European legislation, they can also be used as explanatory material for developing programming documents for the new Regulations on Structural Funds for 2007-2013.

The biggest advantage of the Communication is that it sets out basic principles and minimum standards for consultative processes.

Consultation processes run by the EU Commission must be transparent for those directly involved and the general public. It must be clear:

- what issues are being developed;
- what mechanisms are being used to consult;
- who is being consulted and why;
- what has influenced decisions in the formulation of policy.

The minimum standards are as follows:

- All communications on consultation should be clear and concise, and should include all necessary information to facilitate responses.
- When defining the target group(s) in a consultation process, the Commission should ensure that relevant parties have an opportunity to express their opinions.
- The EU Commission should ensure adequate publicity to raise awareness and adapt its communication channels to meet the needs of all target audiences. Without excluding other communication tools, public consultations should be published on the Internet and announced at the "single access point".
- The EU Commission should allow enough time for planning and responses to invitations and written contributions. The Commission should strive to allow at least eight weeks for responses to written public consultations and 20 working days' notice of meetings.
- Receipt of contributions should be acknowledged. Results of public consultation should be displayed on websites linked to the single access point on the Internet.

Aarhus Convention

As the EU legislation did not provide a clear and feasible definition of partnership, while the published Communications are not much more specific than the Regulations, we can explore the tool set out in the Aarhus Convention.

The Aarhus Convention – the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters – was signed in June 1998 in Aarhus, Denmark, by 38 member states of the European Economic Commission. Even the European Commission itself signed the Convention and, as a result, the provisions of the Convention apply to all institutions and administrative acts of the EU authorities.

The Convention provides a legal and institutional framework for implementing the partnership principle into regional planning. Although they are intended for only the environmental field, the Convention provisions introduce a universal and general system that is applicable on a broader basis. The system is built on three pillars:

- access to information;
- public participation in decision-making;
- public access to justice.

Article 7 of the Convention refers to strategic planning and stipulates that the public be involved in the making of plans, programmes and policies relating to the environment.

A broad interpretation of the Convention provides for public participation in the preparation not only of environmental plans, programmes and policies but also all strategic documents relating to the environment.

On the other hand, a narrow interpretation of the Convention limits its use to regulations on strategic documents with a direct impact on the environment or strategic documents (plans, programmes) of the environmental policy.

Whichever interpretation of the Aarhus Convention we follow, there are two important reasons for abiding by its regulations in the strategic planning processes in regional development:

- Documents about regional development always have direct impacts on the environment, therefore the system for public participation suggested in the Convention is always suitable when preparing planning documents for regional development.
- The structure and principles set by the Convention can be used to interpret how the partnership principle is implemented in practice since it is stipulated by European legislation on Structural Funds.

Article 7 of the Convention requires that public participation be undertaken within “a transparent and fair framework”. Unlike Article 6, it does not specify the steps that should be taken. This allows authorities to use steps appropriate to each activity and be flexible. Using the structure set out in the Convention, we will find that any participatory process consists of:

- access to information (Article 4 of the Convention);
- active dissemination of information (Article 5 of the Convention with reference to Article 6.2);
- consultations with citizens in order to find out their views on the document (Article 7 with reference to the provisions of Articles 6.3, 6.4 and 6.8);
- direct involvement of the partners in the planning team (Article 7).

Those are the four key components of any participatory process with a special focus on the planning stage of Structural Funds implementation. In further stages, some of the components are slightly diminished but never left out. In most consultations at project appraisal stage, for example, only experts are consulted during the selection process in order to give their opinion to decision-makers. There is usually no attempt to involve the public, yet the process can still be considered as open and transparent.

1.2. Basic principles and characteristics of an effective partnership

Community Strategic Guidelines, 2007 - 2013:
 “Thus, when developing their national strategies, Member States should systematically analyse to what extent a more efficient, accountable and transparent public administration can help raise productivity levels.”
 “A related, and highly important, factor determining the effectiveness of cohesion policy is the quality of the partnership between all stakeholders, including those at regional and local level, in the preparation and implementation of programmes.”³

Basic principles

The principles of an effective partnership listed below were formulated for the programme development stage. However, they are also applicable for the programme implementation, monitoring and evaluation stages.

Basic principles of interpersonal communication in the framework of development of the programming documents:

- Equality of all partners and acknowledgement of everyone’s input to the planning process. Serious and responsible approach to outputs of all target groups. Respect is also given to non-governmental and community groups, who can provide the planners with additional expertise and local knowledge.
- Openness of the process and empathy to the needs of different target groups.

Basic requirements for the development of the programming documents themselves:

- Timely access to information.
- Feasible timeframe for the programme planning process according to the capacities of other partners.
- Detailed rules for disseminating draft documents among stakeholders, ensuring everybody is working with the same version.

Basic principles of decision-making on the documents:

- Where possible, stress the consensus and broad agreement on decisions taken during elaboration of the programming documents. Such a consensus and agreement supplement the formal decision-making when the programmes are being adopted by the responsible authorities (ministry and government).
- Lay down in advance and publish the steps to approval of the structure, content and extent of the documents and who exactly is responsible for such decisions. It prevents later frustrations for the stakeholders and exaggerated expectations.

Characteristics of an effective partnership

The structure of partnership as promoted in this text is very similar to the structure of Aarhus Convention as explained above. If any process is to be considered as a partnership, it must demonstrate the following characteristics:

Identification of partners

The decision-maker in co-operation with the programme planner must identify the interested or directly-affected target groups. See the list above of partners within Article 10 of EC Regulation for 2007-2013.

The selection of partners should be open and transparent. Election tools or open competition on strict and previously-announced criteria should be used to avoid political preferences influencing the selection. In most Member States, partners are chosen by Managing Authorities, or by regional or local authorities through the Managing Authority.

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We consider that an effective partnership should involve:

- the Programming Authority;
- the regional authorities, and local authorities of the area concerned by the programme;
- representatives from the statutory economic, social and environmental agencies;
- representatives from economic, social and environmental NGOs;
- politicians;
- additional experts as required.

Information campaign

Information about the programme planning process is provided on request and also actively disseminated using these basic tools: web pages; e-conferences; leaflets, bulletins and other printed materials; and mass media.

Consultations with the public

At certain stages of the programme planning process, the programme planner has to give the opportunity for every legal or natural person to give their opinion on the materials. This opinion must be taken into account in formulating the strategic document. Each comment is recorded, made public, evaluated, and – if relevant – incorporated in the document. For this purpose adequate communication instruments are prepared (seminars, workshops and e-tools). Public discussion in open hearings should be held at least at the end of consultations on the general concept of strategic document.

Direct involvement

The stakeholder representative is usually a member of a thematic working group set up to discuss draft documents elaborated by the planners/consultants. There are difficult issues on the legitimacy of partners and the legitimacy of selecting or avoiding particular target groups. Not directly affected or interested target groups may be omitted, but the working group's logistics must remain feasible.

The working group may be formed publicly, such as at the introductory seminar or conference where the system of work is presented. In arranging the introductory seminar, it is necessary to identify very carefully all concerned groups (NGOs, citizens living within the area to be regulated by the strategic document, mayors etc.).

Evaluation of the effectiveness of the participatory process

Evaluation is usually part of any process if managed well.

The evaluation checks whether:

- the obligatory (methodological) requirements were met;
- partners' participation was effective;
- the programme planning team did all they could reasonably do to follow both items above.

1.3. General recommendations

Effective partnership requires an early involvement of partners in preparing programmes, budgeting, management, monitoring and evaluation of assistance. The partnership's contribution is required at each stage and has to be taken into consideration.

Experience shows that investment in participation early in the programming cycle pays off in better acceptance and support from partners at a later stage. A co-ordinated input from the partners at all levels is needed and advantageous, as it increases consensus and acceptance of the proposed measures. Co-ordination is key to efficiency, as engagement needs to be maintained and contributions organised.

It is very important to engage the right partners in the work at the right time, if possible from the very beginning of the programming process. The continuity of partners' representations is to be stressed at this point. It is very demanding to start each step with different people or different organisations.

The new Structural Fund and Cohesion Fund Regulations identified environmental partners among the appropriate bodies to form national, regional or local partnerships. Environmental partners need to benefit from equal representation with economic and social partners.

Moreover, continuous presence of Environmental Authority representatives at each stage of decision-making will raise awareness of environmental sustainability among partners.

It is suggested that Environmental Authorities should be involved in all development programmes, beyond the Structural Funds.

It is important to involve local partners in order to develop programmes that meet local needs and are more widely accepted locally.

A multi-level co-operation:

- has to produce added value for the partners (a 'win-win' situation);
- requires institutional and personal continuity and time;
- needs flexibility and adaptability;
- has to be built on mutual trust and confidence;
- cannot be imposed;
- needs the right balance between formal and informal instruments.

¹Some countries have national regulations on partnership but practices differ significantly. Below are some examples:

Poland: The Regulation of the Minister of Economy and Labour of 17 August 2004 on the detailed procedure for the selection of social and economic partners as members of the Steering Committee for the Sectoral Operational Programme – Improved Competitiveness of Enterprises for 2004-2006 (Official Journal of the Laws of 2004, No. 183, Item 1887). The Act on the National Development Plan of April 20, 2004 provides for the involvement of other partners within advisory bodies: (1) monitoring committees responsible for monitoring the implementation, and (2) steering committees selecting the projects. The Act stipulates that one-third of the members of each committee must be social and economic partners. There are national and regional committees for the Integrated Regional Operational Programme that are co-ordinated at the national level and implemented at regional levels.

The UK, Objective One for Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly: This requirement is referred to in the Service Level Agreement (attached) between the Competent Environmental Authorities and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister in defining the Competent Environmental Authority's role in Structural Funds. Lastly, the Implementing Provisions, in chapter 12 of the Cornwall Single Programming Document (SPD), set out the main management responsibilities of the Secretariat and Programme Monitoring Committee, including partners. These provisions designate the management of partnerships for the programme to the Secretariat, and state that the PMC will set up working groups to encourage the full participation of partnerships in the decision-making process for the programme. Clearly these provisions are binding as the Single Programming Document is agreed with the Commission under the terms of the General Regulations.

²The explanatory and/or declamatory clauses at the beginning of a piece of legislation. Also known as the 'Whereases' as most start with 'Whereas...'. Recitals do not have legal effect.

³Cohesion Policy in Support of Growth and Jobs: Community Strategic Guidelines, 2007-2013, Communication From The Commission, Brussels, 05.07.2005, COM(2005) 0299, pgs. 10,11

2

Partnership in programming

2.1 Value added of partnership in programming

Basic advantages of partnership within programming

The advantages could be summarised as follows:

- The programme responds to local needs - in partnership, the planners and decision-makers design the programme to meet the social-economic conditions, biggest needs, development gaps and potentials of a particular territory. Discussion with people living and working in the field improves the relevance of the programme; local knowledge and local expertise can be exploited for free or at very low cost. If partners are involved effectively, it is also easier to design performance indicators - the very heart of any regional development programme - that reflect:
 - local development needs;
 - organisational and financial capacities of further project promoters;
 - data collected in the field.

If designed in partnership, the indicators can be easily built into the project scoring system and also into the information campaign. Thus, from the very beginning the impact of structural operations can be measured properly in co-operation with both major data collectors: (a) project promoters and (b) other interested institutions (development agencies, environmental agencies, statistics). The programme impact is more predictable if designed in partnership.

- The implementation structure responds to local potential - partners involved in the programming process are informed about the programme in detail at a very early stage. Later, project promoters are ready to prepare projects applications as soon as the programme is launched. The information flow and advisory assistance could be designed in compliance with partners' capacities, and proper capacity-building activities can be introduced if necessary. The implementation structure is then more effective and cheaper, because it is built on existing structures.

The importance of the quality of the partners involved

Within the programming phase (and also later phases) the partnership applies to more organisations than just environmental partners. Partnership promotes interdisciplinary discussion on development needs among economic development organisations, social organisations and environmentalists. All three types of organisations should always be invited. This way the partnership helps to improve the development of planned interventions.

The value added by partnership depends heavily on the quality of partners. Motivation is often missing on both sides:

- Management Authorities often lack motivation to look for partners because of the tight timescale and shortage of personal and financial resources.
- other institutions lack the motivation to become partners because of doubts about their real influence on programme content.

The habitual mistrust and struggle mean that an equal partnership is not created. Motivation amongst stakeholders, and consequently the quality of partnership itself, thus usually depends on the quality of political atmosphere and the existence of co-operation amongst affected institutions. A well-developed civil society and a long participatory tradition are usually good factors for motivating key players in the process.

2.2. Current practice review

The intensity and level of consultation varies from programme to programme and country to country. Partners can simply be informed about the programme development, asked for proposals, asked for comments or be actively involved in drafting the programme.

Some countries such as Austria have developed structures to co-ordinate the work in partnership on Structural Funds.

The Austrian Conference on Spatial Planning (ÖROK) ensures the co-ordination of partners in Austria

ÖROK was created in 1971 through a political agreement between several partners. At political level, it brings together the Federal Chancellor, Federal Ministers, State Governors, Presidents of Associations of Towns and Communities, and Presidents of Economic and Social Partners. A committee of deputies represents the administrative level and is divided in three sections: Committee on Spatial Development, Committee on Regional Policy and Committee on Spatial Data Infrastructure. Social and economic partners are members of each monitoring committee.

The Committee on Regional Policy has working groups on Managing Authorities and Evaluation.

OEROK is the Secretariat for all the monitoring committees of the Objective One and Two programmes, as well as the EC initiatives Urban II and LEADER+.

Tasks specifically related to programming:

- programming;
- recommendation on contents and management of EU Regional Policy 2000-2006;
- definition of eligible areas and distribution of EU funds;
- negotiation of programme contents and financing among partners;
- elaboration of legal framework for programme implementation
- programme secretariat; continuous co-ordination across programmes

Other strategic tasks:

- embed EU Regional Policy in wider national context;
- ensure co-ordination across programmes (e.g. through common standards);
- facilitate finding compromises among the different actors (e.g. definition of eligibility map);
- provide a neutral platform, easy to address, to provide at least a basic level of mutual confidence amongst partners.

Operational tasks:

- secretariat for Monitoring Committees;
- service point for programme managers and European Commission;
- platform for exchange of know-how and experience;
- INTERREG III B National Contact Point;
- ESPON Contact Point.

Public consultations

In most countries, public consultations were also held before drafting the programmes, in order to gather proposals from the various sectors and organisations.

The consultations can take various forms, including conferences, sectoral round tables and information seminars.

The consultation and information strategy for the development of the National Development Plan in Malta.

The Malta Council for Economic and Social Development (MCESD) provides a forum for broad-based consultation on major national policy issues between social partners and, where necessary, organisations of civil society. The Council, appointed by the Prime Minister, has a distinct legal personality. It is entrusted with the task of advising Government on issues relating to Malta's sustainable economic and social development. In this regard, the Malta Council for Economic and Social Development - in addition to specific NGOs representing equal opportunities, the environment, farmers and fisheries - are the main Structural Funds partners.

Within the context of drafting the National Development Plan (which forms the basis of the SPD), nine sectoral working groups⁴ were set up to allow ministries and the social partners to achieve a common vision for their sector's future.

These groups included representatives of the social/economic partners as well as non-governmental organisations relevant to each sector. Each working group also considered three horizontal themes: environment, gender equality and the island of Gozo.

A SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) workshop was also held in April 2002 to which all major partners, members of the Civil Society and political parties were invited. The results of the SWOT were made available on the Internet. National sectoral strategies (e.g. the Rural Development Plan, and the Joint Assessment of Employment Priorities) were all drafted in consultation with relevant partners.

The draft Single Programming Document (SPD) was presented to the public at a workshop on Regional Policy on 5 February 2003. The draft was sent to the Malta Council for Economic and Social Development and relevant members of the civil society, and formal

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consultations were held on 24 February. An additional information workshop for the public was held at the Chamber of Commerce on 24 April. Leaflets and a CD-ROM summarising the SPD's priorities and measures were distributed to local councils, the Malta-EU Information Centre and the public. In April, the first draft SPD was posted on the Planning and Priorities Co-ordination Directorate website, followed by its subsequent versions. The public was invited to send comments to the website. The content of the draft SPD was the subject of various newspaper articles and television and radio programmes in February and March 2003. The Government's stand at the 2003 and 2004 Malta International Trade Fair, which is held for two weeks every July, was devoted to Regional Policy and Malta's SPD.

Procedures for applying the partnership principle to issues relating to Regional Policy were signed by the two sides on 18 December 2002 and are attached to the SPD as Annex VI. Through this arrangement the partners are directly involved in monitoring the Programme on a regular basis. Moreover, the partners are members of the official Monitoring Committee under Article 35 of EC Regulation 1260/99.

However, the Nature Trust (NGO) indicated that their only involvement was at the Structural Funds committee level.

In the Puglia Region of Italy, sectoral round tables⁵ were organised to provide participation in developing the Regional Operational Programme, and local authorities and socio-economic partners actively participated.

A regional partnership committee⁶ was created in Puglia and was involved in drafting and updating the programming complement and elaborating proposals for the implementation of the Regional Operational Programme. Participants in this committee are also members of the ROP monitoring committee. One environmental organisation – the regional branch of *Legambiente* – sits on the monitoring committee as the official representative of all environmental NGOs.

Mühlviertler Alm, Austria

The prime example in Austria for the combination of LEADER and a Local Agenda 21-process is Mühlviertler Alm. This is an association of nine local authorities in a rural area of Upper Austria with about 16,000 inhabitants. In 1995 the region joined the LEADER II-programme which subsidised the first important projects in its development. In 2001 the region was selected for the LEADER+ programme. At the same time it began a Local Agenda 21 process that was especially important in defining the region's sustainable development and in integrating the inhabitants into the process. In workshops, interested people and all local authorities discussed and developed visions, goals, principles and measures for the region's sustainable future. These were then included in the "future-book". Implementation of this "future-book" through projects is subsidised through the LEADER programme.

Participants in the process

National and regional authorities

The national and regional authorities involved in the future management of the programme are the main partners during the programming phase in all countries. Unions and other professional organisations usually have a consultative role.

Environmental Authorities and their networks

In countries such as Italy, Spain, Austria and the UK, environmental authorities were heavily involved in drafting the programme documents. However, when sectoral consultations are organised, the environment is generally considered a sector on its own and not as a transversal issue.

The Spanish network of environmental authorities' contribution during programming

The Environmental Authorities Network is an informal entity created in 1997. It is a forum for co-operation and co-ordination among authorities responsible for the environment and for the programming and management of Structural and Cohesion Funds at different administrative levels.

The members are the ministries in charge of the Funds (Finance, Agriculture and Fishery, Labour and Social Affairs), the Ministry of Environment, representatives from the Ministries of Environment of the Autonomous Regions and representatives of the Directorates-General of Regional Policy, Employment, Agriculture, Fisheries and Environment from the EU Commission.

For the 2000-2006 programme, the Environmental Authorities Network was included in production of the Regional Development Plan and the ex-ante assessment formed part of the Strategic Environmental Assessment, providing documents and offering guidance and methodology.

In La Rioja Region, the Environmental Authorities network has demonstrated its effectiveness in resolving numerous questions and has achieved a fluid dialogue between environmental authorities, Fund managers and those in charge of the programme. The next step will be to increase its resources and, perhaps, modify its formal status. The Network holds workshops for information and debating specific environmental topics in the Cohesion Policy. It has also set up working groups on specific topics such as agriculture, fisheries, tourism and indicators.

Environmental NGOs

In Austria, partnership has been achieved by integrating the relevant environmental partners at regional and national level as well as NGOs in the Monitoring Committees of EU Regional Programmes.

In Puglia, environmental NGOs are represented on the Monitoring Committee and have created an environment working group which submitted proposals for the mid-term review.

When the new Member States undertook their planning processes during the 2004-06 period, there was no country-wide – nor even sector-based – platform for NGOs in the consultation process, with the exception of Hungary and Slovakia. In other cases, however, all or some of the

NGOs had a highly active role when given the chance. However, in some cases NGOs lost interest in participation because they had not seen any results nor any progress from the 1999 pre-accession programming practice. In Latvia, NGOs were not active from the beginning of the process but from later on, and the quality of comments improved. The necessity of a country-wide NGO platform emerged in almost all countries but apparently civil society is not receptive to this idea - it is not thought to be mature enough for this⁷.

Universities and research centres

These sometimes participate by providing the programmes with technical expertise and knowledge, e.g. they can provide a sound scientific basis for programme development. In Puglia, Italy, they provided support for environmental assessment techniques.

Transparency in the process

The transparency in access to the documents, data and information on the partners involved, on the comments made and on the administrations' reaction on these comments is generally very poor. A shortage of time is usually the main issue in communication.

In the same way, there is often little transparency on why certain proposals were taken on board or not.

Feedback on the decisions

Most partners ask that those who contribute through comments must be notified which comments were accepted and which were not, annexed with proper arguments why, but this happens only rarely.

Some countries organised feedback meetings to explain how priorities were developed. In Malta, the Rural Development Plan (RDP) was developed by consulting various key stakeholders in meetings two years before its implementation. General meetings and one-to-one meetings took place and then the national priorities were developed. Two other meetings were held for feedback, and then the RDP was finalised. For the next programming period, a bottom-up approach will be applied: representatives from stakeholders will be selected to join the committee for the strategy and implementation of the Structural Fund. Malta Environment & Planning Authority (MEPA) will also participate.

In the new Member States, "wherever there was a possibility to comment on documents, feedback was lacking or NGO proposals were hardly reflected in the document"⁸.

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“In the Czech Republic and Hungary, NGOs organised consultations which resulted in their recognition as partners by the authorities. In all countries, there was a shortage of time to implement it well or implement it at all (if authorities intended that, of course). In all cases, the consultations were not really relevant to the outcome of documents, either through bad performance (no real discussion, e.g. the consultation was used to present information instead of holding debate), bad timing (i.e. there was no chance for documents could be amended), or the unclear status of consultations⁹”

In future, the consultation process during the development of programmes should improve partnership in the consultation processes.

2.3. Recommendations for future programming

The system as outlined further below is based on experiences from different planning processes in several countries, mainly in new Member States. We assume that the planning process is undertaken in a standard manner that complies with practice evolved in years of planning the EU structural assistance. It is very important that involving partners in programme design does not replace the public authorities' responsibility for its content. If managed properly, the partnership should not harm, delay or replace the standard democratic political decision-making process.

Appointment of a partnership manager

If a responsible authority wants to have a real partnership in place, it is necessary to appoint a person or organisation to be responsible for managing and providing professional support to partnerships within the programming process.

The possibilities for this are:

- partnership consultations, managed by the authority responsible for development of the programming document (usually ministry or regional authority) - best option;
- a partnership manager from the consultancy team hired to write the programming documents;
- a partnership manager from the ex-ante evaluation team;
- external consultant hired just for communication with the partners (public) and facilitation of the partnership dialogue.

Tasks for the partnership manager are:

- develop a detailed participation plan for partners in the programming process¹⁰;
- management of the information campaign (design and maintenance of the information tools - web, mass media, information materials, e-conference);

- organising and chairing/moderating the public hearings, workshop, seminars, conferences;
- logistical and expert support for the working groups and other teams (ex-ante, SEA and others), in close co-operation with the consultancy developing the document itself;
- involve environmental partners at the right time in order to secure the environmental aspect of the sustainability of the programmes.

It is recommended that the partnership manager is:

- a) a member (or sub-contractor) of the ex-ante evaluation team or
- b) part of the managing authority. The consultation process can then form part of the ex-ante evaluation process.

This will ensure that the consultation process is formalised and its outcomes will at least form part of the ex-ante evaluation reports, if these are not incorporated into the documents themselves.

Basic qualification criteria for the partnership manager are:

- sufficient period of existence (only in the case of organisations – it is one of criteria that help to measure their stability and expertise);
- sufficient staff, and sufficient expertise backed up by references;
- existing links with important organisations in the relevant sector or region;
- good understanding of the principle of environmental sustainability.

Who shall participate?

The partnership shall cover wide range of organisations and institutions:

- national environmental authorities;
- local/regional environmental authorities;
- environmental non-governmental organisations;
- municipalities and local authorities (their associations and in-formal of formalised networks);
- trade unions;
- social services providing organisations;
- cross-sectoral NGO networks;
- economic development organisations;
- Professional associations (Chamber of Commerce, Farmers associations, etc.);
- universities and think-tanks, innovation centres, Research and Development institutions;
- community groups (if important for the programme focus).

The groups must remain manageable logistically. Interest groups should be invited to be represented and they should be included in the information flow. The responsible authority must pay very close attention to the creation of a core programming group to which the most important partners are invited – economic, social and environmental. The major meetings for draft programmes consultations shall also be open to public.

Setting up a programming group

For drafting the complex programming documents, it is usual to set up an expert programming group or a committee to support the authority that will approve or adopt the programme. There are several models for creating a programming group that is partly political, partly experts. It should always include representatives of the social, economic and environmental partners (see also the section above on legal definition of the partnership, Article 10 of the new Regulation).

Non-professional partners in particular do not have the time to read and analyse all the materials, so a short introduction to themes and procedures should be made at the start of every meeting.

The programming group shall be created on the basis of elections if possible, at least in cases where a large number of individuals is covered by one interested or affected group of stakeholders, such as environmental NGOs, social NGOs, municipalities or professional associations. The responsible authority shall appoint the person who was democratically selected by the group itself.

It is essential to have an environmental advisor on the programming group responsible for writing the programme, to ensure that the environment contributes fully to delivery of economic and social outcomes. This environmental advisor should have access to a range of environmental expertise from statutory agencies, NGOs and environmental businesses, to support the development of the programme.

Setting up expert working groups

In addition to a programming group, smaller working groups are normally set up to target specific issues. These expert groups are the forum for in-depth discussions on drafts of the programme. The groups must be logistically feasible, so the number of members should not exceed 15 if possible. There should be no political negotiation in the groups, but

instead they should discuss themes such as the measures and proposed interventions, and parameters for the intended assistance.

The working groups' composition should be also assured on the partnership basis. The environmental sector should be represented to ensure the integration of the environment in all measures and priorities. Steps may need to be taken to cover the members' costs, or at least their indirect costs from participating in the working groups. In order to make the groups as inclusive as possible, existing organisations are asked to nominate their representatives to the groups. The list of group members is always made public, with their e-mails and contact numbers if possible.

It may be convenient to set up a separate opponent group of various NGO representatives. The partnership's facilitator is then responsible for providing logistical support to this group. The outcomes of the group might be included in the paper developed by the ex-ante evaluation team, or the NGO group might even become part of the ex-ante evaluation team.

Organisation of public meetings

Within the process of programme elaboration, several public meetings such as seminars, workshops, conferences and public hearings should be organised. These allow broader public discussion of drafts of the documents in key stages of the programming process. The consultations also provide feedback for the teams of planners and others, ex-ante evaluators and Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) specialists. Attention must be paid to the timing of such meetings within the stages of the programming and SEA/ex-ante processes. Attention must also be paid to the agendas so that the meetings do not cause frustration amongst participants and make them feel that they cannot actually influence anything, despite being asked to give their opinions.

The format of the public meetings should always be designed according to local conditions and the relevant stage of elaboration of the programming document. The partnership's facilitator should always be responsible for organising the meetings, taking records and releasing outputs of the meeting. The meetings should always include discussion of the draft documents and outcomes from the SEA and ex-ante evaluation of particular chapters of the document.

Outputs of the public meetings are always published on the web-page at very least, together with reactions to each comment from the team of planners.

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Organisation of information campaigns

The quality of partnership depends on the quality of information flow. A well-designed system for disseminating up-to-date, comprehensible and relevant information helps partnership dialogue to succeed. A high-quality system for informing people during the programming stage increases absorption capacity and educates potential project applicants, helping them to understand the interrelations of the programme under development.

The basis of each information campaign is:

- a web-page;
- an email conference – discussions and direct email distribution of materials and information to partners who asked for them.

We may live in the 21st century but we should not rely solely on electronic means of communication and sharing information. These should always be supplemented by:

- printed information materials such as leaflets and brochures issued only for elaboration of the programming document. It is convenient to issue at least one explanatory leaflet with a brief description of the function and prospective content of the programme, the procedure and timetable for its elaboration, and a contact for the persons responsible;
- information point – an information centre where comments on draft documents may also be submitted;
- newsletters and bulletins – it may be convenient to use existing ones, but it's necessary to be aware of the relevance of the newsletter target group;
- mass media;
- public hearings.

Creation of a web-page

We strongly advise that a separate page is created on the website of the responsible authority, where all relevant information can be published. The facilitator is responsible for administration of the web-page, which has links from the web-pages of the facilitator and the planner, if they have them.

Information that should be available on the web-page:

- an announcement that programming process has started;
- a contact who is a responsible person - a facilitator and/or employee of the responsible authority;
- the subject of the consultation - what document is being elaborated and its links to EU policies and related EU and national legislation;

- document's importance - the reasons for its elaboration and expected impacts on social-economic issues;
- objectives of the partners' participation and what is expected from public consultations;
- an up-to-date timetable for its elaboration;
- a composition of the programming group and thematic working groups - see above - with contacts if possible;
- dates of public meetings and their preliminary agendas;
- all draft documents including addresses and deadlines for submitting comments;
- rules for submitting comments, the specific commenting sheet if any, and information on how comments will be taken into consideration (there is even interactive software for submitting comments online);
- outputs of previous consultations, including reactions from planners;
- information on the cross cutting themes and their importance and relevance.

Use of email conferences

Email conferences are a very effective tool for informal communication and spreading information. Announcements of new draft documents, dates of public meetings etc. might be distributed through such a conference.

Members should be registered only on request and a list of conference participants should be published.

Summary of the minimum standard for partnership in programming

- **A detailed participation plan** for partners in the programming process should always be developed by the partnership manager. This participation plan should be linked to a publicity plan, which supports the dissemination of information about the programme to key stakeholders and the general public. Both plans should be made available to the general public.

The Participation plan encompasses:

- identification of interested or affected organisations, groups or individuals to be invited into the process, or addresses with information on the process;
- a detailed description of the proposed system for partnership consultations and how they relate to the timetable and methodology of the programming document elaboration:
- the territory or sector to be covered by the document;

- whether the consultations are a parallel process or are incorporated into the ex-ante evaluation or SEA;
- links with previous strategic planning that has been realised.
- steps to be taken in the partnership consultations: conferences, workshops and hearings, including the proposed method for dialogue;
- the organisational framework: team members, responsibilities and staff;
- budget;
- timetable.

- **A partnership manager should always be appointed.**

The following should be set up:

- **an interactive web-page;**
- **email conference;**
- **information points in major town and cities with regular opening hours for the public.**
- **a kick-off conference** (seminar) should be organised where the intention to elaborate a programming document is presented to the relevant partners, and explanations are given of its purpose, how it will be elaborated, its timetable and partnership management plan.
- **A leaflet should be printed** summarising the purpose of the programming document, how it will be elaborated, sources of information and useful contacts.

- **At least one NGO representative** should sit on the programming group and every working group. The representative should be selected in a transparent and non-discriminatory manner.
- **Public hearings** (major workshops) to inform the general public should be held at least during the following stages of programming document elaboration:
 - after finalisation of the analysis and first draft of programme priorities;
 - after finalisation of the description of the measures, financial plan and implementation scheme

In both the above stages, at least three public hearings (workshops) should be organised to properly cover all the territory that is the subject of the programming document. For example, with the regional operational programme, public hearings are organised in the regional capital and two other non-neighbouring cities in the region (if there are any, of course).

Every comment gathered during the consultations should be recorded, made public, evaluated, and – if relevant – incorporated in the document. Arguments on how the comment was taken into account by the programming team should be made publicly available.

- **A closing conference** should be organised where final outcomes and decisions are presented and the involvement of partners in management of the programme is discussed.

⁴Agriculture and Rural Development, Enterprise Policy, Tourism, Employment and Training, Environment, Energy and Water Production, Education, Social Policy, Transport and Communications.

⁵Tavoli di concertazione settoriali. . The following sectors took part: public works, agriculture, environment, industry, cultural heritage and tourism, training and employment, transport and urban planning.

⁶Comitato regionale di concertazione

⁷Partnership for sustainable development?" Report on the Structural Funds Programming Process in Central Europe

⁸Partnership for sustainable development?" Report on the Structural Funds Programming Process in Central Europe

⁹Partnership for sustainable development?" Report on the Structural Funds Programming Process in Central Europe- Centre for Community Organising, Czech Republic, National Society of conservationists, Hungary; Green Liberty, Latvia; European Center of Sustainable Development, Poland

Center for Environmental Public Advocacy, Slovakia; Milieukontakt Oost-Europa, The Netherlands February 2004

¹⁰Details on the participation plan are included in the next section

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Partnership in programme implementation

3.1. Value added of partnership in program implementation

The partners have two basic roles in programme implementation:

Policy promoters - want to influence others' projects rather than have their own projects. Usually the organisations have their own idea of how to manage local/regional/sectoral development (which is significant for example in the case of environmental NGOs). Their role is to participate in the project appraisal process, in order to select the best projects available. Within the project selection process, the debate already begun in the programming phase continues, and different approaches shall be incorporated, in order to reach the best quality. The added value is the local information provided by the partners and this should be freely exploited within the project selection process. Partnership in project selection is not meant to transfer the decision-making power outside the competent authority (usually Managing Authority). It shall be seen as a tool for improving the process while the authorities in charge take the real decisions.

Project promoters - want to develop their own projects. If the programme is to reach its objectives and performance indicators, it depends on the quantity and quality of projects. The involvement of stakeholders results in a greater understanding of the actions that a programme wants to support. These stakeholders can then ensure that information is disseminated to potential project applicants as widely as possible. Partnership strengthens both the local sense of ownership of the projects funded, and the legitimacy of economic and social development policy. The effectiveness in spending the money on good quality projects also comes through user-friendly systems of assistance provided to project promoters by the management authorities and other relevant organisations through the "project pipeline" - see also the recommendations below.

The partnership approach can also pay off in the following aspects:

- **More projects** - The involvement of the stakeholders results in a greater understanding of the actions a programme intends to support. These stakeholders can then ensure information is disseminated to potential project applicants as widely as possible. Involving more organisations in developing projects with equal access to information leads to a larger number of projects being prepared and a better absorption of the structural fund at significantly low cost.
- **Better projects** - projects prepared by well-informed partners respond to the logic of the programme better. Since programme performance depends on the level of knowledge of the project applicants, a partnership within programming that continues into the implementation phase and links closely with project promoters is the best way of training applicants in policy, indicators, welcome actions to be financed, scoring criteria etc. Better-informed applicants mean better delivery of better projects in future. Workshops and joint work followed by shared capacity-building activities are the tool to improve the more quality-oriented absorption of the programme.
- **More control** - partnership gives more possibilities for control (the so-called "four-eye principle") and therefore provides better prevention of corruption. Transparency, openness and a non-corruption environment in the project selection process support smooth implementation of the programme. Wider control by public/partners safeguards the regularity of the programme implementation and its resistance to unfair machinations.

3.2 Current practice review

Partners' participation in project appraisal boards and steering committees

The project appraisal process varies from programme to programme and can involve different partners and public organisations.

It is important to have an advocate for the environment on the project appraisal board as this helps raise awareness of the environment amongst members.

An example of this role is in the Objective One programme for Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, UK, where the Environmental Sustainability Theme Manager sits on the Priority Management Group¹¹ and the Working Group¹² that carry out project selection. The theme manager can thus scrutinise every application for Objective One investment for environmental sustainability, and ask questions of projects that have not provided sufficiently detailed information. The theme manager is able to explain the relevance of environmental sustainability to each project. The theme manager's active participation in the key stages of the project selection process ensures that environmental sustainability is always addressed. By using open debate to reach decisions about individual projects, members of the Priority Management Group and the Working Group can increase their knowledge and understanding of environmental sustainability.

Objective One Programme for Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, UK

When an application is initially made to the Programme, the project is checked by the Environmental Sustainability Theme Manager to determine whether it satisfies the environmental sustainability gateway criteria¹³. Only those projects that meet the gateway criteria go forward to the actual selection procedure.

Once a project is fully assessed, it goes first to the Priority Management Groups, which advise the Working Group¹⁴ on the suitability of individual projects for Structural Funds investment. The Priority Management Groups are managed and administered by Government Office for the South West¹⁵ (GOSW), which is responsible for identifying and appointing members. Each Priority Management Group is made up of people with knowledge and experience relevant to activities in which the Priority and/or Structural Fund concerned is seeking to invest. With the exception of GOSW staff and the theme managers, Priority Management Group members are appointed as individuals and not as representatives of particular organisations or interest groups. The Working Group includes the chairs of the seven Priority Management Groups, the theme managers and members of the Secretariat (GOSW), and is chaired by the Secretariat. The theme managers are full members of the Priority Management Groups and the Working Group.

In most of other countries, environmental partners are members of the Steering Committees, which appraise the project proposals.

In Poland, an essential role is played by the Steering Committee for the Sectoral Operational Programme – Improved Competitiveness of Enterprises. Its tasks include providing opinions and recommending to the Managing Authority projects which qualify for support from the programme. Under the partnership principle, the Committee includes representatives of non-governmental partners, including environmental ones.

In Greece, it is requested that environmental partners are first 'designated' and then their participation is legislated at as early a stage as possible in the next programming period.

The participation of environmental partners in advising the Managing Authorities during the selection of projects could be even more effective. For example, certain projects that may be nominally environmentally friendly may actually entail threats to the environment. In such cases, a negative appraisal is easier for a broadly-based committee to achieve than for a single staff member who is liable to pressures.

The implementation of the Bristol Objective Two Neighbourhood Action Plan, which is part of the Objective Two South West of England Programme, is supervised by the Regeneration Delivery Group¹⁶. This is a stakeholder group reporting directly to the Bristol Chief Executive and comprising community representatives, including neighbourhood renewal leaders, local businesses and the environmental sector. The group's responsibilities include consideration and approval of Objective Two grants for individual projects. It is a 'hands-on' group actively involved at all stages of a project's lifecycle: development, approval, implementation and evaluation. The Technical Appraisal Panel was created within the Regeneration Delivery Group; it assesses the outline application forms against a broad scoring matrix.

Training and guidance for the Managing Authorities and board members

Sitting on the decision-making boards is the most efficient way to influence a programme. However, there are other ways to improve the integration of the environment while working in partnership.

It is vital that all those involved in managing a programme understand the importance of environmental sustainability

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for their region's economic development. Some programmes and partners have developed information tools, guidance and seminars to increase understanding of environmental sustainability.

In the UK, the Objective One programme has carried out capacity-building activities with partners such as Business Link¹⁷ and with managers, particularly managers of delegated grant schemes. Information workshops on the three cross-cutting themes were organised. English Nature - one of the UK's three Competent environmental authorities - also provided training for Objective One programme staff and senior management from the organisation Cornwall Tourism. The aim of the training was to increase understanding of biodiversity and conservation issues. This comes in useful for Objective One staff when talking to project applicants and making appraisals.

In the Objective Two programme for the East of England, workshops on environmental sustainability were organised for local facilitators and area groups as well as for the Programme Monitoring Committee.

In Italy, the Task Force for Structural Funds of the regional environmental authorities has given valuable support on environmental sustainability to programme managers. The Regional Operational Programme in Puglia, Italy allocates some funds to education and training activities that support partnerships with local authorities and socio-economic partners.

In Malta, members of the Project Selection Committee have had several meetings with Malta Environment and Planning Authority officials to increase their understanding of environmental criteria and environmental sustainability. The Project Selection Committee also has the right to call in ad-hoc experts on the environment and other areas, as required.

The Environmental Authorities Network in Spain has developed working guidance and advice for the environmental authorities and regional management. These documents cover the following topics: draft reference documents on the integration of the environment in the sectors; draft documents providing guidance; methodology, guides and proposals on indicators for environmental monitoring of the programming and the assessments described in the Regulations. They also designed a strategy to achieve the integration of the environment into actions co-financed by the European Social Fund. The strategy resulted in the Environmental Awareness Module - a manual, teaching guide and video - that has so far been used with more than half a million workers.

Training and guidance on environmental sustainability for project applicants

Guidance to project applicants is usually available on the websites of the Managing Authorities. Personal advice is the most effective way but is rarely available because it entails more staff and financial resources. The guidance helps project applicants think through the environmental implications of their projects, and thus comply with the environmental sustainability criteria of the programmes that carry some weight in the global appraisal process.

In Malta, the Ministry for Rural Affairs and Environment (MRAE) advises partners through paper guidance sent to applicants and information on the website. Personal advice can also be given and the Ministry usually redirects the applicants to specialists.

In the Objective One programme for Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, a guidance officer helps the Environmental Sustainability Theme Manager give all applicants access to technical advice and support on environmental sustainability. The guidance officer is provided by the programme to offer a free consultancy service to anyone applying to, or working for, Objective One in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly. It should be noted that this approach relies on adequate staff resources to ensure that there are sufficient staff to advise each project applicant. .

In Poland, support for the development of environmentally sound project proposals is allowed through community workshops within the "Integrated Programme to Mitigate the Impacts of the Restructuring of Mining, Metallurgy and the Chemical Synthesis Industry in Malopolskie Voivodship". The programme provides for regular meetings of all partners with an interest in the programme's implementation. Workshops on local economic recovery are also held: one of their tasks is to ensure that representatives of all the communities in a given area participate and work out solutions to local economic problems. The participation of environmental NGOs and other social partners in these workshops and later in the individual taskforces offers quite a good guarantee that environmental protection will be integrated into the projects.

In Spain, the Network of Environmental Authorities produced manuals and videos for raising environmental awareness in the agricultural, fisheries and tourism sectors.

Creation of an environmental sustainability group

Many interviewees across the Member States express the need for a dedicated body responsible for ensuring that the environment is considered within programmes. Such a body would need sufficient resources and qualified staff dedicated to the task.

Some programmes already have this kind of support, and the example of cross-cutting theme managers in the UK is typical.

The Environmental Sustainability Advisory Group for the East of England Programmes¹⁸

In 2001, the region's Structural Funds Strategy Group set up a Environmental Sustainability Advisory Group to advise on how programmes could meet the requirements for integrating environment and sustainable development as a horizontal theme in their design and delivery. Most of the East of England programmes¹⁹ opted for an environmental sustainability horizontal theme to be overseen by an Environmental Sustainability Advisory Group. This group is chaired by a representative of the National Trust, an NGO, and advises the Operative Group (the project approval board) on environmental issues.

Responsibility for providing environmental advice and guidance to the Managing Authorities in England rests with the Competent environmental authorities: the Environment Agency, English Nature, and the Countryside Agency. All three are represented on the East of England Environmental Sustainability Advisory Group, in addition to other regional environmental organisations. They are also represented by the Environment Agency on the Structural Fund Operating Groups and on the Local Area Groups, which comprise organisations from eligible areas in the sub-region. In this way, the environmental dimension is represented at all levels of decision-making in the management and accountability of Structural Funds in the East of England.

Local facilitators give technical support to programme and project managers. The facilitators are supported with programme Technical Assistance funds and are based with local organisations to support projects. In addition, there are five regional facilitators: an Objective Two Facilitator, an Objective Three Facilitator, a Business Facilitator, Cultural Facilitator and an Environmental Sustainability Theme Manager.

The role of Environmental Sustainability Theme Managers varies from programme to programme in the UK, but generally they all aim to promote and co-ordinate environmental sustainability activities in the management and delivery of Structural Funding programmes. The East of England Environmental Sustainability Theme Manager is based with the Programme Secretariat at Government Office for the East. The Environmental Sustainability Advisory Group oversees the work of the Theme Manager, who is employed by the Environment Agency with additional funding from English Nature, the Countryside Agency, English Heritage and Technical Assistance funds from the Objective Two, Objective Three and URBAN II programmes. The Environmental Sustainability Theme Manager provides technical support to the management bodies of programmes, and to other local and regional facilitators and project applicants. The theme manager also produces guidance material, training, awareness-raising and environmental performance reports, and identifies and publicises environmental achievements and good practice.

Early experience from the 2000-2006 UK Structural Funds programmes suggested that where an Environmental Sustainability Theme Manager had been recruited, integration of the environmental sustainability horizontal theme had been more effective than in those programmes where no such post existed (Environment and Structural Funds Group, 2001).

After the East of England Environmental Sustainability Theme Manager was appointed in 2003, the presence of a dedicated resource to explain the benefits, opportunities and methods for integrating environmental sustainability helped to increase programme motivation for integrating environmental sustainability even more.

This has had a significant impact on the success of programmes and projects in integrating environmental sustainability. The earlier this motivation can be generated, the more environmental opportunities can be realised. The Environmental Sustainability Theme Manager is based in the same building as the Secretariat, which facilitates the exchange of information.

3

3.3. Recommendations for future programme implementation

Partnership in implementation could be observed in three forms:

- **Partnership in monitoring committees** - this is obligatory for the Structural Funds due to General Regulation No. 1260/1999 and focuses on programme level.
- **Partnership in project appraisal** - the project appraisal, where involvement of relevant environmental bodies should be required in the processes when such bodies are set up in the relevant countries or regions.
- **Partnership in the project implementation** - this is mainly a tool for increasing the absorption capacities and improving the quality and environmental sustainability of projects to be realised.

If programmes are to have real impact on the social, economic and environmental situation in the regions, we must ensure that all forms of partnership are present.

Two types of partnership involvement

Below, we look at two types of partnership involvement. They are mutually dependent: both are necessary for partnership approach and partnership culture in the implementation of the regional programmes.

Involvement of partners in the monitoring committees

The Draft of General Regulation for 2007-2013 (COM(2004)492 final published 14 July 2004) says in Article 63:

“The Monitoring Committee shall be chaired by a representative of the Member State or the Managing Authority.

Its composition shall be decided by the Member State and shall include the partners referred to in Article 10 and the Managing Authority.

On their own initiative, a representative of the Commission may participate in the work of the monitoring committee in an advisory capacity. A representative of the EIB and the EIF may participate in an advisory capacity for operational programmes to which it contributes.”

Partnership in monitoring committees for Structural Funds is thus obligatory for each Member State, as the Council Regulation is binding on the territory of each Member State without having to be transposed into national legislation. The Monitoring Committee is a key body for partnership in the implementation phase, since it adopts the adjustments to the programme complement after approval by the European Commission.

As for the involvement of environmental partners, the involvement of DG Environment might be also considered.

Involvement of local and regional environmental authorities in monitoring committees of regional programs should be seen as obligatory minimum.

There is a question of the legitimacy of representatives of various sectors in the composition of Monitoring Committees. In setting up the Monitoring Committee, the responsible body – usually the Management Authority – must be careful in selecting organisations to be given a seat on the committee and then in selecting people to represent the chosen organisations. This task always needs delicate negotiating skills.

Involvement of partners in the project appraisal process

The Managing Authority is responsible for designing the project appraisal process, with the exception of the selection criteria, which must be adopted by the Monitoring Committee.

An interdisciplinary “project evaluation committee” (also called selection panels) should be established, including - besides the staff of the implementing agency - representatives of environmental partners as well as social, economic and regional partners. The “project evaluation committee” should consist of people selected on the basis of their professional expertise. Funding decisions have to be made on the basis of the outcomes of the project scoring which has to be carried out by the evaluation committee to reflect the economic, social and environmental impacts of every project. The final funding decision should generally be taken by the Programme Steering Committee. A summary of the project proposals submitted, their scoring outcome and funding decision should be made available to the public.

An advocate for environmental sustainability should be on the Programme Steering Committee, as it helps raise the awareness about environmental sustainability amongst the members.

See the example above of the Cornwall Environmental Sustainability Theme Manager.

Capacity-building

Using domestic resources and the technical assistance measures, the implementing authorities should:

- a. Where programmes are developed and managed at national level, authorities should support the involvement of NGOs and also support regional and national networks of NGOs for monitoring and evaluation of the regional policy operation and its effectiveness. These might be interconnected, at least at regional level (e.g. NUTS2 level).
- b. Build the capacity of economic, social and environmental partners through training, consultancy and financial assistance. If possible, a user-friendly project pipeline should be developed, consisting of:
 - effective structure for gathering project ideas;
 - regular screening of the quality of project ideas gathered (i.e. an open and transparent process for selecting ideas to be developed further, if possible on a partnership basis);
 - clear rules for public assistance for the development of selected project ideas (i.e. public funds available for project development).
 - mixture of communication tools;
- close network of regional and local organisations responsible for project collection and development (a mixture of commercial organisations, NGOs, municipalities and other public bodies, if possible).
- c. Design financial and administrative tools that enable beneficiaries who are financially or administratively weak (e.g. SMEs, small municipalities and NGOs) to operate EU-funded projects, e.g. local or regional grant schemes and small projects funds).
- d. Have a clear set-up for incorporating environmental criteria into the system above, for example environmental experts are involved and special priority is given to environmentally-friendly and also economically profitable projects.
- e. Need to build capacity on the understanding of environmental principles and its interaction with long term economic development.

There is a strong need to build capacity on the understanding of environmental sustainability principles and its interaction with long term economic development. Training can be provided by environmental authorities or NGOs to Managing Authorities, Programme Monitoring Committee members and project applicants.

¹¹The Priority Management Groups advises the Working Group on the suitability of individual projects for Structural Funds investment

¹²The role of the Working Group is to recommend projects for approval to the Objective One Secretariat.

¹³The gateway criteria for the environmental sustainability cross-cutting theme are: Has the applicant considered both the positive and negative environmental impacts of the project, and explained how they propose to mitigate any negative effects? Has the applicant given details of the way in which they will measure, monitor and report on the environmental impact of the project? Has the applicant made allowance for environmental actions, including training, in the costs for the project? For projects with total costs of over £4 million, has an environmental appraisal been provided by the applicant?

¹⁴The role of the Working Group is to recommend projects for approval to the Objective One Secretariat.

¹⁵Government Office for the South West (GOSW) represents central Government in the South West Region.

¹⁶The Regeneration Delivery Group is a sub-group of the Bristol Partnership Group – city's stakeholder group.

¹⁷Business Link is a business support, advice and information service managed by the DTI (Department of trade and Industry).

¹⁸Promoting Regional Sustainable Development Through European Funding Programmes: Experiences From The East Of England, Simon Chubb, Environment Agency, United Kingdom

¹⁹In the East of England the Structural Funds cover the following programmes: Objective 2, 3, Eastern Rural Development Plan of the rural Development Regulations, Equal, LEADER+, INTERREG.

4

Partnership in programme monitoring and evaluation

4.1. Added value of partnership in monitoring and evaluation

Partnership in monitoring and evaluation is a big learning experience for all participating parties at significantly low cost. The participation of partners in monitoring committees provides mutual exchange of views and concepts.

Partnership in monitoring committees, if managed well, gives an insight into the principles of environmentally-sustainable regional development for all participating parties instead of using expensive capacity-building schemes. The partners within programme monitoring committees are forced to discuss with others their opinions on project selection criteria and their weight within the project scoring system. They also have to discuss adjustments in the programme through adopting changes to the programme complement etc. Through such an experience they will understand each other better. It is an advantage that cannot be calculated in monetary terms, although its influence on better programme performance is surely beyond any discussion.

Programme evaluation is a tool for learning more from current practice. If an evaluation is seriously meant to identify all available best practise examples and also the worst deficiencies of the programme, instead of being a formal task to produce an evaluation report, it must be organised within a partnership. It allows the inclusion of experience from a wide range of stakeholders involved in the several levels of programme implementation (from project leaders through different intermediary bodies to management authorities). Partnership is then (just as in the programming phase) a tool for mobilising additional expertise that can be used by the evaluation team for free or at low cost.

Partnership in monitoring and evaluation is also a driving force for building long-term local responsibility for the management of the programmes, if the same partners together went through all phases of the programme cycle - programming, implementation and evaluation. The local approach is usually more sustainable from all aspects – environmentally, institutionally, politically – than nationally managed schemes which are always more removed from the actual effects of the spent funds.

4.2. Current practice review

The programme monitoring committee

The EU Structural Funds Regulations require all regional development programmes to have a Programme Monitoring Committee to oversee the management and delivery process.

Monitoring Committees are always the responsibility of the Member States. These committees, chaired by a representative of the Managing Authority, ensure the efficiency and quality of implementation of the structural measures.

The tasks of Monitoring Committees are usually to:

- monitor implementation of the entire programme;
- introduce complements to programmes;
- consider and approve changes to the criteria for project selection in the programme framework;
- periodically review progress in implementing the programme's objectives.

Some Monitoring Committees are also in charge of approving large-scale projects (e.g. the South West of England Objective Two Programme).

Participants involved

Most programmes involve representatives of social and economic partners and environmental, national and regional authorities in their Programme Monitoring Committee, and NGOs also sometimes take part. However, not all these members can vote: depending on the programmes, some might have only a consultative role.

The voting members of the Monitoring Committee of La Rioja Region in Spain mainly represent the departments and ministries of the regional government, and the managing authority. The other partners representing local authorities and social partners only have a consultative role.

Another example is the Monitoring Committee for the Malta's Single Programming Document. As the Structural Funds are managed by central government, the voting

members essentially represent central ministries and managing authorities. The representatives of the Malta Council for Economic and Social Development, the social and economic partners and the environmental organisations only have a consultative role.

In Greece during the last programming period, environmental partners (NGOs) were involved as voting members in the Monitoring Committees for each of the 24 Operational Programmes.

Environmental Authorities' involvement

Environmental authorities are members of the Monitoring Committees in most countries. They also often play a much larger role, and are generally in charge of the implementation of the environment as a cross-cutting theme of the programme.

For example, in Puglia, Italy, the Environmental Authority co-operates with the Managing Authority and the measure managers to integrate the environment in the programme and its measures at both the programming and implementation stages. It also controls compliance with environmental legislation by measures and projects. Moreover, it develops methodologies for the environmental assessment of some categories of projects and plans at regional and local level. In some cases it is involved in the assessment of projects (e.g. integrated projects, major projects and projects funded by the performance reserve).

In the UK, the cross-cutting theme managers²⁰ sit on the Monitoring Committees with other representatives of key regional stakeholders. In the Objective One programme for Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly. The Environmental Sustainability Theme Manager's presence at every Programme Monitoring Group²¹ is important because the theme manager is able to advocate the environment in general principles, in Objective One Programme decision-making. The theme manager can help the Programme Monitoring Groups develop their knowledge of environmental sustainability. Involving an environmental specialist in the Programme Monitoring Group and Working Group gives people who otherwise might not come into contact with such issues the chance to become familiar with the concepts and practice of environmental sustainability.

In most regions of England, a representative of the Competent Environmental Authorities (the Environment Agency, the Countryside Agency and English Nature) sit on the Programme Monitoring Committee as well as the Environmental Sustainability Theme Manager. Many of the Environmental Sustainability Theme Managers are

seconded from one of the Competent Environmental Authorities or are part-funded by one or more of them. Both the Competent Environmental Authority representative – using their network of colleagues with specialist technical skills – and the Environmental Sustainability Theme Managers – using their personal expertise – provide environmental sustainability advice and guidance.

In Poland, in the programme “Sectoral Operational Programme - Improved Competitiveness of Enterprises”, the groups on environmental protection and sustainable development set up by the Monitoring Committee have the task of ensuring the integration of environmental protection and sustainable development. These groups include representatives of non-governmental partners, including environmental ones.

NGO members' involvement in the programme monitoring committees

In the Czech Republic, at least one seat is provided for NGO representatives on the Monitoring Committee for each operational programme. In most cases there are two NGO representatives – one each from the social and environmental sectors. These representatives were chosen by Governmental Council for Voluntary Organisations (an advisory body of the Czech Government) after an open competition. A call for applications included strict criteria for the expertise of the NGO representative, and the chosen representatives were then appointed by the minister in charge.

Environmental NGO representatives' election procedures to sit on Monitoring Committees and Steering Committees in Poland

Two types of election procedures were used for most committees:

- Recommendations for appointment by the Council of Public Benefit Activity, under procedures set down in the Act on the National Development Plan.

The Ministry of Economy and Labour releases the press and web page announcements.

The organisations can register candidates by filling in the form on the Ministry's web page.

continued overleaf

4

The Council of Public Benefit Activity recommends representatives to the Minister of Economy. The Minister makes the final choice.

- Open competition and vote (the Ministry of Environment's procedure worked out with the environmental NGOs).

The Ministry of Environment releases the press and web page announcement.

The organisations can register candidates by filling in the form at the Ministry web page.

Every environmental NGO can vote for two of the candidates.

The candidates with the largest number of votes are awarded seats on the respective committees.

The election procedure for the Cohesion Fund Environment Steering Committee is undoubtedly an example of good practice. The environmental NGO representatives have a real mandate from the environmental NGO. The procedure should define precisely which environmental NGOs are authorised to vote in order to eliminate organisations that only deal theoretically with environmental protection.

In Austria, NGOs are integrated within Monitoring Committees when they are established. The choice of their representatives has been made through elections among the NGOs themselves. This process has also been applied to NGOs responsible for equal opportunities. The OEROK (Austrian territorial planning conference) organised meetings where the NGOs received broad information on the role of the Monitoring Committees and their members' rights and duties.

Environmental evaluation of the programme

The aim is to evaluate the programme's environmental impact, and the evaluation is based on the project's environmental performance. The inclusion of environmental sustainability outputs in all application forms and project progress reports is therefore the key to assessing the programme's global impact. However, in most programmes the collection of environmental data has not been as comprehensive as for other programme targets.

Environmental sustainability theme managers in the UK are, for example, increasingly asked to suggest environmental sustainability outputs that applicants can report on. Environmental indicators need to be defined at the start of each measure in the programme.

The evaluation of the programme is regularly reported back to the Monitoring Committees: continuous evaluation is valued by most practitioners.

OEROK: The Austrian territorial planning conference delivers comprehensive work on evaluation:

- Definition of method and indicators for evaluation and monitoring of environmental aspects.
- joint study on Gender Mainstreaming aspects;
- terms of reference for the Mid-term Evaluation (MTE) and standards;
- exchange of experience and quality checks;
- reflection on results & conclusions;
- method for allocation of performance reserve;
- update of MTE.

OEROK developed the study "Methode zur Evaluierung von Umweltwirkungen der Strukturfondsprogramme" (Method to evaluate the environmental impact of the Structural Funds)²².

In Spain, environmental monitoring of the programme is carried out by the Environmental Authorities Network. The regional environmental authority of La Rioja provides information, via the Monitoring Committee, on the integration of the requirements for environmental protection under the Single Programming Document by providing its own indicators and with the help of documents drawn up by the Environmental Authorities Network. The Environmental Authority draws up an environmental report for the Monitoring Committee in which the environmental effects of financed actions are assessed using indicators. However, it is said that there are too many indicators and sometimes the implementing authorities do not know how to use them.

4.3. Recommendations for future monitoring and evaluation

Involvement of partners in monitoring committees

It is advisable that full and equal membership is given to each type of partner. This build joint responsibility for interested and/or affected organisations. Environmental partners should receive the same consideration as economic and social partners.

Partnership in the Monitoring Committees of Structural Funds is obligatory for each Member State. The selection of Programme Monitoring Committee members should be open and transparent, where appropriate. Elections or open competition based on strict criteria announced by the

responsible body should be used²⁰. The members shall be then appointed by the highest available authority (minister or similar) so that they have a strong mandate from both sources – the election and the high-level political appointment. After the mid-term evaluation the process should be repeated in order to secure proper intervals between elections.

The Management Authority must also be careful in selecting organisations to be given a seat on the committee as representatives for the whole sector. As recommended above, elections are likely to be used.

Involvement of partners in programme evaluation

The evaluation process is similar to the programming process - see above recommendations on the partnership in programming.

Similar tools may be used for organising the partnership in evaluation. The scale of partnership depends on the resources available. Local or regional stakeholders should be part of the evaluation team whenever possible, or at least, data on regional experience should be collected. A broad mixture of different types of organisations should be interviewed if possible – Management Authority, intermediary bodies, project leaders, experts and regional consultancy organisations. The Evaluation report is always published.

The quality of partnership itself should be also evaluated within the programme's ex-ante, mid-term and ex-post evaluation. It must be noted that clear indicators of good partnership may still be missing, but it is evident that the main point is to be the partnership's impact on the quality of programme performance (in all its phases).

Through not following these steps, the evaluations will probably fail to identify the best practice developed in the programming period or fail to uncover the worst deficiencies in the evaluated programme.

We should also mention the problem of data collection for environmental evaluation reports. The partnership between those writing the reports and those collecting data should be strengthened, at least in the phase of designing the format and methodology of programme evaluation.

Some of the recommendations presented in the chapter on implementation are also relevant for this section.

²⁰Managers for equal opportunities, sustainable development and Information and Communications Technology (ICT)

²¹The Programme Monitoring Groups includes people from the regional government office, local government, the South West of England Regional Development Agency, other public sector organisations, private enterprise, and the voluntary sector. The Programme Monitoring Committee's official duties include: advising Government Office for the South West on programme management and implementation; assisting with the monitoring process; and approving progress reports to the Commission

²²http://www.oerok.gv.at/EU_Regionalpolitik_in_Oesterreich/strukturfonds_2000_2006_i_D/EU_Regionalpolitik_Evaluierung.htm

²³The criteria shall evaluate both: the quality/expertise of the individual and his/her expected contribution to the Monitoring Committee work, and also the quality and position of the organisation sending the representative.

5

Typical barriers to an effective partnership

5.1. Lack of understanding and knowledge of Structural Funds among partners

NGOs, municipalities and other partners often lack sufficient knowledge of regional development policies and programmes. This leads on the one hand to the danger of discussions staying at a superficial level, or on the other hand, to standard arguments being used in discussions. There is a need for training and information but also for more resources to be made available so that the partners can hire qualified and experienced staff.

5.2. Different status of partners

If the participation of environmental NGOs is limited to their full integration into official committees, and they are excluded from the preparatory and informal processes, it may not have positive results. Their involvement becomes an excuse because the NGOs are partners with less information than the others.

5.3. Lack of understanding of the environmental aspects of sustainable development

We need to build understanding of the environmental aspects of sustainable development and its interaction with long-term economic development. All bodies involved in managing the programme need to understand and appreciate the interaction between long-term economic development and sustainability. At the moment, many see the environment as a legal barrier, when it should be seen as a condition for a quality economic development.

Raising awareness of this issue is needed through improved communication, training and the higher involvement of qualified staff dedicated to the integration of sustainable development in programmes at all levels and in all priorities.

Lack of staff dedicated to integrating sustainable development into the programmes usually prevents a better understanding of the concept within the competent authorities. These dedicated staff could be hosted within the environmental authorities or form a taskforce linked to the Management Authority. Such a team could not only

take part in monitoring and appraisal committees, but also provide guidance, training and assistance to all participants. The wider audience outside the programmes should also be targeted.

All countries should also develop a sustainable development strategy and use it as a basis for any future planning.

Exchanging knowledge between the environmental authorities and the Managing Authorities, even within the same country, may be a good way to build capacity in both.

5.4. Limited capability to participate fully

The key problems identified from the questionnaires were time constraints and lack of human resources. This limits the partners' capability to participate. Moreover, there appears to be a lack of feedback on inputs and no efficient mechanism for effective participation by NGOs and other social partners.

It is recommended, if possible, to provide technical assistance and/or domestic match-funding to support national and regional NGOs or NGO networks involved in partnerships. For example, direct costs (ie travel and overnight stays) for the NGO representatives involved should be covered by the technical assistance budget or by including an additional budget line in the programmes.

5.5. Lack of clear participation procedures and formalised role for partners

Most respondents highlighted the need for structured arrangements and clarity of roles. For example, the role of environmental authorities and environmental NGOs in the Structural Funds Regulations and other guidance documents needs to be made explicit. The rules must include a clear definition of the relationships between partners in programming and implementation. Environmental authorities must play a key role in making sure that programmes follow the principles of sustainable development.

The way that feedback and recommendations from partners are handled needs to be formalised. The authorities should allow a reasonable time for commenting and should decide about the comments in a transparent way. Those who provide comments must be notified about which were accepted and which were not, and why.

5.6. Lack of discussion, communication, availability of information and feedback

Access to information on planning and operational processes and their timescales could be improved, and advance notification could be given of meetings and consultation deadlines. All programming documents should be publicly available and at a reasonable time before the consultation deadlines. Transparent, timely and accurate information must also be ensured for all partners on steering and monitoring committees.

Clear explanations should be provided to stakeholders whose comments have not been accepted. When comments are accepted, it should be explained how they were incorporated in the relevant documents.

The communication between partners should be constant and fluent. The crucial factors are to build trust between the people and institutions involved and to facilitate openness in discussions and working relationships. Building trust and openness takes time and intensive communication in order to develop a common understanding of the thinking, constraints etc. of the various partners.

Most environmentalists participate in programming as volunteers and are not paid. Other participants, such as the Chamber of Commerce for example, are usually paid for sitting on the committees, as lobbying is part of their job. Direct costs (including travel expenses) should be covered at least. In Ireland, the NGO representatives are paid to sit on the committee two days per month.

Annex 1

British example of document setting basic rules for participation of environmental institutions on EU SF management

Service level agreement between the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions and the Environment Agency, Countryside Agency and English Nature in relation to EU Structural Fund Programmes

Purpose

The purpose of this service level agreement ("this agreement") is to define the role that nominated environmental authorities should play in the development and implementation of EU Structural Fund programmes that operate in England.

Introduction

This agreement concerns the post-1999 EU Structural Funds programmes that will operate in the eligible areas in England under Objective 1, Objective 2 and associated Community Initiatives. The Funds involved include the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), European Social Fund (ESF), European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund (EAGGF) and the Financial Instrument for Fisheries Guidance (FIFG).

One of the objectives of the Structural Funds is the strengthening of economic and social cohesion across the European Union. This is pursued through partnership and agreement between the UK Government and the Commission of the European Communities ("the Commission") on strategies setting out funding priorities for programme areas in Single Programming Documents (SPDs). The three main funding strategies which will operate post-1999 and which are affected by this agreement are:

Objective 1:

to promote the development and structural adjustment of regions whose development is lagging behind.

Objective 2:

to promote the development of regions facing serious social and economic decline; including industrial, rural, urban and fisheries dependent areas.

Community Initiatives: proposed by the Commission to support cross-border and transnational co-operation (INTERREG); rural development (LEADER+); combating discrimination and inequalities with the labour market (EQUAL); and regeneration of cities and urban neighbourhoods (URBAN).

In order to ensure that these objectives are met, EU Regulations require the involvement of environmental authorities in the Structural Funds process.

Role and responsibilities of the nominated agencies

Whilst the DETR retains overall responsibility as the competent environmental authority (CEA) for English programmes, in practice this role will be delegated to the following three nominated environmental authorities for each programme – the Environment Agency, Countryside Agency and English Nature. This role is part of the nominated authorities' general obligations to advise DETR on environmental issues, and this role is consistent with the statutory duties of the organisations under UK legislation.

As joint environmental authorities the Environment Agency, Countryside Agency and English Nature shall attend and advise all meetings of Programme Monitoring Committees, Advisory and Working Groups as members of the regional partnership. In participating in meetings the role of the authorities will be to ensure that environmental issues are taken into account when policy and strategic matters relating to the programme area and programme implementation are discussed.

The Environment Agency, Countryside Agency and English Nature should be involved in developing the strategy for the programme, and drafting of the SPD, from the outset. The responsibilities of the nominated environmental authorities under Structural Funds are to act in an advisory and informative capacity to programme managers and administrations in the following areas:

- drafting the environmental baseline and profile for the region as a basis for determining the programme's environmental strategy;

Annex 1

- definition of an environmental strategy and appropriate environmental objectives and targets for the programme, ensuring compatibility with relevant regional and national environmental policies and strategies being pursued within the region;
- the environmental appraisal of the SPD, and addressing the findings of the appraisal;
- identification of appropriate indicators relating to the measurement of the environmental impact of the programme or measures;
- project appraisal procedures and criteria so as to improve the overall process of project selection from an environmental perspective;
- guidance to applicants on environmentally sustainable project design;
- annual reporting;
- advice on monitoring and evaluating the environmental impact of programmes.

The Structural Funds Regulations give rise to tasks which have resource implications for the programme administrations, eg drafting environmental profiles, setting environmental objectives, monitoring and evaluation. It has been agreed that the nominated environmental authorities will support the process by providing advice and information, as is consistent with their statutory duties. While it has been agreed that the nominated environmental authorities will support the process by providing advice and information as is consistent with their normal statutory duties, this Agreement does not commit the authorities to undertaking these tasks.

The nominated environmental authorities role is not restricted to activities in the programme partnerships but they shall also advise DETR as implementing authority on general issues of environmental concern in relation to Structural Funds.

Contingent liability

The role of nominated environmental authority does not assume, imply or contain any contingent responsibility on the Environment Agency, Countryside Agency or English Nature in respect of advice, information or recommendations offered by them while carrying out this role.

Role and responsibilities of DETR

Accountability in respect of Structural Funds in England rests with DETR as the implementing authority. It is the responsibility of DETR to decide whether to accept or reject any advice offered by the nominated environmental authorities. DETR is accountable for any decision, once taken, no matter who contributed towards the information on which the decision was based.

Where there is a gap in provision in respect of environmental information that is not within the remit of one of the nominated environmental authorities DETR will act as CEA and invite informed views and comments on which a decision may be based.

Reporting and information

The Environment Agency, Countryside Agency and English Nature shall **submit written** reports to DETR at 12 month intervals about their experience as participants in the Structural Funds process, with suggestions and advice for improving the quality of the process and for improving the implementation of Structural Funds in

England. **The reports and DETR's response will be issued to Structural Funds programme managers.**

The roles of the Environment Agency, Countryside Agency and English Nature as joint nominated authorities will be evaluated at the end of the next Structural Funds period, 31 December 2006, to identify what benefits they have brought to the process and to reconsider their involvement for the future.

Signed on behalf of :
Department of the Environment,
Transport and the Regions

Signed on behalf of :
Environment Agency
Countryside Agency
English Nature

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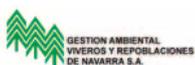
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Devon County Council, UK



Environment Agency for England and Wales, UK



Environment Management, Nurseries and Afforestations of Navarra, Spain



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Italian Environmental Authority for Structural Funds, Italy



Local Urban Ecology Agency of Barcelona, Spain



Malta Environment and Planning Authority, Malta



Med.O.R.O. - Organization for Research, Orientation and Territorial Development in the Mediterranean, Italy



Ministry of Tourism, Environment and Territorial Policies, La Rioja, Spain



Municipality of Wroclaw, Poland



Marche Environmental Authority, Italy



Regional Environmental Authority for Structural Funds, Sicily region, Italy



The Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe (REC), Hungary



University of Debrecen, Centre for Environmental Management and Policy, Hungary



Western Greece Region, Greece

They work in association with:

Bristol City Council, UK
Castilla and Leon Regional Development Agency, Spain
Department of Environmental Protection and Reclamation, Programming Waste Management,
Piemonte Region, Italy
Natural England, UK
Eszak Alföld Region, Hungary
Learning and Skills Council for Devon and Cornwall, UK
Ministry of Environment, Secretariat of the Spanish Environmental Authorities Network, Spain
North Great Plain Regional Development Agency, Hungary
Objective 1 Partnership Office, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly Programme, UK
Objective 2 Programme for the South West of England, UK
Regional Environment Authority of Campania, Italy
Regional Environment Authority of the Calabria Region, Italy
Regional Environment Authority of the Piemonte Region, Italy
Regional Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development of Galicia, Spain
South West of England Regional Development Agency, UK
United Nations Development Programme, Bulgaria

For more information on the GRDP project, visit the website:

www.grdp.org

or contact the project team in Exeter:

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