3. Building local partnerships

Why create a partnership?

Local actors interested in Axis 4 of the European Fisheries Fund (EFF) are required to create a local group to deliver the measures, i.e. a local partnership involving “public and private partners from the various local relevant socio-economic sectors”. Under Axis 4, these local partnerships are known by the generic name, Fisheries Local Action Groups or FLAGs, although sometimes other names are used, such as “Coastal Action Groups” (Spain) or “Local Fishery Groups” (Poland).

FLAGs, or the equivalent, are charged with developing and implementing an integrated local development strategy for a coherent territory, based on a bottom-up approach. The FLAG must ensure that there is sufficient critical mass of resources to support the strategy, including sufficient administrative and financial capacity to administer the assistance, and ensure operations are successfully completed. These conditions define the nature of the partnership and the basis of its operation. Thus, we are talking here about a relationship that:

- brings together – on an equal footing – entities from the public, private and civic society sectors;
- ensures that they work together to identify and pursue the achievement of common goals;
- is long-term, i.e. goes beyond a single project or short-term cooperation;
- involves the sharing of risks and benefits between all the partners; and recognises that in working together, building on and complementing each others strengths and assets, the partners are stronger.

The creation of a partnership is a long and challenging process, requiring the partners to commit resources and assets (not necessarily money, but also local knowledge, time and effort). They do so because they recognise that greater gains or benefits can be achieved through working in partnership or because problems may be too complex to be solved by working independently. In local, area-based development initiatives, such as Axis 4 of the EFF, there are real benefits to be gained, especially in areas that are in decline or are facing serious economic or social challenges.
In such areas, there is a need to **combine all the potentials and strengths** of the local actors in order to address common issues, opportunities and challenges. Such partnership involves sharing ownership, developing a shared sense of place, and finding common ground through which to find solutions, addressing not only one sector but the entire area and its needs by acting in an integrated way.

In such a situation a local partnership can:

- pool local resources, experience and skills in order to use them more effectively, and develop appropriate solutions to the identified problems;
- engage a wider public in decision making and development planning, thereby growing civic involvement in governance, enhancing local capacity to act, and building a constituency of support; and,
- provide a mechanism for identifying and dealing with potential synergies and conflicts between different interest groups (e.g. between the environment and development)\(^1\).

The principal role of the partnership is to develop and implement a shared strategy or action plan for its area.

**How are partnerships structured?**

The EU regulation requires the delivery of Axis 4 by groups or partnerships comprising “representatives of the fishing sector and of other relevant local socio-economic sectors”. The approach should therefore be **inclusive** and the mapping of stakeholders should seek to ensure that account is taken of groups that might sometimes be excluded. Experience from the Leader programme shows that groups often excluded from such initiatives include: the young (whose future is at stake), the economically active (who may have limited availability), women (frequently excluded in male dominated industries), or the elderly (often experienced and available).

As Axis 4 is concerned with fisheries local action groups, it is important to ensure the strong presence of the fisheries sector. At the same time, it is also vital that **no single sector or partner dominates**. A balanced and inclusive partnership is likely to produce a more effective and balanced strategy, reflecting the needs of the area and any special needs or interests. This will also tend to motivate cross community involvement, by valuing people’s contributions and encouraging them to contribute their resources (time, knowledge of the area, financial and technical resources) to the benefit of the area.

The organisations represented within the partnership are important, but of equal importance are the individuals that represent these organisations in the partnership. The **involvement of senior personnel or representatives** contributes greatly to the success of the partnership, in particular by giving it a higher profile within the management of the partner organisation and by facilitating quicker decision making on behalf of the partner.

Targeting the involvement of individuals who recognise the limitations of their own organisations and see that the area’s problems cannot be solved without the involvement of other partners and sectors can also help to overcome such problems.

Highlighting the potential for partners to influence key decisions within the partnership (such as the final shape of the strategy, or the selection of projects) is also important in terms of encouraging their active participation – especially for those with little experience in cooperation with other sectors.

\(^1\) Based on the manual “Animating local partnerships in rural areas – a practical guide” developed with the TEPA project (Training of European Partnership Animators), www.partnershipanimators.eu.
**A new approach to governance on the French Basque coast**

The Basque-South Landes Coast EFF Group is a broad informal partnership involving a wide range of stakeholders. The Local Fishing Committee (LFC) is the support structure which gives the group its legal status. The LFC mandates a Programming Committee to decide on the support provided by Axis 4 for the project promoters, based on the strategy. This Programming Committee, responsible for steering and implementing the strategy, is made up of 30 members (21 from the private sector, including 17 from the fisheries sector, and 9 from the public sector). The recruitment of a head of the Axis 4 initiative provides the LFC with the human resources required to fulfil its role as the organiser, driving force and coordinator of the initiative. A small Technical Committee provides additional expertise and advice.

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**Legal status**

In different member states, there are different organisational models of FLAG. In some countries, FLAGs are required to form a legal entity (often a non-profit company or NGO), in others, one (or more) of the partners is selected to coordinate the implementation of the strategy, including undertaking administrative and financial responsibilities on behalf of the partnership (see the section on legal structure in the implementation plan for more detail).

**Partnership composition**

Partnerships are dynamic bodies which change and evolve over time as they develop and effect change. They do not emerge fully formed, they have different beginnings, trajectories and endings. While it is possible to identify different broad types of partnerships, these are best regarded as starting points. In reality, there is frequently considerable variation within types and in the transition between different types. Partnerships may be led by:
3. Building local partnerships

- **The private sector or representatives of a specific sector of activity (e.g. fishing)** – often emerging when private sector interests come together to respond to a specific issue, challenge (such as the restructuring of the fleet) or opportunity (e.g. funding opportunities). Possessing advantages in terms of mobilising private investment and talent, they may, however, have a narrow focus, possibly limiting their activities to improving the competitiveness of their own sector. As such, they might not take sufficient account of the opportunities for diversification, improving the environment and opening up to wider interests in the area.

- **The public sector** – often the starting point and common in areas new to partnerships and territorial development, and in countries with a relatively weak civic society (e.g. the EU Member States from Central and Eastern Europe). Pump priming activity and resourcing from the public sector can be vital in establishing new partnerships. Such partnerships tend to focus on securing resources, physical investment and infrastructure. They can play an important role in strengthening municipal and inter-municipal governance but can remain dependent on or driven by a dominant public sector interest and therefore may not evolve to become independent or self-sustaining.

- **Civic society** – these partnerships tend to emerge from civic society organisations concerned with improving their area, its economy, the environment and/or the quality of life. They are more common in areas where civic involvement is strong or where there is a history of partnership working. Funding can also be a strong motivator. The focus here tends to be on investment in animation, training, culture, as well as local jobs, the environment and community facilities. These partnerships can have positive effects on social and environmental sustainability and can develop into highly effective and self sustaining partnerships. They can, however, be limited by issues related to economic viability and political legitimacy.

The advantages and disadvantages of the different mixes of partners has led some countries to advocate the “one third principle”, where there is an equal balance of public, private and civic society representation. However, there is no magic formula for the perfect composition of partnerships – the important thing is to find a blend of partners which brings the enthusiasm, skills and resources that most suit the needs of the fisheries area concerned.

**How to identify and involve the partners?**

If the partnership is to make a real contribution to the development of the area, it is essential to ensure that all the key stakeholders in the area are involved as partners. Prospective partners should have a positive interest in the changes happening in the area, support the work of the partnership, be willing to commit their resources and reputation, and help promote and encourage others to join in the process.

Partnership building is usually initiated by a core group of interested or motivated people willing to make a commitment to joint action. An essential early task is the mapping of stakeholders, which involves carrying out an analysis of all the people, organisations and institutions which have had or can have a significant impact (positive or negative!) on the area’s development. These stakeholders should then be invited to become involved in the work of the partnership. A useful tool here is a table such as the one outlined below, setting out each stakeholder’s main characteristics (strengths as well as weaknesses), motivation (expectations) and any potential contribution they can make or benefits they may accrue through their involvement in the partnership. Such an analysis is usually carried out by sector, so that stakeholders from the public, private and civic society sectors are taken into account.
This stakeholder analysis is designed to produce a map of the existing organisations, institutions and groups active in a given area.

The approach to involving partners will vary, depending on the profile of the area concerned. This can range from areas with a shortage of local initiative, where a small number of highly motivated actors must kick-start local action, to areas with a crowded playing field, where a number of experienced internal and external players may compete for similar domains of responsibility. In the latter situation, a new partnership could confuse the situation even further, so it may be preferable to adopt the role of broker between different local interests, for the benefit of fisheries communities. Such partnerships can, in some cases, be grafted on to existing organisations.

### What are the stages of partnership building?

It is important to recognise that “no partnership is born fully formed”. The process of the partners recognising each others strengths and weaknesses and building trust takes time and requires many meetings and discussions. Partners who express great enthusiasm at the beginning may drop out, while others, apparently unconvinced at the start, eventually become involved and are often among the strongest supporters of the partnership. Therefore, establishing each partner’s commitment before electing governing bodies or drafting decision making rules and procedures is a key step.

Partnership building should be treated as a dynamic process that unfolds through the interaction of those involved. This is a process that is always evolving and the role of the partners is likely to change over time. The partnership cycle can be a useful tool in helping to understand and manage this process. Ways and means of dealing with internal partnership problems (such as conflicts, lack of motivation of partners etc.) will have to be adapted to the development stage of a given partnership. This cycle involves four stages broken into twelve steps:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholders by sector</th>
<th>Characteristics e.g. strengths/ weaknesses</th>
<th>Motivation, expectations</th>
<th>Contribution</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Public sector:</td>
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<td>- stakeholder A</td>
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<td>Civic society sector:</td>
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2 Advantage West Midlands: Guidance for Developing and Implementing Leader Local Development Strategies, [www.advantagwm.co.uk](http://www.advantagwm.co.uk)
3. Building local partnerships

**Stage I – Scoping and Building**

1. Scoping: understanding the challenge, gathering information, consulting with stakeholders and with potential external resource providers, building a vision of/for the partnership.

2. Identifying: identifying potential partners and, if suitable, securing their involvement; motivating them and encouraging them to work together.

3. Building: partners build their working relationship through agreeing the goals, objectives and core principles that will underpin their partnership.

4. Planning: partners plan a programme of activities and begin to outline a coherent project.

During Stage I there is sometimes a period of disagreement and tension (or competition) between partners, which may need skilful leadership or guidance before the partners adjust to team work and the group decision-making process. This is usually followed by a period of normalised relationships with a stronger sense of common goals.

**Stage II – Managing and Maintaining**

5. Managing: partners explore the structure and the management of their partnership in the medium to long-term.

6. Resourcing: partners (and other supporters) identify and mobilise funding and other resources.

7. Implementing: once resources are in place and project details agreed, the implementation process starts – working to a pre-agreed timetable and (ideally) to specific deliverables. Usually by this stage the partnership has become an effective unit with partners working well together.

**Stage III – Reviewing and Revising**


9. Reviewing: reviewing the partnership: what is the impact of the partnership on the partner organisations? Is it time for some partners to leave and/or new partners to join? Should roles change?

10. Revising: revising the partnership, programmes or projects in the light of experience, achievements or changes in the context in which the partnership operates.

**Stage IV – Sustaining Outcomes**

11. Institutionalising: building appropriate structures, resources and mechanisms for the partnership to ensure its effectiveness in the longer-term.

12. Sustaining or terminating (moving on): building sustainability or agreeing an appropriate conclusion.

The above description, adapted from IBLF’s “The Partnering Toolbook”, applies to all kinds of area-based partnerships, whether created spontaneously at the initiative of the partners or in response to a funding opportunity e.g. a Fisheries Local Action Group. Each of the twelve steps is important to ensuring that the partnership is sustainable in the long term, but FLAG partners may well be forced to speed up or streamline the steps of partnership formation to meet the deadlines of the funding programme. It might also be necessary to work in parallel on the Planning (e.g. strategy development), Managing (developing the FLAG management structure) and Resourcing (e.g. identifying co-financing).

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3 International Business Leaders Forum (IBLF) and the Global Association for Improved Nutrition (GAIN), The Partnering Toolbook, 2003
3. Building local partnerships

What are the main functions of local partnerships?

There are considerable differences between local partnerships, depending on the national context as well as on the specific needs of the area. However, most partnerships have the following main functions:

- implementation;
- financial management and administration; and
- strategic decision making.

The **implementation** function is usually responsible for:

- information provision and animation of the community;
- providing support to project promoters; and
- implementation of those projects which are undertaken directly by the partnership (e.g. agreed strategic priorities, cooperation projects etc).

The **administrative and financial** functions can be dealt with by the same organisation as implementation, but it is important to remember that these two types of functions are distinct. The entity responsible for administrative and financial issues will usually deal with:

- organisation of the project application and selection process (including eligibility);
- financial management (including claims, payments, if the group operates a decentralised budget; i.e. makes payments to project beneficiaries);
- monitoring of performance and reporting; and
- administrative support to the decision-making bodies.

In all cases it is important to ensure separation of administrative and financial functions from **strategic decision making**. Local partnership’s strategic decision making depends on its formal status (loose association of partners vs. separate legal entity) and the legal framework of the country. Some countries require a certain level of representation by different sectors. Usually the following principles apply:
3. Building local partnerships

- Key strategic decisions (e.g., strategy approval or any major changes, selecting the partner responsible for financial management, employment of key staff, internal decision-making rules for the partnership) are made by a body representing all the partners.

- Project selection decisions are usually entrusted to an elected body (committee, board, etc.) drawn from the partnership. This body has the crucial responsibility of approving projects and allocating funding to contribute to the overall development of the area. Its decisions should therefore be corporate, based on group consensus, not on a simple count of votes or percentages. Care should also be taken to ensure transparency of all decisions (e.g., publication of records of the proceedings of the committee).

In addition to the formal functions, the less formalised elements of the partnership play an important role in motivating and encouraging the partners and bringing them together. Working groups can also be an important way of involving other members of the local community in the work of the partnership. The presence of an animator is often necessary to stimulate the development of the partnership, especially in the early stages, while active and strong working groups are one of the signs of the partnership’s maturity.

Finnish FLAG builds on Leader structure

In the Kainuu and Koillismaa inland FLAG area (Finland), the strategy was designed and is being implemented on the basis of a consortium contract between three Leader groups. The Oulujarvi Leader Association administrates the strategy and hosts a Fisheries Committee, which coordinates the implementation and evaluates the feasibility of project applications. The Committee has nine members, three from each Leader area, representing fishermen, trade and processing entrepreneurs, consultancy organisations, land and lake owners, NGOs, municipalities and the Leader boards. One-third of members come from the private sector, one-third from the public sector and one-third from civic society. The team that developed the strategy was also coordinated by the Oulujarvi Leader group and had 16 members, representing different stakeholders.