

How to build and select high performing local partnerships¹

What do the regulations say?

The EFF Regulation mentions three different types of criteria for assessing the quality of the local “group”:- the socio economic balance of the partnership in relation to the composition of the area, the capacity to implement the strategy successfully, and the financial and administrative capacity. It says that:

- The group should represent “public and private partners from the various local relevant socio-economic sectors -”
- “With *adequate administrative and financial capacity* to administer the assistance and ensure that the operations are completed successfully.”
- “The group should, wherever, possible be based on existing experienced organisations”. (Article 45.1)

The Implementing Regulation continues that in terms of *socioeconomic balance*:

- “A group shall be composed in such a way that it is able to draw up and implement a development strategy in the area concerned”
- “The partnership shall comprise, including at the decision making level representatives of the fishing sector and of other relevant local socio economic sectors” (IR Article 23.1)

In terms of the *capacity to administer the assistance and ensure that operations are completed successfully*, the IR says:

- “The relevance and effectiveness of the partnership is to be assessed in terms of its composition as well as its transparency and clarity in allocation of tasks and responsibilities. The capacity of the partners to carry out the tasks assigned to them, and the effectiveness and decision making must be guaranteed”. (IR Article 23.1)

In terms of *administrative and financial capacity* the IR says:

- The administrative capacity of the group is to be considered adequate when the group:
 - Either selects from the partnership one partner as the administrative leader who will guarantee the satisfactory operation of the partnership (IR Article 23.2a) or
 - Or comes together in a legally constituted common structure, the formal constitution of which guarantees the satisfactory operation of the partnership (IR Article 23.2b)
- In addition, if the group is entrusted with the administration of public funds its financial capacity shall be assessed either in terms of the financial capacity a) of the administrative leader or b) of the common structure to administer the funds (IR Article 23.3)
- If the group is entrusted with the administration of public funds it shall create a separate account for the implementation of the local development strategy (IR Article 25.2)

What to look for in a high quality partnership?

In terms of socio-economic balance:

- Have the main actors and organisations that affect the success of the local development strategy been identified? What are the points of common interest and of conflict with fishing activities and communities?

¹ Advice given in the official working document prepared for the conference on the implementation of Axis 4, “The sustainable Development of Fisheries Areas”, held on 25-27 January 2007 in Seville, Spain. Full document: http://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/meetings_events/events/archives/events_2007/250107/working_doc_en.pdf

- Is there a tradition of cooperation and organisation within the fishing communities? What is their weight on the decision making bodies of the partnership?
- Is there a tradition of cooperation and common action between fishing communities and their organisations and other economic and social actors in the area. Does the partnership reflect these links?
- Is the partnership committed to reinforcing the capacity of fishing organisations, their links with other socio-economic actors and ensure a positive balance of interests between sectors?
- Does the involvement of local authorities and of the private sector reflect the reality of the area?
- Are there mechanisms to ensure that groups that are under represented be involved in the local partnership and its decision making structures (women, young people, environmental groups, cultural groups, private businesses....)? What is their level of representation?
- Are there any “hidden” power structures in the decision making organs?
- If the partnership is an existing organisation have the necessary steps been taken to ensure that there is a balanced representation of fishing interests in the decision making procedures concerning axis 4 (and other related measures). In other words, what is the weight of fishing interest on the decision making boards concerning axis 4 and what is their weight in the general structure of the organisation)
- What are the actions for establishing channels of communication, building trust, motivating, capacity building?
- Have the roles, responsibilities, rights and tasks been clearly defined and communicated to the partners?

In terms of *capacity to ensure that operations are completed successfully*

- Does the group have the necessary capacity to provide technical assistance to the projects envisaged in the strategy (e.g. food projects, tourist projects...)?
- Does the group have the necessary staff to animate the territory and encourage both individual and collective projects?
- Does the group have the necessary staff to monitor and evaluate results?
- How will all these forms of support be organised – through the internal staff of the group or of the partners or through external expertise?

In terms of *administrative and financial capacity*

- Does the local partnership have the right to select local projects in practice or is this limited by outside financial control and procedures (e.g. cofinancing procedures, eligibility checks, payment delays)?
- What is the role of the group in terms of the management and payment of funds? Will it be directly responsible for receiving and paying funds or will it simply select the projects leaving the payment to the managing authority?
- If the group is responsible for the management and payment of funds is it legally recognised for doing this or has it designated a recognised member of the partnership?
- If the group is legally responsible for the management and payment of funds or if it has designated a partner to do this can it demonstrate that it has the experience and the systems in place to ensure sound financial management (separate accounting systems, qualified staff for accounting and certifying payments)?
- In order to guarantee an effective support to the local project can the group guarantee to pay the beneficiary in an acceptably fast period of time? Are there serious risks of liquidity problems or delays?
- If needed, does the group or the designated partner have the financial capacity to advance funds to final beneficiaries, for example, through agreements with banks or through its own funds?

What to avoid?

In terms of socio-economic balance:

- Too weak or too strong representation of the fishing community
- Too weak or too strong representation of the private sector.
- Dominance of institutional bodies and the public sector.
- Insufficient representation of weaker social groups.
- A partnership organised around an artificial committee without real decision making power.

In terms of capacity to ensure that operations are completed successfully:

- Inability to coordinate and provide leadership for the programme at local level
- Insufficient dedicated local resources and capacity for animating and implementing the strategy and the projects given the size of the territory
- Insufficient information and communication about the programme.

In terms of administrative and financial capacity.

- Excessively bureaucratic and complex procedures for beneficiaries. Long delays in payment. Difficulty in mobilising cofunding.
- Lack of transparency in selection criteria and in decision making processes.
- Underpayment, non-eligible payments, audit problems