

## **PARTNERSHIP BUILDING FOR Axis 4 EFF**

This section provides guidance on the following issues:

- Why is it useful or necessary to create a partnership?
- How to identify and involve the partners?
- What are the stages of partnership building?
- How is a local partnership structured?

### **WHY PARTNERSHIP?**

Local actors interested in Axis 4 of the European Fisheries Fund 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”. This is based on the considerable experience of such local partnerships in Leader, the rural area based initiative and its Local Action Groups. In Axis 4 of the EFF the 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” (Galicia) or “Local Fishery Groups” (Poland).

Partnership is a term with many meanings. What is meant here? And why is the creation of a local group or partnership mandatory to obtain funding from Axis 4? Partnerships as we understand them here are charged with developing and implementing an **integrated local strategy** for a **coherent territory**, based on a **bottom-up** approach, with sufficient **critical mass** of resources to support the strategy, and with the 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, business 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 **sharing of risks as well as benefits** between all partners;
- recognises that in working together, building on and complementing each other’s 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 often local knowledge, time and effort of the people involved). They do so because greater gains or benefits may be achievable through working in partnership or because problems may be too complex to be solved without a partnership. 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 and/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 the 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 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 growing civic involvement in governance, enhancing capacity to act and building a constituency of support;

- provide a mechanism for **identifying and dealing with potential synergies and conflicts between various interests** (e.g. between environment and development)<sup>1</sup> in a locally appropriate manner.

The principal role of the partnership is to develop and deliver a shared strategy or action plan for its area which is owned by the partnership and is appropriate to the area.

## 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 actors** in the area are involved as partners. They should take a positive interest in the changes happening in the area, support work of the partnership, be willing to commit their resources and reputation, and will 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 to carry 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 actors should be invited to become involved in the work of the partnership. A useful tool here is a table such as the example 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 the partnership. Such an analysis is usually carried out by sector, so that stakeholders from the public, business and civic society sectors are taken into account.

Stakeholders by sector	Characteristics e.g. strengths/ weaknesses	Motivation/ expectations	Contribution
Public sector: - stakeholder A - stakeholder B - ...			
Business sector: - ... - ...			
Civic society sector: - ... - ...			

This stakeholder analysis is designed to produce a map of the existing organisations, institutions and groups active in a given area.

## Partnership areas

Several main types of situations can be distinguished:

*Areas of initiative:* 'something must be done' or 'we have the opportunity to achieve something'. Key individuals or interests gather around a common issue or opportunity and decide to effect change, take ownership of the issue or opportunity and make progress. This can occur either in areas with experience of taking initiatives or in new territories and tends to arise in response to emerging change or opportunity within or affecting the community. There are dangers of being seen to be too proactive, to 'rock the boat' or have special interests. Supporting, fostering and providing **guidance** for such initiatives to help them become inclusive, effective and strategic is the priority here.

*Areas with a shortage of local initiative:* "Not even a dog moves in my village". The partnership, often limited to a small number of highly motivated actors, must kick-start local action. This means identifying and involving any focal points of energy within the community and nurturing them to create projects that have a demonstration effect on other people. The starting point may simply be to surprise

<sup>1</sup> 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](http://www.partnershipanimators.eu).

people by getting the dog to move. The key task here is **animation**. Such partnerships are often new, free standing organisations because there is nothing else.

*Areas with a crowded playing field.* At the other extreme there are areas where a number of experienced internal and external players compete for similar domains of responsibility. In these situations, a new partnership can either confuse the situation even further by creating yet another competitor, it can link in with one or more of the main players thus tilting the balance of power, or it can become a forum for negotiating and coordinating different local interests for mutual benefit and for taking better account of the interest of fishing communities. The key task here is “**brokerage**”, and such partnerships can, in some cases, be grafted on to existing organisations.

*Areas with a history of conflict.* In almost all communities there are rivalries or factions, this enmity or rivalry can be very local or wider, between communities or groups within the community. One of the main benefits of the partnership in such areas is to launch practical projects which build bridges between people who would normally rather drown than get into the same lifeboat as their historical rival. The key task here is **mediation**.

### **Partnership composition**

The EU regulation requires delivery of Axis 4 by groups or partnerships comprising “representatives of the fishing sector and of other relevant local socio-economic sectors” and that this should be ‘**according to the principle of proportionality**’. The approach should therefore be inclusive and the mapping of stakeholders should seek to ensure account is taken of groups who may frequently be excluded. LEADER experience shows this can include diverse groups e.g. the young (whose future is at stake) economically active (who may be working when meetings are held), women (frequently excluded in male dominated traditional industries) or the elderly (overlooking their experience, skills and relatively free time).

It is important to ensure from the start that **no single sector or partner dominates**. Such domination may be dangerous. A balanced and inclusive partnership is likely to produce a more effective and balanced strategy reflecting the needs of the area including relevant special needs or interests. This will tend to motivate cross community involvement by valuing people’s contributions and encouraging them to contribute their resources (such as commitment, unique knowledge of the area, financial and technical resources) for the benefit of the area.

Who the partner organisations are is important – but, of at least equal importance is **which individual** from that organisation participates in the partnership. **Senior involvement** contributes greatly to the success of the partnership e.g. by giving it profile within the management of the organisation or in being able to make binding decisions on commitments and resources on behalf of the partner.

Some specific issues have arisen with regard to EFF Axis 4 partnerships in some countries. In certain cases incentives have been introduced to ensure involvement of the fisheries industrial sector in Axis 4, potentially resulting in a disproportionate influence in the partnership. In others e.g. where groups may have large budgets allowing infrastructure or other large scale investments to be financed the local administration may try to play the dominant role. This reinforces the importance of encouraging the participation of other stakeholders (e.g. NGOs) who can play a mediating role between sectors to ensure balance and highlights the importance of the focus on the area rather than narrower sectoral or organisational needs. 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 is a positive approach to this.

Demonstrating to partners that they have the ability to influence the key decisions (such as e.g. final shape of the strategy or the selection of projects) is very important in their motivation – especially for those with little experience in cooperation with other sectors.

### **Partnership origins**

Partnerships are dynamic bodies which change and evolve over time or as they themselves develop and effect change. They do not emerge fully developed: they have different beginnings, trajectories and endings. We can identify different broad types of partnership - however, these may be best

regarded as starting points. In reality there is frequently considerable variation within types and transition between different types, each partnership is unique. Partnerships may be led by:

- *the public sector* – often the starting point and common in areas that are new to partnerships and territorial development initiatives and in countries with relatively weak civic society (e.g. the new EU Member States from Central and Eastern Europe). Pump priming activity and resourcing from the public sector can be vital contributions 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 more independent or self-sustaining.
- *the private sector or representatives of a specific sector of activity* (e.g. fishing), often emerging when private interests come together to respond to a specific issue, challenge or opportunity (e.g. funding opportunities). Possessing advantages in mobilising considerable amounts of private investment and talent they may tend to be narrow and interest focused. Risks arise in limiting their activities to improving the competitiveness of their own sector, without taking sufficient account of the opportunities for diversification, improving the environment and opening out to the wider interests of the area, new groups and activities.
- *civic society*, these partnerships tend to emerge from civic society organisations concerned to improve their area, its economy, the environment and/or the quality of life. They tend to emerge in areas where civic involvement is strong or where there is a history of partnership working, they may also be motivated by the funding opportunity. The focus here tends to be on investment in animation, training and culture as well as local jobs, the environment and community facilities. They can have positive effects on social and environmental sustainability and can develop into highly effective and self-sustaining partnerships. They may be challenged by bottlenecks related to economic viability and political legitimacy.

The advantages and disadvantages of the different mixes of partners have led some countries to advocate the “one third principle” where there is an equal balance of public, private and civic categories. There is no magic solution for the perfect composition of partnership – the important thing is to find a blend of partners which brings in the enthusiasm, skills and resources which most suit the needs of the fisheries area.

### **The stages of partnership building**

It is important to recognise that “no partnership is born fully formed”<sup>2</sup>. The process of the partners recognising each others’ strengths and weaknesses and building trust must take 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. Establishing partners’ 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. A cross-sector partnership is always in the process of evolving and the role of the partners is likely to change over time. This is a process that is always unfinished and always a work in progress, often involving different partners and different types of relationships at different stages. Thinking and operating in terms of a **partnership cycle** has proved to be a useful tool, this example involves four stages broken into twelve steps:

Stage I – **Scoping and Building** – comprises the following steps:

(i) Scoping: understanding the challenge, gathering information, consulting with stakeholders and with potential external resource providers, building a vision of/for the partnership;

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<sup>2</sup> Advantage West Midlands: Guidance for Developing and Implementing LEADER Local Development Strategies, [www.advantagewm.co.uk](http://www.advantagewm.co.uk)

(ii) Identifying: identifying potential partners and – if suitable – securing their involvement; motivating them and encouraging them to work together;

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

(iv) Planning: partners plan programme of activities and begin to outline a coherent project.

Stage II – **Managing and Maintaining** – comprises the following steps:

(v) Managing: partners explore structure and management of their partnership medium to long-term;

(vi) Resourcing: partners (and other supporters) identify and mobilise cash and non-cash resources;

(vii) 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.

Stage III – **Reviewing and Revising** – comprises:

(viii) Measuring performance: measuring and reporting on impact and effectiveness – outputs and outcomes. Monitoring and evaluation. Is the partnership achieving its goals?

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

(x) 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** – comprises:

(xi) Institutionalising: building appropriate structures, resourcing and mechanisms for the partnership to ensure longer-term commitment and continuity.

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



The above description developed for IBLF's "The Partnering Toolkit"<sup>3</sup>, 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. for a Fisheries Local Action Group. All partnerships will follow their own development pathway. All the above stages are important for the partnership to be sustainable in the long term but FLAG partners may well be forced to speed up or streamline the stages of partnership formation to meet the deadlines of the funding programme. It might 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).

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. Partnerships operate very much as teams and an understanding of team development processes can go some way to developing understanding of and approaches to easing the development process. A useful approach here is to consider the four stages of team development as identified by Bruce Tuckman<sup>4</sup>:

- **Forming**, getting to know each other, unchallenging, little real team work, leadership needed;
- **Storming**, resolving differences, developing focus, power struggles, requiring guidance;
- **Norming**, adjusting to team working, group decisions, clear roles ; and
- **Performing**, interdependent, functioning as a unit, autonomous, getting the job done.

There is a large amount of freely available supporting information regarding this approach and its further development on the internet.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> International Business Leaders Forum (IBLF) and the Global Association for Improved Nutrition (GAIN), The Partnering Toolkit, 2003

<sup>4</sup> Tuckman, Bruce W. (1965) 'Developmental sequence in small groups'

<sup>5</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Forming,\\_storming,\\_norming\\_and\\_performing](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Forming,_storming,_norming_and_performing)

## What are the main functions of the local partnership? How is it structured?

In different member states, there are different organisational models of FLAGs; 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 deliver the implementation and/or administrative/financial structure for the partnership. There are considerable differences between local partnerships, depending on the national context as well as on the specific needs of the area. Most partnerships would have the following main functions:

- Implementation;
- Finances and administration;
- decision making

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

- information provision and animation of the community,
- providing support to project promoters,
- 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 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
- administrative support to the decision-making bodies.

In all cases it is important to ensure separation of administrative and financial functions from **decision making**. Local partnerships 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 that specific proportions of various sectors be represented. Usually the following principles apply:

- the 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 as far as possible, be corporate, based on group **consensus**, not on a simple count of votes or percentages. Remember the importance of having **senior people** involved. 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 important roles e.g. in animation motivating and encouraging the partners and bringing them together, and Working Groups – an important way of involving members of the local community into the partnership. The presence of a formal or informal animator is often necessary to stimulate the partnership development, especially at the early stages, while active and strong Working Groups are one of the signs of the partnership's maturity.

