

A customized approach to fisheries areas

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The LEADER approach and fisheries areas

Community Led Local Development is a rather recent approach for the fisheries sector. Although the LEADER-Territorial approach has been implemented in the past, it did not convey a direct strategy for the fisheries communities and economic activity in fisheries.

The fisheries sector and fisheries communities have very distinct characteristics and issues. It had become apparent by the first application of the LEADER method that it is necessary to consider a more customised strategy in order to have clearer results for social capital in fisheries communities.

The insular climate and biophysical characteristics of the Aegean Sea have, historically, encouraged human settlement in insular coastal- zones with emphasis on traditional resource-based activities, such as coastal fisheries, aquaculture, agriculture and trade which often develop side by side with activities such as small-scale industry, shipping and tourism.

Therefore, there are many implications to consider and many different ways in which LEADER/CLLD is supporting or could be supporting economic growth and social inclusion in coastal and inland communities dependent on fisheries.

The Lesvos Local Action Group started planning a LEADER-Fisheries approach in 2008, and had to consider several new aspects of the area that had not been in high priority mainly because of the way the regulatory guidelines were directing the planning of the past local LEADER approach towards a rural-agricultural nature.

Coastal resources were and still are a key element in economic and subsistence activities, but the fisheries sector and the people involved still did not appear as a high priority compared to the rural and agricultural aspects of the area. In the past few years the approach of the 2007-2015 Axis 4 EFF Local programme has been re-defined by taking into consideration lessons learned:

- Bringing the fisheries sector to the forefront, ensuring issues regarding fisheries are discussed in more depth.
- Introducing diversification inside/outside fisheries activities but still with the idea that the fisheries sector is the priority for the communities and people involved.
- Focusing on coastal communities needs which in various ways differ from inland needs and perspective and studying more carefully and in more depth the fisheries sector and characteristics.
- Helping to boost the self-confidence and visibility of the fisheries sector.
- Getting professional fishermen more actively involved, raising their awareness and motivation.

Achieving results in fisheries areas through CLLD

The dependence on coastal resources in areas such as Lesvos is likely to remain strong. Industrial development and the opening of markets mean that processing of agricultural and fishery products is an important factor for the economic sustainability of the area and dependence on the rural and coastal resources will likely increase. This increased dependence will however trigger a surge in user conflict over natural resources and environment that calls for the need for diversification of the local economy. These are basic facts that along with the Common European Fisheries policy have substantial impact on the economic and social structure of fisheries communities in areas like the island of Lesvos.

The LEADER/CLLD approach has the ability to address a great variety of aspects that a centrally defined policy might not be able to see in territorial detail, especially when it comes to fisheries issues. It includes aspects of added value in the fisheries production, diversification of the local economy, life-long education and awareness, social well-being and culture and in some cases even some small-scale local infrastructure which would not be otherwise a priority for central policies.

The LEADER/CLLD method so far has been a very useful tool in order to derive tangible results in the fisheries area of Lesvos, namely:

- The activation of a rather conservative community. In Greece the fisheries sector is a closed and very regulated profession, LEADER-Fisheries in Lesvos, gave the opportunity to fishermen and their families to consider new economic activities that are supplementary to fisheries.
- Fishermen saw new potential in using their skills in order to increase their income. They have been offered the opportunity to diversify without leaving the sea, not leaving a profession which is a way of life, not only of individual fishermen but very often of a whole village.
- Environmental Awareness – fishermen nowadays get actively involved in discussions concerning the sustainable use of marine resources and related pressures on the environment. This leads to more responsible production and consumption patterns thanks to a better understanding of the issues and the development of realistic solutions which help reduce the inevitable tensions whenever environmental issues are pitched against economic activities.
- Discussions with the fisheries sector empowered the (F)LAG and increased its understanding of the fisheries communities' local needs. The (F)LAG local development strategy (LDS) is now more realistic and coherent especially in its assessment of the linkages and interdependence of coastal and inland resource system.

What next?

The future of fisheries areas is an issue that still entails discussion and better understanding due to fast changes that occur in the European Community. There are many aspects which LEADER/CLLD can identify and prioritise and act with specific locally planned measures that entail strong animation and empowerment. Especially approaching the "post 2020 agenda" in the fisheries areas it is important to take into consideration the following steps:

- Derive lessons from the recent past, as examples of how the fisheries sector can be more actively included and involved in the island's economy.
- Concentrate on incentives that activate capacity - social and economic- but also be constantly present as FLAGS in order to facilitate, make the way somehow easier and analyse and face the challenges ahead.
- Listen to local needs, be close to local people while planning and consider the details that have impact in small geographic areas and fisheries communities.
- Simplify the management systems in applying the LEADER approach features. The FLAGS main purpose should be to be more present in the field. There should be a better equilibrium between preparing reports and paperwork and in carrying out strategic animation.

- Strengthen the role and involvement of fisheries communities and stakeholders in the LDS governance in order to boost self confidence in fisheries communities

In order to achieve better results now and in the future, we should put emphasis on making visible and clear the element of vision for a given area and its people. It is also important to restore and establish trust in the system. The relation between people and the planning and delivery systems of policies is crucial for the future and the wellbeing of the areas involved.

It is the social capital above all that we should focus upon with intensive consultation, proximity, animation, empowerment, networking and cooperation.

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Their aim is to trigger the reflection and fuel the debate on how to improve CLLD intervention in fisheries and aquaculture areas. [The other articles can be accessed on the FARNET website.](#)

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