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G U I D E #1



Area-based Development in EU Fisheries Areas

*A Start-up Guide for
Fisheries Local Action Groups (FLAGs)*



European Commission
Maritime Affairs and Fisheries

EN

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1. Introduction

What is the purpose of this guide?

This guide has been prepared to assist current and prospective Fisheries Local Action Groups (FLAGs) and those working with them in the essential elements of setting up and operating an area based partnership and developing and delivering a local development strategy.

Priority Axis 4 represents a new departure for the European Fisheries Fund (EFF) in that it focuses on the sustainable development of fisheries areas. This area-based approach was introduced into the EFF Regulation for the first time in the period 2007–2013 and reflects the Commission's recognition that the complex and rapidly-changing forces affecting fisheries areas and communities cannot be dealt with by traditional policies and tools on their own.

The Commission argues that the EU “must be able to provide accompanying measures in conjunction with the conversion of areas affected by the restructuring of the fisheries sector”. Axis 4 provides the EFF with such measures, and the area-based or territorial approach means they can be adapted to the many different situations that exist in fisheries areas across the EU.

However, this presents a new challenge for fisheries areas, where there is often limited experience and knowledge in territorial development. This guide is designed, therefore, to help stakeholders in these areas to better understand the territorial approach and how it can be applied in their area.



Port Baiona (Spain).

What are the key features of the Axis 4 area-based approach?

In some respects, Axis 4 may appear similar to other initiatives; many of the actions carried out in Axis 4 will probably be similar to those implemented in fisheries areas under other programmes such as PESCA, INTERREG and EQUAL.

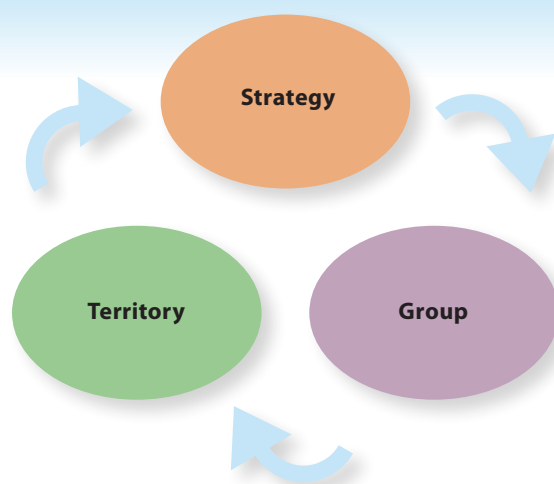
However, the crucial difference between Axis 4 and other elements of the EFF lies not so much in the individual actions undertaken but in the way in which these actions are implemented and linked together, both in the fisheries area and by the fishing communities themselves. In this respect it is most similar to the Leader area-based approach to development in rural areas, the key principles of which provide the basis for the Axis 4 (see Box).

The Leader approach

Since it was launched in 1991, the Leader Community Initiative has been working to provide rural communities in the EU with a method for involving local partners in steering the future development of their areas. The Leader approach is based on the premise that, given the diversity of European rural areas, development strategies are more effective and efficient if decided and implemented at local level by local actors, accompanied by clear and transparent procedures, the support of the relevant public administrations and the necessary technical assistance for the transfer of good practice. The following seven key features summarise the Leader approach: local public-private partnerships or local action groups; area-based local development strategies; bottom-up elaboration and implementation of these local strategies; integrated and multi-sectoral actions, innovation; networking; and cooperation. These are described in more detail at: http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/rur/leaderplus/pdf/factsheet_en.pdf.

Axis 4 seeks to go beyond merely tackling the short term effects of the economic, social and environmental consequences of the depletion of fish stocks. Its purpose is to enable fisheries communities to create new and sustainable sources of income and to improve their quality of life. It does this by empowering local people, those who best understand both the problems and the aspirations of fisheries communities – providing them with the tools and resources to develop and adapt solutions to meet their real needs.

The central principles of the approach are driven by the diversity of fisheries areas and situations that exist throughout the EU and the principle of subsidiarity, empowering local people to become the drivers of local development. Assistance under Axis 4 is designed to form part of an integrated local approach centred on a local development strategy which is adapted to the local situation. Its design and implementation should be as decentralised as possible, preferably coordinated by a partnership of local actors from the public, private and community sectors that have come together to form a FLAG. The overall approach can be characterised by three main and interlinked strands, the so called 'Holy Trinity of Territorial Development': the territory or area; the group or partnership; and the integrated local development strategy.



The “Holy Trinity” of Territorial Development

This territorial development approach fundamentally changes the way in which local areas, partnerships and strategies are perceived and defined. It is no longer enough merely to start from fixed administrative boundaries, consider the needs or problems in deficit terms and look for someone (usually an outside agency) to fill the gap by distributing public funds.

The cycle has to start with a positive vision and strategy for what the area could become in the future. This is backed up by an active alliance of local stakeholders working together to achieve shared goals. The precise boundaries of the territory then depend on what they want to achieve and with whom. The territories that result are defined as functional and coherent areas, where people are bound by common or shared elements; they become “project-based regions” and the territory itself is seen as an active learning organisation.

How is the guide structured ?

This guide is divided into three main sections; these may be read as stand alone documents but have been written in such a way as to reflect the integration of the three elements of the trinity. The three sections therefore integrate with and support each other as do the elements of the area, partnership and strategy in practice. The main sections of the guide are:

- › **Defining fisheries areas.** This section explains what is meant by fisheries areas and describes the main factors to take into account when defining the types of areas to be covered by Axis 4, from the perspective of both local actors and managing authorities.
- › **Building local partnerships.** The second section of the guide explains the concept of local partnerships and outlines the main steps involved in developing a partnership, including the points to consider when deciding on its composition and functioning. There is also some guidance and references on partnership building.
- › **Developing effective strategies.** This last section is composed of three main sub-sections: the first explains the key steps involved in a participatory, bottom-up approach to strategic planning; the second describes the main components of an effective strategy (the content); and finally, the last section deals with the operational or business plan – or how to ensure that the strategy becomes reality.

All these sections are linked to examples and tools on the FARNET website. A further core element of the Axis 4 approach, cooperation, is addressed through a separate guide.

2. Defining fisheries areas



Fishing on ice (Finland).

What does fisheries area mean in the context of the EFF?

Axis 4 of the European Fisheries Fund (EFF) is different from the other three Axes in that it targets fisheries areas (it is titled 'Sustainable development of **fisheries areas**') rather than just the fisheries sector. The use of funds allocated to EFF Axis 4 requires three basic conditions to be fulfilled:

1. A local area must be selected, in conformity with EU and national requirements;
2. A local partnership or group must be created (the Fisheries Local Action Group or FLAG), involving key actors in the given local fisheries area; and
3. The partnership, together with the wider community, must prepare and implement a local development strategy for the fisheries area.

The area, therefore, constitutes the common basis for forming the partnership, preparing the strategy and implementing the proposed actions. The strategy and the activities financed under it must be closely related to the characteristics, conditions and needs of the fisheries area. Fundamentally it is the area itself (and not individual projects) which is the subject and target of the public funding and it is those living or working in the area who decide on the priorities and projects that will be supported.

What do the EU regulations say about fisheries areas?

The EFF Regulation imposes relatively few conditions on the fisheries areas, stating that:

- › the areas must be limited in size and, as a general rule, smaller than NUTS 3 (Article 43.3);
- › the areas should either have a low population density, or a fishing sector in decline, or be characterised by small fisheries communities (Article 43.4);
- › the area should also be sufficiently “coherent from a geographical, economic and social point of view” (Article 43.3) and “have sufficient critical mass in terms of human, financial and economic resources to support a viable local development strategy” (Article 45.3)

The Implementing Regulation adds that:

- › the operational programme shall specify the procedures and the criteria for selecting the fisheries areas. Member States shall decide how they will apply articles 43.3 and 43.4 of the Regulation (IR Article 22.1);
- › the fisheries areas selected do not necessarily have to coincide with a national administrative area or with zones established for the purposes of eligibility under the objectives established by the Structural Funds (IR Article 22.2).

Who defines the area ?

The EU regulations allow Member States or regions to use different approaches to area selection.

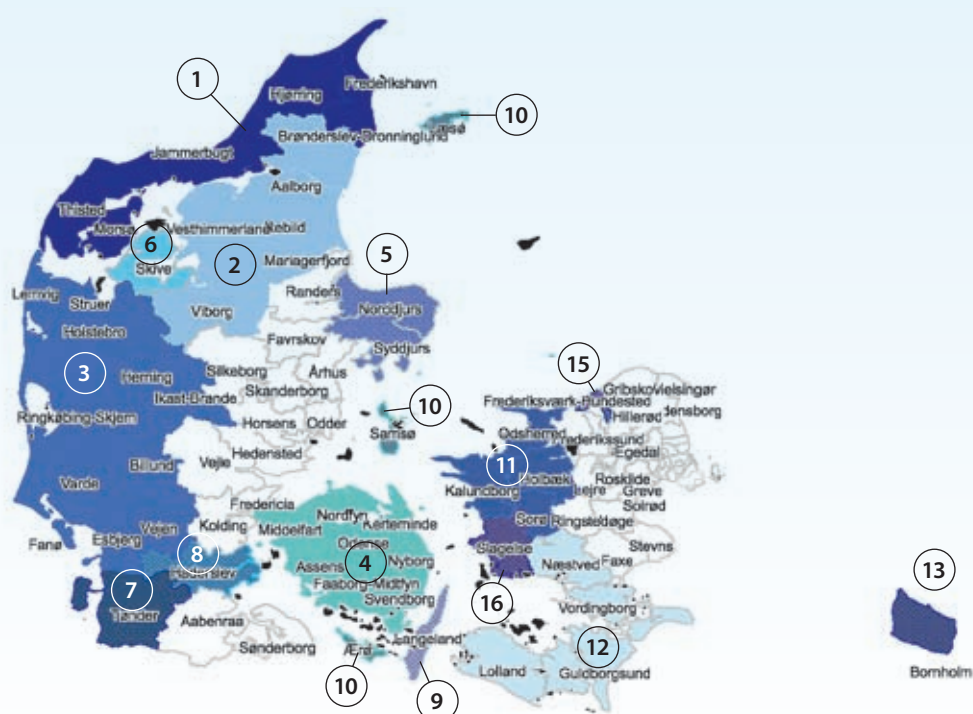
Some Member State managing authorities define only the broad conditions that a territory has to meet in order to benefit from Axis 4, and **invite fisheries communities to make proposals** for FLAG areas. This has the advantage of being more bottom-up, but Member States have to judge whether they have the systems in place which will allow them to select the areas that genuinely have the “critical mass” and are the most “coherent and able to support a viable development strategy”, as required in the regulations.

Other **managing authorities prioritise territories** which meet certain characteristics and then encourage the creation of partnerships and the development of strategies in these areas. Whilst in certain circumstances this can help ensure that funding is concentrated on areas that fulfil the conditions for meeting the strategic objectives of Axis 4 it does have the disadvantage of being more rigid and top down.

There is also an **intermediate option**, where the managing authorities might indicate the broad geographic scope of Axis 4 eligibility (e.g. only a certain part of the coast, exclusion of certain large ports and so on), but the actual number of groups and their borders are negotiated between the local stakeholders.

Defining fisheries areas in Denmark

In Denmark, the country was originally divided into 7 “fisheries regions”, within which one or more FLAGs could be established. It was then the local stakeholders who specified, in their expressions of interest, the areas that their local development strategy should cover, thus ensuring a “bottom-up” approach to defining the areas. The managing authority then evaluated and took the final decision on the proposed areas. A total of 16 FLAGs were eventually selected.



In practice, the definition of fisheries areas is often one of the most **hotly contested issues** in Axis 4. It is frequently the result of long discussions and negotiations involving key local, regional and national authorities. During these negotiations there is often strong pressure to satisfy a wide range of stakeholders and this can lead to an expansion of the boundaries of fisheries areas and a dilution of the funding.

Despite the fact that, under Axis 4, **fisheries areas do not have to be confined to existing administrative boundaries** (Implementing Regulation, Article 22.2), the result of the negotiations is usually a combination of municipalities (NUTS 5 areas). In fact, in some countries the formal declaration of the local authority (e.g. the local council or mayor) is a necessary condition for the given locality to be formally included in the FLAG area.

What are the eligibility criteria ?

We have seen that the EFF Regulation leaves Member States with considerable flexibility in defining fisheries areas. In addition to the criteria mentioned in the regulation, managing authorities can use additional criteria suited to their particular context, as long as these are mentioned in their Operational Programme. Normally, managing authorities tend to prioritise areas that are clearly dependent on the fisheries sector, analysing such characteristics as:

- › the economic importance of fisheries, e.g. as measured by the percentage of area or sectoral GDP, GVA or employment generated by the local fisheries sector;
- › the social importance of fisheries, i.e. the implications of the current and historical dependency of the community on fisheries activities e.g. in terms of local infrastructure and services;
- › the degree to which the fisheries sector in the area has been affected by wider or global trends and influences;
- › the heritage, tradition and culture of fishing; and
- › the fisheries sector's role in the preservation of valuable natural or cultural assets.

Managing authorities may also decide to use additional criteria in order to target more deprived areas (e.g. GDP or unemployment level).

The overall size of the Axis 4 budget will also influence the process of defining eligibility. For example, countries or regions with relatively large budgets can “afford” to allow more flexibility in defining areas. Countries with a very limited budget will need to focus the funds on a smaller number of areas, which means they have to apply stricter criteria.

The natural environment was a key factor in the selection of fisheries areas in France.

The entire French coastline, along with French Guiana, was considered eligible for Axis 4 measures. However, the potential threat that areas faced from declining fisheries and the quality of the local environment were important factors in the final decision making. All 11 fisheries areas selected in France include protected or environmentally managed areas (nine of which are Marine Natura 2000 sites).

What other factors influence the selection of fisheries areas ?

The process of establishing a FLAG and the managing authorities' criteria for evaluating group proposals should also seek to ensure that areas selected constitute a good basis for the local partnership and strategy. In selecting and defining areas, at least the following factors should be taken into account:

- › the size and critical mass of the area;
- › the common characteristics of the area and its coherence;
- › the sense of local identity; and
- › the development potential of the area.

Size and critical mass

There is no “golden rule” concerning the size of the area, however areas that are too small or too big can have serious disadvantages. The minimum population size that is thought to **ensure the necessary “critical mass”** is usually 10 000, but in some countries or regions with low population density this threshold can be reduced to as low as 5 000. In general, however, an area with a very small population is unlikely to have sufficient “critical mass”, which might mean, for instance:

- › that there may be too few local leaders or other community activists capable of ensuring implementation of the strategy (community activity may depend on a small number of key individuals and when they retire or depart, they may be difficult to replace);
- › there are too few entrepreneurs to propose good private sector projects;
- › there is insufficient local funding or other resources available to co-finance projects or otherwise contribute to their delivery;
- › the administrative costs of setting-up and running the partnership might be disproportionately high.

On the other hand, an area that is too large can create other types of problems. Large populations, significantly above 100 000, may limit the extent of direct contact between the FLAG and the fisheries community, and this may reduce the level of trust between the different actors. Where a local group covers a very large geographical area, e.g. in sparsely populated countries, the physical distance between the local actors can also make cooperation difficult.

If the budget allocated to such areas is low, Axis 4 **resources may be “spread too thinly”** to achieve any real change. Both these scenarios challenge the FLAG to demonstrate the required critical mass.

Some countries exclude towns over a certain size (e.g. ports) from participating in the FLAG, to avoid a situation whereby they absorb a high proportion of the budget. However, the important role of market towns and ports in stimulating the development of surrounding areas should not be underestimated, and it is important to choose an area that constitutes a coherent and functional whole.

Common characteristics and coherence

If the FLAG's activities are to contribute to the sustainable development of a given area, it is important for the area to demonstrate sufficient **coherence in geographical, economic and social terms**. Large disparities should be avoided, as they will make it difficult to identify common priorities and reach agreement on a common strategy.

In general terms, this means that the different parts of the area (i.e. the different villages or municipalities that constitute the area) should have some common or shared characteristics that bind them together. They may share certain resources, face common or shared challenges, or have common needs and opportunities.

This does not mean areas should be homogenous. Indeed, the **different but complementary parts** of an area may be the link that binds them together (e.g. one part of an area may offer tourist facilities, while another part provides the staff to run these facilities). Such complementarity and links may, therefore, contribute to the area's coherence. The common characteristics of the area could include:

- › similar or shared geographic features (e.g. an area situated along a specific type of coastline or along a river valley);
- › similar or shared history or cultural heritage;
- › common or similar social challenges (e.g. small isolated communities, ethnic minorities or an aging population);
- › similar environmental factors (e.g. water pollution, high nature value areas or shared resources); and
- › a common economic situation (e.g. post-industrial or transformation areas, tourist resorts, areas in decline or growth areas where the fisheries sector is in decline and facing user conflicts).

Some countries require Axis 4 areas to be **geographically continuous** (with the possible exclusion of big cities mentioned above). In others, this is not mandatory as long as the different parts of the area show enough common characteristics (as in the case of several small islands forming a FLAG). Although a lack of continuity can make it difficult to develop and implement an effective strategy, the continuity of an area may sometimes be less important than its cohesion.

A sense of local identity

A sense of local identity is extremely important in an area-based, bottom-up approach. This is because:

- › it contributes to **social capital**, especially mutual trust between the local partners and within the whole community, which makes cooperation easier;
- › it strengthens the **belief that something can be achieved**, in spite of problems and difficulties, thus improving the chance that the strategy will be successful; and
- › it **motivates local actors** to contribute their own time and effort more willingly.

Although the sense of local identity is often stronger in homogeneous areas, this is not always the case. There are situations where people in a diverse or diffuse area share a stronger common identity. This might be based not so much on, “what do we have in common”, but on, “what do we face in common” or, “what is it that makes us different from others”, or a combination of these. It also often contains a strong component of local pride. Establishing a “**sense of place**” and building on that can be an extremely important motivator and a positive driver in an area, and could be an inherent part of the local development strategy.

A sense of local identity develops over time and may be **weak in communities of recent origin** (e.g. where there has been an influx of inhabitants from another part of the country), or where a large part of the population spends much of their time elsewhere (e.g. commuter areas neighbouring a city). In these situations, efforts to strengthen local identity, including activities such as community animation and joint work on the strategy, should be one of the first priorities of the local partnership. Successful implementation of the strategy will also help to reinforce and strengthen local pride.

Development potential of the area

The development potential of the area is understood here as the degree to which the economy of the area can utilise the range of **endogenous resources** present to provide a sustainable income for the local population. This is related to many factors, such as:

- › the distance from markets for local products and/or places of work (e.g. cities);
- › the level of education and economic mobility of the inhabitants;
- › the skills and organisation of the community;
- › the nature and extent of the natural and cultural assets;
- › the extent to which the local economy is dependent on a single or narrow range of sectors;
- › the nature, extent or potential for economic diversification;
- › the attractiveness of the area to external investor's or tourists;
- › the nature and extent of inward or outward migration;

- › the proximity and accessibility of neighbouring areas that may present complementary opportunities; and
- › the capacity of local people and enterprises to attract investment.

No two fisheries areas have identical development potential. However, through a consideration of factors such as those outlined above, the nature and extent of the potential of any area can be assessed. These considerations will have a **direct bearing on the FLAG area and strategy**. For instance, in areas that are or have been heavily dependent on the fishing industry, it might not be easy to find alternative or additional employment. The proposed FLAG area may be amended in the light of such considerations, should that appear advantageous.

Conclusion

The careful definition and selection of the FLAG area will contribute to the success of the FLAG partnership and its local strategy as all three elements are closely linked. The guidance provided in this manual highlights many of the key factors which will help the local partnership to ensure that all three elements work together to the benefit of the fisheries area and its people.

Fisheries and tourism link counties on the south coast of Galicia

The FLAG, Ría de Vigo-A Guarda, covers the south coast of Galicia (NW Spain) and includes a total of 10 counties in the Vigo Bay and Baixo Miño. The total coastline of these counties is 137 km and together they have a population of 135 720 inhabitants (4% of the Galician population), spread over an area of 404.4km². This area has one of the highest dependencies on the fisheries sector in Galicia as well as one of the highest population densities (336 inhabitants per km² – compared to the regional average of 93.75). It is characterised by the existence of a strong marine-industry cluster, with 11.3% of the active population directly employed in the fisheries sector. However, other sectors such as tourism are also important, due to the area's large number of beaches and tourist attractions, several outstanding natural parks and protected areas, and up to 12 marinas.

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.



FLAG Lesvos Development Company S.A. (Greece).

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.

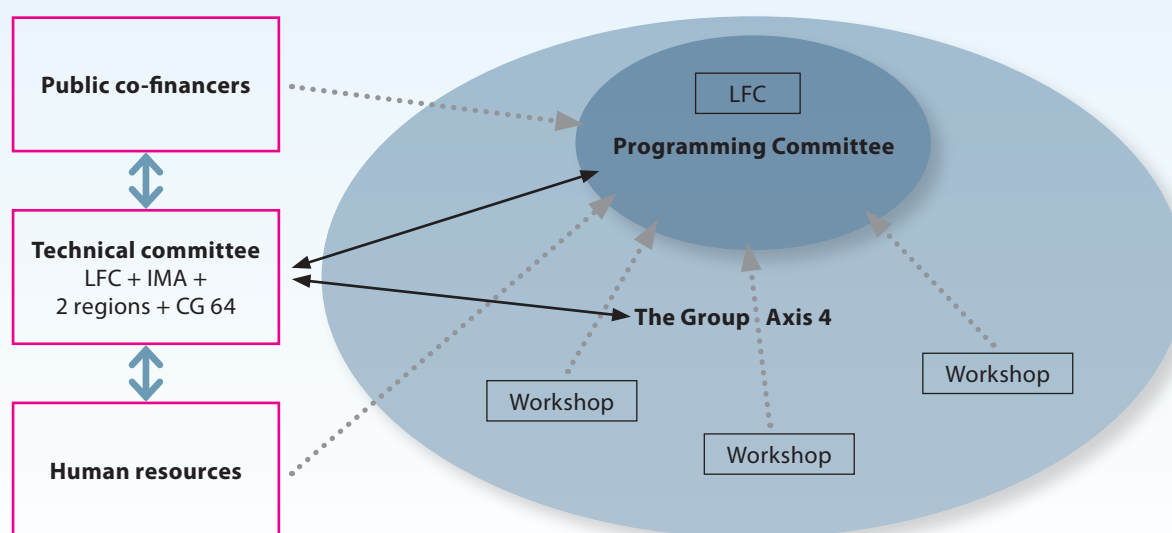
Targeting the involvement of individuals who recognise the limitations of their own organisations and see that the area’s problems cannot be solved without the involvement of other partners and sectors can also help to overcome such problems.

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.



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:

- › *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 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.

Stakeholders by sector	Characteristics e.g. strengths/ weaknesses	Motivation, expectations	Contribution
Public sector: - stakeholder A - stakeholder B -...			
Private 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.

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”²**. 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:

² Advantage West Midlands: Guidance for Developing and Implementing Leader Local Development Strategies, www.advantagewm.co.uk

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

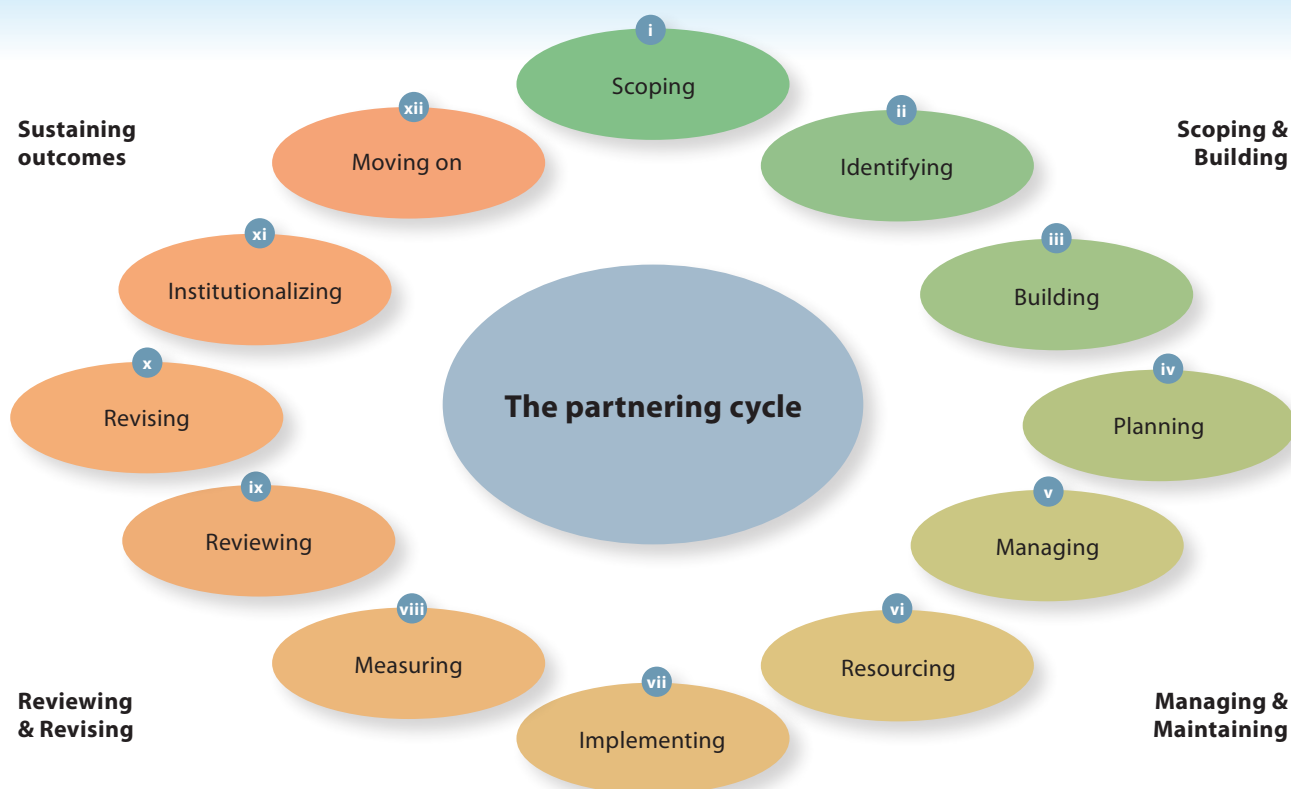
8. Measuring performance: measuring and reporting on impact and effectiveness, outputs and outcomes. Monitoring and evaluation: is the partnership achieving its goals?
9. Reviewing: reviewing the partnership: what is the impact of the partnership on the partner organisations? Is it time for some partners 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 for IBLF's "The Partnering Toolkit"³, 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).

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



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:

- › 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. 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.

4a. Developing Effective Strategies

Introduction

This section is divided into three sub-sections, covering: the participative process of strategy development; the key features of a territorial development strategy, and the preparation of an implementation plan.

There may be some variations from one Member State to another in terms of the structure of the strategy and whether or not the implementation plan should be part of the strategy or a separate document. In general, however, the following sub-sections cover all the key elements that need to be considered and should, therefore, be relevant in all situations.

A Participative Process of Strategy Development

What is a participative process of strategy development ?

The EFF Regulation insists that strategies for fisheries areas should be drawn up through a “bottom-up approach” involving a representative cross section of local stakeholders. The objectives of this are twofold; firstly to fully utilise the unique knowledge that local actors have of their area; and secondly, to engage them in the development process and the Fisheries Local Action Group (FLAG).

Developing a strategy for a fisheries area will normally involve a FLAG steering group and other local actors in carrying out a **joint analysis of the situation in their territory**, this is commonly based on a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis. This analysis of the situation will enable the development challenges to be identified, the strategy and its objectives to be defined and the development priorities agreed. The output of this is a local, integrated strategy, which addresses a small, well defined area and takes account of the concerns of a wide range of stakeholders from this area.



Port of St. Jean de Luz (France)

This participative process of strategy development has the following main aims which relate to both the strategy itself and the overall development process;

- › to build a shared understanding of the main problems, needs and opportunities of a local fisheries area;
- › to identify and build agreement on the importance of the above issues for the area as a whole, for different groups, particularly local fishing communities, and for different parts of the territory;

- › to collectively identify and develop an understanding of the main causes of these problems and the internal strengths and weaknesses of the area that can be applied in dealing with them;
- › to create a greater and shared awareness of the common external threats and opportunities and the implications of these;
- › to develop a shared vision and agree on a strategy for achieving this vision, which can be used as a flagship for engaging key internal and external actors; and
- › to agree what can best be done through Axis 4 (as opposed to other programmes), and the main steps and measures for making this a reality.

In undertaking this process, the FLAG and community would normally be supported by technical experts as this complex task requires a sustained approach over a considerable period of time, normally around six months.

What are the strategy development phases and steps?

The process of developing the strategy through community involvement can be broken down into seven main phases, comprising sixteen distinct steps. The phases and their constituent steps are sequential, except for phase 5, where a number of the steps can run in parallel. As you will see from the quantity and nature of the work involved, this will take considerable time and effort. However, if good quality outcomes are to be achieved, in terms of the group, the development strategy and the benefits of community involvement, it is important to ensure that participants have adequate time and resources for each step.

Phase 1: Preparatory steps and resourcing

1. The first step in the preparation of the strategy is the establishment of a **preliminary steering group** to coordinate the diagnostic work and to plan and drive community engagement and the preparation of the strategy itself. The steering group does not have to be large. Initially, there should be at least two partners (for example, the local fishing community and a local authority) but the steering group should progressively be broadened and may eventually evolve and become the FLAG.
2. A dedicated **team of one or, ideally, two people** is required to carry out the diagnostic work and to engage with the local fisheries community and sector. The steering group may not possess all the resources to undertake the range of tasks required, even large partner organisations such as local authorities may not be able to dedicate this resource. Contracting a team of one or two people to carry out the diagnosis may therefore be the best approach. They may come from within the area, from a university, a public agency or a consultancy, but the important thing is that they are committed to this task.

The team needs to have proven skills and experience in relevant research techniques, territorial development and facilitation. A reasonable estimate based on past experience is a requirement for about **two full-time equivalents for six months** (this will cover all stages: diagnosis of the situation, developing the strategy, preparing a business plan and the formation of the partnership). There may be a need for more people and more time in areas with no experience of similar processes.

The entire process requires an intense sequence of meetings and discussions with the different villages, communities and other stakeholders. In all cases, this will require a great deal of **voluntary work** and the application of good animation and facilitation skills. Even the most experienced areas will benefit from the support of skilled experts at certain points in the process, not least in terms of their objectivity and ability to act as honest brokers.

It should be assumed that the experts will be involved in supporting the work of the steering group in each of the following steps.

Phase 2: Preliminary analysis of secondary information sources and the formulation of hypotheses for the strategies (desk research).

This desk based research stage is essential in providing the evidence base to inform the development of the strategy. This contributes to a chapter in the strategy on the profile of the area (see page 24).

3. The team should carry out an initial scan of all relevant secondary data sources to identify those sources which can help to inform the process. There is likely to be a large amount of data available from standard sources and the experts should be aware of these and should be able to judge what is reliable and relevant. The aim here is to make the best use of the material which already exists and **avoid duplicating work which has already been done**. It is important to ensure that relevant existing plans and strategies for the area are taken into account.
4. Once the data and information have been gathered the next task is to organise this secondary information into a series of logical sections, **analyse it, identify any gaps**, and draw out the relevant key points. These sections usually cover: the territory, its geography and environment, transport, infrastructure, population, society, the economy and labour market, governance and administration. For each of these areas it is worth formulating a set of preliminary hypotheses about the main problems and changes taking place.

Phase 3: Preliminary interviews with key stakeholders to test hypotheses and mobilise support.

During this stage, the steering group supported by the experts use the desk based findings and their interpretation of them, the hypotheses, to undertake a series of consultations with key local stakeholders.

5. Interviews should be arranged with key stakeholders in the area or in relevant organisations (a minimum of 10 such interviews is suggested). The aim is to **tap local knowledge and expertise** in exploring the main problems and opportunities facing the area. From this, the steering group can start to map out where there is agreement and where there are potential conflicts. These consultations also inform the steering group about local opinion leaders and can help to identify who is prepared to be involved in possible thematic working groups or to be future partners in or supporters of the FLAG.

Phase 4: Public meeting(s) to inform the local community and decide on the next phases of the strategy development and building of the partnership

The next stage in the process is to broaden and deepen the base of community and sectoral involvement.

6. This may require more than one public meeting to ensure that all parts of the area have the opportunity to participate and that the **process is inclusive**. The aim is to inform as many local people as possible that a local diagnosis is taking place, that it will be used as the basis for the development of a local strategy and action plan for the fisheries area, and that this will then be submitted to obtain funding to deliver the strategy. In the course of, or immediately following this meeting, people should be invited to take part in working groups, these can be organised on an area, thematic or sectoral basis, whatever is considered most appropriate to the area concerned. Throughout the processes, it is important to make an effort to ensure ongoing communication with local people to ensure a high level of participation by all possible interested parties.

Phase 5: Detailed working groups

Small working groups should be established as indicated on a thematic, sectoral or area basis, a combination of these may also be used.

7. Typically these working groups would involve five to ten people. Their task is to help develop the SWOT, identify key objectives and priority actions, and develop a strategy and indicative budget **by sub-theme or area**. It is important to identify potential chairs or coordinators of the working groups that command respect within the community before the public meeting so that they may be identified as group leaders. The aim is to involve a broad cross-section of motivated local people who have ideas. Care should be taken to consider the relationships or dynamics within communities to avoid “blockers”, who may exclude others, and to involve groups that are often excluded.
8. The choice and number of themes for the groups depends on the area, the resources available and the Axis 4 global strategy. One could, for example, have working groups on the valorisation of fish products, the diversification of fishing activities, the protection of the environment and the development of fishing related tourism. There may also be working groups for women or young people. It is often necessary to break into even smaller groups and use methods which make it easier for people who are not used to working together to participate. In general, there should be no more than ten people per group and they should command respect and consult with their peers. It may also be useful to have presentations and **support from outside experts** as long as they do not dominate. A minimum of 2-3 meetings per working group is normally required to enable them to carry out the following tasks:
 9. A stakeholder analysis. It can be very helpful to carry out **a formal analysis of the different stakeholders** associated with a particular theme, their official remit, interests, capacity or resources, and possible projects they may have an interest in or wish to promote. There are various techniques and computer software to assist with this (stakeholder analysis matrix, SWOT matrix applied to specific groups, Venn diagrams of relationships, spider diagrams of organisational capacity, mind maps, etc)
 10. The collective identification of problems and opportunities. The aim is to bring the different stakeholder points of view together and to try and reach agreement on **the main problems and opportunities, and their respective priority**. Once again, there are a wide range of different techniques for doing this. Participants can use a matrix to score the links between different variables (drivers), use force field analysis, clustering, the plusses, minuses and interesting fact technique, or they could build a problem tree.
 11. A SWOT analysis of the theme or sector in question. Strengths and weaknesses are internal factors, or things the partners can influence directly. Opportunities and threats are external factors that the partnership could seek to address or take advantage of. The SWOT analysis could, for example, work through the internal strengths and weaknesses of the tourist sector linked with the fishing activity in the area, and compare this with the external opportunities (closeness to a large city) or threats (other cheaper or better quality destinations, etc). Once again there are a wide range of graphical and other techniques for organising and displaying this. Whichever is used, it is important to develop a collective sense of the order of importance of both opportunities and needs and **avoid producing an undifferentiated list**.

12. An analysis of objectives. From the analysis undertaken, the working groups should seek out ways in which the problems or negative situations can be rephrased in terms of positive situations or actions to be pursued that are realistically achievable. It is also important to allow space for more forward and positive thinking **“visions” of what the area might become**, although this also has to be prioritised and subjected to a reality check in the next phase. Try to formulate real objectives, which are SMART; Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-bound.
13. An analysis of possible strategies for achieving the objectives. This involves participants deciding on how to reinforce the areas strong points, reduce its weak points, avoid the threats and take full advantage of the opportunities. At this stage it is useful to start considering the level of potentially available resources and what can be done by other programmes by, for example, proposing **strategies with indicative budgets and actions**. This helps considerably with reality checking, expectation management and prioritisation. In general, objectives should be ranked and their share of the budget should reflect the degree to which they contribute towards meeting the fundamental needs and opportunities identified earlier.
14. At the end of this stage, thematic and area working groups will all have a basic picture of the main problems or needs, what they would like to achieve in relation to these needs, the relative priority or weighting and how they think it would be best to get there, expressed in terms of a series of feasible actions.

Phase 6: Building a consensus. Joint negotiations and meetings to agree on the principles of the strategy, budget and final composition of the partnership

15. Joint territorial meeting(s). The next phase is one of the most delicate as it involves bringing the different visions together to create one unified territorial strategy. This is much more than simply adding up the positions of the sectoral or thematic groups. Constructive leadership and a spirit of compromise are essential to identifying the synergies between actions and developing common win-win strategies. This involves starting with the actions and projects where there is agreement and leaving aside those which cross the red lines of one or more local stakeholders. It is particularly important to find **flagship projects** and lines of action with a strong multiplier effect on the rest of the strategy, where actions link with and reinforce each other and mobilise the different local actors.

There are a wide range of techniques available for doing this and you should use experts to help identify the best approach for your specific group.

Phase 7: Preparation of the operational programme and final application

16. The planning phase. This more technical part of the process is addressed in the next sub-section on *“key features of the development strategy”*. This involves setting out the clear *“intervention logic”* for the strategy which links the overall objective, purpose, expected results and activities to a set of verifiable indicators and is based on realistic assumptions. These activities must then be allocated a budget, made the clear responsibility of a member of the organisation, and planned over time with identifiable intermediate (milestones) and final outputs. An implementation plan or business plan for how the group will conduct its business will also be required; this addressed in the final sub-section, on *“preparing an implementation plan”*.

4b. Developing Effective Strategies

Key features of the Development Strategy



The port of Lira on the Costa da Morte (Galicia, Spain).

This sub-section focuses on the structure and content of the strategy and complements the sub-sections on participative approaches to strategy development and preparing the implementation plan. The approach outlined is consistent with EC guidelines on Project Cycle Management and the Logical Framework Approach⁴.

Preparing a strategy is not a case of following or filling in a template and there is no universal model. What is vital, however, is that the strategy demonstrates that there is a consistent flow of logic established through the document linking the analysis of the area, its needs and opportunities, the priorities to be addressed, the objectives, the resources and proposed delivery measures, and the synergies with other strategies and policies affecting the area. The structure outlined below presents such a logical structure, as illustrated in the diagram below. This is also cross referenced to the relevant stages in the previous sub-section on, *“the participative process of strategy development”*.

⁴ http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/multimedia/publications/publications/manuals-tools/t101_en.htm



(Stages identified in italics refer to the Participative Process of Strategy Development)

Executive summary

It is useful to provide a summary of your document at the front to enable people to quickly understand the main points. Two or three pages long, this section should lay out clearly the main points of the strategy, this should include:

- › the basis of your partnership;
- › the area and its principal distinguishing features;
- › the main challenges and opportunities identified;
- › the overall theme or focus of the strategy and why it is appropriate;
- › the global objective;
- › the measures through which the strategy is addressed;
- › the overall total and balance of resources;
- › what it is hoped to achieve.

Key features of the fisheries area

The focus on the fisheries area is central to Axis 4 and differentiates it from the rest of the EFF. The strategy should therefore concisely define and describe the target fisheries area and its key distinguishing features, clearly explaining why it is an appropriate area upon which to base a strategy. Focus and clarity is important here, this is a key element of your strategy's justification.

The EFF Regulation is quite clear that FLAG boundaries need not follow administrative boundaries. There are, however, benefits in defining the area along the lines of local administrative areas. One of the main reasons for doing so is because these are often the levels at which key data sets are presented, which allows for a more accurate description of the area and its situation. A useful approach is therefore to build from the smallest such units to the largest that are relevant, ideally this should be supported by a map.

The aim is to provide a realistic description of the area and how it functions, focussing on the key features that are relevant to the Axis 4 strategy. Again, this should address any specific criteria the managing authority requires and the EFF eligibility criteria in terms of population density, dependency on fisheries and the presence of small fisheries communities.

Social, economic and environmental context

The strategy should present an analysis or diagnosis of the social, economic and environmental context of the fisheries area. This can be undertaken by members of the group or through contracted experts. The analysis should be modest in scope and should be pitched at a level consistent with Axis 4, its focus and the extent of its potential achievement. The information and data presented should therefore be specific and relevant and tightly focused on the local fisheries area.

This part of the analysis should mainly make use of secondary sources, published statistics identifying baseline and trend data. Relevant reports and studies should also be identified. At this stage it is also important to consider the fit of the strategy with other locally relevant strategies and programmes and how to complement or add to these. These may also provide useful data and analysis or may identify useful data sources. There may be some problems of spatial fit of some data sets for some fisheries areas. In such cases it might be necessary to consider undertaking some bespoke research, which may or may not be supported by the managing authority.

Key socio-economic data sets to be assessed include:

- › resident population and its profile;
- › number of jobs in the area;
- › employment by sector and by gender, full-time and part-time;
- › skills and qualifications;
- › unemployment;
- › enterprise, the business base, numbers and sizes;
- › infrastructure and access to services;
- › deprivation and disadvantage.

The strategy should also provide environmental baseline data and analysis relevant to the fisheries area, including any designations, and should identify environmental assets that may be relevant to the strategy.

In each case you should pick out and highlight any specific dimensions relating to the fisheries area and sector.

From this analysis you should identify those key challenges and opportunities facing the fisheries area which the FLAG will consider in refining the strategy.

Community and stakeholder engagement

As a bottom up process, the expectation is that the community and stakeholders will be involved in driving forward the development of the FLAG and its strategy from the outset. Guidance on the approach to this is provided in the previous sub-section, on '*participative approaches to strategy development*'. The FLAG should set out the basis of its community and stakeholder consultation, evidencing this bottom up involvement by explaining what was done, how the community was involved and the extent of their involvement. The strategy should summarise the findings from consultation with stakeholders and the wider community. This should include the findings from the working groups. Normally there would be two main and clearly linked elements to this:

- › perceptions of the strengths, assets, needs and opportunities facing the area, (either forming part of the SWOT analysis process or feeding in where this is a separate stage); and
- › perceptions on the focus and balance of the strategy, the measures and how it will be delivered.

A key facet which should emerge here is the perspective from which the strategy is approached or addressed, or the extent to which the strategy is focused primarily on the fisheries sector and through that on the fisheries community, or vice versa, or whether the approach is primarily from the social, economic or environmental perspective.

The SWOT

The strategy should contain a high quality SWOT analysis based on the key features of the fisheries area, the socio economic and environmental context, the review of documents and policies, the community and stakeholder consultations and any expert knowledge or input. The key element of the SWOT is the analysis. This should not be merely a list of the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats, this does not contribute to the justification of the strategy.

The SWOT must show an analysis of the implications for the fisheries area and community of these factors and provide a basis for prioritisation of actions and resources. It is a pivotal element connecting the evidence base, the community engagement and the proposed programme. Guidance on conducting an effective SWOT is provided at page 64 of the EC Project Management Cycle guidance⁵.

Derivation of strategy, main objectives and rationale

The fisheries area strategy should clearly be seen to flow from the combination of the analysis and consultation findings. You should present a short synthesis of the conclusions from the analysis and consultations and from this draw out the agreed central focus and global or overarching objective of the strategy. This global objective should encapsulate what the fisheries area strategy seeks to achieve and should be stated in SMART terms, i.e.

- › Specific – clearly stating what the project will address and by what means;
- › Measurable – containing a basis for measurement and a quantified target;
- › Achievable – technically attainable given the scope of action proposed;
- › Realistic – attainable given the resources provided, the time allowed, size of target group, etc.;
- › Timebound – incorporating the date by which the targets should be achieved.

⁵ http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/multimedia/publications/publications/manuals-tools/t101_en.htm

The following represents an example of such a global objective which is presented in SMART terms.

“By 2015, to strengthen innovation and adaptability in businesses within the FLAG area, through actions leading to 10 new processes or products being introduced, 200 individuals successfully gaining and implementing new skills and 100 gross jobs being created or safeguarded”.

Present a clear rationale for the strategy – what it proposes to do and why it is appropriate – justifying through the analysis and consultation findings. Identify in overview the measures through which the strategy will be implemented explaining how this represents a coherent response to the central theme and overall objective i.e. that it is internally consistent.

Consistency and synergies with other policies

As noted in the section above on the social, economic and environmental context, it is vital to ensure that appropriate account has been taken of the consistency of the strategy with other local policies, strategies and interventions. As Axis 4 is a relatively small programme, it is important not to undertake actions that can be addressed by other policies, but instead to use Axis 4 as a tool to highlight the need for action and to complement and, if possible, lever in additional resources. Achieving best fit with the range of other interventions will help ensure best value for efforts and resources applied under Axis 4.

This will also help to avoid duplication and overlap, thus complementing or adding value where possible. How this is to be achieved in practice should be described in the strategy; this is often most clearly illustrated using a table, which maps out what other policies and programmes exist and their scope of activity and intervention.

Specific objectives and measures

From your analysis and consultations you will have derived proposals for the groups of actions or measures to be undertaken in order to achieve the overall objectives. These need to be described in your strategy. For each of these measures, a factsheet, following a common format and containing the following elements should be prepared:

Specific objectives

Objectives specified in line with SMART principles and encapsulating what the measure proposes to do should be provided and should contribute to the global objective. An example of such an objective at this level, which links to the global objective example, would be:

“By 2015, to improve the economic performance of the FLAG area through actions leading to 340 participants that successfully ended a training activity, 200 gross jobs created or safeguarded and 2000 of additional tourist bed nights.”

Rationale

A justified rationale for the measure and its contribution to the overall strategy should be provided. This should demonstrate the logic behind your proposals by drawing on the evidence from your analyses and the consultation findings, as appropriate.

Scope of action

The range of actions that will be considered for support under the measure should be identified here. In doing so you should check the relevant national EFF programme documents to ensure the consistency and eligibility of what is proposed.

Complementarity and demarcation

Any scope for complementarity between this measure and other initiatives should be outlined briefly. This includes internal complementarity within the strategy and your EFF programme, and externally with other programmes or initiatives.

You should also specify any additional measure specific actions required to ensure clear demarcation of activities supported.

Target beneficiaries

Groups that are intended to benefit from the projects supported should be identified. This should include reference to any target or priority groups identified through the development of the strategy.

Resources and weighting

The indicative allocation of EFF funding for the measure should be provided, broken down in monetary terms and as a proportion of the total EFF resources for the fisheries area strategy. The basis of this allocation should be explained by reference to your analysis and intervention logic.

Results and outcomes

The types and scale of outcomes anticipated from the measure should be identified. This is normally done by identifying appropriate performance indicators and setting quantifiable targets. These should be proportionate to the scale of resources devoted to the measure. It may be helpful to think in terms of a hierarchy of effects for the measure i.e. what outcome you wish to achieve, the results you wish to achieve and the outputs sought. Logically these effects will relate directly to your SMART objectives. For example in relation to a training initiative:

- › the outcomes sought could be the number of individuals who are more employable or have their employment safeguarded through greater adaptability;
- › the result would be the number successfully completing the training course and gaining a qualification or implementing new skills in the workplace; and
- › the output would be the number of training days taken up by individuals.

You should identify appropriate indicators from the suite specified in your national programme. You may also include performance indicators that reflect the specific theme or focus of your strategy and/or local priorities, although it is essential that these are well defined, practical and limited in number.

Proposed project actions

It will not be possible at this stage to specify all project activity that is likely to emerge under the strategy. You should however make best estimates of activity likely to emerge in the early stages on the basis of the consultations, research and analysis you have undertaken in preparing the strategy; you should also use these for profiling funds over the life of the programme in the implementation plan.

Horizontal issues

Equal opportunities

All EU funding is required to mainstream the Commission's policy on equal opportunities, enshrined in the EU Treaty which is also reflected in Member State legislation. This is important, not just in upholding citizens' rights, but also in ensuring that all available talents and abilities are harnessed. The Strategy should make a clear and concise statement which lays out the strategic approach to enabling and ensuring equality of opportunity and how you propose that this will be addressed operationally. A pragmatic approach here is to adopt a suitable equal opportunities policy from one of the partners, cross checking this against the FLAG strategy and amending to demonstrate how this will be implemented operationally. The policy may be attached as an annex.

Environmental sustainability

All EU-funded Programmes are expected to mainstream the Commission's policy on environmental sustainability. Integrating environmental sustainability in FLAG area strategies is important because of EU and domestic legislation and because of the dependence of fisheries communities and economies on a high quality natural resource and environment. The strategy should set out the environmental sustainability principles to which your FLAG is committed and outline how these will be implemented and monitored.

Innovation

The important overarching strategic principle is the search for innovation, encouraging new, forward looking and entrepreneurial approaches and solutions and therefore your strategy should outline your overall approach. In doing so it is important to consider the fit between innovation, co-operation and networking. Transferring best practice, sharing and learning from others allows access to a huge range of experience and stimulates innovation.

Stimulating innovation is one of the core principles of Axis 4. The focus on innovation is founded on the belief that doing "more of the same" is unlikely to enable fisheries areas to reach their full potential and that new solutions to existing problems should be sought.

Experience of Leader and other area-based initiatives shows that innovation is often poorly understood. It may be conflated with risk of failure rather than an understanding that in seeking new solutions or approaches some projects inevitably will fail to some extent and that this should be allowed for. Examples of forms of innovation which commonly emerge include:

- › the way a project is developed or managed;
- › who is involved in the project and how they are involved;
- › how the project is resourced;
- › how the results or lessons are identified, used, disseminated or communicated;
- › how the project becomes self sustaining;
- › how the project links to other initiatives.

A statement as to how this will be addressed in the strategy should be included (e.g. by giving priority to projects which clearly demonstrate some desirable form of innovation).

Co-operation and networking

Article 44 of the EFF makes provision for two related actions in Axis 4:

1. Specific measures dedicated to transnational and interregional co-operation; and
2. Networking between groups.

Provision is also made for national and EC level networks.

You should consider the different forms of co-operation, formal and informal, all of which can offer very significant benefits. Although the formal focus is very much on joint projects, less formal approaches such as peer support and mentoring are vital areas of co-operation. In embarking on the development of a FLAG and a local strategy you are not alone; you are joining a community. How can you make use of or contribute to this to develop your group, to undertake joint projects or initiatives or to share or transfer knowledge and experience? Your strategy should set out your proposed approach, how you will develop it and what you wish to achieve for your FLAG.

4c. Developing Effective Strategies

Preparing an implementation plan (business or action plan⁶)

The implementation plan is the document which describes how the FLAG intends to implement its strategy. It accompanies the strategy and, depending on the specific requirements of the Member State in question, would probably contain some combination of the following elements.

1. A description of the delivery process;
2. The administrative and financial management arrangements, including staffing;
3. An outline of activities for further FLAG development;
4. The project development, application and approval procedure;
5. The project selection criteria which will be employed;
6. The planned procedures for monitoring and evaluation;
7. A communications or publicity action plan;
8. The detailed financial information concerning allocations, expenditure etc.



Laura Nieto Zas; FLAG Manager of the FLAG Ría de Pontevedra (Spain).

Additional elements may be required by the Member States and the order of these elements may vary. In some cases, they may be presented in different documents e.g. some elements may be presented in strategies or other parts of the application. The important thing is to ensure that they are covered somewhere. This section provides a brief description of what should be considered for each of these elements.

⁶ This operational part of the strategy is called different things in different countries. In the UK and Ireland it is usually referred to as the “business” plan while in other countries it is referred to as the action plan, the implementation plan or the operational plan.

The delivery process

Overview

An introductory section should provide a brief rationale for your proposed delivery methods or procedures, demonstrating how this will contribute to achieving the overall aims and objectives of the strategy, through the application of the Axis 4 approach. Once again, the components of the delivery approach can vary from one country to another but they are normally considered to consist of at least:

- › a description of the administrative and financial lead body;
- › the group structure;
- › how the group will operate;
- › key responsibilities of the different organisations; and
- › the way in which the FLAG will interact with the range of local, regional and national stakeholders and managing authorities.

A flow diagram may be a useful tool here to illustrate this.

Legal structure

The EFF Implementing Regulation (IR 23.2)⁷ allows Member States to choose between two alternative structures when setting up the FLAGs:

- › they can create “a legally constituted common structure, the formal constitution of which guarantees the satisfactory operation of the partnership”; or
- › they can “select from the partnership, one partner as the administrative leader who will guarantee the satisfactory operation of the partnership”.

If the first option is chosen, it will be necessary to specify which legal form has been adopted (i.e. civic society association, public body, private non-profit making body, other) and to provide a copy of the approved statutes.

Such a legally constituted body should also demonstrate that it fulfils the requirement of the regulation in terms of the representativeness of its decision making bodies and its administrative experience and capacity.

Administrative and financial lead body

Under option 2 the body that the FLAG has agreed will act as the accountable body for the administration and financial management of the FLAG programme should be identified. Depending on the way in which the FLAG is constituted this may be a FLAG member such as a local authority or the FLAG itself. It should be explained why this organisation is suitably qualified to undertake the role (e.g. in terms of its systems, staffing, experience and capabilities). This body will normally be responsible for;

- › compliance with the national EFF programme and other relevant regulations;
- › the financial accountability of the programme; and
- › employment and management of staff on behalf of the FLAG.

FLAG structure and operation

This section should describe the way in which the partnership intends to operate. Key considerations here are;

- › the basis of membership of the FLAG; is it to be representative (i.e. members are principally representing the direct interests of their organisation) or corporate (i.e. members are principally acting in the interests of the FLAG as a whole);
- › what wider contributions partners can make to the work of the FLAG (e.g. as advisors); and
- › the rules for decision making (e.g. whether by consensus or vote, the required quorum and the balance of its make up etc).

⁷ Commission regulation (EC) No 489/2007

The principal responsibilities of the FLAG and its members, and what expectations are placed on FLAG members should also be explained. Typically, this might include: monitoring the strategy; promoting the programme; community engagement; overseeing management and progress; networking; liaison; and supporting the work of the staff.

Where the FLAG is associated with another existing entity such as a Leader LAG, then it should be clear how the separation required under the EFF Regulation will be managed. This is particularly relevant to the next three points.

The decision making body

A common approach to project approval is the use of a FLAG executive committee, management board or subgroup – a decision making body (DMB) reporting to the main FLAG. The DMB may be mandated only up to a certain financial threshold, above which FLAG approval is required. This smaller group reduces demands placed on FLAG members, allows more frequent meetings, and speeds the decision making process and the turnaround of applications. The DMB must respect the FLAG membership principles. It should also have clear terms of reference or operating procedures. For example, membership of such a group could rotate between FLAG members.

This section should detail the decision making approach, roles and responsibilities of those involved, any levels of delegation and the principles which will be employed.

Operational complementarity and demarcation with other programmes

This section should include a description of how the FLAG and its staff will work with other organisations and initiatives (e.g. Leader, but also Axis 2 and 3 of the EFF) in the area to ensure that the complementarity and demarcation outlined in the strategy is delivered in practice. This should cover both the general operational principles and the specifics of the major interventions in the area (e.g. Structural Fund programmes). Clear procedures and lines of responsibility should be described here. A flow diagram is an effective means of demonstrating this clearly. This could also identify financial responsibilities.

Lines of communication and responsibility

The implementation plan should specify the lines of communication and responsibility within the FLAG, and how the FLAG will link and communicate with the community. This could also be included in the flow diagram mentioned above.

Working with the community

The FLAG is likely to have been very active in engaging with and consulting the community in establishing the FLAG and developing the strategy. Here you should describe how you will seek to ensure that the wider community remains involved and engaged. For example, you may wish to have local community input to the decision making process. This might involve working with existing local groups or the creation of area forums or subgroups and should also be considered in your information and publicity approach.

Administration, Finance and Staffing

FLAG Staff

Leader experience suggests that good quality staff are a key ingredient in successful FLAGs, contributing to the successful running of the organisation, animation and facilitation, and strategy delivery. Depending on scale, each FLAG will require either a part-time or a full time **manager or coordinator**. However, groups with large budgets operating in areas with few other local organisations may also employ additional staff. For example, in some countries, partnerships employ 4-5 people on the Leader programme, including dedicated community and business or project development workers. The nature and scale of the additional support will vary according to the size of the FLAG, its prior experience (e.g. as a Leader LAG), the level of support and technical input provided by partners (e.g. the accountable body or Tourist Board), and the administrative arrangements adopted.

Up to 10% of the allocated budget can be committed to meeting the costs of running and staffing the FLAG. As such, this may represent the FLAGs single biggest financial commitment. Ensuring that the right people are doing the right tasks is critically important but often difficult to achieve in smaller FLAGs with **finite resources**. Cooperating with neighbouring Leader LAGs or FLAGs to share back-office or support services is an effective approach to addressing this issue.

Staffing requirements may vary over time (e.g. a new FLAG is likely to require more hands on resource in the early stages to build involvement and capacity). It is important to consider **what resources will be required at different times**, what are the key roles and tasks, what are the associated skills and experience that staff will require? In general a series of functions need to be carried out in any local development process (for example, support for project design and development, community development and training, strategy development). In some areas these functions are well covered by existing agencies and organisations but in others they have to be created from scratch. FLAGs therefore need to specify the following in their implementation plan:

- › the staffing and employment structure proposed;
- › the key roles, supported by relevant job descriptions;
- › a breakdown of headline employment costs and the other costs associated with the delivery of the programme;
- › any complementarity or co-operation with other initiatives, FLAGs or LAGs.

Location

Physical location is an important consideration in terms of the geography of the area and/or any organisational host. Consider the geographical accessibility of the location, physical access, perceived accessibility to the community and potential operational complementarity (e.g. with the accountable body or other services). Prepare costed proposals for the physical establishment and equipping of the FLAG office. In some cases this can be provided by an existing organisation and in some cases it may be considered as local co-funding.

Finance

Provide a clear description of the different elements of your proposed financial and administrative structure. Normally this will be managed by the FLAG accountable body, which has ultimate responsibility. This need not be complex; clarity is the most important attribute. This could, for example, be presented in the form of a flow chart, with an accompanying commentary showing the lines of communication and responsibility, specifying the roles and responsibilities of all those involved.

Being responsible for the financial accountability of the programme, the accountable body (either the FLAG itself or a FLAG partner) will often also act as a banker for the FLAG and will be responsible for local financial management and payments.

This section should therefore clearly outline any such responsibilities, the staff involved, the associated principles and procedures, and the required checks and balances in the system. The provisions which have been made for internal financial auditing should also be described.

State Aid

Compliance with State Aid regulations should form an essential part of projects' technical appraisal. These regulations will govern what may or may not be supported and to what level. State Aid rules can be rather complex and you should seek advice from your managing authority if there is any doubt. Procedure for ensuring such compliance should be clearly set out in the implementation plan. Some managing authorities prescribe this, elsewhere it is the responsibility of the accountable body.

FLAG development

As is noted in the partnership section, 'no FLAG is born perfectly formed'. Growing the FLAG and its capacity as a sustainable organisation is a central part of the Axis 4 approach. How is the FLAG going to develop as an entity, how will it become established, develop as an organisation and work to deliver Axis 4 and the strategy? This section may often be included as part of the strategy but is mentioned here to ensure that it is addressed.

This section should describe how the FLAG will develop throughout the programme and the activities through which this process will be undertaken. This could cover the organisational structure, resources and systems; employing staff, training for staff and FLAG members; partnership expansion, capacity building and community engagement; and implementing priorities or strategic projects. It might also include the FLAG exit or continuation strategy. How it will evolve or grow, what is the next step, and what will be the sustainable legacy going forward?

In this section you should therefore include the key steps to be taken in establishing and growing the FLAG, and a table or checklist detailing the actions, milestones, timelines and the responsible actors is a useful tool here.

Project Development and Approval

The implementation plan should contain an outline of the proposed project development and project approval procedures. The supporting materials should be available and accessible to potential applicants in the interests of transparency. A flow chart could help to illustrate the application process, whilst a table could also help to clearly allocate responsibilities.

Project development

The project development and application process and its stages should be explained, including any support provided by FLAG staff. There are at least three different approaches that are likely to be used:

- › strategic projects initiated and/or developed by the FLAG (these can have heavy resource demands);
- › directly supporting project development in priority areas (again, relatively high resource requirement e.g. in capacity building); and
- › open calls for project proposals.

There are two main approaches to open calls for applications; either the FLAG issues a call for applications/tenders by a specific date; or there is a rolling open application process. There are advantages and disadvantages to both approaches. Development of applications may be supported by FLAG staff, depending on the available resource.

An expression of interest stage prior to progressing to a full application helps to avoid wasting the applicants' and the FLAG and its staff's time. FLAG staff should advise on the potential suitability of proposals:

- › does it fit with the strategy?
- › is it likely to make the grade, with development support if necessary?
- › is it well suited to Axis 4 funding or would the applicant be better directed elsewhere?

This final point is a role likely to increase in importance as the LAG matures as a development body.

Project approval

Procedures should take into account the distinctive stages of project development, project appraisal and project approval, and ensure that adequate separation of responsibilities is maintained between these elements to ensure transparency in decision making and to avoid any potential conflict of interest. In general:

- › those involved in project development should not be involved in project approval;
- › staff should only undertake technical appraisals or offer technical advice on a project;
- › a member of the project approval group with an interest in a project should declare that interest and withdraw while the application is being considered.

Project Selection Criteria

Here you should present the criteria against which projects will be assessed for support. Member State or regional programme documents will contain core criteria which must be applied by FLAGs in the selection of eligible projects. FLAGs are also expected to develop local criteria for the selection of projects, which reflect the specificities of their local strategy and the priorities and objectives thereof. These will include both technical and quality criteria. Indicative selection criteria are available on the FARNET website (www.farnet.eu).

Technical criteria could, for example, include:

- › whether the applicant has the practical and financial capacity to deliver the project;
- › whether the need for grant aid is clearly demonstrated;
- › whether the targets, indicators and milestones are realistic.

Quality criteria might include:

- › the extent to which the project contributes to the achievement of the strategy and complements activities covered by other relevant initiatives;
- › the extent to which the project responds to identified needs and is supported by evidence of prospective demand;
- › the degree of local appropriateness and consistency with needs.

In the interests of transparency, appraisal criteria should be available and accessible to potential applicants.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The purpose of monitoring and evaluation is to:

- › provide information to the FLAG to facilitate the ongoing management, development and prioritisation of programme activities;
- › identify possible weaknesses or risks in the operation of projects;
- › provide for corrective measures to be taken to eliminate weaknesses, risks or irregularities identified in the course of project operation, in particular as regards financial management;
- › learn from the experience of programme implementation, informing adjustment of the approach for the existing or following programmes.

Procedures for the formal monitoring and reporting on the implementation of the strategy, and associated compliance checks, are likely to be either laid down by the managing authority or outlined in national programme guidance. Where this is the case, FLAGs should indicate how they intend to comply with these requirements.

Where this is not the case, FLAGs should provide a description of their proposals for reporting on the financial and physical performance of individual projects and of the FLAG strategy. This should tie in to the delivery process described and the flow diagram of who does what.

Proposals for evaluation of the FLAG and strategy should also be addressed within this overall approach. Again, this is likely to be specified at least to some degree by the managing authority.

Communication, Information and Publicity

The communication, information and publicity plan should be set-out, in compliance with Articles 32 and 33 of the EFF Implementing Regulation. The formal aim of such a plan is to acknowledge and publicise the EU intervention. However, it may be extended to increase the engagement and involvement of actual and potential beneficiaries and their awareness of the opportunities for involvement.

A typical plan would include:

- › target groups;
- › publicity activities and materials;
- › access to FLAG documents and information on the FLAG;
- › the financial plan;
- › lead responsibility;
- › information for applicants;
- › information for the general public; and
- › the overall schedule of programme activities.

Financial Information

Normally this section of the implementation plan would address two main elements:

- › a description of the way in which FLAG activities are to be match funded (i.e. those funds which the FLAG or project promoters have to raise, which are neither EFF nor national public co-financing); and
- › the financial tables for the FLAG programme, profiling the expected expenditure from all sources over the period of the programme.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	1	4a. Developing Effective Strategies: A Participative Process of Strategy Development	19
What is the purpose of this guide?		What is a participative process of strategy development?	
What are the key features of the Axis 4 area-based approach?		What are the strategy development phases and steps?	
How is the guide structured?			
2. Defining fisheries areas	4	4b. Developing Effective Strategies: Key features of the Development Strategy	24
What does fisheries area mean in the context of the EFF?		Executive summary	
Who defines the area?		Key features of the fisheries area	
What are the eligibility criteria?		Social, economic and environmental context	
What other factors influence the selection of fisheries areas?		Community and stakeholder engagement	
Size and critical mass		The SWOT	
Common characteristics and coherence		Derivation of strategy, main objectives and rationale	
A sense of local identity		Consistency and synergies with other policies	
Development potential of the area		Specific objectives and measures	
Conclusion		Horizontal issues	
3. Building local partnerships	11	Co-operation and networking	
Why create a partnership?		4c. Developing Effective Strategies: Preparing an implementation plan (Business or action plan)	31
How are partnerships structured?		The delivery process	
Legal status		Administration, Finance and Staffing	
Partnership composition		FLAG development	
How to identify and involve the partners?		Project Development and Approval	
What are the stages of partnership building?		Project Selection Criteria	
What are the main functions of local partnerships?		Monitoring and Evaluation	
		Communications, Information and Publicity	
		Financial Information	

Match funding

Approaches to raising match funding and the levels that may be anticipated will vary considerably by Member State and programme. Funds in addition to EFF and national co-financing will be required to support project and FLAG implementation costs. These may come from local public sources or from private sources. Where local public match funding is involved, the total public contribution i.e. of EFF, national and regional co-financing, any local public co-financing and any further public match funding must not exceed the maximum level of public aid intensity as set out in Annex II of the EFF Regulation. As a result of this and the expectation under Axis 4 that the majority of actions will be led by the private sector, it is reasonable to assume that the majority of FLAG proposals will contain a certain level of match funding from private or non governmental sources.

It is likely, therefore, that much of the match funding will come forward on a project-by-project basis. It should be possible, nevertheless, to take steps to identify potential sources of match funding and incorporate estimates in the funding tables. The anticipated average intervention rate should also be specified – the maximum rates are governed by the EFF Regulation. These estimates should be justified in the accompanying text and, where possible, by formal commitments on the part of funding partners.

Detailed financial tables

Managing authorities are likely to provide pro-forma financial tables to be completed, which will be consistent with their programme level financial tables. The following guidance relates to some common considerations which are likely to arise.

A profile of expected expenditure, allocated by year (at least) over the programme period should be prepared. This should be done on the basis of a best estimate of FLAG and project development activity, and should include a draft operational budget for the FLAG, estimating staffing, administration and running costs.

Internal or external factors that might affect the funding profile over the years should be identified and addressed. For example, in relation to FLAG costs, an internal factor in the early years might be higher costs associated with capacity building and developing project activity. There may then be specific considerations in later years associated with preparing for programme closure or succession. External factors might, for example, include opportunities for complementary activities around other programmes or events.

Tables are likely to be required outlining the total expenditure, including match funding, over the period of the programme, split by year and by source between:

- › EFF funding;
- › national, regional and/or local public sector co-financing;
- › local public sector match funding; and
- › private or community match funding.

This should show the projected split of total eligible EFF expenditure, excluding match funding, by year and by Axis 4 measure (Article 44(1)). It should also show the projected split of total programme expenditure, including match funding, by year and by Axis 4 measure.

Overall staffing, administration and running costs should be allocated by year against the sources from which this is to be drawn. You may also be required to provide a quarterly breakdown of your expected expenditure by measure for the first year's plan.



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