A Participative Process Of Strategy Development

INTRODUCTION

The EFF Regulation insists that the 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 utilize the unique knowledge that local actors have of their area and secondly to engage them in the development process and the FLAG. This factsheet focuses on the process of involving the local community in strategy development.

Developing a local fisheries area strategy will normally involve a FLAG steering group and local actors in carrying out a joint analysis of the situation in their territory, this is commonly based on a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, 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 and integrated strategy which addresses a small, well defined area and takes account of different concerns voiced by a wide range of actors from the territory (operators, associations, the public sector) and from different sectors of activity. 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, commonly six months.

AIMS

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 of their importance 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 understanding of the main causes of these problems and the internal strengths and weaknesses of the area which 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; and
- To develop a shared vision and strategy for achieving this vision, which can be used as a flagship for engaging key internal and external actors.
- 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.

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 stages and their constituent steps are sequential other than stage 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 some time and effort. This should neither be underestimated nor hurried if good quality outcomes in terms of group and strategy development and value for the community commitment are to be achieved.

Phase 1: Preparatory Steps and Resourcing

1. The first step in the preparation of the strategy is the creation of a preliminary steering group to coordinate the diagnostic work, plan and drive community engagement and the preparation of the strategy itself. The steering group need not be large, there may be benefits in focus and coordination through a smaller group at the outset. There should be at least two partners initially (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 Fisheries Local Action Group (FLAG).

2. A <u>dedicated</u> team of one or, ideally two people is required to carry out the diagnostic work and to work in engaging 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 organizations 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, however they are contracted it is essential 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 time in areas with no experience of similar processes, flexible or specialist resources may be required. More experienced areas and groups will find it easier to use internal resources to build on past experience and success.

   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 stages.

Phase 2: Preliminary Analysis of Secondary Sources and the Formulation of Hypotheses for the Strategies (desk research).

This desk based research stage is essential in providing the evidence base from the existing available sources to inform the development of the strategy. This then contributes to a chapter of the strategy profiling the area.

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, your experts should be aware of these and should be able to judge what is reliable and relevant. The aim here is to make 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, many of these will have undertaken similar data analysis exercises often involving studies. Use existing studies and calculations where possible and where judged to be reliable.

4. Once the data and information have been gathered the next task is to organise this secondary information into a series of logical sections analysing it, identifying any gaps to fill and drawing 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 area 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.

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

5. Interviews should be arranged with key stakeholders and informants in the area or 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 establish who is prepared to be involved in possible thematic working groups or 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. First public information meeting. This may require more than one meeting to ensure that all parts of the area have the opportunity to participate, 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 for the area 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 most appropriate to your area. Throughout the processes it is important to make an effort to ensure ongoing good communication with local people to ensure a high level of participation by all possible interested parties, providing feedback and informing their participation.

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. These groups tasks are to help develop the SWOT, key objectives, priority actions, outline strategy and indicative budget by sub-themes or areas. 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 by outside experts as long as they do not dominate.

   It is useful to have a minimum of 2-3 meetings per working group 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, any official remit, their interests, capacity or resources and possible projects which they may have an interest in or wish to promote. There are various techniques and computer software for doing 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, opportunities and their causes. The aim is to bring the different stakeholder points of view together and to try and reach agreement on the main problems, opportunities and their causes 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 can build a problem tree.

11. A SWOT analysis of the theme or sector in question. Strengths and weaknesses are internal factors, things you can directly influence, opportunities and threats are external factors which you can seek to address or take advantage of. This analysis will work through the internal strengths and weaknesses of say 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. Which ever 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 you should seek out ways in which the problems or negative situations can be rephrased in terms of positive situations or actions to be pursued and 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, carrying out exercises 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

groups. Constructive leadership and a spirit of compromise is essential to identify the synergy between actions and develop 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. More importantly it is necessary 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 which mobilise the different local actors.

There are a wide range of techniques available for doing this and you should use your 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 a separate strategy development factsheet. 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 operational plan or business plan for how the group will conduct its business will also be required; this is also addressed in a separate factsheet.