



Roadmap builds consensus for sustainable rural development

Where agricultural policies are in conflict with environmental and social issues, a 'roadmap' can provide a way forward as part of a sustainable rural development planning process. New research describes an approach used in the Netherlands, which brings together stakeholders to create a mutually desirable vision of the future.

Agricultural policies have conflicted with environmental and social development for many decades. The Netherlands, for example, has seen much conflict between conservationists and farmers in the past, with neither party satisfied with results of top-down planning procedures. Reforms to the EU's Common Agricultural Policy have sought to improve the competitiveness of agriculture and forestry, as well as improve environmental quality. However, the researchers believe that implementing these new policies has been hampered by difficulties in involving all parties concerned with rural development.

According to the authors, sustainable rural development could be much improved by developing a 'roadmap'. This explores all potential social, economic and ecological benefits of developing rural land and aims to reduce stakeholder doubts about co-operating with other parties.

The roadmap identifies all stakeholders involved in developing a certain area, the goods and services it might deliver. It begins with a goal-setting exercise in which participants create a desirable vision of the future. For example, a rural community where employment levels, recreational opportunities and environmental quality are strong. From this vision of the future, participants 'back-cast' to decide on how to achieve these mutually desirable goals.

The researchers emphasise that all stakeholders must be properly represented. Throughout the process, they are made aware of not only what they can achieve for themselves, but also what they can contribute to others.

The roadmap was developed by the Dutch government in the rural Winterswijk district to address conflicts of interest, such as competition over water for drinking and agricultural purposes, or the desire for free access to the countryside damaging productive land.

In the Winterswijk case study, participants used the roadmap to create two future scenarios for the region. One was a conservative vision where little changed, and the other saw the scenic appeal of the area strengthened. The stakeholders could explore the two scenarios and compare changes to production, employment and recreation.

The roadmap process proved to be a practicable and useful way of removing doubts about cooperation over new land uses for Winterswijk. Other strengths included being able to involve policy makers from the beginning. The focus is on mapping goals for the future rather than emphasising environmental problems of the past.

There were some areas identified for improvement, including insufficient coverage of energy related issues during the process, the need for an independent process manager and the risk of one small but strong group overpowering others.

Source: de Graaf, H.J., Noordervliet, M.A.W., Musters, C.J.M. and de Snoo, G.R. (2009). Roadmap for interactive exploration of sustainable development opportunities: The use of simple instruments in the complex setting of bottom-up processes in rural areas. *Land Use Policy*. 26 (2): 295-307.

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