

PORTUGAL

Stakeholder involvement

Location
Portugal

Programming period
2014 - 2020

Funding (EUR)
n/a

Duration
2015 – 2015

Implemented by
MINHA TERRA

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An example on how the process of preparing a local development strategy was used for stakeholder consultation on key rural development issues.

The challenge

MINHA TERRA - Federação Portuguesa de Associações de Desenvolvimento Local (Portuguese Federation of Local Development Associations) is a federation that brings together 53 Local Development Associations. These associations are the leading members of local partnerships responsible for the implementation of Local Development Strategies under LEADER. MINHA TERRA, a member of the European LEADER Association for Rural Development (ELARD), was also a co-organiser of the European Rural Parliament in 2015.

As there is no tradition of rural social movements with a participatory character in Portugal, it became clear that MINHA TERRA had to get involved in the European Rural Parliament to make their voice heard. They did so through the activities of the LDA in preparation of the Local Development Strategies, to operate under the Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) instrument. As the national champion, MINHA TERRA ran national campaigns for the European Rural Parliament in 2015.

Main steps and features

In the run-up to the European Rural Parliament in 2015, MINHA TERRA wanted to involve rural communities to ensure a grassroots 'cascade of ideas' on the challenges of modern farming. In order to do so, various activities of Local Development Associations were planned. These activities would serve to capitalise, enhance and systematise the results of past projects and work in progress, e.g. meetings and local workshops, territorial diagnosis, to feed into the Local Development Strategies (LDS), to operate under the Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) 2014 – 2020. These LDS would be the basis for the recognition of these local partnerships as Local Action Groups.

All 53 LDA members were requested to provide access to territorial diagnostics, macro strategies and evidence of the consultation of community initiatives (participation record forms and photos).

Eventually, 24 Local Development Associations responded and contributed information on their meetings, territorial diagnosis and SWOT analyses. The associations also designed workshops and meetings to involve as many members as possible. In total 4 200 members, 41% of which were women, participated in 168 events across Portugal, Madeira and the Azores. Of the institutions represented, 40% were from the social economy, 35% from the public sector and 25% from local enterprises.

In order to broaden participation, an online questionnaire was sent to five national organisations/networks (Animar - Portuguese Association for Local Development, CNA - National Confederation of Farmers, Confagri - National Confederation of Agricultural Cooperatives and Agricultural Credit in Portugal; FC & T - Citizenship and Territory Forum and Portugal's National Rural Network), which generated 50 responses.



Results

Based on the feedback, it became clear that there were major concerns amongst rural communities. These pertained to low birth rates, rural exodus, loss of population, aging population, unemployment, poverty and social exclusion, failure of vocational training, illiteracy, most qualified young people leave rural communities, weakness of local economies, low added value activities and low incorporation of innovation and knowledge.

Moreover, most of the national public policies were viewed as inadequate considering the realities and needs of the population and rural communities. According to Luís Chaves, Coordinator MINHA TERRA, these concerns are "not much" considered (77.6%) or are "not at all" considered (10.2%).

However, there have been positive changes in recent years. Improvements were made to facilities and infrastructure (e.g. roads, water supply, sanitation, ICT). An increase of small entrepreneurs investing in business based on the products and resources of territories (including tourism and differentiated agriculture) bodes well. As does the increase in social responses targeted at the elderly. Finally, there is a growing awareness and involvement of the population in the processes of community development (rurality, environment, etc.).

Challenges and lessons

- ❑ When preparing a local developing strategy, it is vital to give stakeholders in rural communities a platform to voice their opinions, concerns and suggestions. This fosters an inclusive environment on a local, regional and national level, culminating in a much broader platform.