

SWEDEN

Stakeholder involvement

Location
Sweden

Programming period
2007 - 2013

Funding (EUR)
From member submissions

Duration
2010 – 2015

Implemented by
Swedish National Rural
Network

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Sweden's National Rural Network has set up thematic working groups to improve and encourage the role of rural stakeholders in the delivery of rural development activity.

The challenge

The Swedish National Rural Network considered carefully how to engage with stakeholders, and who the stakeholders of the NRN should be. A decision was taken that stakeholders should be identified and at what level they were engaging. It was felt that in Sweden the main stakeholders are the national and even regional organisations and authorities related to rural development.



These organisations may not necessarily directly represent the final beneficiaries but be an important actor on their behalf or an important contact. Examples of these included the managers of publicly owned kitchens (for schools, hospitals etc.) and the network of rural development officers within the municipalities.

The NRN cannot work directly with the final beneficiaries, as they are an intermediary that supports and delivers knowledge and tools to organisations so they can inform and motivate their members to improve their use of the RDP measures. Through learning and cooperation within the network, the ability to deliver rural development is strengthened. There is a very strong tradition in Sweden to form associations in every area of rural life. It would therefore be unwise, and often counterproductive, to try to bypass these associations and work directly with their members. It is better to use the organisations in order to engage with local actors. This can also deliver sustainability in the delivery of activities.

Main steps and features

A decision was taken to build the network through formal membership. The NRN can then use the funds towards fees, allowances and to cover travel expenses for the member representatives of the working groups. Through the participation of members in the thematic working groups the NRN is able to organise seminars, surveys, study visits and so on.

Through these members, who have applied and committed to engage in a certain level of activity, the NRN can initiate and conduct delivery through thematic working groups. To maximise stakeholder interest the thematic working groups have to be targeted and aimed at tangible operational objectives. It is therefore necessary to have a thematic focus and not only try to address some vague 'general issues'. It is also important to enable organisations to participate through remuneration, particularly for smaller organisations, where members work voluntarily (for example bee keepers association, breeders of endangered species, rural youth organisation). They do not have financial resources to pay for travel, accommodation and working fees.

The thematic working group to strengthen "Green businesses" (farming and related businesses) consists of representatives for the Farmers' Federation, The Organic Farmers, WWF, The National Food Agency, the Agricultural Advisory Service, The Swedish Consumers' Association, the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency, the Swedish Forest Agency, the Swedish Association for Pig Producers, Leader and the County Administrations.

One of the activities of the working group has aimed to create a dialogue and cooperation between organisations for primary production and the consumers' organisations and actors. It has targeted managers of publicly run kitchens (schools, hospitals, elderly homes etc.). The public kitchens are a major buyer of food. Through public procurement regulations many municipalities have stopped buying locally produced food due to their interpretation of the rules. The working group was able to address this important issue.

Another group was formed to tackle the issue of the integration of immigrants in rural areas. Many small rural municipalities have refugee centres where immigrants are

placed during the period of investigation of their permission to stay in Sweden, and also after that period ends. This gives an opportunity for small depopulated rural municipalities if they can find methods to integrate and include these immigrants in society. The immigrant groups do not usually have a clear organisation structure. To reach these groups and to work together with them the NRN is supporting and strengthening them to organise themselves. Then it is easier to identify them as a stakeholder group in rural development. It has also been transferring information to national immigrant organisations to raise their awareness about the concept of rural development and connect them to other rural organisations.

The NRN also supported the organisation of a group of youth representatives from Leader groups in a national "sub-network". In this manner the group has become a stakeholder, a member of a specific thematic working group for rural youth. It has also been a platform to exchange experiences of the Youth Umbrella Project in several Leader groups.

Results

A common understanding of the need to use local food and improve food quality in public kitchens was built through dialogue between producer organisations and public kitchen managers. A questionnaire asking for good examples of when locally produced food had been purchased by municipalities within procurement rules was conducted. Understanding each other's situation and context made it easier to cooperate. This led to survey responses from 118 municipalities and 17 counties and 15 in-depth interviews. A flyer on food quality was produced, and following the report and seminar on activities, a four page newsletter on examples of success in the procurement of local food.

'Young Events' which was co-funded by the Rural Network was conducted across five sites in Sweden with a total of six events and approximately 300 young people participating. A final report has now been created 'Support methods and systems for rural youth'.

Challenges and lessons

- By using the national organisations in the thematic working group the dialogue has also been transferred to the local level. According to the Federation of Farmers and the national Food agency this is a dialogue and common understanding that was difficult for them to establish without the platform provided by the NRN. The next step is to establish the same kind of dialogue with the private consumers' organisation.
- Other new groups being formed to address important issues, the latest of these being in Rural Tourism.

Additional information

[Swedish Youth Events](#)

[Group Reports \(in Swedish\)](#)