

SWEDEN

Implementing local development strategies

Location

Startgas and Sixten

Programming period

2007 – 2013

Axis / Priority

Axis 4 – LEADER

Measure

M413 – Quality of life /
diversification

Funding (EUR)

Total budget 950 000

EAFRD 295 000

National/regional 295 000

Private 360 000

Project duration

2008 – 2015

Project promoter

Leader Mitt I Småland

Contact

arvid.stiernstrom@slu.se

Website

www.upplandsbygd.se

LAG-owned projects in Sweden are used to allow small seed-funding for specific purposes.

Summary

In the Swedish context, a number of Leader areas during the program period 2007-2013 established a working mode where LAG-owned projects were used to allow small seed-funding for specific purposes. This method has proven very efficient, both in economic terms and in terms of mobilizing local actors and capacity building.



The conceptual framework of Umbrella projects applied in the projects presented here are on SME-development and Youth respectively, but has also been applied for other purposes. The concept has proven to be a very efficient use of EAFRD funding, both in terms of creating new jobs and to involve young people in rural development. The method has raised the interest among (rural) stakeholders from many other EU Member States.

Results

The LAG-driven Startgas program granted support to 72 projects whereof 50 were actually executed. . In total the umbrella project resulted in 30 new businesses with 50+ new products.

The LAG-driven Sixten program was ongoing for six years, 2008-2015. The Sixten program resulted in 45 projects run by 1200 youngsters which generated a number of new networks, new meeting places, ongoing activities for young people, and strengthened young people (more than 250 youngsters participated in training activities).

Lessons & Recommendations

- First of all, the experiences from these umbrella projects show that small sums and simplified administration can provide great results.
- The program promoters employed by the LAGs from the budget of the umbrella project were important for the success-rate.
- Through the mobilization of local actors and the many success stories reported about, a positive image of an active rural area was created.

Context

Any development requires individuals that have the will, ability and confidence to act to achieve change. Sometimes a small push in a certain direction can lead to great achievements. Local people have many ideas for both, business and social activities, that have never been tested or realized for different reasons. Enabling instruments, e.g. in the form of policy interventions, are needed to harvest such unused potential, raise people's awareness, increase their perception, improve their ability to conceptualize new solutions, and overcome insecurity and fear to act and test their ideas. Indeed, a range of policy programmes do exist, but how are support programs that can really make a difference to be designed? What are the ingredients for a successful program which ignites or acts as a catalyst for new initiatives? These questions were also discussed by LEADER groups, i.e. Local Action Groups (LAGs), around Sweden, which realized that existing instruments are insufficient and therefore started to create an umbrella projects as a tool by which people were allowed to test their ideas in a non-bureaucratic and simple way, in a small scale.

Objectives

Different LEADER regions in Sweden have established umbrella projects in the programme period 2007-2013. These projects have been LAG-owned and within their framework groups of actors or individual persons can apply for funding to test ideas within a smaller sub-project, for which LAG takes on the overall responsibility. The basic idea was to see whether easy access to small amounts of funding, which are normally hardly provided under the general funding programmes, could be a fruitful and efficient method for delivery of EAFRD support.

Activities

Both projects were owned and run by the LAGs themselves. The LAGs marketed this opportunity through numerous meetings with local actors, among them, e.g. municipalities, businessmen, social organization and other interested parties.

In both cases, the projects were conceptualized as programs, where the financial project support for the projects was limited, by around 3 000 Euro. The co-funding in these projects was mainly the time dedicated by the small project owners (working time was valued a certain sum).

In the Startgas program, launched by the LEADER group Mitt i Småland, in the Southeast of Sweden, individuals or networks with business ideas were invited to apply for so called "Startgas funding" to try their business ideas in practice, do a market survey, network, do a study tour or other minor tasks to get started. The Startgas program provided an opportunity to start slowly and try out their business concept. The LEADER office helped the applicants with the administrative work. The decisions and payment of support could often be done within a week (maximum one month) by the LEADER office.

The Sixten program by LEADER Upplandsbygd was launched in a similar way. The aim was to allow young people getting involved in projects to develop their own local areas through a simple application process. Most of the projects were of shorter-term nature, from one month to half a year. The Umbrella-project led to a number of new initiatives in the local areas by young people who through the projects also improved their abilities, e.g. in the field of management, and their own self esteem.

An interesting feature of the Sixten program was the establishment of a "Youth LAG". This group processed all incoming applications and recommended the LAG-manager to approve a certain project or not. Both this Youth LAG and the young project applicants were supported by a Youth Coach or mentor. All project groups got a project management training included in their projects. The Sixten motto was "by, for and together with young people". The project holders were obliged to "spread the word" and talk about their project to inspire other potential project holders.

"Small support to private individuals and to networks of existing entrepreneurs give the best cost effectiveness, better outcomes and tangible new businesses and jobs in the countryside."

Per Andersson, former LAG-manager of Mitt i Småland

Main Results

Through a program that offers easy access to limited funding the LAG have not only had a chance to support vague ideas to see if those ideas can become viable businesses and create jobs. Moreover, even if specific projects fail, the participants have gained new abilities and new networks through their participation in the umbrella project, and are enabled to try other ideas later on. This is an important capacity building approach, where learning is done through action, not through more formal education or training. Both umbrella projects revealed that it is important to support the individuals throughout the process, catering for success rate.

On the LEADER level, the number of projects per se created a high visibility for the work of the LAGs; partly of course through the mobilizing process to promote the umbrella project but most of all through the many successful projects that resulted in many articles in local media.

The LAG-driven Startgas program granted support to 72 projects whereof 50 were actually executed. In total the umbrella project resulted in 30 new businesses with 50+ new products. Many of those who received support through the start gas checks were women. A maximum of 3,000 Euro could be granted by the LAG to each successful applicant. Support was not given to investments or to existing businesses. The total budget was around 450,000 Euro over the 7-year period (2008-2015).

The LAG-driven Sixten program was ongoing for six years, 2008-2015. The Sixten program resulted in 45 projects run by 1200 youngsters which generated a number of new networks, new meeting places, ongoing activities for young people, and strengthened young people (more than 250 youngsters participated in training activities). Many of these youngsters are now more involved in their local communities, not only in their limited projects.

Key lessons

First of all, the experiences from these umbrella projects show that small sums and simplified administration can provide great results. The combination of concrete financial support, quick response through a simplified application process and limited administration on behalf of the project owners have been revealed as success factors in both umbrella projects.

The program promoters employed by the LAGs from the budget of the umbrella project were important for the success-rate. It is clearly advantageous if you have your projects managers at a phone-call distance, maintaining close contacts as the projects evolve. The key features of the umbrella projects, which are access to small-scale funding and management in a relatively close context by familiar persons and with little administrative burdens, form a significant difference to many EU programmes in similar fields of action (e.g. targeting SMEs or social developments).

Even project applications who were granted support under the umbrella projects, but did not finalize their projects, had at least a chance to try their ideas, even if it the project did not succeed to deliver.

Through the mobilization of local actors and the many success stories reported about, a positive image of an active rural area was created, which in turn contributes to a new story of the countryside and strengthens the LAGs.

Additional sources of information

www.leaderupplandsbygd.se/sixten---for-unga/projekt/