



Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived

Background information on
'BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS TO IMPROVE FEAD SUPPORT'

11th FEAD Network Meeting

Brussels, 19 June 2018

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1. Introduction

Building partnerships is essential for the effective delivery of FEAD support and its sustainability in the long run. Therefore, it is crucial to identify those strategies that have been proven successful so far, as well as the challenges that were encountered during the process. Partnering is also an important element for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In this context, multi-stakeholder partnerships are recognised as ‘important vehicles for mobilising and sharing knowledge, expertise, technologies and financial resources to support the achievement of the sustainable development goals in all countries, particularly developing countries’.^{1,2}

Partnering is a form of stakeholder engagement characterised by a strong role of the different actors in the decision-making process and the ownership of the results.^{3,4} In the context of FEAD, a partnership is therefore the ‘umbrella’ that permits several stakeholders to ‘act’ as a group in order to accomplish a common objective, i.e. the delivery of food parcels and accompanying measures.⁵ From this point of view, those partnerships in which the empowerment of the relevant stakeholders allow them ‘to influence and steer programme activities’ can be considered as successful.⁶

With regard to the challenges that partnering involves, a key issue is to ensure that stakeholders are properly engaged during the different phases of a program or initiative (Stott, 2016).^{7,8} For example, engagement can be achieved by means of public consultation forums, national SWOT workshops, use of media, involvement of the end recipients, capacity-building and support among others.⁹

As stated in the European Code of Conduct of Partnership (ECCP), ‘Partnership implies close cooperation between public authorities, economic and social partners and bodies representing civil society at national, regional and local levels throughout the whole programme cycle consisting of preparation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation’.¹⁰

With regard to FEAD, building partnerships at different levels (NGOs-NGOs, Managing Authorities-NGOs, etc.) could increase the impact of the support by allowing a more efficient utilisation of the available resources, as well as a better identification of the needs of the target groups. The upcoming **FEAD Network Meeting on 19 June 2018** will focus on improving our understanding of the complexity and the challenges that the delivery partners have faced when partnering. This background paper also introduces the European policy context in terms of

¹ Full report is available at: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdinaction/2016report>.

² The focus of Goal 17 is to encourage and promote effective public, public-private and civil society partnerships, by building on the experience and resourcing strategies of partnerships.

³ A toolkit to help organisations to ensure effective stakeholder engagement is available at: <https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Stakeholder-Toolkit-210316-1.pdf>.

⁴ Caplan, K. and Stott, L. (2008). Defining our Terms and Clarifying our Language, in Svensson, L. and Nilsson, B. (eds.) *Partnerships – As a Strategy for Social Innovation and Sustainable Change*, Santerus Academic Press, Sweden.

⁵ See, also: Austin, A.E. and Baldwin, R.G. (1991). Faculty Collaboration: Enhancing the Quality of Scholarship and teaching ASHE-ERIC, *Higher Education Report No. 7*, Washington, D.C.: The George Washington University.

⁶ See, also: Stott, L. (2016). Partnership terminology. Available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/esf/transnationality/library>.

⁷ The definition of a clear task allocation, as well as designating a lead partner for each task/phase of the program is key for engagement with the initiative under consideration.

⁸ Further discussion on the different forms of engagement is provided by Stott (2009). Stott, L. (2009). Stakeholder Engagement in Partnerships Who are the stakeholders and how we ‘engage’ with them?, *BPD Research Series*, BDP, London.

⁹ An overview of different activities that can be undertaken for engagement with stakeholders are provided in Stott (2016).

¹⁰ Available at: http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/policy/what/glossary/e/european-code-of-conduct.

partnering, and refers to successful approaches of FEAD delivery involving partnerships among different organisations.

2. Building partnerships: European policy context

Building partnerships has been for many years one of the key principles of the implementation of the European Union's funds. Many of the issues that ESF projects address are complex matters. Therefore, ESF¹¹ and FEAD¹² regulation promote partnerships between regional and local authorities and bodies representing civil society, which can deliver the critical mass needed to find and implement solutions, for example by creating better access to health services or education provision.

ESF projects and programmes usually involve many actors in their design and implementation – not only EU and national institutions, but also regional and local authorities, NGOs, local communities, as well as social partners, including workers' organisations and business representatives. Therefore, ESF promotes networking between these stakeholders at EU, national, regional and local levels, while encouraging the participation of social partners and NGOs in projects concerning social inclusion, gender equality and equal opportunities. ESF also recognises the 'value' of the local community for a better understanding of the problems that are experienced at local level.

Case study examples: Typology of partnerships

Partnerships can be categorised **according to** the **different actors** that are **involved**.¹³ For instance:

- NGO/civil society sector-NGO/civil society sector partnership, e.g. Maistobankas in Lithuania;
- NGO-private sector partnership, e.g. FoodCloud Hubs;
- NGO-public sector partnership, e.g. The Italian Federation of Organisations for Homeless;
- Private-public sector partnership, e.g. OCMW Antwerp ; and
- Partnerships involving the three sectors; e.g. Libraries in Utrecht, The Hague, Rotterdam and Amsterdam in cooperation with the Mira Media Foundation.

Partnering has a clear added value in enhancing the effectiveness of FEAD delivery, as well as the support of other funds such as the European Structural and Investment (ESI) Fund. The experience so far reveals that building partnerships has enhanced the collective commitment and ownership of the EU policies. In other words, it increases the available knowledge, expertise and viewpoints in the design and implementation of strategies and ensures greater transparency in decision-making processes.¹⁴ The exchange of experience

¹¹ [Council Reg No. 1304-2013 - European Social Fund.](#)

¹² [FEAD 'basic act': Regulation \(EU\) No 223/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 March 2014 on the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived](#)

¹³ See, KPMG International (2015) for further discussion of the different principles, approaches and desired outcomes of each type of partner fit together. Available at: <https://assets.kpmg.com/content/dam/kpmg/pdf/2016/01/unlocking-power-of-partnership.pdf>.

¹⁴ The partnership principle is now endorsed for all ESI Funds and in 2014 the European Code of Conduct on Partnership (ECCP) was adopted, which shall help Member States in organising a meaningful partnership with the relevant stakeholders. See, further details at: European Code of Conduct on Partnership (ECCP). European Union 2014. ISBN 978-92-79-35209-6 – doi:10.2767/41854.

and mutual learning is also essential to strengthen partnerships and improve its sustainability in the long run.

3. Building partnerships and its implication for FEAD

3.1 The process of building a partnership

While each partnership is unique, there are many similarities on how organizations engage with each other and create a partnership. Essentially, there are four phases through which partners should go through together. The first phase is the so-called 'identification and development phase' which includes partner identification, resource mapping, discovery meetings, relationship building and the final partner selection. In this identification phase the relevant stakeholders are identified. These potential partners are usually a combination of different civil society, private and public organisations, e.g. the NGO-public sector partnership established by The Greek Catholic Charity in Prešov.

Case study example: Prešov Greek Catholic Charity (Slovakia)

The Greek Catholic Charity in Prešov provides **warm, healthy meals to homeless individuals during the winter, along with accompanying measures**. The Greek Catholic Charity is a partner organisation in Slovakia and works closely with the FEAD Managing Authority in the delivery of the project. The charity identifies the end recipients of the project and provides the meals. It doesn't limit support to individuals living on the streets, but also helps other individuals whose basic living needs are not being met. Besides a lack of accommodation, this may also include limited access to regular meals or an inadequate amount of clothing.

Project activities are carried out by employed staff as well as students. The project is managed by the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic, the FEAD Managing Authority in Slovakia, and is implemented by the Greek Catholic Charity Prešov.

The second phase is the 'implementation and managing phase'. In this phase the Partnership Agreement and the Governance framework is set up to formulate the overall objectives/actions, as well as the individual objectives/actions each partners. This phase also involves the documentation of the implementation of the different actions.

Thirdly, partners should go through the 'assessing and revising phase' which involves an evaluation of the whole programming phase to assess whether the partnerships objectives are met. Finally, each partnership will face the 'sustaining impact' phase, which includes inviting potential new partners, upscaling of the program, and/or institutionalising the partnership.

3.2 Strategies to build partnerships

When there is a clear need for a partnership, stakeholders will need to first identify which are the principal desired goals and how these goals can be successfully achieved. Potential facilitating factors and barriers that could influence the achievement of those goals should be identified as well.¹⁵

¹⁵ <http://www.strengtheningnonprofits.org/resources/guidebooks/Partnerships.pdf>.

Another important aspect to be considered is the organisation of the partnership. This includes a clear definition of the roles and responsibilities of all partners, as well as the overall approach to reaching their goals. In addition, clear working arrangement for the different partners should be set. In order to measure whether the goals are successfully achieved, it is necessary to define how success can be measured and how this will be monitored during the programming period. Also a plan for monitoring the effectiveness of the partnership itself should be developed.

Overall, for a successful partnership it is important that there is clarity of purpose and a shared vision. Partners should acknowledge that they depend on each other and recognise the added value of the partnership. Moreover, to successfully cooperate with partners it is important to recognise and allow the differences in culture/practice that exist among partners. But also recognise and accept that others have a diversity of skills and innovative abilities. A partnership is also only successful when there is a level of ownership and management commitment from the senior level in all partner organizations (e.g. directors, members, and trustees). Moreover, partners should be able to trust each other, i.e. equal status among partners, effective, open and honest communication including exchange of feedback to and from partner organisations and sharing good practices.

3.3 Lessons learnt

Building partnerships has been proven as a successful approach to maximise the impacts of a particular project or support initiative.¹⁶ In general terms, partnering has improved the efficiency of programmes by avoiding duplication of efforts, achieving economies of scale, as well as favouring the creation of synergies with other initiatives and resources. In the context of FEAD, the Italian mechanism of FEAD support constitutes an interesting example of the better utilisation of resources by building a partnership. With regard to the effectiveness of particular actions, partnering is also beneficial since it permits to address real needs that are linked to multi-dimensional and multi-level issues; while contributing to the identification and provision of services that cannot be delivered by an organisation working individually.¹⁷

Case study example: A joint planning mechanism involving stakeholders and partners (Italy)

In Italy, FEAD aid is distributed through a complex network of partners and relies on the cooperation of state agencies with several important private, non-profit organisations. The **food distribution network is based on a joint planning mechanism that involves a considerable number of actors**. The product basket is selected on the basis of an assessment carried out by AGEA together with seven charities (Croce Rossa Italiana, Caritas Italiana, Fondazione Banco Alimentare, Comunita di S. Egidio, Banco delle opere di Carita, Associazione Banco Alimentare Roma e Associazione Sempre Insieme per la Pace). In Italy, the Managing Authority established a National working group for Operational Coordination, which also involves the Ministry for Agriculture, Food and Forestry Policies. The working group identifies the product basket, which is approved by the Ministry of Labour.

¹⁶ See, Working Group of member States on Partnerships (2006) for further discussion. Available at:

http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/equal_consolidated/data/document/200606-reflection-note-partner_en.pdf.

¹⁷ In context, multi-dimensional issues are those that involves a variety of actors and perspectives. Multi-level issues are those that consist of local, regional and national aspects.

The food basket aims to provide a balanced regime and a typical Mediterranean diet, in addition to products that are normally long-lasting. The **distribution of food is based on an estimate of needs, which takes into account the number of beneficiaries assisted during the previous year** and the capacity of the organisation for storage and further distribution.

Another important dimension in which building partnerships can contribute is the empowerment of stakeholders and the development of strategic and operative capacity by stimulating learning through the knowledge sharing of expertise and experience and the promotion of understanding of different organisational cultures and objectives, particular to different types of stakeholders, e.g. between public and private sector. There is also a significant contribution in terms of identifying the 'value added' of an action and engaging with it. In other words, partnering brings together all stakeholders in the process of defining the issue to be addressed and its solution. This improve the sense of ownership regarding the action.

The experience so far has also revealed that partnering can create a framework in which the public sector can speed up the development of private initiatives. By creating shared ownership and active participation, partnering contributes to the sustainability of the outcomes in the long run.

4. Challenges in building partnerships and way forward in relation to FEAD

Despite the strong consensus regarding the 'value added' of partnering when tackling complex problems such as social inclusion, its implementation is not exempt from challenges. In the context of the ESF, Stott (2016) identifies a set of problems that the different stakeholders will face. For instance, the weak connection between EU and global SD priorities; the obstacles related to the integration between different institutional levels, sectors and policy agendas; as well as the lack of integration of views regarding approaches to build partnerships. In a broader context, other challenges that were identified are the prevalence of 'top-down' approaches for policy-making; limited links with on-going initiatives; lack of identification of clear synergies among different participants; and insufficient knowledge transfer on successful cases and adequate solutions to overcome them.

With regard to transparency and accountability, an important condition to favour the development of partnerships is the availability of accessible channels of information and frameworks to promote engagement. This condition becomes very relevant at local level, as well as in the case of informal involvement. Moreover, ensuring sufficient diversity among the stakeholders that are involved is also an important issue. Leading the lack of diversity to a limited perspective that might be disconnected from the reality of the target group. However, once a partnership has been built, efforts should focus on the maintenance of a 'healthy' and strong connection between the different stakeholders.

Drawing attention to participation, quite often partnerships fail to achieve their full potential since capacity-building efforts and institutional strengthening is fragmented and accompanied

with insufficient investments in training and support facilities. Another relevant challenge that any successful partnership should overcome is the insufficient exchange of learning experiences which could limit the impact at policy and societal level. Sufficient knowledge sharing will also contribute to the sustainability of the impacts in the long run. Within FEAD, the case of Bulgaria illustrates the benefits of knowledge sharing.

Case study example: Combining food distribution with counselling and information distribution (Bulgaria)

Alongside the **distribution of food parcels**, Bulgaria's FEAD programme offers a variety of **accompanying measures** to support end recipients in their transition out of poverty and social exclusion. Recognising that while helping fulfil end recipients' basic needs is important, it is equally important that end recipients are encouraged to actively take steps towards re-entry into social life.

The Agency for Social Assistance purchased food products and the Bulgarian Red Cross distributed individual food parcels to eligible end recipients (approximately 300,000 parcels in total). When distributing food parcels, partner organisations provide guidance on welfare provision to end recipients and when particular problems or urgent needs are identified they can be guided to Social Assistance Directorates. Notably, **the majority of individuals were referred to social services financed by the European Social Fund (ESF)** (e.g. personal assistants, day care centres), while others were provided with other social services in the community.

An additional element that should be in place when partnering is the establishment of an effective system for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the partnership principle. These constant assessment of the activities carried out by the partnership will contribute to the identification of problems that can be tackled at an early stage.

Future partnerships should strive to achieve a balance between compliance with the existing body of legislation and the flexibility to generate relevant and participatory solutions that involve the target group. Special attention should be also paid to ensure active and efficient knowledge sharing of successful experiences for delivering FEAD support.

In the context of FEAD support, a successful partnership is the solution developed by FoodCloud Hubs which involves the cooperation of private businesses with large food surpluses with charities that distribute them in the form of food parcels. This is an interesting example that demonstrates that the appropriate coordination within a partnership could permit the achievement of several objectives with a single effort, i.e. delivery of food while reducing food waste. Another relevant example of support that relies on a strong collaboration between stakeholders is the Maltese case of the Foundation of Social Welfare Services. In addition to the distribution of food parcels, accompanying measures are provided while involving the end recipients for a better identification of their needs.

5. Conclusions

Partnering is a form of participation in which different stakeholders work together towards the achievement of a common objective. Partnerships among different bodies (Managing Authorities, NGOs, restaurants, supermarkets, etc.) have the potential of improving the impact and sustainability of FEAD by favouring a more efficient use of the available resources and a better identification of the needs of those supported the fund.

In this context, a number of questions arise:

- What is the role of partnerships in the new ESF+ Regulation?
- How can partnering reinforce the impact of FEAD support? Which examples of FEAD partnerships have been proven successful? Which ones are working better (e.g. NGOs-NGOs, Managing Authority-NGOs, etc.)?
- What are the challenges related to establishment of partnerships in the context of FEAD?
- Can we identify 'key practical enabling factors' or 'good-practices' that could help building partnerships within FEAD? How could they be used in the future ESF+? Are there any synergies between FEAD and any other ESF initiatives?

The 11th FEAD **Network Meeting on 19 June 2018** provides a valuable opportunity to raise awareness and further discuss these issues. By relying on the knowledge and experience of the FEAD community on the subject, it is expected that additional efforts to create partnerships that increase the impact and sustainability of the FEAD support will be introduced in the coming years.

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We look forward to hearing from you!

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