

## Synthesis of workshop 1: Local development organisations and institutions

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in

Chassany J.P. (ed.), Pellissier J.-P. (ed.).  
Politiques de développement rural durable en Méditerranée dans le cadre de la politique de voisinage de l'Union Européenne

Montpellier : CIHEAM

Options Méditerranéennes : Série A. Séminaires Méditerranéens; n. 71

2006

pages 175-178

Article available on line / Article disponible en ligne à l'adresse :

<http://om.ciheam.org/article.php?IDPDF=6400069>

To cite this article / Pour citer cet article

Pugliese P. **Synthesis of workshop 1: Local development organisations and institutions.** In : Chassany J.P. (ed.), Pellissier J.-P. (ed.). *Politiques de développement rural durable en Méditerranée dans le cadre de la politique de voisinage de l'Union Européenne* . Montpellier : CIHEAM, 2006. p. 175-178 (Options Méditerranéennes : Série A. Séminaires Méditerranéens; n. 71)



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# Synthèse de l'atelier 1

## « *Local development organisations and institutions* »

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### Introduction

Local development organisations and institutions play an important role in rural development processes and policy-making both in Northern and in Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries. Factors and circumstances linked to their emergence and recent evolutions are extremely varied, but some common features and trends can be also identified. Accurate needs assessment and adequate responses are urgently needed.

The case-studies presented in the workshop, and the debate which followed, resulted in a number of interesting inputs both in terms of lessons learned and in terms of recommendations for future policy-making and action. These inputs are briefly discussed in the present report.

### I - Lessons learned and recommendations for future policies and action

Ideas and field experiences shared in the workshop on “*Local development organisations and institutions*” can be summarised around three main conceptual categories, namely:

- ❑ general approaches,
- ❑ best practices,
- ❑ crucial gaps.

LEADER experience represents an ever-present element in discourses and debates on rural development policies and practices. Positive aspects of the LEADER approach are extensively discussed in specialised literature, in which necessary pre-conditions and various difficulties are also widely reported.

The case of the *Comarca Guadix-Marquesado* in the province of Granada (Andalusia, Spain), presented in workshop 1, is one of the many LEADER success stories across EU. In this disadvantaged rural area, the adoption of the LEADER approach has been supported for more than ten years not only by the EU Community Initiative but also in the framework of the Spanish PRODER Program.

Important economic results are reported, interestingly, with the allocation of relatively limited funds. Social and cultural impacts produced in the area, in the last decade, appear to be even more impressive, the most significant aspects being: the mobilisation of the local community, the mushrooming of local organisations, local people's progressively changed attitude towards the preservation and sustainable use of local resources and heritage (Cefía and Calatrava, 2006).

EU LEADER experience constitutes, in many ways, a promising model worth considering in the design and implementation of sustainable rural development initiatives in Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries. Some essential pre-conditions need to be in place though. An enabling institutional environment as well as availability of local capacities and access to local resources are, for instance,

critical requirements. Another crucial factor seems to be the existence in the concerned area of a minimum level of socio-economic development and, as a result, of an emerging/growing demand for rural goods and services.

LEADER and LEADER-type programs (like PRODER in Spain) are *consolidated frameworks* for local development strategies and action in rural areas of Northern Mediterranean countries.

At the same time, it is very important to notice that rural development policy-making and practice is a very dynamic, continuously evolving field, in which the very idea of “*laboratory*” – not by chance at the core of the LEADER approach itself – remains still very powerful, especially when considering the constant experimentation of new (or new combination of) approaches and tool.

In the Mediterranean (just like everywhere in the world) rural development is a continuing *learning by doing process* both for policy-makers and practitioners. Hence, personal & collective commitment and willingness to experiment are critical success factors. Similarly, individual & institutional capacities to profit of available toolboxes cannot be overlooked.

Good approaches need to be complemented by *best practices*.

A sustainable rural development strategy can be envisaged, and eventually implemented, only by a wide local partnership, including both private and public actors. It has been the case of the Spanish case-study showing how the local rural development association has progressively become the “ideal forum” for local groups with divergent, and sometimes opposing interests, in other terms, the ideal laboratory for collective experimentation of LEADER-driven organisational innovations (Cefa and Calatrava, 2006).

In general terms, when designing (and realising) rural development initiatives, it seems advisable to stimulate broad participation.

Efforts to involve different institutional actors, concerned in a way or another with rural issues, are an important preliminary step which would contribute to reduce compartmentalisation of tasks and responsibilities. To ensure coordination mechanisms is clearly equally important.

National and regional authorities’ role and local organisations’ action have to complement each other, but private actors need to be adequately encouraged, especially in areas where self-help attitudes, self-organisation of local communities and participation of private stakeholders are not a long-standing practice.

Interestingly, in many rural areas of Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries, new, *modern* forms of representation and participation of local communities – often emerged in response to national institutional stimuli or to international organisations’ funding opportunities – co-exist with *traditional* organisations and structures. In some cases, successful integration and collaboration is reported (Elloumi *et al.*, 2006). In other circumstances, potential and actual clashes are worryingly emphasised together with the equally serious risk for certain local development initiatives (and connected funding) of being dominated by new powerful rural elites (Bessaoud, 2006).

Poor representation and participation is but one of the many *crucial gaps* identified in current rural development policy-making and practice. Another important gap to bridge is, reportedly, the one between international donors’ requirements and local organisations real capacities. This is a dual-facet issue. On one hand, rural development programs and tools need to be adapted to local organisations and institutions’ capacities. On the other hand, adequate support for professionalisation of local actors, that is for capacity and skills development, need to be envisaged.

In the last decade “empowerment” and “capacity building” issues have been – more or less effectively – addressed in cooperation programs through education, training, best practice exchange and networking initiatives. Further, substantial support in this important area of action is demanded though, especially in certain areas of Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries.

In theory, four essential ingredients are required for sustainable rural development policies, namely:

- ❑ a vision,
- ❑ a strategy,
- ❑ good resource management and good governance,
- ❑ mobilization of local actors.

These four elements are hardly ever found together, in practice.

It is not uncommon to come across rural development strategies drafted without a clear vision in mind. And they clearly show it. At the same time, well-thought and structured strategies often lack adequate means and capacities for implementation, for effective mobilisation of stakeholders and the adoption of good governance practices.

Many Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries are experiencing the emergence of a new wave of rural development policies and approaches. The case of Egypt was presented at workshop 1 (Nawar, 2006). Clearly, a good combination of the four mentioned elements represents a sensible objective for concerned national governments as well as for international organisations supporting governments in drafting their national rural development policies.

## Concluding remarks

Conclusions were drawn trying to go beyond the shared field experiences and connected discussion. Moreover, a “south towards north” perspective seemed more appropriate.

Despite some interesting success stories across Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries, on this shore of the *Mare Nostrum* the idea of sustainable rural development as a matter of “*shared responsibility*” between national/local government and civil society organisations appears to need (further) development. This should be clearly fostered in each country on the basis of a strong vision and an appropriate and realistic strategic agenda for rural development, which would prove to be very fruitful also in negotiations and cooperation with EU.

Under the discussed circumstances,

- ❑ a mission can be envisaged for the CIHEAM. It could help facilitate sustainable rural development processes and policy-making through: education and professional training, capacity building, networking, knowledge sharing and animation activities. Request for support comes from governments as well as from NGOs,
- ❑ a request is addressed to EU and other donors. They are required to support cooperation initiatives adequately designed to accompany the current evolution of national/local rural development processes, allowing for national/local specificities, but also for common needs and trends.

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