



Involvement of local actors in ESF programmes and promotion of local initiatives

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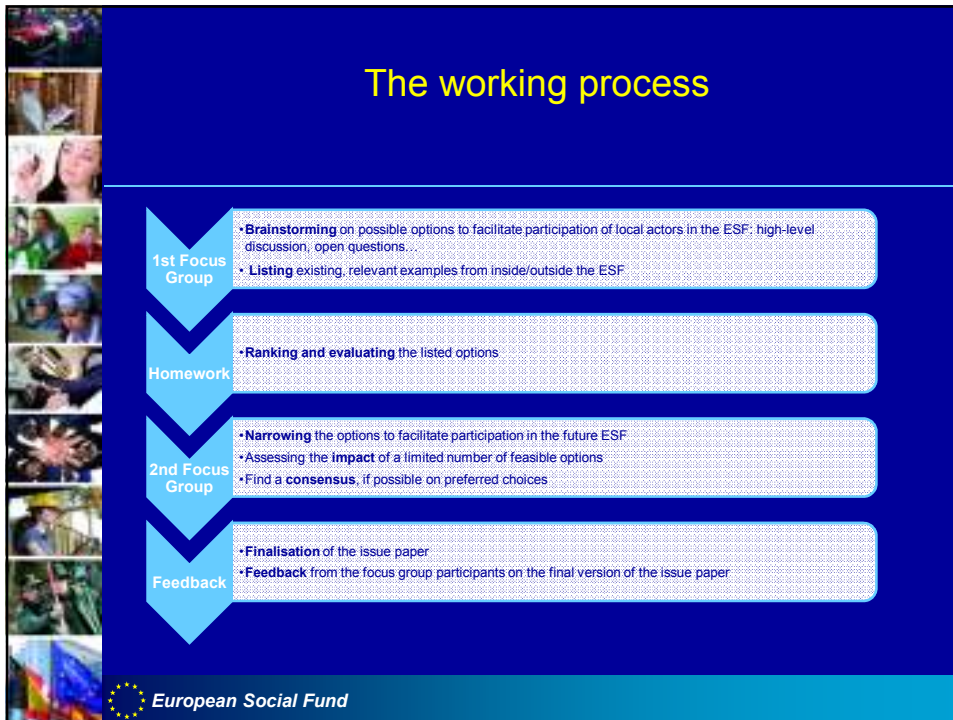
6th meeting of the ESF committee Ad-Hoc Group on the Future of the ESF – 2.02.2011




Focus group on the involvement of local actors in the ESF programmes

- Focus group
 - Composition:
 - 3 experts from MA in PL, AT, ES
 - 3 experts from regional /local stakeholders
 - 3 experts from the Commission
 - 2 meetings:
 - 15th December
 - 20 January
- Goal of the focus group
 - To discuss a number of potential ideas which can feed the discussion on how to facilitate the participation of local actors in the ESF
 - To discuss how local actors are currently participating in the ESF






First conclusions of the focus group



- Question of definition:
 - The definition of local actors should remain broad enough to accommodate a complex and evolving situation.
 - An attempt to define local actors in the ESF context: "all relevant actors which can act locally to improve education attainments, employment and social inclusion".
- The question on the involvement of local actors in the ESF programmes is obviously related to ne important dimension of the partnership principle
 - Involvement at the programme level (design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation)
 - Involvement at the project level


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First conclusions of the focus group

- The need to reinforce the involvement of local actors is widely acknowledged
 - advantages: responsiveness to people's needs, translation of general objectives into concrete actions, better outreach of the vulnerable groups, better governance (transparency, ownership)
 - difficulties: choice of the partners, additional administrative burden, time consuming, weak added value in some cases
- The involvement of local actors in the ESF varies among MS depending strongly on traditions and legal frameworks.



First conclusions of the focus group Involvement of local actors at programme level

- Proposals discussed:
 - More precise requirements in the regulations for the implementation of the partnership principle
 - introducing a "soft law approach" in terms of partnership (code of good practice, peer review, exchange of good practices)
 - extended use of technical assistance or capacity building



First conclusions of the focus group Involvement of local actors at programme level

- More precise requirements in the regulations for the implementation of the partnership principle
 - Introduce the objectives of partnership (article 11 of the GR)
 - Make the definition more stringent, by removing some restrictive elements in article 11 of GR
 - Detail “how the partnership principle” has been applied in the preparation of the development and partnership contract and the OPs” (currently article 27 and article 37 of the GR)
 - Mention the representation of the economic and social partners, the civil society and the presence of NGOs in the composition of the monitoring committee (article 64 GR).
 - Require a dedicated part in the AIR (article 67 GR)

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First conclusions of the focus group Involvement of local actors at programme level

- Introducing a “soft law approach” in terms of partnership
 - The introduction of a code of good practice
 - A regular exchange of good practices among MS, which could be built upon the current work made in the CoP on Partnership
 - A regular dialogue between the Commission and the organisations representing the economic and social partners and the regional and local stakeholders at European level on the implementation of the principle of partnership

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First conclusions of the focus group Involvement of local actors at programme level

- Extended use of technical assistance
 - Adding a specific reference in article 46 of the GR to specify that “MS may use TA technical assistance to strengthen the administrative capacity of the relevant partners”.
 - But TA is already used by some MS in this way.
 - The focus group participants considered that such an expression of intention would not make enough difference in practice.
 - Question was raised on the use of TA by the Commission to promote at EU level the capacity of NGOs / local authorities / social partners through their European networks.



First conclusions of the focus group Involvement of local actors at project level

- Proposals discussed:
 - Creation of a specific priority in the ESF scope to promote local initiatives and small projects
 - Creation of a specific priority axis to promote the territorial dimension of the ESF
 - Establishment of specific funding arrangements



First conclusions of the focus group Involvement of local actors at project level

- Creation of a specific priority in the ESF scope to promote local pacts and initiatives
 - The focus group was not convinced of the need for a specific heading priority for "local pacts and initiatives in the scope article"
 - pacts and initiatives are crossing the different ESF priorities which makes an ex-ante categorisation difficult to achieve.
 - adding a specific heading priority is incompatible with the orientation to reduce the number of priorities and to concentrate the ESF resources.
 - Some focus group members consider that the ESF should, on the contrary, play a role in "breaking the silos" between policy areas

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First conclusions of the focus group Involvement of local actors at project level

- Creation of a specific priority axis to promote the territorial dimension of the ESF
 - This priority axis will promote a methodology to implement part of the different policy priorities set in the other axes.
 - This model exists already in some MS in the current programming period
 - This could facilitate the coordination between the structural funds (urban integrated projects, local development)
 - For some focus group participants, such system can be applied without major difficulties in big programmes but will raise some questions for the smaller programmes
- Idea of dedicating a specific amount of money (earmarking) for this priority axis was not seen as easily acceptable by MS

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First conclusions of the focus group Involvement of local actors at project level

- Establishment of specific funding arrangements (1)
 - **Extended use of global grants.**
 - Many participants would support the extended use of global grants.
 - **Adjusting the co-financing rules.**
 - Current co-financing rules already allow MS to adjust co-financing rate within a priority axis. Focus group members agreed that Member States could be further encouraged to adjust co-financing rules for small projects.
 - **A smoother financial payment system**, which enables pre-financing.
 - The current payment system is seen as a stumbling block for local actors to participate in the ESF. For the focus group participants, pre-financing should be more systematically used to improve the access of small actors to ESF programmes.
 - **Eligibility of in-kind contributions:**
 - The financial regulation allows in kind contributions to be declared, but MS have the right to limit their eligibility or make them ineligible. Eligibility of in-kind contributions is not widespread, due to high potential errors in estimating "in-kind contributions"

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First conclusions of the focus group Involvement of local actors at project level

- Funding arrangements (2)
 - Most of the focus group participants supported the idea of introducing a provision indicating that:
 - *The programming of Fund interventions shall provide that a reasonable amount of the Fund appropriations be made available for territorial actions, through global grants (...)*
 - *... with special arrangements for access by non-governmental organisations and local partnerships such as lump sums grants, higher co-financing rate, advance payment for project promoters, the eligibility of in-kind contributions...*
- **Reinforcement of the proportionality principle**
 - Currently, regardless their size or co-financing rates, all ESF operational programmes and all ESF projects comply with the same legal requirements.
 - Simplification should be the key challenge for the future programming period and is seen as crucial for the future relevance of the ESF and to keep all local actors "on board"

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Study on Local Employment Initiatives

▪ In the last and in the current programming period, 14 member states have been identified to significantly support Local Employment Initiatives (LEIs).

▪ There was so far no comprehensive analysis of these actions

▪ In order to analyse how the Local Employment Initiatives approach has worked so far and what could be learnt with regard to the next programming period, the Commission:

- has asked AEIDL to conduct a study reviewing the ESF support for local employment initiatives and local social capital.

- organised one workshop at the end of November 2010 (65 participants) and another one at the end of January 2011 (85 participants)

▪ The final report will be available in February-March and its findings will be used for the development of the ESF post 2013