

Guideline on creating multi- stakeholder national biomass panels

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LIFE BIO-BALANCE

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Summary	This document serves as a guideline for international forerunners to engage different stakeholders into expert panels to discuss biomass sustainability issues.



INTRODUCTION

About LIFE-BIOBALANCE

Co-funded by the European Union LIFE Programme, the overall aim of the Balancing solid biomass for climate neutrality in CEE countries (LIFE BIO-BALANCE) project is to support EU Member States to shift to a low-carbon and resilient economy by ensuring that solid biomass is produced and used sustainably at all levels.

It builds multi-stakeholder, multi-sector policy and knowledge sharing processes at the national and local level to ensure that biomass is balanced with other feasible alternatives and only solid biomass with a high sustainability safeguard is included in updated national National Energy and Climate Plans (NECP), Long Term Strategies and on local level in the Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plans.

Background

The transition to a climate neutral circular economy puts pressure on the forestry sector from multiple aspects. Beside the maintenance of ecosystem services, forestry biomass is the most significant carbon sequestration pool, a renewable energy source which can balance the intermittent renewable energy sources, and also wood is becoming a more and more preferred material to substitute plastic and carbon intensive alternatives, like iron and steel. These interests often pitted against each other, as increasing one of them could have a negative impact on the other two. Finding a healthy balance needs intense interaction and coordination among the different stakeholders.

To achieve the project objective, the project partnership in the three target countries - in Bulgaria, Hungary and Romania - is working on to develop an integrated biomass governance framework. To achieve the project objective, the partnership applies a multi-stakeholder, cross-sectoral integrated policy approach, which includes steps from the analysis of the current situation of the biomass sustainability, identification of issues until how policy recommendations can be integrated into the policy document, developed with intensive consultation of identified stakeholders. Step by step, the approach includes the following five steps:

- 1) Market analysis of solid biomass
- 2) Multi-stakeholder, multi-sector engagement of stakeholders
- 3) Develop options for policy improvement - as developing recommendations for stronger sustainability criteria for solid biomass
- 4) Quantifying the benefits of stronger criteria - through developing a modelling tool, which can be applied on both national and local levels.
- 5) Identify policies and measures to deliver the benefits - developing recommendations for the update of key climate policy documents, like the National Energy and Climate Plans (NECP), and the Long-term climate strategies.



The cornerstones of this process are the so-called national biomass panels, which bring together stakeholders from different fields, directly or indirectly connected to the solid biomass sustainability, and engaged in step 2). Based on the project experience, this short guideline focuses on the engagement process of the stakeholders from three aspects: why, who and how?

We hope forerunners of biomass sustainability of other countries can find this guideline useful, and expert panels on biomass sustainability will be organized elsewhere as well.

Why are biomass panels important to strengthen biomass sustainability?

It was proved in many cases that good stakeholder engagement is considered inevitable to the success of any kind of advocacy or communication activities. This is especially true for biomass sustainability, because different topics need to be involved. The project identified 6 key topics for this:

- Energy production - covering the transformation sector,
- Solid biomass supply - including forestry, but other solid biomass sources, like industrial waste or agricultural residues,
- Nature and environmental protection - dealing with biodiversity, soil and air quality safeguard of sustainability criteria,
- Climate protection - including the LULUCF sink aspect of the sustainability,
- Energy efficiency - directly connected as efficiency of the transformation process, but indirectly also as building energy efficiency, in order to reduce the overall heat demand,
- Energy poverty - energy efficiency in low-income households needs a specific approach, in light of the complexity of energy poverty.

Traditionally, biomass in governance is considered as an energy topic, however, to ensure its long-time sustainability, it needs a multidisciplinary approach. Even though not applying a fully complex methodology, the Governance Regulation of the Energy Union requires Member States to include in their NECP the source of forestry biomass and impact on the LULUCF sink; and also, the Union Bioenergy Sustainability Report, due to be published in 2023, should address impact on biodiversity, soil, water and air protection.

To overcome the so-called silo-mentality, when stakeholders are dealing with one aspect of the complex issue, without interacting with each other, breaking down barriers not only needed by stakeholders from different sectors, but from different levels of governance and type of organization. Even though stakeholders with highest impact are



from the national governments, to explore the issue in depth, inputs from regional or local level can be also valuable, and also from different types of organizations. The partnership engages stakeholders from the following type of organizations:

- national governments,
- national authorities,
- research institutes/universities,
- for-profit organizations (both privately and state-owned),
- associations,
- NGOs (both national and local),
- local authorities.

Who are the stakeholders needed to be engaged?

To exactly who should be engaged to the expert panels, is depending on the local situation. But in overall, it should be diverse and cover all the topics presented above. The most important is that the purpose should be clear, i.e. the aim of the panel is to foster solid biomass sustainability. As a first step, a stakeholder mapping exercise should be done, in order to list potential members who then will be approached. For stakeholder mapping, in LIFE BIO-BALANCE, partners built a database, which had the following attributes, with explanatory note.

	Attribute name	Explanation
Basic information	Name	Full name of stakeholder including the acronyms
	Sector of Organization	Please specify the sectors such as Public Sector, Private Sector, Non-profit Sector
	Type of Organization	Please specify the type of the organization when appropriate: governmental body, authority, statistical office, forestry company, protected area administrator, university, research institute, energy agency, energy supplier/biomass power plant, umbrella organization, lobby groups, CSO, other
	Description of stakeholder	What are the general activities of the stakeholder? Please state it as briefly as possible.
	Aspect of biomass	Please specify that in which aspect of the biomass is the stakeholder active: biomass supply, biomass demand, supply chain, sustainability
	Location	Please, specify the region or sub-divisions of the region or municipality.



Contacting	Contact Information	Provide the detailed contact information.
	Contact persons	Please, provide the contact information of the contact person. Identification and setting up the communication with relevant stakeholder include finding at least one contact person from the community
		Please provide the contact information of the second contact person when appropriate.
	The previous interaction with the stakeholder.	Please provide the previous cooperation when appropriate. Is the stakeholder a new or old partner for your organization? New Contact (yes or no)?
	Key person in the organization (if not the same as the contact person)	Engagement is always towards a person, not to an organization. Within the organization, who is the key decision maker who should be engaged?
	Way of engagement	How will you engage them, if they are new contacts
	Methods of communication	What is the method of communication that you are using? Is it email, phone or in person communication?
Assessment	Reason of the engagement	Why is it needed to engage the stakeholder?
	Objective of the engagement	What do you expect from the stakeholder? How can they help to reach the project objectives? This is especially important for opponent stakeholders (see mapping worksheet).
	Benefit of engagement from the stakeholders perspective	What will be the benefit of the stakeholder to be active in the project? What can you offer them?
	How supportive the stakeholder is to the project objectives (-6.0 Opponent to 6 - Supportive)	Explain why you give this number.
	How big is their influence on the project objectives? (1- low impact; 6 - high impact)	Explain why you gave this number.



This database contains not only basic information about the stakeholder, but practical information for the engagement process, and also information for evaluating the stakeholders. The latter one is crucial for further steps, as it influences the way of communication. With the last two attributes - level of support and influence, combined with the objective of the engagement to map the level of interest, stakeholders can be grouped to the following four groups:

Grouping stakeholders by level of interest and influence. Source: Pagan, H.C. – Vollmer, E. (editors). Advocating for Sustainable Energy in Central and Eastern Europe, PANEL 2050 project, 2017

		High influence	Low influence
High interest	Supportive	KEY PARTNERS	SECONDARY PARTNERS
	Opposed	KEY OPPONENTS	
Low interest	Supportive	SECONDARY STAKEHOLDERS	
	Neutral		
	Opposed		

For the engagement to the panels, first, stakeholders identified as key partners or key opponents should be contacted. Key partners can be for instance governmental bodies on nature protection, who are also interested in strengthening bioenergy safeguards, while key opponents can be for profit organizations who are interested in the volume of, or energy produced from forestry biomass.

Secondary stakeholders are also important, but as their influence or interest are low, they are not crucial to be part of the panel itself, however, collecting feedback and informing them are also essential. Secondary partners can be for instance local authorities, while secondary stakeholders can be national authorities.

The maximum number of the stakeholders also depends on the given national circumstances, however, for effective communication there is certainly a limit. In the LIFE BIO-BALANCE project, we have put a maximum limit of 30 organizations.



How stakeholders can be engaged - the process of effective stakeholder engagement

Once stakeholders are identified and grouped, the next question is how much engagement should be sought with stakeholders. The level of engagement should be depending on the identified groups.

- Stakeholders out of the four groups, i.e. with low influence and low interest. Even though they are not a key target group, they should also be informed about the process. Therefore, engagement is primarily one-way, information is shared with stakeholders but they are not given an opportunity to respond. Please note, that communication with secondary opponents, like those who have high interest but low interest with opponent opinion can be also handled with this one-way communication, as they would not cause major problems. Typically, they can be governmental bodies with other focus than the identified six topics.
- Secondary partners or secondary stakeholders. For this group, stakeholders are asked to give comments or input. The key point is that no commitment is given regarding the use of input. This is typically done when the primary goal is to gather information and actions may or may not be taken based on the info gathered. One example of this is the municipality survey done in the LIFE BIO-BALANCE project for municipalities, regarding firewood use and environmental issues.
- Key partners and key opponents: they are the ones who should be engaged primarily to the panel, so they will be participating directly in future discussions, sharing ideas with each other. Stakeholders expect that they will have an effect on the results of the collaborations. (See in detail table below.)

Of course, one of the key success gradients is the stakeholder engagement person itself. Besides good communication skills, and past experience of other community outreach, this person should prove the importance of the panel, and effectively engage key opponents as well. It also means that the person should know the topic well, and applies tailored tactics to different stakeholders. Good administrative skills are also required, as keeping an appropriate record of contacting different stakeholders can be useful later on, especially in case of personal changes.

The engagement itself should be based on the database above, reflecting the contact person's preferred communication means, and the way of engagement, which should always reflect on the objective of the engagement and the benefit of engagement from the stakeholder's perspective. Which can be easily done with key partners, it is the opposite with key opponents. Convincing strategy to make them join the panel can for instance build on the fact that the European Union itself strengthens the sustainability



criteria, with two-years reporting on biomass sustainability, therefore it is their interest as well that they should be part of the process, not to mention the increasing knowledge regarding the issue by the public.

The levels of engagement – specifically from a public policy perspective. Based on: Easy Agency. 2012. Tools and concepts for the local energy planning. Methodological guidelines for the development of Sustainable Energy Communities and Systems in urban decentralized areas of the Mediterranean Region. Brussels: ECF. (Easy Agency, 2012).

STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT	LOW	MEDIUM	HIGH
WHAT?	Inform, share	Consult	Collaborate
WHEN?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Factual information is needed to describe a policy, program or process; a decision has already been made (no decision is required); ➤ The public needs to know the results of a process; There is no opportunity to influence the final outcome; ➤ There is need for acceptance of a proposal before a decision may be made; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The purpose is primarily to listen and gather information; ➤ Policy decisions are still being shaped and discretion is required; ➤ There might not be a firm commitment to do anything with the views collected – in this case, advise participants from the outset; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ It is necessary for stakeholders to talk to each other regarding complex decisions; ➤ There is a capacity for stakeholders to shape policies that affect them ➤ There is opportunity for shared agenda setting and open time frames for deliberation on issues; ➤ Options generated will be respected;
HOW?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Websites ➤ Leaflets, flyers ➤ Documents ➤ Newsletters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Public comment ➤ Surveys ➤ Online consultation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Participatory decision making ➤ Working/Focus group

If there is a high share of negative answers, the engagement process should be evaluated and re-designed. The key input for this is to never take no for an answer, always try to find out why. Most likely your stakeholder database was not filled properly, or had misinformation. If you think you cannot enter the needed information, try to involve supporting stakeholders, who you already engaged successfully to this process.



When the panel is set up

When you have the stakeholders on board, and you think the panel is ready to kick-off, the next step would be to set up a common way of communication, which is convenient for all engaged stakeholders and the agenda. It is also useful for the engagement process, if you can present the agenda of the planned discussion. In this case, the stakeholders can assess the needed human resource from their side.

The agenda of the whole process can be the five-step process what the LIFE BIO-BALANCE project built up, and was already described in the Background part, or based on the policy agenda, it can have different approach, but it would be important to produce recommendations which can have impact to the legislation.

And last but not least, some useful advice for working with the panel:

- Try to develop more than one contact at an organisation, this helps to maintain contact with the organization even if one of them leaves.
- Define the tone of communication which is comfortable for everyone. Since the engagement person is the one who knows everyone in the panel, they should define and pursue the style of communication, i.e. on the scale of highly formal/friendly communication.
- Use a neutral facilitator for meetings, which would also show the need for objectivity.
- Establish ground rules for meetings, most importantly how they can react to any information.
- Inform all participants about the specific purpose of meetings beforehand, including the desired outcomes and decisions that need to be made.
- As conflicts can occur, mainly between key partners and opponents, this should be handled appropriately, including reminding them of the ground rule and the aim of the meeting. This direct conflict needs specific attention from the facilitator. It is important to let the different opinions be known, and do not avoid any possible conflict. When these different opinions are shared, they are valuable inputs of the meetings, however, it always has to be in light of the ground rules (e.g. let them finish speaking, but in light of the given timeframe, using polite tone of voice).