

Ireland

Local Development

Building the capacity of rural communities to protect water biodiversity in Ireland.

Summary

Communities in the Duhallow area of Ireland lacked local-level knowledge about conserving water biodiversity so communities were not in a position to propose or support initiatives that would support it. To address this issue, the area's LEADER group designed a training programme in water biodiversity to help communities to help themselves deliver local area impact through targeted action which supports the EU Water Framework Directive (WFD).



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Location

Duhallow region

Programming period

2014 – 2020

Priority

P6 – Social inclusion & local development

Measure

M19 – LEADER/CLLD

Funding

Total budget 58 093.52 (EUR)

Project duration

2021 – 2021

Project promoter

IRD Duhallow

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Website

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Project Results

This capacity building initiative equipped community groups across 38 parts of the project area with skills and knowledge to develop strategies for increased local action in the areas of biodiversity, habitat conservation, protection and development, and habitat mapping.

The training involved the creation of a habitat conservation and (biodiversity) development plan for each of the participating communities/groups. These plans contain proposals designed to be compatible with different funding sources and the WFD.

Lessons & Recommendations

- Building relevant capacity within communities about WFD actions helps tackle environmental issues at local level.
- Capacity building project results can align with eligibility for funding sources to further expand and extend a project's legacy.
- LEADER can be a useful catalyst to attract larger sources of funding.

Context

The EU Water Framework Directive places statutory obligations on Member States and local authorities concerning the development and implementation of River Basin Management Plans. Community groups in Ireland's Duhallow area lacked knowledge about water biodiversity issues and were not in a strong position to propose or support initiatives that would support it. The Water Biodiversity Training Programme was designed by a LEADER organisation (IRD Duhallow) to fill this gap in knowhow about bottom-up approaches to biodiversity conservation.

This initiative complemented the Local Authority Waters Programme (LAWPRO) which coordinates Irish local authority responses to WFD obligations through a novel approach that includes five themes: Programme Coordination, Community Engagement, Catchment Science, Governance and Innovation.

Objectives

The overall aim of this initiative was to equip local community groups with WFD knowledge and skills to plan for protecting water biodiversity in their area by ensuring that their water courses and sites deliver robust benefits for the local environment.

Activities

Well-established community and industry links were used to survey the local population and determine the level of interest in the training project before a series of thematic workshops were organised. These were advertised through social media and local newsletters.

Thematic workshop modules were:

Module 1 – Introduction to the Training Course.

Module 2– Training: Understanding Your Local Water Body.

Module 3 – Training: Water Quality & Impacts.

Module 4 – Training: Citizen Science.

Module 5 – Biodiversity plan discussions.

Module 6 – Identification of projects and actions for the plan.

Module 7 – Finalising the aims and objectives of the plan.

Module 8 – Presentation of plans.

Communities were supported to undertake an assessment of their areas from an environmental perspective. This would feed into future WFD projects and actions being undertaken by the communities themselves, lessening the need for expensive outside experts.

LAWPRO provided their input in devising the modules to make sure that all the training modules were in line with the WFD and other European Directives.

Main results

Outcomes equipped 38 communities in the project area with skills and knowledge to develop strategies for increased local WFD action in the areas of biodiversity, habitat conservation, protection and development, and habitat mapping. This had a positive impact on the environment by supporting communities to undertake WFD actions that increase water biodiversity and improve their awareness of related issues through education.

The training resulted in the creation of a habitat conservation and biodiversity development plan which covered the specific local area or water course for each of the participating communities and groups. These plans identified actions and projects that can be supported by the region's Community Water Development Fund or other funding applications including LEADER.

This project has acted as a catalyst for future WFD biodiversity-related activity in local communities.

Key lessons

Building the capacity of community organisations to develop and maintain biodiversity sites/projects along water courses and riverbanks is key to tackling environmental issues at local level for the WFD.

Capacity building effectiveness can be optimised by project results that align with eligibility for funding sources that can further expand and extend the project's legacy. LEADER can act as a useful catalyst to develop and demonstrate initiatives that attract larger sources of funding for strategic community-led projects.