European Network for Rural Development

Let's Clean the Water

EAFRD-funded projects

SLOVENIA

LEADER Implementing Local Development Strategies

Location
Škofja Loka

Programming period
2007-2013

Axis / Priority
Axis 4 – LEADER

Funding*
Total budget 149 286 EUR
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Nation./region. 25 236 EUR
Own funds 23 355 EUR
*both projects combined

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2011 – 2013

Project promoter
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A LEADER project helped the population in an area where the public sewage system will not be provided, to get familiar with the new environmental standards, legislation and requirements related to wastewater treatment and enabled them to take informed decisions on which technology to use.

Summary

The Local Action Group (LAG) of Škofja Loka hills covers an area of about 41 800 inhabitants. The area is hilly with numerous small dispersed settlements and isolated farms where public sewerage networks do not exist. Around a quarter of population did not have access to public sewage networks. Thus it was necessary to get the concerned population informed about the new environmental standards and legislation on treatment of wastewaters and support them in finding their own solutions.

A first project supported training a team of local advisors and setting up an advisory office where information and guidance to potential investors was provided. The project also supported study visits, lectures and consultations. A follow up project funded the construction of four small wastewater treatment (WWT) for testing and a wide range of awareness raising activities and advisory support to the local population concerned.

Results

Around 2 600 concerned building owners received information on the legislation requirements and got access to professional and independent information. 13 group counselling events and 4 study tours were organised locally. Information activities included open days at the demonstrations sites, publication of news and professional articles in local print media and radio, and leaflets distribution to households.

The projects helped install four WWT facilities of different type for testing. Their operation had a direct positive effect on the environment and all facilities are still in operation.

Lessons & Recommendations

It was deemed crucial that the two projects were initiated at the right time to bring information support when it was most needed and it also allowed sufficient time for the households to get ready for the necessary investments.

Setting up demonstration sites for testing helped to the local population to overcome some negative perceptions people had, e.g. that constructed wetlands for wastewater treatment could not function properly in all seasons.

Monitoring the use of electricity seemed to be a quite important factor in terms of defining operational costs for different types of small WWT plants and their share in total operational costs. This was a demanding activity from organisational and logistical aspect. The results however showed that electricity consumption is not a key factor influencing decisions on selection of the WWT technology. More significant factors are the simplicity of WWT plant maintenance, frequency of sludge removal, quality of materials, warranty period, quality of suppliers' services, etc.

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Context

The Local Action Group (LAG) of Škofja Loka hills covers an area with a population of around 41,800. The area is hilly with numerous small dispersed settlements and isolated farms where public sewerage networks do not exist. It was estimated that around a quarter of population in the LAG area would need to find their own solutions to comply with environmental standards and new environmental legislation on treatment of wastewaters. When the initiative started in 2011, there was few information available on the legislative requirements on sewage.

Objectives

The overall objective was to inform the population in the entire LAG area about the environmental standards and legislation as well as on the practical options available on the market on small wastewater treatment (WWT) plants in the areas where public sewage systems would not be available.

Activities

An initial LEADER project was launched to raise awareness on the local population on this subject. A team of local advisors was trained and an advisory office was set by the LAG where initial information and guidance to potential investors were provided. Various types of small WWT plants across Slovenia were visited by the interested participants and a series of lectures and consultations were organised. During the implementation of the first project it became evident that the market offered several different products, however it was challenging for the households to decide on the most appropriate technology for several reasons: the actual performance of different small WWT plants was not yet well known, in some cases the products did not fully match the legislative requirements, not enough knowledge on the maintenance requirements and operational costs existed, etc.

For this reason a follow up project was designed to expand the awareness raising activities to the entire LAG area and to continue supporting the target population with practical and independent advice on actual performance of WWT plants.

The second project included two phases. In Phase 1 the project partners, the Municipality of Škofja Loka, the Municipality of Železniki, and the Mountaineering Association Sovodenj were assisted by the lead partner in defining the actual needs, testing available technologies and selecting the most suitable. It was decided that each partner would invest in a different type of technology. The lead partner assisted in preparing the procurement documentation including supply, instalment, start up operation and maintenance. Demonstration sites were arranged at three primary schools and a mountain hut. Three mechanical WWT plants and one constructed wetland for wastewater treatment were set up with capacities ranging from 2-5 to 11 PE. Persons responsible for management were trained to use the new appliances.

Along with the investment component, information and advice measures were organised. These included group counselling on different types of small WWT plants with presentations from selected suppliers, individual counselling and information activities such as professional articles published in local media, compiling with the Chamber of commerce a list of suppliers that could provide the appropriate technologies and complied with the standards, as well distributing a leaflet.

The second phase of the project was concentrated on monitoring the performance of the small WWT facilities and on information and awareness raising actions. The four demonstration sites and additional 14 private investors from the LAG area who showed interest in cooperation in the project were monitored by an accredited laboratory. Samples of wastewater were taken from the WWT facilities and analysed. When the results showed that the performance was not satisfactory the investors were supported in solving the identified problems. The project also monitored the use of electricity by different types of technologies. A comparison of monitoring results between different technologies was made and published in a brochure.

The project organised four study trips within the LAG area for potential private investors, two presenting typical small WWT plants and two presenting constructed wetlands for wastewater treatment. Group and individual counselling was organised in the entire LAG area focusing on the results of the project.

Mass media were used to inform on project updates and to stimulate the citizens to start considering the investment in wastewater treatment and to use the provided support. Open door days of pilot WWT plants set in demonstration sites were organised.

Main results

The project was very successful in animating, informing and engaging the population to start looking for the appropriate solutions for treatment of wastewaters imposed by the change of the environmental legislation and standards in LAG areas where public service does not and will not exist in the future.

Around 2 600 inhabitants were directly informed on the legislation requirements and provided with access to professional and independent information. 250 people were engaged in 13 group counselling events, 113 participated in 4 study tours organised locally. 45 individual counselling were provided and over 100 citizens participated at open days organised at the demonstrations sites. Continuous provision of news and professional articles in local printed media and radio helped raise awareness of the population in addition to leaflets distributed to households.

Installing the four WWT facilities created direct positive environmental impacts on the environment. All facilities are still in operation.

Local authorities in the LAG area designed measures to subsidise investment in instalment of small WWT facilities.

The project was recognised as a good environmental practice by other LAGs across Slovenia that used and adapted the information materials produced in this project for their own needs and activities.

"Selecting an appropriate small WWT plant is an important decision for the household as it is a long term investment contributing to the environment protection. The project helped the citizens to understand the legal requirements, how to choose between different available technologies on the market and provided professional and independent advice resulting from practical experience."

Samra Šečerović, project leader

Main lessons

The two projects were initiated early enough to bring information support when it was most needed and left sufficient time for the households to get ready for the necessary investments and learn from practice.

The project team was aware of both the importance of the project and its sensitivity as a large share of population would have to take their own responsibility for treatment of wastewaters after finding out that public sewage system would not reach them. Project support along with subsidies provided by local authorities helped the citizens concerned to recognise the positive environmental effects over the cost.

Putting in place demonstration sites was important to check in practice some negative perceptions people had, e.g. that constructed wetlands for wastewater treatment could not function properly in all seasons.

Private investors who had already installed different WWT plants benefitted largely through improved knowledge about their proper operation and maintenance. They also learned that it was important to put more attention to maintenance. In few cases the project also supported them in claiming their customer rights towards suppliers regarding improper operation of WWT plants.

During project preparation, monitoring of electricity use seemed quite important in terms of defining operational costs for different types of small WWT plants and their share in total operational costs. This activity was demanding from organisational and logistical aspects, however the results showed that electricity consumption was not a key factor influencing decisions on selection of the WWT technology compared to other factors (like simplicity of WWT plant maintenance, frequency of sludge removal, quality of materials, warranty period, quality of suppliers' services, etc.).

Additional sources of information

www.las-pogorje.si