

BELGIUM

Energy use efficiency

Location

Waasland

Programming period

2014 – 2020

Priority

P5 – Resource efficiency & climate

Measure

M16 - Cooperation

Funding (EUR)

Total budget 122 992.21

EAFRD 39 972.47

National/Regional 39 972.47

Private 43 047.27

Project duration

2018 – 2019

Project promoter

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An example of an initiative promoting energy efficiency that addresses climate change through targeted actions at grassroots level.

Summary

To combat climate change it is important to take action, not only in cities, but also in rural areas. This project aims to support a shift to a more energy efficient countryside through a series of actions targeting different sectors in the region of Waasland.



Project activities include creating a territorial energy vision for the ten municipalities in the region; stimulating the interest of farmers in renewable energy and energy efficiency; carrying out research on the fermentation of verge cuttings by local municipalities; offering energy coaching; promoting the use of solar panels in schools within the region and setting up a cooperative for renewable energy.

Results

Three information meetings were organized with energy experts.

Six farmers were provided with free “energy scans” and advice on how to become more energy efficient. The results were disseminated across the region.

An information session and several coordination meetings were organised concerning the research into the fermentation of verge cuttings, which is to be completed at the beginning of 2019.

Two climate congresses have been organized for 183 schools to inform them about the benefits of solar panels and energy monitoring. An agreement was signed with 21 schools to install energy monitors and 31 schools were willing to install solar panels. This will result in a CO2 reduction of 154 metric tons per year.

Lessons & Recommendations

- Farmers must take a great deal of legislation into account to understand the full range of different subsidies that are available.
- Bio-energy has great potential, however, it is complex as there are many legal obligations and the economic potential is less stable compared to that of petroleum for example.
- When dealing with schools on such issues, the schools need someone they can trust who will provide them with security and practical support, since their focus should be on education rather than technical installations.

Context

The region of Waasland consists of 10 municipalities. All local governments have signed the ‘Covenant of Mayors’ committing to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 20%, by 2020. However, three years after undertaking this commitment, very little has been achieved.

There are many reasons for this: in order to significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions it is necessary to have a strong national climate policy, with local municipalities able to take action at their own level. However, local municipalities are unable to act in ways that would have a significant impact. For example, they cannot force citizens to insulate their houses, or force car manufacturers to produce cars with lower greenhouse gas emissions. Nevertheless, local municipalities can stimulate their citizens, schools and farmers to participate in climate actions. In this context, this project focused on stimulating public awareness on local energy issues.

Objectives

The overall objective of this project was to raise public support for energy saving actions and renewable energy. The project holders considered it wise to run campaigns for various target groups simultaneously. In this way it’s more likely that the message will stick in the citizens’ minds. Specific areas of intervention included:

- Children's education - to influence their (future) behaviour and to reach their parents.
- Approaching farmers to help them take cost-effective actions.
- Influence local councils to promote renewable energy production (wind, biomass, solar) with the maximum participation of citizens.

Activities

Actions were taken on five different levels:

1. The creation of a territorial energy vision for the ten municipalities in the region of Waasland. Energielandschap Oost-Vlaanderen, is a department of the Province of East Flanders, which will conduct a study into the potential of renewable energy in the region and define the best locations for different techniques, in cooperation with the different stakeholders including the local municipalities and citizens. One goal will be to stimulate citizens’ participation in renewable energy projects. The study will start by the end of 2018. Several start up meetings with stakeholders were organised before

starting the work.

2. Stimulating the interest of farmers in renewable energy and energy efficiency. In March, the project holders, together with Innovatiesteunpunt (the Innovation Support Centre for Agricultural and Rural Development), organised three information sessions about energy efficiency and renewable energy production including solar panels and small wind turbines. Afterwards, six farmers were selected for energy audits, which were conducted in September and October. The farmers received an overview of their energy consumption patterns (and production), an assessment of their potential to produce renewable energy (mostly solar, size and energy payback-time, estimated costs), and their potential to become more energy efficient. This work also showed that although these farmers do not have to pay energy taxes, they still have to apply for this exemption. Almost all of the participant farmers are willing to invest in such actions if they are proven to be cost-effective.
3. Research was carried out on the fermentation of verge cuttings by local municipalities. After a regional meeting in June, the project holders started meetings with the MIWA (Inter-municipal Association for Domestic Waste) and the company Biogas-e. The latter was assigned the task of conducting a study into the fermentation of verge cuttings and domestic biodegradable waste. There was also a meeting with the Flemish Agency for Innovation and Entrepreneurship (VLAIO) to consider other support/subsidies for the realisation of this project.
4. Energy coaching and the promotion of solar panels was offered in 183 schools in the region. Since the need for energy coaching and information about the potential for solar energy at schools was great, the project holders decided to employ an expert who could assist schools in taking action. In May, the energy coach organised a meeting for schools and presented different options for installing solar panels on the school roofs. After that, several schools applied to be assisted in their decision-making process, or they took independent steps to move further. In the meanwhile, the coach participated in meetings with education departments and schools in the 10 municipalities of the region. He also started up the process of energy monitoring in 21 schools. In November, he co-organised together with the energy coach for the schools in Sint-Niklaas, an event for all of the schools in the region on sustainability.

- In October 2017, the project holders organised, together with [Vormingplus](#) and the city of Sint-Niklaas, an information session about setting up a cooperative for renewable energy in the region. The meeting was attended by around 25 people. Several interested citizens attended a second meeting in November, to take further steps towards starting up a new cooperative. [RESCOOP Flanders](#) shared their expertise at both of the meetings. From January until now, a smaller group of driven citizens has been taking steps to start up a cooperative and is planning to take up solar projects in the near future.

Main Results

- Created a territorial energy vision for the ten municipalities in the region of Waasland. The focus will not be restricted to wind energy, but rather, it will aim towards a complete energy vision.
- Stimulate interest in renewable energy and energy efficiency among farmers. Three information meetings were organized with energy experts. Farmers were able to apply for six free energy audits, which have been executed. Steps are being taken to share this information with all farmers in the 10 municipalities of the region.
- Research into the fermentation of verge cuttings by local municipalities. An information session was organized and dozens of coordination meetings. The completion of the study is planned for early 2019.
- Energy coaching and promoting the installation of solar panels in 183 schools in the region of Waasland. An agreement was signed with a school to hire an energy coach, who is paid by the region. After an application procedure, an energy coach was recruited. Two climate congresses have been organized for all 183 schools to inform them about the benefits of solar panels and energy monitoring. An agreement was signed with 21 schools that will install energy monitors together. 31 schools were willing to install solar panels. This will result in a CO2 reduction of 154 metric tons per year.
- Setting up a renewable energy cooperative of citizens has been supported for a year by Interwaas. The

region found three buildings to install solar panels on and offered financial support. An educational institution offered secretarial support and a meeting room. The members now meet on a monthly basis. They are set up as a non-profit association.

Key lessons

- Farmers must take a great deal of legislation into account to understand the full range of different subsidies that are available, so they often don't know where to start. For example, many large buildings are available for solar panels on farms, but if there is asbestos in the roof it is forbidden to place solar panels there. The national legislation limits the size of solar installations, and at the same time, a large installation is not always cost-effective.
- The research into the fermentation of verge cuttings by local municipalities concluded that although bio-energy has great potential, it is highly complex. There are many legal obligations and the economic potential is less stable compared to petroleum. In addition, many technical pre-treatments are required within certain time periods.
- While offering energy coaching to 183 schools in the region, it emerged that although the technology used in solar panels is now almost standardised, schools still appreciate guidance and practical support from someone they can trust, in helping them to oversee this sort of technical installation.
- Instead of starting 10 different cooperatives in each municipality, the project opted to bring together all interested citizens in one regional platform for renewable energy. This created a greater economic potential, but also created the challenge that these citizens need to get to know and trust each other. This is a slow process.

Another thing to consider is that starting an energy cooperative has the same legal responsibilities as setting up a company and this commitment and responsibility may not be evident to all of the citizens who are interested in taking part. Setting up a cooperative involves seeking voluntary support for tasks such as bookkeeping and accounting.

Additional sources of information

n/a