

# Engaging with stakeholders for initiating agroecological transition in Living Landscapes

Six guiding principles

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This document is intended to be a living document. After publishing this initial version, we will continue seeking active contributions and co-authorship from team members, in line with the spirit and practice of codesign and partnership which forms an integral part of applying Agroecology Principles.

This document is intended as a living document: it will get updated as the initiative moves forward and WP1 members and partners make new suggestions. Subsequent versions will also include concrete examples of ALL establishment in the seven countries of the Initiative to illustrate to what extent and how the six principles are being used.

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## Purpose and content of these guidelines

The CGIAR Initiative on Agroecology has opted to put Agroecological Living Labs or Landscapes (ALLs) at the very center of its action. ALLs are intended to be multi-stakeholder territorial spaces in which agroecological innovations of a diverse nature (be they technological, in terms of value chains, in terms of enabling policies or in terms of behavior change) can be identified, codesigned, tested and scaled among its members. Establishing ALLs will allow to engage and hopefully achieve a genuine, realistic and context-specific agroecological transition aligned with the 13 agroecological principles identified by the HLPE (2019).

In the Agroecology initiative, work package 1 (WP1) is responsible for ALL establishment. From the very beginning, during the initiative kick-off workshop in March 2022, the country leads of the seven countries in which the initiative operates agreed with WP1 coordination that the ALLs could not be established by applying a standard approach or methodology. Indeed, differences in the current state, trajectory, and human resources in terms of advancing agroecology and implementing multistakeholder approaches in each country need to be considered. Also, by its very design, the Agroecology Initiative intends to have strong national and local partners in each country, which are to contribute to developing the Initiative's objectives and local implementation strategy. It was hence decided collectively that the ALL establishment could best be guided through the identification of **common engagement principles** that each country team could use flexibly to shape and guide its approach and related actions. In other words, considerations and principles presented in this guide may apply differently in each country and it is up to each country team to decide how to make use of them for achieving their objectives.

Following this rationale, this document presents **the six guiding principles** that were eventually identified. After introducing each principle, the document presents generic steps and specific considerations or suggestions for their operationalization/implementation. Subsequently, we propose initial ideas about indicators that might help monitor and assess the actual implementation of the six principles. Since the application of the principles will be context-specific, we then propose troubleshooting ideas to potential challenges in implementation. A final section details how other WPs of the Agroecology Initiative may want to engage with ALL members. Due to the transversal nature of the ALLs, all WPs will have to engage with them for achieving their specific purpose and implementing their activities. Considering and explicitly applying the engagement principles will be important for the Agroecology Initiative's ability to be a meaningful ally to national and local partners in pursuit of agroecological food system transformation.

# Guiding principles

We propose six key principles when engaging with multiple stakeholders from different sectors as part of a living landscape, innovation platform, or similar mechanism. A short rationale and several considerations have been formulated for each proposed principle to clarify its meaning and implications.

These six principles are:

1. Build on existing relevant & functional multi-STH spaces and mechanisms
2. Aim for inclusiveness, diversity, representativeness & legitimacy of stakeholders
3. Ensure there is "real" willingness, interest & motivation from every stakeholder
4. Ensure the collective agenda is "sufficiently" demand-driven
5. Ensure capacity building and collective learning are at the heart of the functioning of the partnership
6. Aim at gradual "local" ownership, empowerment and leadership over the collective agenda

Each principle is presented briefly below in a short rationale and a series of practical considerations. Relationships among the six principles are also commented.

## 1. Build on existing relevant & functional multi-STH spaces and mechanisms

### 1.1 Rationale

*Many projects, sometimes at great cost and ambiguous success, create their multi-stakeholder mechanisms to ensure the "participation" of stakeholders in activities during the project's lifetime. Yet, in doing so, they tend to forget, sideline or overlook existing mechanism(s) which could serve the same purpose, as well as, more generally, existing knowledge, assets and strengths; at the same time, the mechanisms created for the sole purpose of implementing a project have a poor likelihood of being truly appropriated by local stakeholders, and tend to stop functioning once the projects wind down. This first principle does not imply that starting from scratch cannot be justified when no proper alternative exists. However, it asks AE-I country teams to make an explicit effort at identifying "what's out there and see if there are other initiatives they could partner with" before deciding how to go about developing partnerships: this is the key role of the proposed mapping of existing stakeholders and context analysis including a diagnosis of existing initiatives.*

### 1.2 Practical considerations

Conducting an initial mapping not just of individual stakeholders but of existing multi-stakeholder spaces is critical to getting started. As a result of such mapping, two broad scenarios can materialize:

1. Case 1: A suitable multi-stakeholder space on which to build "our" ALL already exist, even though it might perhaps not have all the desirable features we believe are needed for the purpose of the initiative
  - Advantages include that such space is not artificial, and its members may have already acquired experience and capacities to work together and achieve results.
  - There may however be challenges and risks associated with this existing space, as it may be difficult to redesign and "refit it" or align it with our purpose (such as adding or removing members, changing governance, or changing its "ways of working" as we might consider the current ones are questionable or ineffective).
  - To identify such strengths and weaknesses with precision, we need to carry out a quick, qualitative diagnosis to know better what we might be walking into (history, functioning, strengths and weaknesses, how AE fits into this space, etc.).
  - Once this diagnosis is available and confirms the space is suitable, we need to negotiate with members of this existing space on how the AE-I agenda and activities can best be integrated:
    - Do members of this space have the motivation to work with the Initiative on agroecological transition (see also Principle 3 below)?
    - Does it require adjusting some of the boundaries of this existing space (territorial and institutional / stakeholder)? Adjusting its functioning so that it fits better with our engagement principles? Are the stakeholders eager or willing to transform and adjust if needed?
    - Does it require adjusting the AE-I agenda and activities to consider what already exists or stakeholder's objectives and vision? And if so, to what degree would the Initiative be willing to adjust?
    - Should a special working group, committee, sub-chapter, etc. be created within this space that will functionally focus on agroecology and include the necessary stakeholders consistent with our desired boundaries?
2. Case 2: Starting from scratch
  - This may be our only or best option if no existing adequate space already exists that would fit our purpose or if a strong justification exists to create a space in a area with no prior AE trajectory.
  - Creating a new multi-stakeholder space gives us freedom to convene and design it according to AE-I needs and key engagement principles.
  - There are also challenges and risks, as we may be tempted to instrumentalize this new space for the sole purpose of effectively implementing our activities and in doing so, leaving aside some of our key engagement principles, especially principles 2, 4 and 6. Also, this new space may suffer from low sustainability and appropriation potential, as its functioning will depend directly on AE-I investments (resource persons & financial resources). This requires specific thinking right from the

very beginning to avoid this dependency trap and diversify resources available to the ALL (including via in kind and non-financial contributions).

- Finally, creating a truly functional and participatory space may take significant energy and time.

## 2. Aim for inclusiveness, diversity, representativeness and legitimacy of stakeholders

### 2.1 Rationale

*Stakeholders in their diversity span a wide range of interests, agendas, experiences, and power relations. When tackling agroecology, with its wide array of specific topics and angles, the sheer diversity of stakeholders interested or who might have a stake in the issues and changes that the AE-I is keen to promote in a given territory can be huge. Yet, selecting explicitly to interact and collaborate with some stakeholders and not others is not straightforward: one has to think about the issues of inclusiveness and diversity: many stakeholder categories could be involved depending on the specific objective, including farmers and their organizations (from now on: FOs), extension services, research, NGOs, local, regional or national governments, traditional leaderships, private sector (input provision, transformation, services, produce), consumers. Once stakeholder categories or even specific organizations have been identified, one also has to consider their representativeness: for example, FOs can be very diverse in membership, focus, and scale of operation, and each one tends to "represent" a specific type of farmers, ethnicity, gender or age group or interest among its members. There is also the issue of legitimacy vis-à-vis their constituency (in the case of membership-based organizations such as FOs. It is not rare that a given FO might not be very legitimate due to its style of leadership, degree of democracy, possible political capture, etc.), towards other STH or towards the problem/ objective to be tackled. And finally, we need to consider the knowledge, experience or resources a given stakeholder might be able and willing to contribute to the collective agenda. Generally, we should aim to include stakeholders that span the whole food system of interest and hence for high diversity, but this might need to be achieved gradually. During the initial stages, it is usually better to deal with an agile, motivated and limited core group of 'must haves' stakeholders. These must-have stakeholders often have the most ownership for driving the agenda of the ALLs; they will directly participate in and benefit from the ALL activities over the short term and they will get the partnership up and running. This does not mean that other stakeholders are less important, but rather than leading, they will be included later both for legitimacy and for widening the reach of the ALL, as awareness is shared about the issues and as the Agroecology agenda gathers momentum.*

### 2.2 Practical considerations

- A basic rule is to go beyond simply enrolling "our known friends" (from past interactions) or just "the converted ones" (those who support AE from the very beginning). Concretely, this means expanding the universe of stakeholders we interact with and consider, including those key ones that seem relevant (i.e. they have a clear stake, whether in favor of AE or at times for resisting it), legitimate, who have the

resources, knowledge and competencies which are required to realize the partnership's objectives (see the filter however that applying the following principle might introduce).

- To achieve this, we need to use an explicit and, if possible participatory stakeholder mapping. It will help us identify potential STHs and contribute to understanding the relationships among them (which may include important power aspects).
- We also need to assess carefully and ensure as much as is feasible that those who attend ALL meetings in the name of their organizations indeed "represent" their organizations and their actual interest in the ALL or their category (e.g. smallholder farmers) and are active.
  - Including mechanically or under social pressure, the leaders of each organization might not be the best or only solution. One avenue is to encourage more than one member of a given organization to participate in initial meetings, after which, nominating a stable representative that fits the ALL purpose and needs may become easier. Defining a shared vision of the future of the ALL as the initiative proposes to do may also work as a reference point for all stakeholder participants.
- Achieving continuity of representation over time (from one strategic meeting to the next) is also important as it will contribute to ensuring the ALL makes concrete and continuous progress rather than spending time during each successive meeting welcoming and bringing up to speed new people not aware of previous discussions and decisions, dealing with uninformed and passive "sitting reps" or worse, dealing with reps not aligned with the ALL vision and agreed-upon work plan. This should be a particular focus of attention when monitoring the ALL functioning over time.
- Finally, due consideration must be given to ensuring reasonable equity in various dimensions of the ALL stakeholders and representative composition in terms of gender, age groups, ethnicity, vulnerable or marginalized groups, geography, etc.

We also need to ensure that meetings are easily accessible to all participants, e.g. in terms of date and time, length, translation into and from local languages, internet access for online meetings if realistic, etc.

### **3. Ensure there is "real" willingness, interest and self-motivation of each member to be part of the ALL**

#### **3.1 Rationale**

*While identifying stakeholders and partners based on the above principles and criteria is indeed very useful, this, by itself, is not enough to guarantee active collaboration and foster enough momentum for activities not to stall at the first operational obstacles or when the going gets tough (conflict, lack of resources, institutional red tape, etc.). This is where and why interest, willingness, motivation, and indeed agency, at the level of individuals (such as champions) and of whole organizations, are essential to ensure that things go forward. One has to avoid, if possible, ALL membership exhibiting excess "deadwood", or including many partners whose genuine interest is not related to the purpose of the AE-I. In some situations, real motivation*



*to become a member may well relate to access to per diems, or a willingness to "control" other stakeholders, or just to be a free-rider not adding value to the collective work: all such hidden agendas or lack of genuine motivation may become a significant hindrance in establishing and maintaining a meaningful and effective collaboration over time or in achieving the ALL's objectives. Note also that motivation is dynamic: it may evolve (increase or decrease) depending on several factors and hence may need to be managed explicitly.*

### 3.2 Practical considerations

- Avoid mechanical composition for your ALL. Beside stakeholder mapping, gather relevant information in different ways about underlying motivations and be mindful of the interplays between the inclusion (2) and self-motivation (3) principles. Applying principle three may imply that some stakeholders who seem relevant based on the mapping but don't appear strongly motivated will not necessarily be invited to join from the very start. However, keep in mind that as the ALL evolves, the focus of its activities may change. New stakeholders may need to be included and others may drop out, which means that who is in / out and active or motivated may change.
- Try and identify and engage with AE "champions" from the start, i.e., stakeholders (or individuals from a given stakeholder group) who (1) have a meaningful experience, knowledge, skills, connections and other valuable resources related to the ALL's objectives to contribute, (2) are truly convinced that the objective of the ALL is worthwhile and show their support, (3) are seen as legitimate and are widely considered by others as being open and fair and (4) are willing to "get out of their way" to engage with and motivate others, and to promote and implement activities in a fairly altruistic manner (5) are able to relate to other stakeholders who might have similar assets but different strategies. 'Running with the strong ones' is likely to ensure real buy-in and agency. Be also mindful not to confuse champions with, or limit them to, "well-endowed" resource persons and existing leaders or people with significant experience practicing or dealing with AE: some might indeed be great champions, but there is nothing automatic about it and it might not always be easy for others to relate to them. Besides, some great champions might emerge, over time, from unlikely sources and stakeholder groups. Not to mention that the initiative can contribute explicitly to forming future champions.
- Consider what steps need to be undertaken to motivate intrinsically, properly engage, and truly inspire the ALL stakeholders and the champions regarding the collective vision and system transformational objective of the ALL from the onset. The stakeholders need to share a tangible goal that brings them together. All STH groups will need to have some sense of why it is worthwhile for them to invest time and energy in the ALL. It is worthwhile to reflect about the following question: "What's in it for them?". This differs for the different sectoral groups. Joint visioning towards the beginning of the engagement process is a good way to find shared ambitions and go beyond the single interests of specific STH groups. Another useful tool could consist of tracking the learning that is taking place.

## 4. Ensure capacity building and collective learning are at the heart of the functioning of the partnership

### 4.1 Rationale

*While identifying the right stakeholders by applying the principles 2 and 3 is critical, some entirely legitimate and motivated stakeholders will not, from the very beginning, have the necessary experience and skills to participate actively and effectively engage in the ALL or to carry out the activities they might have agreed collectively to implement or that they volunteered to do. Each member of an ALL might need to develop specific capacities, including the researchers. Examples include implementing trials on one's field, measuring agronomic variables, dialoguing and negotiating with different stakeholders, presenting or analyzing results or speaking in public, positively resolving differences of opinion or conflicts, accounting for expenses, evaluating market risks, etc. Hence assessing capacity-building needs, and designing functional mechanisms for collective learning and capacity-building are essential for the partnership to thrive and achieve its stated goals.*

### 4.2 Practical considerations

- Initially, some STH who will join the ALL might have limited capacities in various areas related to the objectives and activities to be implemented and their effective participation, which may affect the achievement of desired outcomes. Hence an explicit effort has to be made to assess existing capacities and needs through capacity-building (from now on: CB) and collective learning.
  - CB and learning can tackle a host of different topics, from general capacity and agency, to technical-practical skills, to organizational ones (Fuchs et al., 2020).
  - CB & learning may target specific STH groups with clearly identified needs and demands (such as leadership or members of FOs, researchers, extension agents, government civil servants, etc.).
  - CB can follow diverse modalities: formal classes (virtual, face-to-face, during non-CB events, learning-by-doing, field visits, etc.), peer learning formats and be organized and delivered by various types of resource persons and experts, including originating from the very STH involved (e.g. farmers innovators and other local champions).
  - Proper sequencing of CB needs to be given careful consideration: for example, supporting proper record-keeping might have to come before engaging CB on business models and access to market.
- Collective learning under different forms is essential for achieving objectives, it must be made explicit (as a goal, as a process), pursued and facilitated in a variety of formal and informal ways. Collective learning relies a lot on establishing and implementing a relevant MEL system and process and includes the corresponding spaces and times in the collective agenda (as part of routine activities, during yearly reporting & planning events).
- Be aware that being part of an ALL can be a great opportunity for many STH to develop a number of skills and capacities for which they don't necessarily have alternative providers and which can also be

very useful outside the ALL context. Hence, making such benefits explicit may constitute a concrete incentive for them to stay active and engaged in the ALL over time.

## 5. Ensure the collective agenda is "sufficiently" demand-driven

### 5.1 Rationale

*An externally funded project such as the AE-I has a clear agenda, with formal deliverables and accounting on such deliverables. Yet, its stated intention to use a co-design approach implies that a collective vision is developed, and a specific agenda of change is actually negotiated with the ALL partners in each country / site as soon as possible. In such negotiations, it is hardly conceivable that the only proposals and vision on the table be those brought by the AE-I: in that sense, giving sufficient room to demands and needs formulated by ALL partners in each country is essential, as it contributes to creating motivation, increases legitimacy and promotes co-ownership of the collective agenda (see link with Principle 6). Of course, expectations must be managed properly by discussing and agreeing on what can be addressed: not all demands by stakeholders in their diversity (see principle 2) may be accommodated as they could be unrelated to agroecology or be beyond the reach of the AE-I. Transparent priority setting may also be required as resources (human, financial) are scarce. Finally, a common challenge is that some stakeholders may not be able to express a concrete, proper demand or vision from the start: rather, they may limit themselves to mention "problems" or "issues" whose causes or legitimacy may not be immediately clear, and which may need to be reformulated until they can be understood and addressed, or only become clear over time as capacities and trust develop.*

### 5.2 Practical considerations

- Implementing a co-design and co-owned change process cannot translate into simply establishing ALLs as pure instrumental devices for "us" (international scientists and institutions) to implement activities we desire, design and control as outlined in the original AE-I proposal or in the activities we submitted to AE-I leadership for 2022.
- Efforts should be made to support collective reflection on the different STH's problems and issues and how these "problems / issues" can be reformulated, partitioned, organized, prioritized, etc. and how the results relate or not to the scope of the AE-I.
- Joint action planning that is holistic can help accommodate and voice various interests – and joint prioritization can help ensure that the ALL targets the interests and objectives relevant to the initiative's overall goal are compatible with the resources we can mobilize.
- Clear rules on how people will work together (communication, decision making, leadership and responsibilities: in other words, concrete governance of the ALL) will need to be developed and agreed upon by the ones involved in the partnership.

- Once negotiations have been successfully concluded among ALL members, the collective agenda of the ALL and its work plan need to be properly communicated to its members, and to relevant authorities and decision-making powers outside the ALL.
- Developing a collective vision or aspiration for the future with respect to AE or a collective work plan does not mean that individual ALL stakeholders do not have interests or stakes which extend beyond AE and the ALL. Hence a challenge is to deal with the tendency of some members to widen the agenda instead of keeping the ALL well focused around the collectively agreed agenda.

## 6. Aim at gradual "local" ownership, empowerment and leadership over the collective agenda

### 6.1 Rationale

*While the AE-I team is committed to delivering to donors the agreed outcomes and will clearly lead the process in the early steps of multi-stakeholder engagement, it would be dangerous and undesirable if it were to remain the sole leader of the multi-stakeholder process of change. This for at least three main reasons: (1) AE transition is a lengthy process (it might take many years of continuous efforts to get there) which will probably far exceed the duration of the AE-I; (2) if AE is to take root in a given site / country, it requires that national or local stakeholders bear responsibility for necessary changes which go well beyond the limited agenda of the AE-I; (3) finally, as collective learning and capacity building are to be an integral part of the ALL functioning (see principle 4), it seems natural, and strongly ethical, to envision that local<sup>1</sup> ownership, leadership and empowerment be encouraged from the start, and be developed gradually so that over time, the agenda and process become increasingly owned by local stakeholders (ideally up to 100%) with decreasing influence of the AE-I and its partners. A final important point is that increased ownership increases the likelihood of implementation.*

### 6.2 Practical considerations

- Power issues may need to be identified and addressed explicitly and "soon enough", to ensure local leadership will not just land by default or be grabbed actively by the existing powerful STH in the ALL, especially if and when their motivations do not coincide well with AE and co-designed principles. This might also imply dedicating attention and means to empowering specific organizations and stakeholder categories, such as farmers and FOs or weaker / marginalized groups and organizations.
- The AE-I international implementing partners need to be well aware of their own strong influence and dominance over the agenda-setting, innovation and co-design process (not to mention their control over access to funding): they should hence make explicit efforts to free / reserve enough space for the local ALL partners to contribute meaningfully and significantly to the agenda, to the process design and to actual decision-making on key issues: doing so goes beyond simply "validating" our own proposals. WP1

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<sup>1</sup> or regional, or even national depending on the scale(s) at which the ALL will be established

team members, with the help of the ALL facilitators, should hence adopt a 'leading from behind' perspective and approach that explicitly places agency and ownership in the hands of the local ALL STH.

- Achieving significant local ownership and leadership might require capacity-building and collective learning, with particular attention to strengthening some STH groups, and especially the weaker /more marginalized ones (see principle 4).
- AE-I should rapidly design and then put in place gradual exit protocols in each ALL favoring a smooth transition to local (collective) leadership after the AE-I project is completed/withdrawn. This may also include designing a sustainable financial mechanism able to support the ALL which does not rely primarily on AE-I funding (see below Specific considerations related to diversifying funding).

## 7. Relationships among the six principles

The six principles presented individually above maintain functional relationships with each other (Figure 1), i.e. they cannot and should not be applied individually, but as part of a coordinated way of thinking about and identifying or building ALLs. Also, while not automatic, there is some sequencing in their application over time. For example, a country WP1 team would usually start with applying principle 1 (cf. red star in Figure 1), then move towards applying principles 2 and 3. Applying principles 1 , 2 and 3 relies in large part from having conducted a thorough stakeholder mapping and diagnosis of existing initiatives. Once a relevant space (existing or new) and initial key members are identified, the team may then move towards applying principles 4 and 5, which have to do with what an ALL will do and how it will function. Applying principles 4 and 5 might also influence back the application of principles 2 and 3 however: it is in effect because of the demand-driven nature of the ALL and the clarification of capacity-building needs of specific members that some of them may be selected. Finally, principle 6 will, in most cases, be applied gradually as the ALL has started to function, rather than as an initial step.

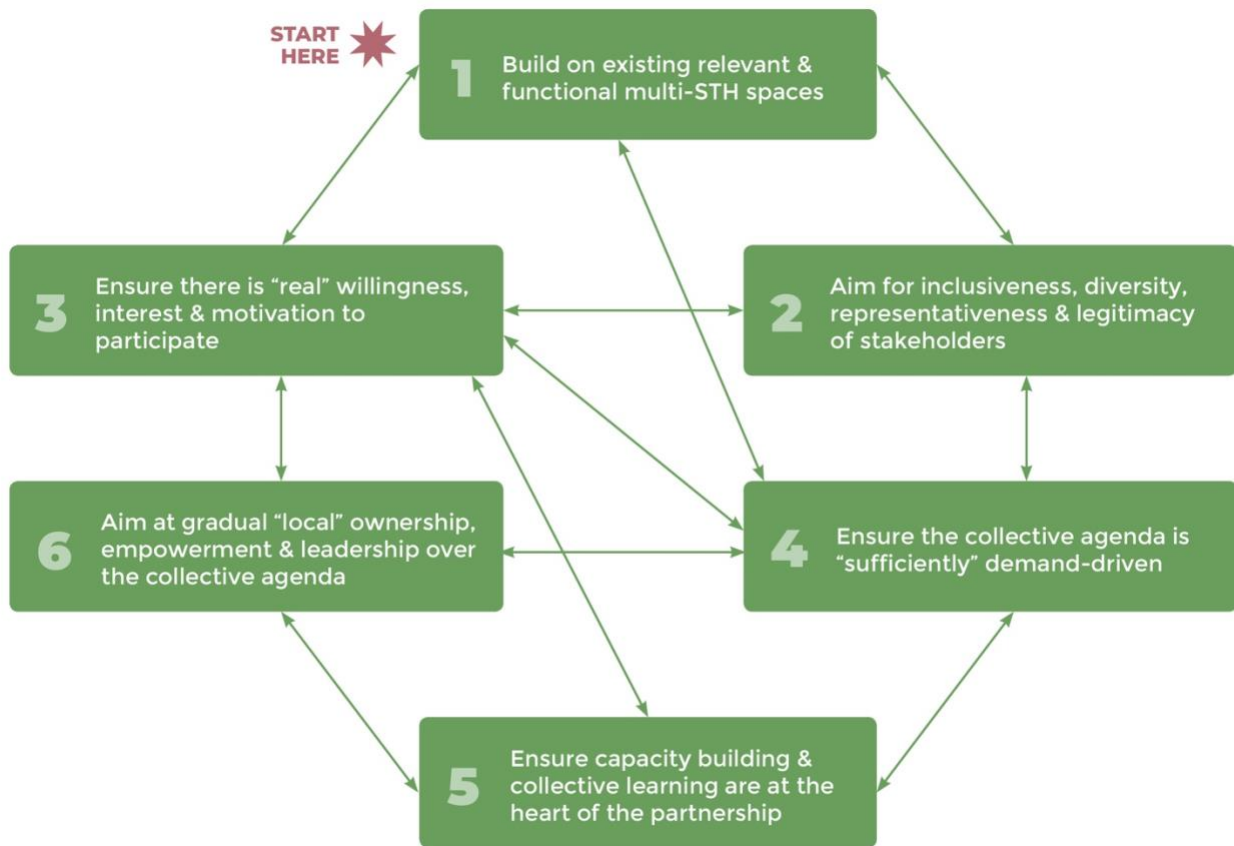


Figure 1. Key relationships among the six principles.

# Operationalizing the engagement principles

The above six principles need to be applied smartly and in a context-sensitive fashion in each of the 7 countries of the AE-I. This may require identifying and engaging a series of steps and using specific methods and tools, which selection and description go beyond the purpose of this document. However, the following broad recommendations may be useful for ensuring the six principles or an adaptation thereof are effectively applicable and applied in any given context.

## 1. Useful generic steps

The following generic iterative steps, are expected to be useful in each country team to be able to apply the engagement principles concretely and establish ALLs or identify existing spaces with which the AE-I could work:

- Mapping and characterizing stakeholders, past and on-going initiatives and existing multi-STH arenas (mechanisms) related directly or indirectly to agroecology and sustainable agriculture.
- Systematizing and assessing past and on-going experiences in relation to AE with respect to key results, lessons, and challenges in terms of AE practices and other innovations and their level of use, and co-design and multi-stakeholder processes.
- Specifying ALL boundaries (spatial, institutional), and clarifying how best to deal with necessary interactions among scales and stakeholders at the local, regional and national level.
- Getting stakeholders on-board by inviting them to become members.
- Identifying a common vision for what the ALL should all be about.
- Identifying concrete governance and facilitation modalities that will allow the partnership to function smoothly.
- Developing and agreeing on initial realistic work plans and who does what.
- Identifying initial capacity building needs and implementing initial CB activities for both the AE-I teams and key national or local ALL stakeholders (including research), on concepts, approaches and tools related to innovation, co-design, participatory action-research and ALL, agroecology and agroecological transition, etc., depending on identified needs.

Such steps should be properly sequenced and calendarized, and duly adjusted to each context. In effect, which activities to conduct first, and when would be the right timing for establishing the ALL may well vary from one country to the next. In particular, there may pre-existing quality information available about the stakeholder landscape or about relevant initiatives and whatever lessons can be drawn from them that can

be useful for ALL establishment, especially if the selected sites have a significant history of past or on-going interventions. Hence *a careful and critical review of available formal and grey literature / documentation related to the above issues* is part and parcel of kick-starting ALL activities in each country.

Which specific method or tools to use to conduct any of the above steps is beyond the scope of these guidelines and will actually partly be dealt with in forthcoming sets of guidelines. Generally, a number of well-conceived methods and tools exist along with detailed "how-to" guidelines and can easily be downloaded directly from a variety of web sites following fairly standard searches for such material. Individual WP1 resource persons or WP1 country teams may have their own experience and preferences with particular methods and tools. What is essential in all cases is to ensure that each specific method or tool an individual or a country team decides to use fits the stated objective (and not the other way around: form should follow function), is actually compatible with the six principles and is sufficiently well mastered by those wanting to use it so that quality results can be achieved through its application. In that sense, WP1 recommends to country teams to go for robust and relatively simple methods and tools, rather than too fancy ones which may depend on a level of expertise beyond the reach of most country teams (in terms of time, cost or level of knowledge).

We will dwell deeper into a number of practical considerations in section B below.

## 2. Specific considerations for effective implementation

While the above generic activities are key to establishing ALLs, several considerations, rather of an operational nature, are also important to ensure quality and that the desired end-result (establishing functional, vibrant ALLs able to engage in meaningful agroecological transition) is indeed achieved.

### a. Be concrete and realistic, keep it simple and align your choice of methods and tools with co-design and participatory principles

A typical risk and even bias of systemic, transdisciplinary, co-design and participatory approaches is to propose approaches, methods and tools that are conceptually complex by nature, imply several iterations and constant adaptation to work effectively (and hence high costs). Considering this, be mindful of the following aspects:

- Avoid too vague formulation of objectives, governance, and activities: go for concrete formulations that everybody on board the ALL can understand what they are about.
- Favor fairly straightforward, lower-cost tools, processes, activities that are easy-to-master, understand, learn and share among team members and with national and local partners, especially at the beginning, since everybody first needs to learn to work together.
- Be very explicit about the proposed timeframe and sequence of activities, discuss and adapt them with national and local stakeholders and jointly set milestones/deadlines.



- Avoid utterly arcane conceptual or initiative-related jargon when meeting with (potential) ALL members, especially farmers and FOs: this applies to the ALL label itself, which might need to be renamed.
- Besides holding periodic multi-stakeholder meetings, give enough room to organize bilateral (informal) meetings, semi-structured interviews and focus groups, as it will contribute to building trust and relationships.
- Do not overemphasize simple "statistical" and cold "fact-collecting" surveys (e.g. for stakeholder mapping or for characterizing initiatives) and focus rather on qualitative assessments and sense-making.

## **b. Ensure there is effective and neutral facilitation**

Ensuring facilitation is a key ingredient and possibly a condition for dealing effectively with multi-stakeholder spaces such as the proposed ALLs. Hence, country teams should pay the utmost attention to the following aspects:

- Finding a right skilled facilitator(s) for the ALL from the onset, whether such individual(s) belongs to one of the organizations of the ALL (the OneCGIAR entity in charge of the initiative, a national /local organization) or is being hired specifically for such purpose Furthermore, such person should have enough time to invest in the activities related to ALL functioning not only during ALL meetings, but also before (for preparing them) and after (for following up on agreements).
- Ensuring facilitation is neutral (concept of honest broker) so that each member feels they can contribute to proposing ideas and decision making and that the partnership is not too biased towards one stakeholder group (not even biased towards the interests of the AE-I member convening the ALL!).
- Given the onus placed on active participation by local smallholders in the initiative, the selected facilitator(s) should be multilingual and able to work and communicate fluently in relevant local / regional and national languages. If this is difficult to achieve, proper translation arrangements should be made for implementing All-related activities.

## **c. Define and implement clear yet flexible, context-sensitive rules of engagements**

While in a given country / contexts, some key stakeholders may not necessarily value and practice transparency or democratic decision-making, and while many partnerships function in an ad hoc mode, we recommend as much as possible to try and achieve / clarify the following aspects for setting up and maintaining a well-functioning ALL:

- Ensure transparency of All establishment process and functioning (who is a member, who facilitates, what are the objectives, etc.).
- Define clear and realistic roles for each member and adjust them periodically to match evolving needs and proven record of accomplishment of various partners (see below).
- Develop collective, transparent budget and report periodically and honestly on use of funds.
- Develop and apply robust and consistent conflict management procedures.

- Ensure clear decision-making especially for agreeing on strategic aspects (objectives, work plans, dealing with conflict, budgets, etc.).
  - Develop and implement simple, cost-effective MEL process to track progress towards ALL objectives. This involves defining clear and collectively agreed indicators of progress and success.
  - It also implies defining who will oversee implementing the agreed-upon procedures and interpreting the collected evidence.
- Define and implement an open data and shared ownership of information and results.

#### **d. Engage gradually and dynamically with partners depending on the topic and activity**

Applying the first 3 principles might lead to identifying a relatively large potential membership for setting up an ALL. However, for a number of reasons (lack of experience, absence of dedicated facilitation, limited time, logistical considerations, etc.), it seems wise and "effective" in most countries to start an ALL even with relatively few members on-board (e.g. those who are motivated and well aligned with the core objectives and activities). In other words, not implementing "literally" the first 3 principles, and especially principle 2 from the start is not really an issue one should worry about, as long as the membership is periodically revisited and the ALL does not become an exclusive, closed-door "club of old friends" or "club of the founders".

Also, because a partnership is almost always dynamic, stakeholder membership may change over time, depending on topics and activities, on initial and continued motivation and on trust building, among others. Being aware of such dynamics requires investing continuously in developing and maintaining relationships and trust with and among ALL members, which can and should be done on and off stage (in bilateral formal and informal settings).

The frequency at which field activities are implemented and meetings organized is also key and should be decided collectively. If the intensity is too high, some local STH may be overwhelmed and prone to run away; on the other hand, if it is too low, some STH may forget about previous engagements, decisions and lose confidence and interest.

Remember also that it may well be very effective to develop small task forces or sub-groups within an ALL to deal with specific topics or activities or to address specific scales / territories / value chains that may only be relevant / motivating to specific members. This would be a good way to avoid premature stakeholder fatigue. If such a multi-layer functioning is indeed implemented, an ensuing challenge will be ensuring effective interactions, synergies and integration between what takes place at the level of the entire ALL and at the level of each sub-group(s).

#### **e. Create the necessary reflexive spaces and times for monitoring and adjusting the partnership and its vision / objectives / activities**

Because an ALL is dynamic, and because implementing an AE transition is by definition complex and uncertain, with low predictability of how it may unfold, country teams and their partners must be ready to periodically adapt their approach, be ready to redefine collective objectives, adjust work plans, welcome new members or let go others, etc.

This requires creating the necessary reflexive spaces and times for monitoring and learning about what works and what does not work so well. This will allow the identification of progress, challenges and emerging opportunities, and on this basis, provide the necessary basis for adjusting the ALL functioning and work plans.

#### **f. Do not formalize too fast what the ALL is all about**

Formalization includes aspects such as the aim / objective, the membership, the governance, the vision, access to resources, etc. Advantages of formalizing include clarifying where the ALL is heading and some key rules of the game that some institutions, especially public ones, may need to see in advance order to confirm their participation. Yet it may also crystallize ideas and decisions around the wrong objectives, membership etc., before partners know and trust each other, or before there is enough wisdom and maturity in how collective interactions may occur. Also, formalizing may translate into unnecessary bureaucratization of the ALL functioning, while flexibility and adaptive management based on "learning by doing" might be key to an effective ALL, especially in the initial stages (see considerations above about flexibility).

#### **g. Diversify sources of funding and build financial viability beyond the project timeframe**

From the very beginning, the financing of the ALL should be dealt transparently to create trust and contribute to developing realistic expectations about what the ALL can or cannot fund. The AE-I funding is probably going to be the major source of funding for the ALLs, yet it is wise to identify from the beginning complementary (future) sources of funding for some activities, either through other on-going projects, self-funding of some members for their participation in workshops or training, or through income-generating activities. In-kind contributions are also important given the fact that different stakeholders bring in a great variety of knowledge and expertise, complementary resources, skills and competencies. Such diversification of funding sources will be essential if AE-I funding were to dry up or not match the identified needs and priorities. It is also critical for the sustainability of the ALL and continued collaboration among stakeholders post initiative. Waiting until the very last moment (i.e. when the Initiative is withdrawing) to think about this issue has proven fatal to many multi-stakeholder mechanisms established within the framework of a single externally-funded project.

## h. Communicate in an adapted way

Periodic and timely internal and external communication to a series of audiences is vital to get an ALL started and to achieve and maintain the motivation and adhesion of key stakeholders at various scales. For this, it is necessary to:

- Communicate transparently whatever can be made public widely, so that no stakeholder can develop suspicions about things being done or decided “behind their back”, unless there are specific reasons for keeping some of the information within a closed group.
- Use appropriate means for communicating with different publics at different scales (local, regional national).
  - This usually implies using an effective combination of email, WhatsApp and other social networks, SMS, phone and in-person bilateral and multi-stakeholder meetings and workshops
- Identify and implement an appropriate frequency of communication.
  - Do not assume "once is enough": repetition may be needed to ensure the message is indeed received and acted upon!
  - Do not forget to engage in follow-up communication after key events and activities, or with specific stakeholder groups if actions are expected.
- Use simple language adapted to the audience, by avoiding AE-I or ALL internal jargon and using local language whenever possible / necessary, especially when the target audience includes farmers and local stakeholders who might have a limited mastery of national languages.

Ensuring the above elements are effectively taken on-board requires developing an explicit communication plan.

## Potential indicators related to the implementation of the six principles

While defining indicators is more the realm and responsibility of WP2 of the initiative, and specific indicators are being identified which relates to the ALL, Table 1 below provides some ideas about the type of indicators or analyses which could be developed as part of monitoring and evaluating the ALL establishment and stakeholder engagement process with the potential to assess periodically how the six principles are being operationalized.

From Table 1, it is clear that assessing the implementation of the six principles and the stakeholder engagement process in its dynamic nature over time goes well beyond measuring quantitative indicators (such as number and gender of participants of different STH categories attending an event), especially if one wants to go beyond being able to report "what is happening" but also the why and how.

This may imply using tools such as semi-structured interviews and focus groups and developing impact stories to show the added value (note however that it might be critical to use such tools sparingly to minimize potential stakeholder's fatigue or saturation with such time-consuming participatory approaches).

In any case, significant work is required to come up with "SMART" indicators, and this critical task has ideally to be conducted with the ALL members and stakeholders as part of a co-design approach to identifying and selecting relevant indicators.

Once such indicators are identified and validated, how to measure or assess them in a practical, cost-effective manner will be another key step. In some instances, selected ALL members themselves might be willing and able to assume an active role in monitoring some indicators: one should not assume this to be the sole responsibility of the AE-I research partners.

An added challenge is that the Initiative will in some instances be keen to assess a situation or issue in a comparative and scientific manner across countries and ALLs, or over time: this implies that some indicators cannot simply be defined or negotiated locally, but will necessarily be of a generic and scientifically grounded nature.

In all cases, establishing a rich initial assessment of (potential) ALL stakeholders, including a thorough stakeholder mapping and characterization, along with a diagnosis of existing multistakeholder initiatives, and monitoring how the configuration of the ALL membership evolves over time and how the ALL is functioning in practice, and why are a must for grasping how the six principles are being implemented and addressed in real life.

**Table 1. Potential indicators and ways of monitoring and assessing the application of the six guiding principles**

Principles	Potential indicators / ways of knowing	Observations
<b>1. Build on existing relevant &amp; functional multi-STH spaces</b>	Assessing the established ALL for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. any relationships with pre-existing MSH spaces (existing/new)</li> <li>ii. similarities and differences in mandate / members / objectives / activities etc.</li> <li>iii. results obtained</li> <li>iv. perceptions of its members about its relevance</li> </ul>	<i>May need to be done periodically as the ALL evolves</i>
<b>2. Aim for inclusiveness, diversity, representativeness &amp; legitimacy of stakeholders</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• # of organizations and stakeholder types included in the ALL.</li> <li>• Compare ALL membership to initial stakeholder map and characterize who is in and who is out and why.</li> <li>• Assess whether and when relevant stakeholders (those with an influence or who might be affected by AET) are involved in ALL functioning.</li> <li>• Yearly member satisfaction survey to enquire about issues of equity, decision making and agenda-setting procedures, etc.</li> <li>• A matrix which scores against an "ideal" set of an inclusive, diverse, representative &amp; legitimate stakeholder group.</li> <li>• Participation of marginalized stakeholders in the ALL.</li> </ul>	<i>A simple quantitative measure is vastly insufficient to assess such a complex issue. Need to be assessed periodically as membership may evolve.</i>
<b>3. Ensure there is "real" willingness, interest &amp; motivation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Compare ALL's objectives to individual member objectives.</li> <li>• Degree and continuity of participation in ALL meetings and activities.</li> <li>• Quality of participation of individual members during ALL meetings (contributions to ALL functioning, participation in decision-making, etc.).</li> <li>• Level of satisfaction of the individual members or groups in the design and implementation of ALL activities, etc.</li> </ul>	<i>Doubt: is it possible to identify easily "measurable" signs of motivation and interest which do not simply denote differences in education (ability to speak) and endowments (ability to act).</i>
<b>4. Ensure the collective agenda is "sufficiently" demand-driven</b>	Compare ALL agreed upon agenda and vision to initial AE-I agenda and to individual members' priorities, objectives and needs (are ALL objectives in line with stakeholders' objectives? Are relevant issues being addressed? How relevant is the ALL for stakeholders over time (to be measured yearly during implementation)).	<i>This may require access to documents from ALL members outlining objectives &amp; priorities, or conducting semi-structured interviews with individual members or having a regular member survey to verify whether the objectives/priorities of the both the ALL and individual members are still aligned.</i>
<b>5. Ensure capacity building and collective learning are at the heart</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analysis of work plans to identify CB activities (# of CB activities, who are the beneficiaries, etc.).</li> </ul>	<i>Assessing whether an activity aimed at CB has actually had an effect for "trainees" is challenging.</i>

Principles	Potential indicators / ways of knowing	Observations
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participatory assessment of CB effects (question: did capacities increase? to what end or in what way were they applied / mobilized? What concrete benefits did weaker or marginalized groups gain from CB?).</li> <li>• Assessment of collective learning (what is being learned, how, implications on process).</li> </ul>	<i>Learning for its part may not be easy to assess, especially when it is not being explicitly identified and monitored as such as part of the MEL.</i>
<b>6. Aim at gradual "local" ownership, empowerment and leadership</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assessment of who is active in proposing ideas and who contributes to decision-making in ALL events &amp; activities and whether this is reflected in the ALL agenda, with a specific focus on comparing over time the contribution of AE-I international partners vs. that of national / local members, and of comparing more powerful vs. less powerful national / local STH.</li> <li>• Analysis of power relationships with the ALL.</li> <li>• Relevant agreements/results achieved and feeling of responsibility for achieved agreements.</li> <li>• Member participation and influence on decision making perceived quality of decision making.</li> <li>• Analysis of the room (space) occupied by AE-I implementing partners.</li> </ul>	<i>Difficult issue, might need to be done yearly to be able to detect changes / weak emerging trend.</i>

## Troubleshooting section

While care should be taken to apply the engagement principles as carefully and as judiciously as possible without them representing a strait jacket, a number of challenges may arise. Table 2 provides a list of a few fairly common issues that have been known to happen, and suggestions about how they may be dealt with.

**Table 2. List of common challenges and potential strategies to address them**

Common challenge	Strategies to address and manage the challenges
<p><b>Elite capture of the ALL, some stakeholders dominate unduly the agenda &amp; decision-making.</b></p> <p>It happens when some stakeholders with leverage (local authorities, state services such as extension, or research) capture the meetings and agenda setting or always occupy center stage for reasons not related to the purpose of the ALL.</p>	<p><i>Ensure principle 3 has been applied, (re)define institutional boundaries properly, rely on stakeholder mapping to understand the power dynamics and find a solution, clarify and refer to governance rules to allow other stakeholders to have a voice during strategic ALL meetings, ensure proper facilitation of meetings, create spaces favoring inclusive and equal dialogue such as forming sub-groups by stakeholder category during meetings, discuss openly with dominant stakeholders about the situation and risks, try to convince them to be less domineering, empower and increase capacity of weakest stakeholders. In extreme cases, the ALL membership or the institutional boundaries might need to be altered altogether to allow the ALL to proceed without undue elite capture.</i></p>
<p><b>Improper and unstable representation of stakeholders in meetings, poorly motivated, weakly active stakeholders during ALL meetings and activities.</b></p> <p>This tend to happen when an organization keeps changing who represents it in the ALL, and /or when the person representing is clearly poorly informed, stays silent or does not seem to be interested in what the ALL is all about.</p>	<p><i>See initial considerations under Principles 2 &amp; 3. Identify "right" profile and names of reps for each and every key STH, develop a formal agreement on who represents each member in the ALL and what the role of the organization / this rep is in the ALL, engage in proper and personalized communication before each meeting or activity to prepare for it and clarify what is at stake and ensure who will attend, ensure there is a motivational element in every meeting, develop capacities, conduct enough bilateral follow-up. Build a good internal knowledge management system that can support newcomers in case people leave their position or organization.</i></p>
<p><b>Too much influence from the AE-I country team itself. The A-I implementing partners use the ALL mostly for instrumental purpose.</b></p> <p>As mentioned in Principle 6, for many reasons, AE-I team members may inadvertently or “mechanically” occupy too much space in the ALL and use it to pursue their own research goals and activities: this is made</p>	<p><i>Ensure there is neutral facilitation (ideally not done by "one of us"), favor co-leadership and decision-making on a basis of equality, distribute responsibilities, diversify sources of funding, refrain from acting too fast or alone just because there are deadlines and pressure "from above" or because we can do it.</i></p>



Common challenge	Strategies to address and manage the challenges
<p>possible because foreigners are often given privileged, unchallenged status whatever they do, because we are resource persons on key topics, because we propose and master methodology and tools, because we control the funding, etc. In doing so, it becomes difficult to hear properly the voices, proposals and concerns of the other stakeholders and to let them influence or even at times alter our decision-making.</p>	
<p><b>Loosing gradually sight of collectively agreed objectives of the ALL.</b></p> <p>This happens a lot: initial discussion and agreement about objectives are forgotten, and the focus of the ALL drifts gradually, with members not quite knowing where things are going, or some members pushing the agenda towards their own interests.</p>	<p><i>Ensure there is proper facilitation with attention to the process followed to reach collective objectives, develop and engage in MEL, create periodic reflexive times and spaces to identify any undesirable departure from agreed-upon objectives and work plan, adjust periodically, if necessary, objectives and activities based on learning achieved and knowledge gained.</i></p>
<p><b>Believing or behaving as if capacity-building and learning is only or mostly for farmers and professional field staff such as extension agents and happens mostly through formal training.</b></p> <p>A common assumption among researchers is that CB and learning have to focus on farmers, considered to be the ones who know less and hence are more in need of training / CB. A common second assumption is to consider that CB and learning take place mostly and somehow mechanically during dedicated (formal) training events. Both assumptions tend to be quite wrong. Researchers also have a lot to learn outside of their area of technical expertise (e.g. modeling, agroecology, technology development, value chain analysis, policy analysis, etc. ) or even within such areas when it comes to understanding and valuing related local knowledge and experiences.</p>	<p><i>Conduct a capacity needs assessment of all members, including a realistic self-assessment of the AE-I country level implementing team across WPs, identify resource persons on different topics among all members, assess effects of CB events such as training workshops through changes in practices or behavior, and not just at the end of the CB event, identify in each planned activity of the ALL specific spaces and moments during which CB and learning can be focused on and made explicit.</i></p>
<p><b>Consider that ALL members and other local STH have unlimited time to take part in AE-I activities, or that the AE-I constitutes their sole source of inspiration and learning</b></p> <p>As the Initiatives embarks on a co-design participatory approach, it spontaneously plans to implement many workshops and activities across the different WPs. This may imply very significant time commitments by ALL members and other stakeholders in the form of participating in workshops, responding to interviews, implementing field trials, taking part in field days, etc. Yet in reality, many national or local STH have fairly busy agendas; farmers for example typically engage in diversified farming as well as many house and off-farm</p>	<p><i>Limit to the strictly necessary the number of meetings and workshops, hold them when there are no major conflicts with agricultural chores or other events. Combine as much as possible in a given event several objectives and activities (but without creating confusion or overly dense agendas). Do not over-mobilize champions, AE-I friends and other national or local resource persons, but diversify participants whenever possible. Be aware of other initiatives taking place in the same areas and involving the same stakeholders and if possible synergize with these initiatives. Try to ask about other types of useful and relevant information, knowledge, innovation, capacity-building that ALL members are getting from other sources and initiatives. Re-use and mobilize as much as</i></p>

Common challenge	Strategies to address and manage the challenges
<p>activities; they might also have their own associations, or even take part simultaneously in several externally funded projects. A related mistake is to consider, perhaps because we consider AE such an important, holistic and priority change, that the AE-I is bringing to ALL stakeholders all they need for their future. It is certainly presumptuous to think that farmers and others don't have an interest in or access to, other sources of valuable information regarding their future, which can be brought to them by other projects, local authorities, friends and family, etc.</p>	<p><i>possible information available that might fit the AE-I needs through previous research and only plan to collect new information when it is not already available.</i></p>

# Engaging with ALLs and national or local stakeholders at country level: Key considerations for other WPs of the Agroecology Initiative

It is very important that all WPs of the Agroecology Initiative follow a number of basic principles and practices to ensure that the Initiative's claim to "be doing research differently" is indeed vindicated. A major part of doing research differently and applying concretely a participatory and co-design approach lies in engaging properly and in a timely manner with national and local stakeholders when it comes to planning, collecting, analyzing and interpreting data. The degree and nature of participation may obviously vary depending on the actual purpose and interest (measuring soil biological properties on a soil sample requires a different interaction between researchers and farmers than say assessing value chains, market access or agency).

Regardless, there will be a recurrent need for all WPs to engage with stakeholders meaningfully in one way or another. There are two main situations for which other WPs will engage with ALL members and other stakeholders:

1. An ALL or a relevant existing multi-STH space identified by WP1 does exist and other WPs want to implement their activities (conduct a baseline survey or a measurement, assess a value chain, discuss an issue, develop some sort of innovation, etc.)
  - In that case, *and assuming such research has to do with the ALL membership or objectives*, WPs should engage formally with the ALL and follow established procedures within the ALL for presenting, validating, implementing and reporting results.
2. A relevant multi-STH space does NOT (yet) exist at the time a given WP wants to implement activities
  - In such a case (very common in these early stages of AE-I implementation and ALL establishment at the country level), and after consulting with the national WP1 team members, other WPs should engage with concerned / target stakeholders directly, following the same overall logics of co-design or at least participatory research, and decide together what is the appropriate degree of interaction which needs to be developed from planning all the way to analysis /validation of the results. In doing so, they should allow spaces for incorporating suggestions and concerns of stakeholders, for capacity-building and collective learning, and for favoring local appropriation and, if possible, co-leadership.

In both cases, it seems obvious that in order to streamline activities and engagement at the ALL level between the different WPs, there is a need to plan interactions and to collaborate between WPs. This implies developing clear structure and processes, clarifying who communicates what and to whom: this may be achieved by creating and agreeing on an internal knowledge management process.

Once the activity has been conducted and results are available, it is strongly recommended (one could also use the word "compulsory") that the concerned WPs present their results back to the ALL or to concerned stakeholders in a timely and meaningful way and get proper validation and critical feedback, possibly through or in coordination with the WP1 team members.

WPs are also encouraged to discuss and agree up front the ownership of data they will collect with ALL members or concerned stakeholders the goal being to avoid engaging in purely extractive data and research.

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The CGIAR initiative Transformational Agroecology across Food, Land and Water Systems **develops and scales agroecological innovations with small-scale farmers and other food system actors in seven low- and middle-income countries.** It is one of 32 initiatives of CGIAR, a global research partnership for a food-secure future, dedicated to transforming food, land, and water systems in a climate crisis.

[www.cgiar.org/initiative/31-transformational-agroecology-across-food-land-and-water-systems/](http://www.cgiar.org/initiative/31-transformational-agroecology-across-food-land-and-water-systems/)