

PA# 17 Fostering Collaborative Bio-Based Solutions Development in Rural Areas

The development of small-scale bio-based solutions holds significant potential for addressing local challenges, promoting sustainability. Collaboration is crucial in this context, as it can contribute significantly to the socio-economic development of rural areas, fostering resilience, sustainability, and improved quality of life for the communities involved. Considering the need to understand the needs for collaboration between the bio-based solutions adopters, more than 46 experts were surveyed which has a long practical experience in one of more Bioeconomy sectors (agriculture and food, forestry and manufacture of wood and furniture, water systems - fishery, aquaculture, manufacture of biomaterials and bio-based products, and bioenergy). The survey has been carried out in March-June 2023.

Experts were asked “*which type of stakeholders could influence small-scale producers to convert to bio-based production/ processing?*”. According to their answers, **EU, national, regional, and local government institutions** can be active stakeholders as well as **innovation brokers, agricultural/technical advisors**. One of the most influential stakeholders’ groups is considered **cooperatives and producer organizations** because this form of cooperation can easily ensure the shared knowledge and success of innovations through cooperative actions and small-scale strategies. A strong **cooperation and partnership with scientists/scientific institutions** could help to create new or adapt existing innovative production and processing technologies, new products, or update part of the production processes. Some experts say that the biggest impact could be on **local governments at decision-making level and Branch business associations**. These stakeholders can provide support, resources, expertise, and incentives that encourage producers to adopt more sustainable and environmentally friendly practices. However, there is a need for more innovative partnership models, such as **Industry Associations and Clusters** and specialized **Research and Academic Institutions working together with producers, Business Networks, Innovation Hubs, and Incubators**, which creates a collaborative platform for different types of stakeholders.

Also, experts were asked “*does membership with small producer’s groups/ cooperatives, etc., help better to overcome the challenges that are facing adopters and non-adopters of bio-based solutions?*”? Specific importance



Figure 1: Bio-based solutions for rural areas.

Source: Freepik (https://www.freepik.com/premium-photo/couple-hands-holding-pile-earth-soil-with-growing-plant_3332744.htm)

was given to the cooperatives or producer groups, because of their help for the members with their products along the entire value chain. Their role is fundamental for the adoption of sustainable farming practices, due to an increase of knowledge available about these practices through the technical body of these structures. These structures are fundamental and should be recommended and supported to promote “good bioeconomy practices” adapted to the reality of each one of its associates.

The recommendations from the survey: **Encourage Cross-Sector Partnerships** between diverse stakeholders. Cross-sector collaborations can bring together different perspectives, expertise, and resources to address complex challenges in rural areas; **Promote**

Skill Development and Education by providing education on bio-based solutions, sustainable agriculture practices, and technologies; **Establish Collaborative Platforms**, such as bio-based innovation hubs or collaborative networks, where researchers, farmers, entrepreneurs, and community members can come together. It can serve as space for idea exchange, knowledge sharing, and collaborative project development. The analogue of such a collaborative platform is BioRural Toolkit and Network.



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