



WIESENVÖGEL LIFE



Niedersachsen

## RESULTS OF AN INTERNATIONAL ONLINE SURVEY ABOUT COMMUNICATION IN LIFE PROJECTS

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL FOR:

### GUIDEBOOK FOR SUCCESSFUL COMMUNICATION IN NATURE CONSERVATION

*Practical instructions and theoretical background*

The survey was carried out in winter 2019 to collect experiences, challenges, and best practises of a variety of LIFE projects as a solid foundation for the guidebook. This document summarizes the survey and additionally offers selected individual answers to the questions that appear especially relevant to us. Some of the answers were language-edited and slightly changed to keep the anonymity of the surveyed persons/projects.

#### SURVEY PARTICIPANTS

The survey was answered by representatives of 47 LIFE projects (35 NAT, 5 BIO and 7 GIE) from 17 different countries and by 5 representatives of the LIFE Meadow Birds team.

#### IMPLEMENTED MANAGEMENT MEASURES

The projects stated to usually implement a combination of various management measures within species conservation (38 projects), habitat conservation (38 projects), ecosystem conservation (34 projects) Natura 2000 conservation (31 projects) and governance (34 projects). All projects are engaged in education and training, whereas 30 projects focused on communication and information, 29 projects on awareness raising and 11 projects on behaviour change activities. Overall, 21 projects were running measures to increase acceptance and 15 projects were doing active conflict management.

#### TARGET GROUPS AND APPROACH

Most projects stated that they usually start their communication strategies with stakeholder mappings of different extents and depth to identify their interests, needs and networks. As result, in most projects, all relevant actors and stakeholder were approached, as e.g. the public, inhabitants, landowners, authorities, scientists, NGOs, etc. It was stated that it is of high importance to pay attention to choose the fitting communication approach according to the specific needs of the target groups, e.g. farmers can usually be best approached face-to-face.

The projects are using a wide set of communication methods, ranging from rather classical communications such as face-to-face-communications, Email, press releases and exhibitions, to different workshop formats such as World Café, social media campaigns, etc.

**QUESTION:** „How and how often do you communicate (communication formats)?“

#### ANSWERS:

- With farmers we communicate at least 2/3 times per year, mostly via letters and live meetings. With other local stakeholders we also meet in person at least once per year. Nature conservationists and the public is informed through media and presentations in events according to the need, but we have approximately 5 press releases per year and way more news on project site and social media.
- Direct contact.
- Diverse, depending on the focal action. From initial surveys and Q methodology (preparatory action) to final surveys (last year, 2020). In addition, participatory workshops and panels depending on the concrete action, during the duration of the project.
- Meetings, seminars, dissemination events, travelling exhibition, panels; several times per year.
- Local communication, newsletters, informative seminars.
- Brochures, social media, local newspaper, presentation, etc. 150 actions for 4 years
- Facebook page: every week; association meetings: once at the beginning of the project, then when needed; public meeting: once a year so far; postal letter: once so far.
- Sitting together in small groups.
- Daily or weekly we are in touch by e-mail, telephone, skype. At least, every 6 months we celebrate a meeting with stakeholder.
- Newsletter (3 monthly), via Email to our volunteers, and informative tarps.
- Individual meetings ad hoc, newsletters quarterly, seminars, workshops, excursion, etc. according to needs.
- Sporadic communications (as relevant events occur)

and scheduled communications: public participation processes.

- Meetings, workshops, talks, press releases, web news, rural fairs; variable frequencies, from sporadic communications to planned periodic meetings.
- Notably, participation in local livestock fairs has been interesting (and time consuming...). They are very interesting events to disseminate the objectives of the project from the "city approach" to the rural areas.
- According to project schedule: several times per year.
- Meeting and dialogue platforms.
- The project uses all sorts of communication forms, from face to face, through social networks, through different media channels, using printed as well as other visual materials as often as possible, to reach a wider public.
- Mostly direct communication: regular meetings, phone calls, visits at the sites throughout the project duration.
- Round tables (if required, approx. every second year), email (weekly), telephone (weekly), meetings (if required, monthly for whole project (13 sites)).
- We use press releases, radio, and television interviews. Since the beginning of the project 5 media events have been organized in different regions of Bulgaria, two informative films have been produced, over 120 publications and 12 interviews.
- Communication runs on a weekly basis, via our social media, website and via classical media.
- The project has 5 communication and dissemination actions. Apart from the communication campaign of the project and its actions, an important awareness campaign is planned for target audiences (youth, hunters, farmers, rural population, and urban population).
- We communicate via web, social media, email...
- In a formal way to authorities (permit requests, concession requests, etc) and through workshops, noticeboards, and media to public users.
- We communicate via newsletter (6 x per year), a program day (once per year) and social media (continuously).
- Presentation folder, information panels on the restored sites, website, articles published in scientific journals and in journals of broader audience, guided tours, conference or volunteer projects more than twice a month.
- Mails, e-mails, phone calls and meetings in person, on a regular basis (as we are Nature conservation agency - public authority or local NGOs with knowledge of the locals).
- Communication with the public is ensured through regular posts via project website and press releases (at least 4 per year). Communication with stakeholders relies on specific workshops (still ongoing). The project foresees a total of 27 workshops to be run in 3 years (although the project duration has been now extended).
- Website, e-mails; social media, Public council, steering committee, public events, special meetings, regularly.
- At least once a year with each of above-mentioned stakeholders.

- With some of them like schools and media much often communication on regular basis.
- Most often communication format with administrations with power point presentations. But some time face-2-face contact is very important. Meetings with the farmers and hunters also always with presentations (power point/video) but rather informal (around the table) which brings the best achievements. We pay visits to the schools making presentations, quizzes etc. and children pay as a visit back in the Demonstration Centre (often project covered travel costs) where they could see the animal alive, or to do other impressive field work (ring a chick, observe trough the field scope and binocular) and finally to paint a T-shirt y themselves. The communication with media was conducted on a regular basis through press releases and personal contacts.
- The communication with general public through regular publications on the web page and by emails to those who asked to be informed regularly (web bulletin).
- Submission of information (once, at the very beginning of the project), personal interviews (once, at the beginning of the project); general presentations (several times, locally, in every village); initial round of surveys (once, at first year of the project); participatory panels (once, at the second year of the project); final round of surveys (once, at the end of the project, 2020).
- Project steering group (roughly once a year), various events (public consultations during the development process of Species action plan, meetings with forest sector interest groups), ca several times per year.
- Events, meetings, presentations, workshops, press reports, homepage, flyer, others.
- For each of our action we communicate with the specific authorities, social media and website are included as communication channels.
- Through the project website and social media, newsletters, press releases; advertisements of project activities; distribution of TV and Radio spots at a regular basis, seminars, workshops, training seminars, etc.
- The project uses all kind of communication tools, but focuses on face-to-face communication with stakeholders, while also using the project website and social media to communicate our message to the public.
- Two actions per month, and three publications per month through social media and regional news.
- Newsletter twice a year, Facebook year-round, around work in the field dependent of the season and intensity, information panels, leaflets, route-app.

#### LEVEL OF TRANSPARENCY

The surveyed projects stated a very high level of transparency is important for them, especially when communicating aims, values, and positive outcomes of the projects. The exception is the communication of environment-sensible data, such as the coordinates of bird nests. The budget of the project should be communicated in a very confined way.

**QUESTION:** "Would you aim for more or less transparency? Under which conditions/which contents would you not communicate at all?"

**ANSWERS:**

- The transparency must be at its maximum. We do not understand a LIFE project without transparency.
- More transparency. e.g. during the communication crisis we decided to put the project budget online because we faced this need. People were asking to provide numbers, where those big money (4 Mio Euro) are spent to.
- I would not communicate at all contents related with species which may put in risk its (their) conservation: localization, nesting places, etc.
- That depends on the situation. In most cases we would aim for more transparency. In cases of e.g. combating invasive alien species etc. (killing animals) I would not recommend transparency because in Italy animal protection groups are very strong and can cause a severe problem to a project.
- We aim for complete transparency.
- More transparency (answer of 7 project representatives)
- It is necessary to be transparent in the objective, but not in how exactly it is done and when.
- We think we should communicate all the outputs of the project; they should be completely transparent for the entire community and stakeholders.
- The basis is always the transparency and communication of everything.
- So far, the levels of transparency seem to be enough. Some concepts and measures we would communicate at an earlier level of preparation of the project (involve especially nature conservation agency to formulation of the project concept). We would not communicate to the public state of ongoing negotiations with stakeholders and authorities, unless necessary.
- Greater transparency. The only information that should not be communicated is that related to the protection of species in very specific cases (location of sensitive points such as nests, populations of very scarce flora ...).
- In general, greater transparency. Only the specific location of sensitive elements (populations of endangered species, nests, shelters ...) should be protected.
- Transparency helps and is desirable, as much as participation and public "buy-in" (sense of ownership).
- Conservation/biodiversity sensitive information should be kept under control and not divulged to popular recipients likely to make an undesired use.
- We will pursue more transparency and more speed in communication. We would not communicate just to react to provocations.
- The NGO's policy has always been aimed at achieving greater transparency of all our activities and projects.
- I believe that transparency is important under all conditions. Though we did not actively advertised the controlled burning activity, before its implementation (though all the necessary permits were achieved), since this could provoke negative reactions in some parts of

the society and could even lead to the blocking of activities.

- We would not communicate the specific financial parameters set for each action.
- The communication is transparent and will be done with this objective. Only personal data would not be communicated without consent for publication, sensitive information of any ongoing police operation carried out under the project or certain negotiations with sectors that are in progress.
- I would like to do things with more transparency without a doubt. For this we must know how to transmit information about invasive alien species very well.
- I think that since we are financed by public money for the most part, so we must be transparent.
- We would be more careful how we highlight the background of the measures/activities - people like simplicity and usually negatively respond to project publicity or highlighting of sponsors and so on.
- We cannot ensure full transparency in our communication given that we cannot disclose the exact location of the nesting sites of the targeted species due to the poaching risks.
- We are transparent in our work, but we are careful with sharing of information for the bird species and their nesting for example.
- Generally, more transparency is better. NGOs always fight for more of it. However, showing bloody kill of prey by predator, or slow death of chick by starvation are not the best one to communicate.
- More transparency. They usually think that we are hiding relevant stuff of the projects (final targets, total budget, etc.).
- As early and as transparent as possible, even before the project application is submitted.
- More transparency in general. No communication for exact positions of protected fauna and flora.
- As a public NGO, we have always aimed at achieving greater transparency. We have always worked in the public interest and have always tried to communicate our activities as best as we can to the general public.
- Transparency of actions is important, but information should be better managed with those most sensitive actions such as shots.
- More transparency until there is a common uprising in the project area.
- When we are talking about a project supported by the EU programme, we must be transparent!
- We are very open with the results (including setbacks). The only time we do not communicate is if a landowner does not want their land to be included.

**REACTIONS**

Almost all projects stated that they usually experienced acceptance of the projects from their target groups, but often not from the very beginning. Scepticism and reservation were often the first reactions but could most of the times be turned into acceptance by communication.

## ACTORS AND STAKEHOLDERS THAT ARE OFTEN CHALLENGING

Some projects stated that the communication with farmers/landowners and animal right activists can be especially challenging. The first, as the projects may impose an economic risk and the latter due to ethical reasoning.

## CONTACT WITH THE MEDIA

34% of the surveyed project experienced that they at some point a third party, e.g. the local newspaper, communicated about the project in an unwanted way. The conflicts were usually solved by providing facts-based active responses and participation processes.

## REASONS OF RESISTANCE

About 42% of the projects stated that they experienced resistance from target groups towards their projects, whereas 54% of them stated that this was due to the management measure, 16% due to the communication and 29 % due to both.

## BUDGET

The surveyed projects are using 2-30% of their total budget for the communication of their project. Overall, they expressed the wish to use 5-40% of the total budget (most of them 10-20%).

**QUESTION:** "Which/how much resources (budget, time, work power) would you suggest for communication measures?"

### ANSWERS:

- Each project must have a dedicated communication manager, working 1/2 time, as minimum. We strongly recommend also external budget for hiring communication agencies. It helps bringing new approaches and getting out of our own "communication bubble".
- At least 30-40% of the budget. Since projects must be co-financed, often the projects do not have the possibility to involve professional communication staff; therefore, the communication often is not sufficient. Maybe co-funding for communication activities could be increased by the EC.
- That depends on the project framework, goals, and activities; for nature conservation project about 20-30% of the resources seem appropriate.
- We suggest 25% of the budget.
- We suggest 20% of the budget.
- At least 20% of site-based projects' budget.
- Around 15% of the total budget. Networking events with other LIFE projects and Natura 2000 managers are of special interest.
- We suggest min. 10%, opt. 15 - 20%, max. 25% of the budget.
- We would need 10-15 % of the budget.
- In my opinion, 10% would be necessary including the outreach and working on the obligatory reports of the EU.
- We need 10 % of the budget.

- I would say 10 % of total budget is OK. I would also concentrate most of the budget on working days for communication expert. We would not recommend buy media articles (advertisements) for regular news of the project.
- It depends on the project and the conflicts it can create. In our case, we must include personnel specialized in conflict management and improve communication with highly specialized companies. We must increase the time and resources in these activities.
- We suggest 5-10% of total budget.
- The communication efforts after the project end will continue to be important for the organization, but the time and work power will depend on the available financial and human resources. Even without any additional funding, the organization will keep at least two people as part of the communication staff, even though it might be part-time.
- More resources for social media specific communications companies.
- The great impact marketing campaigns designed for example by big companies (think for example of a Christmas campaign), are several million euros. Although we expect a great impact with the communication budget of the LIFE Nature Guardians, the greater the budget, the greater the impact capacity. Therefore, being able to consider large communication campaigns well-endowed with a budget would be ideal.
- We would plan for a higher budget to include more travels so more communication sessions could happen.
- I think it is important to have someone half time on the communication of such a project to have optimal results. In terms of budget, I think this should not be neglected (about 5% of the project).
- Fulltime communication expert.
- We would need > 5% of the budget.
- I think that 2 persons (1 full-time equivalent) would be enough to ensure a good coverage.
- We would need enough to be able to have 100 % expert and doubled budget.
- At least 10% of the overall budget.
- More time and work power.
- That depends on the kind of LIFE project. For LIFE NAT projects, more effort is given in conservation actions, while in LIFE GIE projects more resources are devoted to communication / information actions.
- 10% of the budget is a minimum. I think, it should probably be higher.

## LEARNINGS

Most surveyed persons said that communication is of very high importance for the success of a project and that it should be target-group oriented as much as possible. In a communication, highlighting synergies and multiple benefits of projects are crucial, e.g. that bird habitat conservation supports the increase of biodiversity. Many surveyed representatives stated that communicators must have professional competences and social competences at the same time. Communication trainings would often be welcomed.

**QUESTION:** “How would you communicate differently?”

**ANSWERS:**

- We would involve more professional communication staff.
- Strengthening the communication with farmers is always an improvement.
- I would hire a professional team for the whole project.
- To users I would communicate more in press, radio and tv (personally, I think that there is an overload of info in the social networks). To managers I would communicate in national and international workshops, specific meetings, and newsletters and to the scientific community in conferences and scientific papers.
- We would start the communication activities in an earlier phase of the project.
- We need more participatory panels and more interactive sessions with local the population.
- We need to increase the communication events from the beginning of the project.
- We would not communicate so generally.
- It would be necessary to include specific conflict management professionals.
- We would make the messages more accessible and be more on the field.
- We would provide more information for citizens; one information event for each local community
- We think we are doing our best in communication.
- We would use other means and select a better target audience.
- It is important to anticipate the appearance of negative messages.
- We will base our communication on the two principles of ecological stewardship (ethics of responsible planning and management of natural resources) and shared interests through a robust shared communication and engagement strategy.
- The project includes different means of communication with the public and the stakeholders, it aims at reaching wide publicity. After the project end the team will evaluate the different means and estimate which of them had the biggest impact.
- Since we have not experienced major communication problems, we assume that we have chosen the right communication strategy, i.e. direct (face-to-face) communication with landowners and other concerned stakeholders.
- We do not need to communicate differently. It is very important to hold communication events in different places so that more and more people are thoroughly acquainted with the activities and goals of the project.
- The project plans to carry out its communication campaign through content marketing strategies, which proposes generating content of interest, specifically designed for a specific audience. Among others, blogging strategies, visual content, and collaboration with opinion prescribers (influencers) will be applied.
- I would have more contact with the local population.
- I would request more support from the communication

department of the LIFE program for the dissemination of the project.

- We would communicate with shorter videos (2 min max).
- We would put more money to have images of higher qualities (drone, images by professional photographers).
- We would do more publications, more newspaper articles, more social network publications.
- We would probably hold more personal meetings with stakeholders.
- I would give much more emphasis to the social networks and to the communication via internet in general. Also, videos are particularly important and would deserve more attention.
- We would try to involve influencers, Instagram (to reach the younger public).
- We would hold intensive campaigns at the very beginning of the project for local stakeholders and public in general.
- We would invest a bit more time in local communication in the beginning of the project.
- It is necessary to introduce new professional profiles, such as expert communicators. It is necessary to make a greater investment in communication media (e.g. social media).
- Personal communication is crucial.
- We would make a communication program first/cross border and then set the primary messages to cross link project and other actions.
- We would communicate with more positive slogans, good stories, best examples.

**QUESTION:** “Which contents would you communicate?”

**ANSWERS:**

- Ecosystem services, human-benefit approach, and context. That is, despite nature having intrinsic values, the practical approach calls for convincing people that biodiversity conservation brings tangible benefits (goods, services), or “reward”, while degradation of biodiversity brings “punishment” in reduced potential to deliver ecosystem services.
- We would communicate about the loss of biodiversity, need of nature protection, aesthetics of nature.
- We would communicate about the reasons, necessity and goals of the project and explore ways of involving the local people.
- Initially, we would communicate good examples and then all results.
- We would communicate the same: about the improvement of project activities and successes of the project.
- We would communicate the benefits (direct and indirect) of biodiversity conservation, participation in management decisions.
- We would communicate general contents to help to understand the project at its ending.
- We would communicate directly to drivers about the danger of collisions with wildlife. This is one of the objectives of a second ongoing LIFE Project.
- We would communicate results.

- We would communicate emotional issues.
- It is necessary to improve the knowledge of invasive species and the danger of naturalization of livestock species.
- We would communicate all the subject of the project and enhance face-to-face communication.
- We would communicate “dynamic” nature protection before “conservation” of habitats.
- The value of habitat conservation and improvements achieved in the project and the importance of European funding to carry out this kind of projects.
- Details of public interest; we would communicate more with the volunteers of the results obtained.
- Contribution to attractiveness of the region, climate change related benefits
- The actions planned with the greatest impact, and the reasons why they are raised.
- I would detail the planned actions and why they are carried out.
- We would also revindicating the role of farmers in nature conservation.
- If the communication is related to the involvement of landowners or activities on their land, it should include from the very beginning all conditions, opportunities and benefits related to the activity/conservation measure.
- Actions, measures, the reasons why we do that...
- We would aim to the meaning and importance of measures needed and the wide context.
- We would communicate positive news, interesting observations, products with a cause, new financial mechanism for the lake.
- Targets, possibilities, limits, and constraints of the project.
- We would communicate positive examples.
- Benefits for the future.
- More effort with the local population, giving greater prominence to get messages that are better understood to the public.
- The sustainability goals of the UN and its trans/relation to actions in the project.
- All the activities are interesting enough to be communicated; the most important aspect is how this content to touch/ inspire/ call to action.
- Talk with the people in their language, listen to understand their arguments and questions. And be ready to answer the question “So what?” I learned to be specific, descriptive, and balanced. I learned that people do not want to see the apocalypse, they want to see the possible solutions that we can offer.
- We have learned that the development of the expert capacity of the team not only for conservation activities but also for PR activities is key for the organization and the work we do. We have also come to realise that PR is not a secondary part of the organization's work but a key management function.
- The more you communicate and explain your success, the more people value and agree with it.
- Direct involvement of more professional communication staff.
- Communicate before and during the work on site to not let people get wrong ideas.
- You must communicate, inform, and boost communication and participation from the very beginning.
- Caring for communication in an active way prevents the appearance of conflicts.
- It is important to find meeting points and enable spaces to achieve them.
- You cannot convince people which do not like to be convinced. You never will get all in the boat. Nevertheless, communication helps a lot to be transparent and successful.
- That there is a larger interest than you might think from landowners regarding environmental and nature conservations issues.
- Foresee more time to negotiate with landowners.
- Direct communication with farmers is essential.
- It is very hard to communicate when the frame of communication is “money spent”. Because people normally support nature conservation, but they want to do that cheap. In this case, you need to switch the frame talking about “lives of birds, they deserve to live, we defend those poor birds and etc.”
- The high risk of project failure if local population is not conveniently informed and concerned with the project objectives.
- It is necessary to include measures that are inefficient but that involve specific sectors that help to minimize social pressure on the administration.
- Expect the unexpected ... and be prepared.
- Complexity in project management and difficulty managing the interrelation between multiple partners.
- We initially thought that our volunteers would be retired seniors, but we ran into a problem. They are socially more unoccupied, but they are of great social importance in supporting the family. Children while their parents are at work are the grandparents who support this and are therefore not as available as we originally anticipated.
- Growing awareness of authorities on local level about need for nature and landscape protection from the point of view of adaptation to climate change.
- Not many people are enthusiastic to hear about less tangible, long-term effects. They seem better persuaded by (or see as more attractive) something

**QUESTION:** “What were your (biggest) learnings?”

**ANSWERS:**

- Start the project with preparing a communication strategy and hire professionals to do it. They will analyse your target groups and suggest the best communication methods for each of them. It is very useful.
- Do not improvise. Communication professionals are useful! Understand what people already know and avoid redundancy. Do not appear as providing the holy truth. Try to understand people's needs behind what they openly ask for: hidden needs can be the next shared interests Understand people's expectations and do not promise what you cannot give. Develop the “right message” and use adequate terms in the “right” form for the audience.

tangible and infrastructure-related (ski lifts, roads, public utilities, etc.).

- Direct and active communication is essential precondition for achievement of desired results. This important for communication and supervision of the habitat restoration works.
- When presenting the project, the situation needs to be very well considered in order for the event / press release to receive the best media coverage.
- The impact on communication often does not depend so much on the way in which it communicates but the content, which is attractive. Unfortunately, some news about wildlife mortality, catastrophes or that generate alarm, spread easily. In contrast, scientific contents are more difficult to disseminate.
- When you have little money for direct actions with the species, there are some issues in which you do not invest so much money, communication is one of these issues. This was a mistake, so I would increase the budget in it.
- That the time spent doing communication is incredibly long and that it should not be underestimated.
- It is important to plan the purchase of professional photographs from the project budget. That shooting and making videos is important but that it requires big financial means
- That communication is an important part of the project, that it promotes the acceptance of the project and the involvement of local people.
- The difficulties found to be able to carry out restoration actions (permits, concession request to remove dykes). Changes in governance should be carried out to facilitate restoration of coastal and estuarine areas under the National authority protection.
- We never communicate enough.
- That proper and sufficient communication is the most important thing to be successful. :-)
- It is important to ensure a regular communication flow, rather than on the spot.
- The content is changing very fast and you should be very well prepared and to study all the time about the new opportunities in communication.
- Modern people and children are overloaded with information and they do not even read the text below the picture. Still children are impressed by field visits, but somebody must bring them to the field. So, available finances to cover transport cost helps a lot to make such visits happened especially in poorer countries where parent could not afford such expenditures.
- We experienced an extreme difficulty to change present ideas and thinking of local populations. That is, it is necessary to invest time and resources in communication and dissemination in the early stages of the projects.
- It is not possible to adequately implement Life projects involving local population with no participation of local populations.
- Planning more time for communication, also for the communication with the partners within the project!
- For every detail, the communication is the key.
- Continuous efforts are needed for getting acceptance

and behaviour changes.

- We have once again realised that people are the key to saving a species. So, it is crucial to convince them, to communicate and involve them in conservation activities, not only the local citizens in the target areas, but also the public. Another milestone in species conservation is the correct threat identification and consequent measures for species and habitat protection.
- The management of social media is very important, since science knowledge is not accepted as a management tool in certain social conflicts, so you must look for new paths to make management measures understood to the population.
- Stay in touch with people living, working, and having exceptional knowledge on areas where the project has its measures.