

Fact Sheet for agroecology organizations, researchers and policy makers

Capacity Building to Support Agroecology Transition in a Future Network of Living Labs and Research Infrastructures

Summary

Capacity Building to support agroecology transition is based on a 3-level approach, strongly related to target users:

- Support development of skills and knowledge of stakeholders involved in agroecology transition
- Set-up and management of agroecology Living Labs and Research Infrastructures
- Set-up and implementation of a European Network of Agroecology Living Labs and Research Infrastructures



Photo: Capacity Building Session, Source: ALL-Ready project

Problem

Within the complex landscape of agroecology and the transition toward it, there is a need to develop the competencies and skills of the stakeholders involved. Living labs (LLs) and Research Infrastructures (RIs) are proposed as instruments to support this transition. However, specific competencies are required to establish and operate these LLs effectively and engage stakeholders in the co-creation approach. Supporting competency development enables the structured and sustainable navigation of this transition, particularly when establishing agroecology LLs and RIs. As of now, these initiatives have not yet collaborated within a European network that would facilitate mutual learning.

Solution

One of the primary objectives of the ALL-Ready project is to scope, test, and evaluate a Capacity Building Program (CBP) for the future Network of Agroecology Living Labs and Research Infrastructures. This program is designed to cater to specific key end-users and address their capacity building needs by identifying the essential competencies (skills, knowledge, attitudes) necessary to successfully operate such a network. This endeavor is expected to contribute significantly to the broader agroecology transition, aligning with the management of Research Infrastructures and Living Labs focused on agroecology. While the Capacity Building Program in ALL-Ready is primarily focused on the level of Living Labs and Research Infrastructures, recommendations for further actions will be

provided for other levels. Specifically, the ALL-Ready project aims to deliver to end users:

- Recommendations for Capacity Building to support the transition to agroecology.
- Tools for understanding co-creation and for supporting the establishment and operation of agroecology Living Labs and Research Infrastructures.
- Recommendations regarding the benefits of a European Network of Agroecology Living Labs and Research Infrastructures, along with insights on how to establish and manage such a network.

Benefits

After prototyping and experimenting with the framework, specific end-users can benefit from the implemented Capacity Building items developed, by incorporating them into their local/regional settings and utilizing them to expedite their learning curve.

Supporting the needed skills and competencies of stakeholders involved in agroecology transition via Capacity Building will help them accelerate their learning curve.

Main results

The framework of the Capacity Building Program has been designed, prototyped, and tested with the ALL-Ready Pilot Network Members.

In particular, the ALL-Ready project collaborated with the Pilot Network to identify various training formats, ensuring that the developed materials would align with the diverse needs of different stakeholder groups. Working in conjunction with the Pilot Network, a group of approximately 15 Living Labs and Research Infrastructures established within the context of ALL-Ready, we identified five competencies that were necessary for setting up and running agroecology LLs or RIs:

1. Agroecology as a science
2. Agroecology as a practice

3. Understanding the concept of agroecology
4. Co-creation and the operation of living labs
5. Systems thinking

This effort resulted in the development of a series of training sessions^{1,2,3,4} tested by the Pilot Network Members between March and June 2023. These training sessions included a session on Systems Thinking in the context of agroecology, along with an online training course titled 'Understanding Living Lab Concepts and Co-creation.' This course comprised three modules:

1. Living Lab Basics, Governance Models, and the Business Models of Living Labs
2. Management of Living Labs
3. Living Lab Model, Real-Life Experimentation, and Facilitation Techniques

Special attention was given to the validation of these formats, utilizing post-training surveys and a final validation workshop to ensure that feedback can be integrated into future iterations of the Capacity Building Program.

As part of the broader CBP for agroecology, the ALL-Ready partners also developed a database of existing training materials, which is currently in the pilot phase. These materials will eventually be made publicly available through the Agroecology Virtual Lab.

Practical recommendations

To secure the effectiveness of the Capacity Building Program for the future Network of Agroecology Living Labs and Research Infrastructures, it is essential to:

- Incorporate farmers into data collection and analysis.
- Maintain ongoing communication with members to comprehend their expectations and needs.
- Promote international collaboration and the exchange of knowledge.
- Quality assessments to preserve the integrity of the Living Labs and Research Infrastructures network.

Further information

1. Couture, I., Spagnoli, F., Vilariño, F., & Bertolin, J. (2023, July 20). ALL-Ready Training Module 1 - Understanding Living Lab Concepts and Co-creation. Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.8169285>
2. Couture, I., Schuurman, D., & Wuyts, G. (2023, July 20). All-Ready Training Module 2 - Understanding Living Lab Concepts and Co-creation. Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.8169313>
3. Dimitri Schuurman, & Gilles Wuyts. (2023, August 14). ALL-Ready Training Module 3 - Management of Living Labs. Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.8246156>
4. Bijttebier, J., & Fosselle, S. (2023, November 1). ALL-Ready Training Module 4 - Systems thinking. Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10063924>
5. The recordings of the Capacity Building sessions are available on the ALL-Ready website on the following link: <https://www.all-ready-project.eu/agroecology-living-labs-1-1.htm>



Photo: INRAE



Photo: ÖMKI

About ALL-Ready: ALL-Ready is a Coordination and Support Action (CSA) funded by the European Commission (EC) with the aim of preparing a framework for a future European network of Living Labs (LL) and Research Infrastructures (IR) that will enable the transition towards agroecology throughout Europe. Based on the premise that agroecology can strengthen the sustainability and resilience of farming systems, the project will contribute to addressing the multiple challenges that they are facing today including climate change, loss of biodiversity, dwindling resources, degradation of soil and water quality.

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