

Implementability of Agri-environmental Targets in Sweden

BALTIC COMPASS promotes sustainable agriculture in the Baltic Sea Region. The 90 million people living in the region deserve locally produced, high-quality food, but it is also important to protect the very vulnerable Baltic Sea. Baltic Compass fosters win-win solutions for the agricultural and environmental sectors to promote a more sustainable rural economy and healthier ecosystems. This policy brief focuses on agri-environmental targets as a basis for combating eutrophication in the Baltic Sea caused by agricultural run-off.

Adoption of key agri-environmental goals

Sweden has applied a wide range of agri-environmental measures since the late 1980s, when nutrient problems began to attract attention. The first Swedish programme was aimed at reducing nitrogen leaching. The programme now also includes measures to reduce phosphorus and ammonia losses from agriculture. In general, the measures applied have included financial regulation, voluntary approaches, extension programmes, information campaigns and research. In 1999 and 2005 the Swedish Parliament adopted sixteen national environmental goals for different areas based on Sweden's environmental policy. The goals are closely related to address nutrient enrichment and agriculture practices, and have been formulated in accordance with EU environment policy and directives. The 7th environmental goal is on eutrophication, and the associated quality objective aims to reduce phosphorus and nitrogen in water bodies.

Previous interim targets for the quality objectives are now to be replaced on an ongoing basis with milestone targets, which will define steps toward achieving the environmental quality objectives.

Agriculture and environment in Sweden – key facts:

- In 2007, 177,600 people were employed in the agricultural sector (full- and part-time).
- In 2007 the production value of agriculture was SEK 4.7 billion.
- Sweden's land area is 41.1 million hectares (excluding lakes and watercourses).
- Sweden has 2.7 million hectares Arable land (6.5% of Sweden's land area), and 23 million hectares of forest (56 % of Sweden's land area), and 0.5 million hectares of pasture land (1.2% of Sweden's land area).

Implementing actors

The Swedish EPA is responsible for several of the sixteen environmental goals. The key tasks for the Swedish EPA are to present proposals for environmental policy and legislation to the Swedish Government and ensure that environmental policy decisions are implemented. The Ministry of Agriculture has overall responsibility for the Rural Development Programme (RDP), which is implemented by the Board of Agriculture. The Board monitors and analyzes

developments within the sector and implements political decisions within the field of activity. The County Administrative Boards (CAB) implements the environmental quality objectives and administers the RDP on a regional level. In 2004 Sweden implemented the EU Water Framework Directive. Sweden is now divided into five water districts, with one River Basin District Authority in each water district. The River Basin District Authorities are responsible for reaching the targets in the WFD even though the ultimate responsibility lies with the Government.

Methodology

The assessment has drawn on evidence emerging from a review of literature, interviews and consultations with stakeholders directly or indirectly involved in the implementation of agro-environmental measures.

Key challenges to implementation

Sweden has initiated efforts to reduce nutrient flows to the Baltic Sea from Swedish water bodies, but it is broadly agreed that more action is required. Many mitigation measures have been implemented at the national level. Sweden has been a leading proponent of voluntary policy processes, in contrast to the non-voluntary policy processes at the EU level.

The Baltic Sea Action Plan (BSAP) as well as the Water Framework Directive (WFD) and the Marine Strategy has increased the attention on the role of and need for agro environmental measures to improve the water quality in the Baltic Sea and water bodies in Sweden. The goals in the WFD, the BSAP and the Marine Strategy have influenced and shaped the environment policy in Sweden.

Environmental NGOs in Sweden have complained about contradictory policy measures. For example, the government has endorsed the targets set in the BSAP, but at the same time the government decided to remove the nitrate tax.

In interviews, some of the stakeholders said that one limiting factor in reducing nutrient flows to the Baltic Sea is the lack of a comprehensive picture of nutrient flows. For example, airborne transport of nutrients is not considered in the BSAP. The Environmental Protection Agency (Naturvårdsverket) suggests that the forestry sector should be included in the BSAP.

Some Best Available Techniques (BAT) can prove to be economically beneficial, but not all. Increasing compensatory payments to farmers may improve implementation, but also conflict with budget lines in the RDP and regulations on cost-coverage. This issue needs to be addressed to improve implementation of BATS that are not economically beneficial for farmers.

Existing jurisdiction can block mitigation measures, e.g. such as construction of wetlands, and may need to be revised to take in multiple benefits. New thinking and instruments are needed to increase the incentives for farmers and landowners to implement BAT and mitigation measures.

Voluntary versus non voluntary measures

Voluntary policies emerge from issuance of a goal; a host of voluntary measures can be employed to meet it. Voluntary measures imply that the responsibility for the choice of measure, adaptation, innovation, monitoring and evaluation lies with the implementing agency, or even at farm level. Respondents in this study supported voluntary approaches, owing to the high level of technical skill among Swedish farmers. Respondents argued that the Swedish experience suggests that many other BSR countries prioritise the implementation of mandatory EU

directives (where non-compliance leads to sanctions) rather than non EU voluntary policy such as the BSAP (where sanctions are not applied).

Monitoring and evaluation

A number of the respondents expressed their concern about the current emphasis of monitoring and evaluation is on the measures implemented rather than on the outcomes of implementing measures. Another concern was the use of a quantitative rather than a qualitative evaluation system (e.g. the number of hectares of wetlands constructed or the number of buffer zones established). This has resulted in buffer zones being set up in areas that may not be ideal for that purpose, or where the expected outcome cannot be generated due to other external factors influencing the system. A reliance on quantitative measures of success can prevent an integrated and holistic approach to reducing eutrophication.

Governance

In Sweden of the spheres of governance, the public sector, private sector and civil society are all actively engaged in implementing agro-environmental measures. For instance, private consultancies play a key role in implementation, and the Board of Agriculture provides a control function. This institutional mosaic creates a robust implementing environment that allows for continuity, even in a climate of increasing institutional change and uncertainty. Also, the control and implementation functions are separated. Findings from this assessment suggest that this approach should receive increased attention and support.

The assessment found broad agreement that a monitoring and evaluation system would allow improved insights into which measures are most effective, and how the implementation process can be improved and strengthened. However, this would require a combined qualitative and quantitative monitoring and evaluation system.

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