Participatory and multi-level governance decision-making tools: methodological guidelines, including protocols

D 3.4

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D3.4 - PARTICIPATORY AND MULTI-LEVEL GOVERNANCE DECISION-MAKING TOOLS: METHODOLOGICAL GUIDELINES, INCLUDING PROTOCOLS

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Authors	Ilona Rac (UL BF), Emil Erjavec (UL BF), Simone Sterly (IfLS), Roel Jongeneel (WUR), Carla Wember (IfLS)
Work Package Leader	IfLS
Project coordinator	Ecorys Belgium

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Methodological guidelines for decision-making tools, including protocols (update)

FOCUS

- Support **more inclusive, transparent, and evidence-based policymaking** in the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).
- **Strengthen governance** through structured stakeholder engagement across all phases of CAP Strategic Plan (CSP) development, from early design to implementation and monitoring.
- Promote participatory and multi-level governance to help Member States **align their CSPs with both EU objectives and national or regional agricultural priorities.**

METHODOLOGY

The guidelines is build on insights from the ***Tools4CAP Conceptual Framework***, the ***Evaluation and Benchmarking of CSPs***, and the report on ***Co-Designed Improved or New Decision-Making Tools***.

KEY ASPECTS OF THE NEW DELIVERY MODEL

- **Performance monitoring**
- **Enhanced flexibility**
- **Performance reporting**
- **Results & accountability**

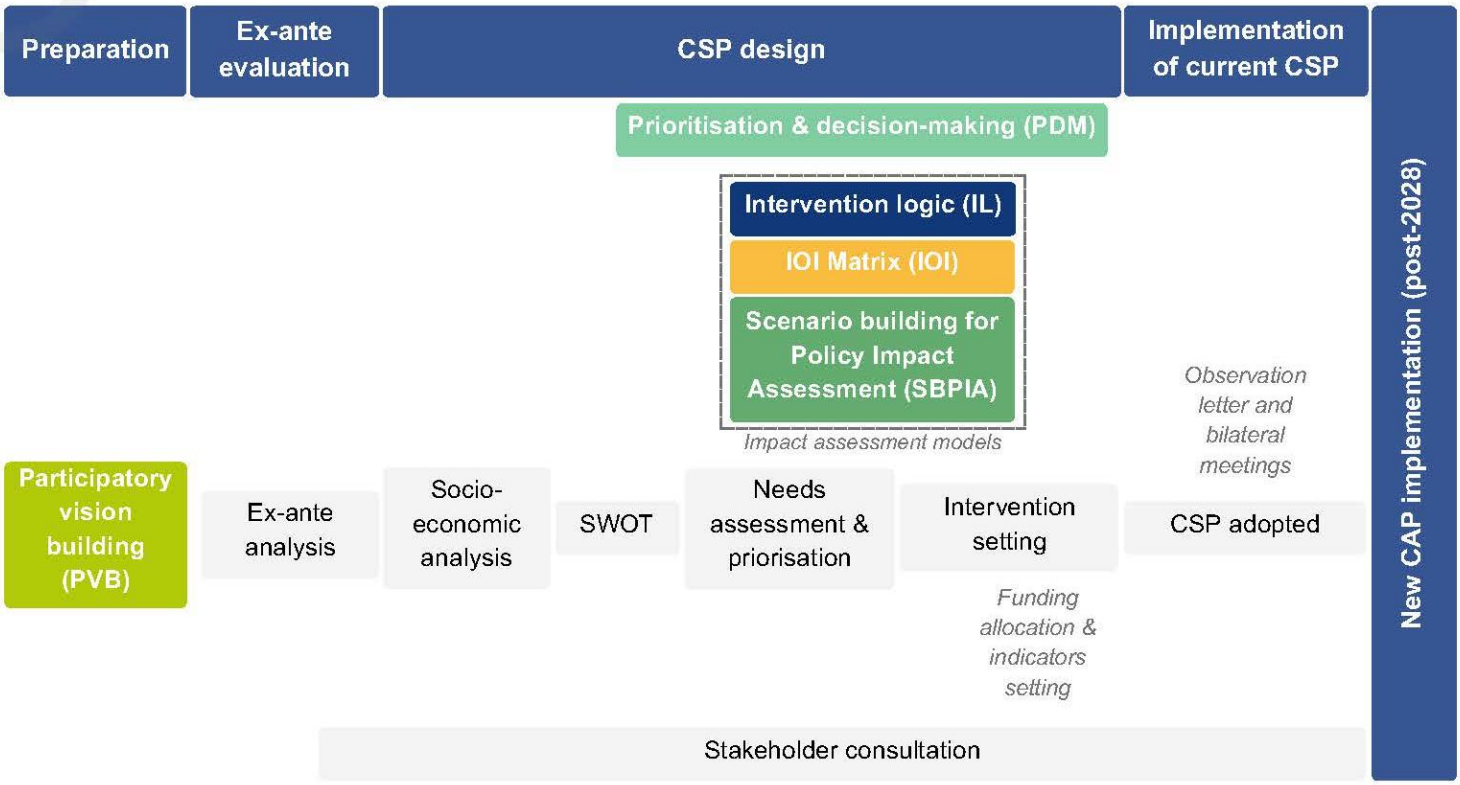
GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF CAP STRATEGIC PLAN POLICYMAKING

- Evidence-based policymaking
- Transparency in decision-making
- Inclusive stakeholder engagement
- Flexibility and adaptability
- Accountability and monitoring
- Coherence with the European Green Deal and Sustainable Development Goals
- Efficiency and cost-effectiveness

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

- A detailed **Policy Task–Tool Matrix** helps authorities match specific CSP planning tasks (e.g., SWOT analysis, intervention prioritisation) with the most appropriate participatory tools.
- Each tool includes a **step-by-step implementation protocol**.
- Guidance covers **all phases of CSP development**: from early design to implementation and monitoring.
- Examples of **real-world best practices** from EU Member States demonstrate how stakeholder engagement can enhance CSP preparation processes.

TIMING OF PARTICIPATORY AND MULTI-LEVEL GOVERNANCE DECISION-MAKING TOOLS AND APPROACHES IN THE CSP



POLICY TASK	END USER NEEDS	SUITABLE TOOL(S)
Socio-Economic Context Analysis	Accurate, comprehensive socio-economic data	PVB
SWOT Analysis	Identification of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats	PVB
Needs Assessment	Inclusive understanding of local needs	PVB, PDM
Intervention Setting	Coherent intervention strategies aligned with CAP objectives	IL, IOI, SBPIA
Target Setting	Consensus on measurable targets	IL, IOI, SBPIA
Financial Allocations	Justified, prioritised budgeting	IL, IOI, SBPIA, PDM
Ex-Ante Analysis and Strategic Environmental Assessment	Assessment of environmental and social impacts	IL, IOI, SBPIA
Stakeholder Consultations	Inclusive and transparent feedback from stakeholders	ALL TOOLS

Executive summary

This document provides guidelines on participatory decision-making and multi-level governance (PDMMG) tools for use in designing, implementing, and monitoring the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) Strategic Plans (CSPs). These tools address the need for inclusivity, transparency, and evidence-based decision-making in CSP preparation, offering structured methodologies for engaging stakeholders such as farmers, rural communities, environmental organizations and consumers, and aligning policy objectives with their needs while respecting EU demands and pursuing national or regional agricultural policy targets. These guidelines are intended to support EU Member States (MSs) in preparing CSPs that are effective, perceived as legitimate by both stakeholders and the general public, and resilient to changes in the broader policy environment.

The presented tools support inclusive policymaking by providing avenues for stakeholder input, ensuring transparency and accountability through structured consultations, and fostering evidence-based and performance-driven policies that adapt to local and regional contexts. They also contribute to building shared ownership of policies, encouraging greater cooperation and alignment with CAP's overarching goals.

These guidelines also address the integration of these tools into the CAP's New Delivery Model (NDM), which emphasises performance-based governance. This model shifts the focus from compliance to measurable outcomes, requiring Member States to monitor and report on progress using a Performance Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (PMEF). The document explains how participatory tools can support the NDM by ensuring that CSPs are grounded in robust evidence and stakeholder input, enhancing accountability and policy effectiveness.

A detailed framework is presented for integrating these tools into CSP design, implementation, and monitoring. Guiding principles are elaborated for incorporating participatory methods, emphasizing inclusivity, transparency, and flexibility, and ways in which these methods can support various policy tasks, from needs assessment and SWOT analysis to financial allocation and target setting, are described.

The document outlines specific tools and their applications, beginning with Participatory Vision Building (PVB). This tool engages stakeholders early in the policy cycle to co-create a shared vision for the future of agriculture and rural areas. By aligning diverse stakeholder interests, PVB fosters consensus and ensures that CSP objectives are rooted in the realities of those affected. It details a step-by-step roadmap for implementing this tool, emphasizing stakeholder engagement, data collection, and iterative feedback to refine and finalize the vision.

The Intervention-Objective-Impact (IOI) Matrix is introduced as a practical tool for aligning policy interventions with specific CAP objectives. This matrix helps policymakers visualize the relationships between interventions and goals, assess potential synergies and conflicts, and optimize resource allocation. It is particularly useful for ensuring policy coherence and addressing trade-offs between competing priorities. The document outlines a systematic approach for creating and using the IOI Matrix, including stakeholder involvement and scenario analysis.

Scenario Building for Policy Impact Assessment is presented as a method for projecting the potential outcomes of various policy choices. This tool allows policymakers and stakeholders to explore different pathways to achieving CAP objectives, considering economic, environmental, and social impacts. It is particularly valuable for fostering adaptive management and ensuring that policies remain aligned with evolving challenges and opportunities.

Prioritization and decision-making tools are also discussed, with a focus on methods for ranking interventions based on their cost-effectiveness and contribution to CAP goals. These tools enable policymakers to make informed choices about resource allocation, balancing short-term needs with long-term sustainability objectives.

Throughout the document, practical examples and best practices are provided to illustrate the successful implementation of these tools. Where available, case studies are included to highlight how MSs have used participatory methods in the past to enhance stakeholder engagement, improve policy design, and build

consensus regarding CAP interventions. Examples include digital platforms for public consultations, multi-actor fora for vision building, and structured feedback loops for continuous policy improvement.

The document concludes by emphasizing the transformative potential of participatory and multi-level governance tools in CAP policymaking by fostering inclusivity, transparency, and adaptability. Some challenges in their effective integration are also highlighted.

This updated version of the document reflects several substantive revisions compared to the original. First, one of the tools previously presented as a separate tool has been removed and integrated into the general analytical framework, in order to improve conceptual clarity and avoid overlap. Second, the document has been updated to reflect recent policy developments, including the European Commission's proposal for the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2028–2034 and its implications for CAP governance. Finally, the descriptions and guidance related to the remaining tools have been revised and refined based on insights from the Tools4CAP case studies (D5.2) and stakeholder feedback collected through focus group discussions, with a particular emphasis on practical applicability and implementation conditions.

1 Introduction

1.1 Participatory and multi-level governance decision-making tools in support of CAP strategic planning

In Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) Strategic Planning (CSP), **participatory decision-**making **and multi-level governance** (**PDMMG)** tools play a crucial role in ensuring that policies are inclusive, transparent, and aligned with the needs of the policy's diverse stakeholders, such as farmers, rural communities, environmental groups, and others. These tools allow stakeholders to contribute actively to CSP design, implementation, and evaluation, enhancing the relevance, effectiveness, and legitimacy of CAP interventions. They can:

- ***Ensure inclusive and representative policymaking***: Participatory and multi-level governance decision-making tools provide structured ways to gather input from various stakeholders, ensuring that the voices of various groups—especially those in rural or marginalised communities—are heard. This inclusivity supports creating policies that address the real needs and priorities of all stakeholders, resulting in more widely supported and sustainable interventions.
- ***Facilitate transparency and accountability***: Participatory and multi-level governance decision-making tools increase transparency by involving stakeholders directly in decision-making processes. Stakeholders can see how decisions are made, the criteria used for prioritising needs, and how resources are allocated, which builds trust in the CAP process. Documenting each step and rationale also improves accountability, allowing stakeholders and oversight bodies to understand the basis for policy decisions.
- ***Support evidence-based and performance-driven CSPs***: many participatory and multi-level governance decision-making tools incorporate methods for prioritising interventions, conducting scenario analyses, and developing intervention logic pathways, helping policymakers make informed, data-driven decisions. This evidence-based approach enhances CAP's performance-driven model by focusing on outcomes rather than simply on procedural compliance.
- ***Enhance policy relevance and responsiveness***: through structured input and feedback mechanisms, participatory and multi-level governance decision-making tools ensure that CSPs are responsive to changing circumstances and local conditions. These tools allow for regular stakeholder engagement during both the planning and implementation phases, enabling CAP authorities to adapt policies as needs evolve or as new challenges arise.
- ***Help build shared ownership and commitment***: when stakeholders are involved in defining objectives, prioritising needs, and monitoring outcomes, they develop a greater sense of ownership and responsibility for the policies implemented. This shared commitment can help improve compliance and cooperation and foster a more proactive approach of stakeholders to achieving the CAP's goals for sustainable agriculture and rural development.

The last (2021) reform (**Regulation (EU)** 2021/2115**)** of the CAP introduced a **New Delivery Model (NDM),** which represents a shift from a compliance-based approach to a performance-based governance model. This model gives EU Member States more flexibility and responsibility in designing and implementing CAP Strategic Plans (CSPs) to meet shared EU objectives while allowing for adaptations to national and regional specificities. Article 106 of the CSP regulation explicitly requires MS to draw up their plans based on transparent procedures, including relevant regional and local authorities, and consult with relevant stakeholders; a report on the consultation of partners is one of the mandatory annexes of CSPs (Article 107). As the introduction to the Regulation indicates, the NDM aims to focus on outcomes rather than prescriptive rules, aiming to streamline CAP administration, increase accountability, and enhance policy impact across Member States.

Key aspects of the NDM are:

- ***Performance monitoring***: under the NDM, Member States are required to monitor and report on their progress using a Performance Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (PMEF)**.** This framework includes indicators (output, result, and impact indicators) that track the achievements of CSP objectives.
- ***Enhanced flexibility for Member States***: the NDM allows Member States to design CSPs based on their own agricultural, environmental, and socio-economic contexts. This flexibility enables tailored approaches that address specific national or regional needs while aligning with broader CAP goals .
- ***Annual performance reporting***: each Member State must submit annual performance reports to the European Commission, detailing progress towards meeting the targets (output indicators) set out in their CSPs. This replaces previous compliance checks, focusing instead on whether objectives are met rather than on how resources are used.
- ***Focus on results and accountability***: by shifting the emphasis to measurable results, the NDM aims to improve the CAP's accountability. MS are now accountable for achieving agreed-upon outcomes, which helps justify CAP funding allocations based on demonstrable impacts.

The NDM thus fundamentally redefines the CAP's governance by promoting a results-oriented approach that respects MS' unique contexts while ensuring alignment with EU-level objectives. However, to ensure that a MS' CSP truly matches the MS' needs, a sound evidence base must be ensured, which can and should partly be achieved through the use of participatory methods that support needs-based planning, transparency, adaptive management, prioritization of interventions, and accountability. The use of these methods can support managing authorities in creating CSPs that are inclusive, transparent, robust and effective. Chapter 2 provides an overview of the elements (policy tasks) of the NDM that are particularly suited to be addressed using participatory methods.

While the legislative proposals under consideration at the time of writing for the **next Multiannual financial period** (2028-2034) do not provide very specific provisions regarding stakeholder inclusion, there are certain demands mentioned both in the introductory citations and articles in the Proposal for a new regulation establishing the European Fund for economic, social and territorial cohesion, agriculture and rural, fisheries and maritime, prosperity and security for the period 2028-2034 (COM/2025/565 final; hereinafter referred to as the NRPF regulation).

This legislative proposal aims to include the CAP in a broader European fund (the National and regional partnership fund), with common preparation, implementation and monitoring rules, in order to, in alia, "Foster ownership at all levels, with a multi-level governance and a strong regional dimension, based on shared management and the partnership principle, ensuring support is focused on the needs of each Member State and its regions and sectors, as well as continuity and predictability for managing authorities and beneficiaries." The partnership principle, "ensuring the involvement of regional, local, urban and other public authorities, civil society organisations, economic and social partners" (introductory citation 24), is enshrined in Article 6 of the proposed regulation, along with the multi-level governance and bottom up approach, MS will be obliged to prepare and implement their Plans in partnership with regional and local authorities (Article 21), as well as report on stakeholder engagement (Article 22).

Furthermore, in the new institutional context governing several policy fields heretofore considered separate and independent, MS will have to ensure and demonstrate coherence, synergies and complementarities between measures supporting different objectives – a goal that some of the tools described in these guidelines, such as the IOI matrix, are particularly well-suited to achieve.

Participatory decision-making tools can significantly contribute to integrate diverse stakeholder input into the CAP Strategic Planning (CSP) process by supporting a collaborative, evidence-based approach. They can:

- Support the transition to sustainable agricultural practices: tools such as **stakeholder consultation platforms** and **scenario building for policy impact assessment** can help engage farmers, environmentalists, and rural communities in identifying and prioritising

sustainable practices and real potentials for their usage. Through these tools, stakeholders can collaboratively assess, for example, the benefits of eco-schemes, agroecology, and other practices aligned with the Green Deal, fostering a shared commitment to reduce pesticide use, improve soil health, and enhance biodiversity. Furthermore, these tools allow for the co-creation of interventions, ensuring that CSPs align with Green Deal objectives – consulting stakeholders and experts from different fields (especially farm management, soil science, ecology and animal welfare, but also sociology and behavioural economics) when constructing specific CAP measures can support farmers' shift to more sustainable farm management practices as part of balanced overarching low-emission strategies. Aligning farm-level measures with higher-level goals is crucial for enabling CAP plans to meet specific climate needs and ensuring alignment with national and EU climate objectives.

- Enhance climate action through collaborative planning: The EGD emphasises the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and the promotion of climate-neutral practices by 2050. Participatory tools like **vision building** and **multi-stakeholder focus groups** can facilitate achieving this goal by bringing together different voices to envision a climate-neutral future for agriculture. These tools allow stakeholders to jointly develop pathways to meet climate targets, fostering buy-in for initiatives like carbon sequestration in soils and sustainable nutrient management. Furthermore, **scenario building** can provide CAP authorities with a basis for, for example, modelling different pathways to reaching climate goals and aligning policies with Green Deal targets.
- Promote transparency and accountability in EGD implementation: tools such as **Process communication and stakeholder engagement** ensure that stakeholders are continuously informed and engaged, building trust in the implementation of EGD objectives. For example, regular updates and open channels for tracking and feedback could help stakeholders understand how eco-schemes and other interventions are contributing to environmental targets such as reducing nutrient pollution.

By integrating stakeholder engagement and decision-making tools into the CAP, MSs can effectively address EGD objectives, making agricultural practices more sustainable, climate-resilient, and transparent. These tools provide a structured, inclusive framework for aligning CSPs with broader EU goals for a sustainable future. It might even be argued that the resistance with which the increased environmental ambition of the EGD was met in many EU MSs is a consequence of an insufficient or inadequate use of such instruments, not only during design but also during the implementation phase of the new CAP (cf. Whitton & Carmichael, 2024).

1.2 Purpose, audience and structure of these Guidelines

This user-oriented Guideline document is intended to improve the uptake and application of stakeholder engagement and decision-making tools in CSP design and implementation. The document builds on insights from the following **Tools4CAP documents**:

1. Tools4CAP – Conceptual Framework (D1.2): This document outlines the CAP's shift towards a performance-based approach under the New Delivery Model. It provides a comprehensive conceptual picture of the design and monitoring of CAP Strategic Plans (CSPs), examining the tools and methodologies selected by Member States (MSs) and the factors influencing these choices.
2. Tools4CAP – Evaluation and Benchmarking of Methods and Tools (D1.3): This deliverable evaluates the methods and tools used by EU MSs for designing and monitoring their CSPs, highlighting strengths, weaknesses, and potential improvements to facilitate their future replication. It includes benchmarking factsheets, evaluation criteria, and key findings for each tool category, providing MSs with a detailed understanding of available tools and practices to support informed selection and adaptation for future CSPs.

3. Tools4CAP D3.2 – Report on Co-Designed Improved or New Decision-Making Tools: This deliverable outlines the rationale for selecting key challenges and methods for co-design in CSP development and stakeholder engagement. It includes implementation guidelines and feedback from working groups on a variety of participatory tools, aiming to enhance the quality of CSP outcomes by addressing regulatory requirements and improving decision-making processes. The implementation guidelines focus on best practices for using participatory and multi-level governance decision-making tools to enhance transparency, continuous engagement, and adaptive management in CSP processes.

Tools4CAP D5.2 – Analysis of case studies, which integrates the findings of 12 case studies undertaken as part of the Tools4CAP project operationalizing different tools or their combinations and provides a transversal assessment of their results. This guideline targets all stakeholders involved in agriculture, rural development, and environmental governance within the EU. This document is primarily targeted at the following audiences:

1. National CAP Managing Authorities (MS level): as the primary implementers of CAP Strategic Plans, these authorities can benefit from guidance on effectively integrating participatory and multi-level governance decision-making tools into CSP design, monitoring, and evaluation. This document is intended to help them navigate the process of engaging diverse stakeholders at different stages of CSP design and aligning their CSPs with EU-level objectives.
2. Regional and local government bodies: local and regional authorities are crucial for implementing the CAP on the ground. Guidance on participatory and multi-level governance decision-making tools can enable them to tailor consultations and engage local stakeholders in ways that reflect regional and local contexts, improving the relevance and acceptance of CSP interventions.
3. EU institutions and CAP oversight bodies: it can be useful for bodies like the European Commission's Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development (DG AGRI) and the European Court of Auditors to be provided with insights into how Member States could engage with stakeholders. Methodological guidelines may help them evaluate Member States' participatory practices and provide guidance on improving them.
4. At the national level, CAP networks and Monitoring committees, which are mandatory bodies at the MS level intended to improve the design, implementation and monitoring of CSPs, can also use the tools described here to help guide and structure their work, as well as increase efficiency, transparency and legitimacy.
5. Agricultural advisory services and CAP consultants: these persons support CAP authorities by offering expertise in policy design and especially implementation. Guidelines on participatory tools can help them provide informed, methodologically sound advice on stakeholder engagement within the CSP process, as well as conduct their own stakeholder engagement processes in support of CAP implementation and feedback on measures for adaptive CAP management.
6. Stakeholder groups and civil society organizations (CSOs): farming associations, environmental NGOs and rural development groups are essential contributors to CAP planning and monitoring. Guidelines like the present can help these groups identify at which stages of CAP design, implementation and monitoring they can actively participate in the CSP process, voice their needs most effectively, and provide feedback on the impact of CAP interventions on the ground.
7. National Coordinating authorities established in accordance with the proposed NRPP regulation to coordinate between managing authorities established under the NRPP.

1.3 How to use these guidelines

This document is structured in such a way that the policy needs corresponding to the CSP design process of end users are met most effectively. Therefore, we first provide users with a general chapter on principles for including participatory and multi-level governance decision-making tools into the CSPs, which includes

(Chapter 2.3) an overview of the combinations of policy needs (tasks) such as needs assessment and prioritization of objectives, with the tools already used by certain Member States or regions (see Tools4CAP Inventory https://www.tools4cap.eu/tools/) and the tools selected by the Tools4CAP consortium (see Deliverables D3.1 and D3.2) as the most pertinent in meeting these policy needs. This is followed by an implementation protocol for each of the selected tools (Chapters 3-8) that includes a general description, the policy tasks that the tool is best suited for, the necessary resources for implementation, a stepwise guide for implementation, and potential challenges in implementation; additionally, examples of use and best practices are provided. Where possible, the document is equipped with internal cross-referencing links that take the user directly to the tool of interest.

2 Framework for the integration of participatory and multi-level governance decision-making tools into CSP design

2.1 Guiding principles of the CSP policymaking processes and options for integrating participatory and multi-level decision-making tools

Integrating tools into the CSP policymaking processes requires a structured and strategic approach. The structured use of these tools, guided by principles of the NDM, will empower Member States to build CSPs that are both impactful and resilient by enhancing transparency, inclusivity, accountability, and evidence-based decision-making. This section outlines the principles essential for incorporating participatory and decision-support tools effectively in the CSP processes, aligned with the NDM. Furthermore, examples of tools serving the principle are provided.

Evidence-based policymaking

- **Objective**: Base policy decisions on empirical data, research, and rigorous analysis.
- **Description**: Evidence-based policymaking relies on collecting and analysing quantitative and qualitative data to guide decisions and evaluate potential impacts. The NDM's performance-based focus requires tools that integrate data into every phase of the policy cycle, from design to monitoring.
- **Outcomes**: Improved policy coherence, consistency, and effectiveness, as policy interventions are founded on concrete data and realistic projections.

- **Example tools**:
    - Scenario building for policy impact assessment (PIA): This tool allows policymakers to model outcomes of various interventions using both quantitative and qualitative analyses. By comparing scenarios to baseline conditions, policymakers can predict potential impacts and mitigate risks effectively.
    - Intervention logic: Outlines a causal pathway from objectives to outcomes, based on evidence and best practices, which aids in assessing whether interventions effectively address identified needs.

Transparency in decision-making

- **Objective**: Enhance trust and accountability by making decision-making processes open, visible and understandable.
- **Description**: Transparency ensures that decisions are well-documented, accessible, and communicated to stakeholders in a timely and comprehensible manner, enabling stakeholder contributions where appropriate. Given the CAP's rather complex governance structure, transparency reduces potential misunderstandings and fosters a collaborative environment.
- **Outcomes**: Increased stakeholder trust, accountability, and support for CAP measures through a clearer understanding of the decision-making process.
- **Example tools**:
    - Intervention-objective-impact (IOI) matrix: This tool provides a structured approach to analyse and communicate the rationale behind policy decisions, illustrating how interventions align with CAP objectives and expected impacts.
    - Scenario building for policy impact assessment (PIA): This tool allows for a transparent comparison of options by exploring various policy scenarios, enabling stakeholders to understand the basis of selected interventions and anticipate potential outcomes.
    - Participatory vision building: This tool helps can help formulate policies in an open, transparent manner with a clear method of stakeholder selection and decision-making process.

Process design and communication

- **Objective:** Foster transparency, inclusivity, and continuous dialogue throughout the CAP Strategic Plan (CSP) policymaking process to ensure stakeholder input is integrated into decision-making.
- **Description:** Process design and communication are not ancillary activities but core elements of effective CSP policymaking. Clear process design provides structure to complex multi-level governance arrangements by defining objectives, roles, timelines, decision points, and feedback mechanisms across the CSP lifecycle. Communication ensures that these elements are accessible and understandable to stakeholders, thereby enabling informed participation and reducing misunderstandings, mistrust, or consultation fatigue.

  Under the CAP's New Delivery Model, Member States are granted greater discretion in designing CSPs, which increases the importance of clearly communicating constraints, options, and degrees of openness in decision-making. Well-designed processes clarify *what* can be influenced by stakeholder input, *when* this input is sought, and *how* it will be considered. Communication should therefore be continuous, bidirectional, and adapted to different audiences, combining formal consultation requirements with informal dialogue, feedback loops, and narrative elements that explain trade-offs and policy choices.

A sound approach to process design and communication also serves as a quality assurance mechanism. By documenting participation formats, decision rationales, and the treatment of stakeholder input, it strengthens accountability and supports learning within and between CSP cycles. This is particularly relevant in a context where CSPs are revised, monitored, and evaluated over time and where stakeholder trust can significantly affect implementation success.

- **Outcomes:**
    - **Enhanced trust and legitimacy**: Transparent communication builds stakeholder confidence in CSP processes.
    - **Shared ownership**: Inclusive engagement fosters stakeholder commitment to CSP objectives.
    - **Policy relevance**: Diverse perspectives ensure CSPs address real-world needs and challenges.
    - **Adaptability**: Continuous feedback loops allow for policy adjustments in response to emerging issues.
- **Example tools:**
    - **Digital consultation and information platforms:** Enable timely dissemination of information, collection of feedback, and transparent reporting on how stakeholder input is used.
    - **Tool A: Participatory "Vision building":** Supports early-stage process design by clarifying long-term objectives and creating shared narratives that frame subsequent policy choices.

Inclusive stakeholder engagement

- **Objective**: Ensure diverse stakeholder involvement throughout CAP planning and implementation.
- **Description**: The inclusion of stakeholders – from farmers, environmental NGOs, and local authorities to researchers and the general public – is fundamental to the broad societal acceptance of CAP measures. This involvement builds legitimacy, captures ground-level insights, and ensures policies are grounded in the reality of those who are impacted by them.
- **Outcomes**: A stronger sense of ownership, social cohesion, and commitment to policy objectives among stakeholders.
- **Example tools**:
    - Participatory vision building: This tool helps develop a shared vision, involving stakeholders in early CSP design stages to establish long-term goals for agriculture and rural areas.

Flexibility and adaptability

- **Objective**: Allow for policy adjustments in response to changing circumstances or new insights.
- **Description**: Given the dynamic nature of agriculture, climate, and rural development needs, as well as a shifting external policy environment, flexibility is essential in CAP policymaking. Policymakers must be able to adjust strategies as a response to policy shocks such as wars, as new data relevant to policy implementation emerges, or as feedback from monitoring processes indicates a need for change.
- **Outcomes**: Policies that remain relevant and effective over time, with an improved capacity to respond to unforeseen challenges and evolving stakeholder needs.

- **Example tools:**
    - Scenario building for policy impact assessment (PIA): Continually update scenarios as new data becomes available to assess emerging risks or opportunities and adapt interventions accordingly.

Accountability and monitoring

- **Objective**: Ensure that policies achieve their stated objectives through regular monitoring and reporting.
- **Description**: Accountability in CAP policymaking entails tracking the progress of interventions and evaluating their impact against predefined indicators. Ideally, the indicators should be aligned with the PMEF.
- **Outcomes**: Greater alignment with the CAP's objectives, ensuring that interventions are not only implemented but are also effective in achieving the desired outcomes.
- **Example tools**:
    - Intervention-objective-impact (IOI) matrix: this matrix can be used to link interventions with measurable impacts, ensuring that policymakers can identify whether each policy achieves its intended objectives.

Coherence with the EGD and SDGs

- **Objective**: Align CSPs with overarching CAP objectives, the EGD, as well as the SDGs.
- **Description**: CAP policies must be coherent across EU and national levels, ensuring that national CSPs support broader EU sustainability and climate goals. This requires tools that help assess the interconnections and dependencies between various objectives, interventions, and impacts.
- **Outcomes**: More integrated policy frameworks that advance EU-wide ambitions while addressing unique MS needs.
- **Example tools**:
    - Intervention logic: Maps out the linkages between CAP objectives and CSP interventions, fostering coherence across policy areas such as environmental sustainability, social equity, and economic viability.
    - Prioritisation and decision-making: interventions can be prioritised based on their contribution to CAP and EU goals, balancing short-term needs with long-term sustainability.

Efficiency and cost-effectiveness

- **Objective**: Optimize resource use to maximise policy impact.
- **Description**: With limited resources, CAP interventions must be designed to deliver maximum benefit relative to cost. Tools that facilitate efficient prioritisation and allocation of resources can help construct CSPs whose interventions are both impactful and sustainable within budgetary constraints, ensuring prudent spending of taxpayer funds. This principle is closely related to Evidence-based policymaking and is becoming increasingly important as new EU budgetary priorities emerge and taxpayers demand stronger substantiation of CAP funding.
- **Outcomes**: Enhanced resource efficiency, enabling CAP interventions to achieve more significant outcomes within available budgets. Broader acceptance of the policy among taxpayers.

- **Example tools:**
  - Prioritisation and decision-making: multi-criteria analysis and prioritisation matrices can be used to assess interventions based on their cost-effectiveness and alignment with CAP objectives.

2.2 Inclusion of tools in the design, implementation and monitoring phases of CSP

While the main focus of Tools4CAP is on the design phase for CSP, the tools developed and described are in many cases useful for subsequent phases as well, especially given the fact that CSP design is not a static process and that the plans and their performance are regularly reviewed and revised both by MS themselves as a product of continuous policy learning, and by the European Commission as part of the Annual performance review stipulated in Articles 128 and 134 of Regulation 2021/2115, during which the Commission assesses the progress towards targets and objectives defined in the CSPs based on the output and result indicators defined in the PMEF. In principle, the early use of stakeholder engagement tools (as well as other tools to support evidence-based policy-making) can help prevent ineffective planning that results in policy failures such as low buy-in for measures or even large-scale political turmoil, and thereby frequent modifications of plans, which entail further administrative costs. These tools can also be used to gather and structure opinions during the implementation phase to ensure appropriate adaptation in case of dissent or changing circumstances.

2.3 Design Phase

As already stated, article 106 of Regulation 2021/2115 mandates Member States to consult economic, social, and environmental stakeholders in the CSP preparation; they must report on this consultation in one of the mandatory annexes (specifically, Annex III, detailed in Art. 115(3)). Managing authorities and other planners must thus incorporate participatory and multi-level governance decision-making tools in the design phase of CAP Strategic Plans (CSPs) to ensure that policies reflect the needs of agricultural and other stakeholders. Participatory tools, such as vision-building workshops or digital consultations (see online Tool inventory for examples of use in the 2023-2027 CSP programming here), are more than just a tick-box exercise: they provide a structured way to gather input on priorities for agriculture and rural areas, fostering a shared long-term vision. By integrating stakeholder feedback early on, end users enhance the plan's legitimacy and ensure a comprehensive needs assessment, thus laying a robust foundation for CSP objectives and interventions that align with both EU sustainability goals and local priorities.

2.4 Implementation Phase

During implementation (including and amendments), participatory and multi-level governance decision-making tools enable stakeholders to track progress and provide ongoing feedback, ensuring transparency and adaptive management. By involving stakeholders, end users create an accountable environment where all parties can adaptively respond to emerging challenges, optimising resource use and strengthening commitment. Regularly engaging stakeholders also provides the flexibility to adjust interventions if local conditions or priorities evolve, ensuring continued relevance. The rationale of improving stakeholder engagement during the implementation phase is reflected in the mandatory establishment of National CAP networks (Article 126 of Regulation 2021/2115), whose objectives include contributing to the quality of implementation and increasing the involvement of stakeholders. Their tasks include the creation of 'platforms, fora and events' that facilitate exchange and learning; such tasks are especially aptly met by stakeholder engagement tools. Tools described here, such as Intervention logic, can be used to support both managing authorities and CAP networks to clarify stakeholders' roles, track performance, and ensure that interventions meet expected outcomes.

2.5 Monitoring Phase

In the monitoring phase, participatory and multi-level governance decision-making tools also play an important role in evaluating and reporting on CAP outcomes, ensuring that CSPs deliver measurable impact. The PMEF mandates ongoing tracking against predefined indicators, making tools like stakeholder feedback surveys, scenario building, and data visualisation platforms highly relevant. Moreover, the CSP regulation (Article 124) demands the setting-up of a Monitoring committee in each MS, which must include both public authorities and other partners (see e.g. this document for guidelines on their effective setting up and functioning). Tools described in this document can be used both directly by bodies such as the Monitoring committee or the National CAP network to assess the quality of CSPs (e.g. the IOI matrix, or Intervention logic), or indirectly – to gather and structure broader stakeholder preferences, allowing them to assess interventions' effectiveness, analyse trade-offs, and engage stakeholders in transparent reporting processes, building trust in CAP's accountability. This is especially pertinent for gathering feedback on potential implementation issues with new kinds of interventions, such as result-based agri-environmental schemes or eco-schemes. By openly sharing results and integrating stakeholder insights in a timely manner, managing authorities not only comply with legislative requirements but enable continuous stakeholder feedback and thus an iterative learning process, improving both current and future CSP design and increasing legitimacy.

The next section provides more detail on including stakeholder engagement tools in different segments of the CSP process, broken down per policy task that CSP authorities must fulfil.

2.6 Policy tasks and end-user needs in CSP design

According to the **New Delivery Model (NDM)** detailed in **Regulation 2021/2115**, the preparation of CSPs should rely on the involvement of all relevant national and regional authorities, as well as competent authorities for the environment and climate, and the relevant stakeholders, including economic and social partners, bodies representing civil society and bodies responsible for promoting social inclusion, fundamental rights, gender equality and non-discrimination (Article 106; see Tools4CAP Deliverable 1.2 for further detail on the NDM). Participatory methods are particularly well-suited to fulfilling several aspects of the NDM, as they align with the emphasis on inclusivity, flexibility, accountability, and performance-based monitoring.

For the design of the CSP, MSs are required to provide an intervention strategy (Article 109 of Regulation 2021/2115) with interventions based on a "sound intervention logic", which should in turn be based on:

- an assessment of the socio-economic context.
- a SWOT analysis for each specific objective (SO).
- an assessment and prioritisation of needs for each SO, based on the SWOT analysis.
- ex-ante evaluation of the CSP and Strategic environmental assessment (SEA), which assess the contribution of the CSP to achieving SOs, the internal coherence of the CSP, the consistency of the allocation of budgetary resources, and the appropriateness of the quantified target values.
- broad stakeholder consultations.

The Tools4CAP Conceptual framework builds around these policy tasks, as shown in Figure 1.

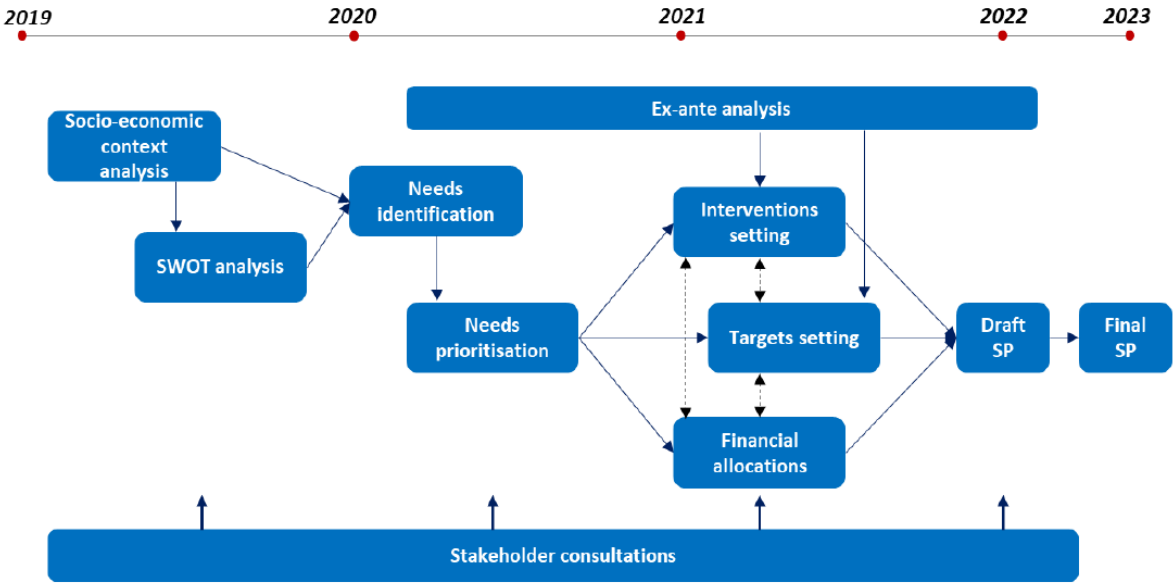


Figure 1: Schematic example of the CAP Strategic Plan design steps. Source: Tools4CAP deliverable 1.2

As Figure 1 conveys, stakeholder consultations (based on appropriate participatory methods) are an element that permeates the entire CSP process. However, all parts of the process can arguably benefit from the utilization of participatory methods to make the process more inclusive and enhance transparency and accountability. Table 1 matches policy tasks with end-user needs and appropriate participatory decision-making tools, which is also reflected in Figure 2. Readers should note that the utility of many of the tools presented here is manifold, and tools should optimally be used in conjunction to complement each other.

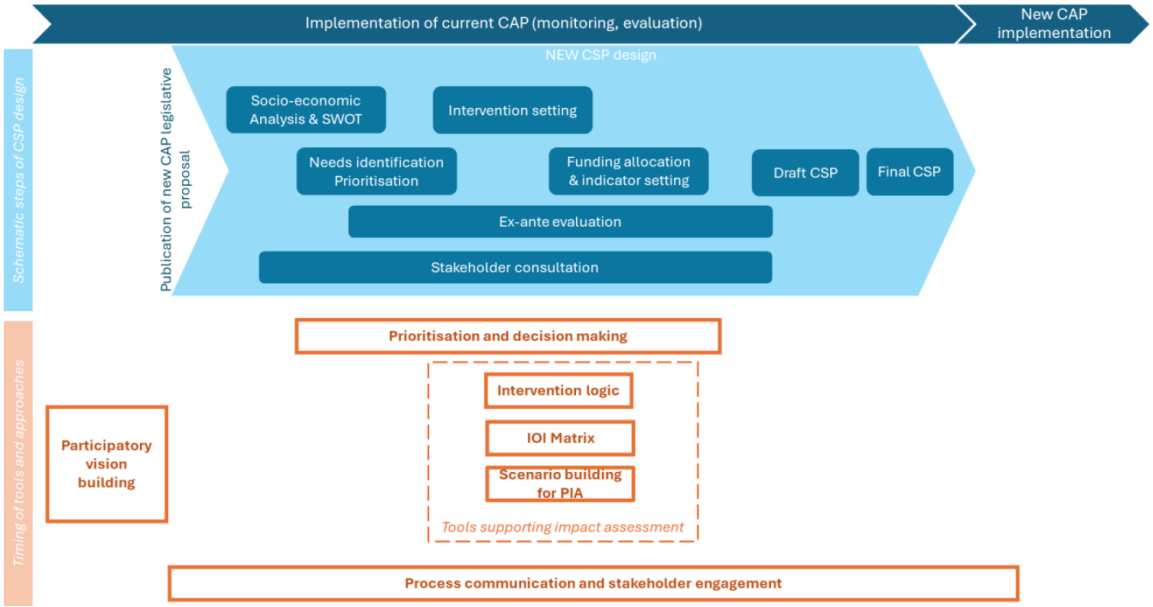


Figure 2: Timing of participatory and multi-level governance decision-making tools and approaches in the CSP design process. Source: Tools4CAP deliverable 3.2

Table 1: Policy tasks, end-user needs and relevant participatory and multi-level governance decision-making tools

Policy Task	End-User Needs	Rationale for participatory methods	Suitable Tools
Socio-Economic Context Analysis	Accurate, comprehensive socio-economic data	Gathering socio-economic data from stakeholders ensures that the context analysis reflects real-world conditions and local insights, providing a balanced foundation for CAP planning.	PVB; PCSE
SWOT Analysis	Identification of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats	SWOT analysis benefits from a collaborative approach with different perspectives. Focus groups allow stakeholders to exchange views, uncovering insights that might be missed in a top-down analysis. Varied perspectives can make policies more relevant to specific regional or sectoral contexts.	PVB; PCSE
Needs Assessment	Inclusive understanding of local needs	Direct consultations with stakeholders help capture diverse needs across sectors and regions, while prioritization tools allow CAP authorities to rank these needs systematically, ensuring focus on the most urgent issues.	PVB; PDM
Intervention Setting	Coherent intervention strategies aligned with CAP objectives	Aligning specific interventions with CAP objectives (IL), ensuring coherence (IOI); helping stakeholders understand potential outcomes and refine interventions (scenario building for PIA).	IL, IOI, SBPIA
Target Setting	Consensus on measurable targets	Allowing stakeholders to signal priority areas; evaluating targets against multiple criteria (e.g., feasibility, sustainability, coherence), supporting balanced, evidence-based target setting.	IL, IOI, SBPIA
Financial Allocations	Justified, prioritized budgeting	Prioritization tools help distribute resources based on ranked needs, ensuring efficient budgeting. Consultations add transparency to financial decisions, reinforcing stakeholder trust in budget allocations.	IL, IOI, SBPIA, PDM
Ex-Ante Analysis and Strategic Environmental Assessment	Assessment of environmental and social impacts	PIA helps forecast the environmental and social impacts of policy options, enabling CAP planners to adjust strategies based on anticipated outcomes.	IL, IOI, SBPIA
Stakeholder Consultations	Inclusive and transparent feedback from stakeholders	Regular communication and feedback loops keep stakeholders informed, fostering an inclusive, transparent planning process where feedback can be integrated continuously. Facilitates consensus and shared vision, fostering stakeholder buy-in and aligning objectives for agriculture and rural development.	All tools

Notes: PVB = Participatory Vision-building; PDM = Prioritisation and decision-making; IL = Intervention logic; IOI = Intervention-Objective-Impact matrix; SBPIA = Scenario Building for Policy Impact Assessment

3 Tool A: Participatory "Vision building"

3.1 Description of the tool

The primary objective of Participatory Vision Building (PVB) is to engage a broad spectrum of stakeholders in co-designing a long-term vision that reflects the needs, aspirations, and expectations of all involved. Being a tool that is most aptly used before the design of specific interventions and financial allocations, it has three overall goals: (1) to **mobilise interest and stakeholder engagement** ahead of other CSP design processes; (2) to **set common objectives and visions** among different stakeholders for the future of agriculture and rural areas; (3) to **provide initial inputs for needs assessment and prioritisation** for CSP. This method addresses the limitations of top-down policymaking by incorporating insights from stakeholders across various sectors, giving them a voice in the policymaking process. In general, the process, outlined below, envisages the use of three complementary tools, aiming to create a foundation for inclusive, transparent, and accountable policymaking; ideally, such an approach would be translated into a CSP that is more relevant, effective, and endorsed by those affected. The approach promotes cooperation by encouraging stakeholders to align on common goals and seek constructive compromise on potentially conflicting ones, fostering a sense of ownership and commitment.

Initially, a team of experts in the field creates a detailed summary overview of information relevant to the emerging vision. This summary is then discussed in a focus group composed of selected stakeholders, with an emphasis on identifying the core direction. The information gathered from these discussions is compiled by the experts and presented back to stakeholders in a survey format in order to establish prioritisation. Finally, a draft vision-building material is prepared and validated in a consensus meeting. Over the course of this vision-building exercise, including stakeholders allows each group to contribute meaningfully, while the experts should ensure unbiased moderation. The resulting vision can thus provide the groundwork for a more relevant, robust and stakeholder-driven policy design**.**

3.2 The place/role of the tool in CSP

As stated, **Participatory Vision Building** is a process that is best conducted at the beginning of the policy cycle, when the contours of the CAP's next (national) iteration are only beginning to take form. Applying the tool can play a crucial facilitating role in CAP strategic planning by fostering a structured, inclusive, and transparent approach to aligning diverse stakeholder interests. The tool can address both the CAP's overall complexity stemming from the overlap of many different fields of expertise (agriculture, agricultural economics, environmental science, social studies), as well as the complexities of **multi-level governance.** It does this by involving a wide range of stakeholders early in the strategic planning process, ensuring that the CSPs reflect shared goals and are aligned both with **local realities and EU-wide objectives**. Formally, it allows CSP authorities to align with the demands of the CSP Regulation's demand for stakeholder engagement in CSP preparation. Substantively, it allows stakeholder representatives of different societal groups (farmers, local communities, policy experts, environmental groups, and researchers) to contribute perspectives on issues related to agriculture and rural areas. By systematically organizing inputs from various stakeholders and distilling their complex feedback the method can help build a coherent strategic vision and consensus on key priorities. Moreover, the tool's structured process ensures that all voices are heard, reducing the risk of any single group's dominance, making the **CSP process more transparent and accountable and enhancing public trust** in CAP governance. The tool's high level of transparency and inclusivity can help reduce implementation issues at subsequent policy steps, especially issues related to legitimacy. Input gathered from stakeholders regarding their expectations and identifying priority areas for policy intervention can be an important basis for designing interventions that are not only responsive to stakeholders' immediate needs but also **adaptable to evolving challenges** in agriculture and rural development. Finally, the tool's emphasis on consensus-building can help ensure that the **identified priorities are realistic**, broadly supported, and better positioned to achieve the CAP's long-term objectives.

3.3 Resources, roadmap and challenges related to implementing the tool

PVB is a widely used practice in strategic planning that was developed primarily in the business world but is increasingly being used in the public sector as well. The purpose of a specific PVB exercise also determines **its scope, structure, processes, timing and content**. It is not mandatory for the preparation of a CSP, but it can be an important aid in setting priorities and selecting interventions.

Even when preparing a PVB process for a CSP, resources, users and implementers cannot be precisely defined. It all depends on political practice, the general development of participatory approaches, requirements for thoroughness and evidence-based approaches, the quality of analytical support, and other factors.

The approach outlined below therefore describes some general needs that need to be further elaborated in each case.

Time needed

PVB is based on a **multi-stage process** and involves **a multi-stakeholder** approach, which takes time and is not a short-term process. In practice, with good organisation, it could be expected to take at least 6 months to complete. A longer period, at least 1 year, is more realistic to achieve a more consensual and high-quality proposal.

Given the time pressure in preparing the CSP, the appropriate time is as soon as the EC publishes its CAP strategy/vision proposal for the next period; this framework should then be transposed into a national framework for preparing the vision of agriculture and rural areas.

Infrastructure

The preparation of a PVB process requires a comprehensive implementation plan, consideration of stakeholder involvement, organisation of events, facilitation of workshops, preparation of technical materials, technical support, communication, etc. The larger the group of people involved, the more complex the organisation of the PVB process. Stakeholders need to feel that they are treated equally and have the opportunity to contribute their views to the vision. As opinions differ, they need to be reconciled and balanced, using facts and data as much as possible. This also requires excellent facilitation that is inclusive but not biased. Writing a vision is particularly challenging and requires specific skills and a creative approach to help participants see that this is something that is both in their own and the common interest and, above all, will bring added value and a leap forward in development, which in the field of agriculture is primarily about transforming food systems towards sustainability in all its three pillars.

The role of ministries of agriculture (MoAs) and other ministries

The **Managing Authority** for the CAP (usually within the MoA) is the key and responsible institution for the preparation of the PVB. It has the responsibility to lead the process and to involve all stakeholders. It has a political responsibility, as the PVB outcome is a political-strategic document, but also a professional responsibility to ensure that the preparation, implementation and output of the process are up to standard and, above all, in a way that involves stakeholders. In addition, once the document goes out for general public consultation, public consent should be obtained. The organisation of the preparation and implementation requires the involvement of the ministry's management and key professional staff. It can be partly outsourced (facilitation, preparation of technical material), but the document must bear the seal of the ministry. Given the growing societal role of agriculture and agricultural policy (Eurobarometer, 2022), it is important to also involve other line ministries, not only those responsible for the environment, but also those responsible for economic, social and regional development.

The End users

End users of PVB are representatives of the entire agricultural public sphere. In addition to government decision-makers, this includes various NGOs from across the agriculture and rural development sphere and beyond. PVB is a citizens' approach, which means that not only farmers should identify with it, but also representatives of other interested social groups. Of course, it is an illusion that these end users will be all the affected citizens of a Member State, but that is what managing authorities should be aiming for, and not just a one-sided view of sustainable

agricultural development that emphasises, for example, only production or environmental aspects. PVB requires good facilitation of the process and convincing stakeholders that there are legitimate different societal perspectives.

The Implementers

PVB is implemented at different levels. First, it is the responsible political or political-professional person from the top of the ministry who legitimises the process and the results. Alternatively, it can also be an independent personage who is recognised by the public as having integrity and a professional reputation. As the CSP is a formal process and there is usually little time to prepare the CSP, it is preferable for the ministry to take the lead.

The lead decision-maker is followed by key officials from various ministries, not just the leading ministry, who in turn bring the most competent people into the process and can provide important expert input to the vision.

External experts can also provide technical input, and it is therefore recommended that a smaller but cross-cutting expert group be organised. Individuals from this group can also assist in the drafting of the final PVB document, which, even as a text, must be of high quality and meet high linguistic, technical and political criteria.

It is also possible and useful to involve professional facilitators in the preparation of the PVB process, who can have an important influence on the quality and objectivity of the process. Conducting workshops and collecting and collating opinions is not easy, given the diversity of views, positions and interests, but requires a considerable level of facilitation skill.

Civil society, science and business representatives

The involvement of key and representative individuals from civil society (not only agricultural, but also other organisations with an interest in agriculture), science and business organisations is an important issue for the legitimacy and quality of the preparation of the PVB process. Participation must be well thought-out. Participants should be selected according to various principles (e.g. Quadruple Helix and Salience Models, see below), representativeness, criticality of views, reform orientation; ideally, there should be a calibrated approach to combining all three elements. The larger the group, the more representative it will be, but also the more difficult it will be to reconcile views. It is advisable to establish a smaller group for the proposal, which can be expanded later for broader public debate and dialogue.

Most PVBs are based mainly on governmental and non-governmental representatives, which does not yield the best result, as the document can quickly move towards stereotypical definitions without the freshness of new and insightful input. A broader and more innovative perspective can be provided by representatives of academia and business. Although they may not understand the political context of the PVB, they can bring the necessary new knowledge and insights.

Communication

Communication is an important part of preparing a PVB process. It must ensure that the process and its results are comprehensive, inclusive and relevant. While it is important that the preparation team has sufficient time during the preparation phase to prepare the material, once it is ready it is important that the public is properly informed of the results and has the opportunity to comment on them. A clear communication strategy and accompanying activities are needed, as this is a politically and strategically important document.

Stepwise guidance and roadmap

PVB in the frame of CSP preparation is a collaborative process that involves stakeholders in the creation of a shared vision for the development of agricultural and related issues. This approach ensures that diverse perspectives are considered, leading to a more inclusive and comprehensive vision. There is no single blueprint for how to implement PVB. Each Managing Authority (or other type of implementer) adapts to its own objectives, culture and possibilities. Therefore, it is not possible give precise technical details. However, each PVB process includes the following elements and steps:

1. ***Preparation and planning***: identify the purpose and scope of the vision-building process. Assemble a diverse group of stakeholders (the whole policy arena dealing with the CAP), ensuring representation from

all relevant governmental and non-governmental organisations, science and business. Define the timeline, resources, and logistical requirements for the process (for Quadruple Helix and Salience Model see below).

2. ***Stakeholder engagement***: conduct initial meetings or workshops to introduce the concept of participatory vision building and explain the process. Encourage stakeholders to share their expectations, concerns, and ideas regarding the vision.
3. ***Data collection and analysis***: gather relevant data, including current challenges, opportunities, and trends affecting the agriculture and related issues. Use surveys, interviews, and focus groups to collect input from stakeholders. The Delphi method (Linstone & Turoff, 1975) is the most widely used, i.e. the repeated formulation and validation of positions and perspectives.
4. ***Visioning workshops***: facilitate workshops where stakeholders can collaboratively brainstorm and discuss their ideas for the future. Use creative techniques such as storytelling, visualizations, World caffe and scenario planning to inspire innovative thinking. Again, the Delphi method is widely used, i.e. the repeated formulation and validation of positions and perspectives.
5. ***Drafting the vision statement***: synthesize the input from workshops into a balanced draft vision statement that reflects the collective aspirations and values of the stakeholders. Ensure the vision is clear, inspiring, and achievable.
6. ***Feedback and refinement***: share the draft vision statement with stakeholders for feedback. Organize follow-up sessions to discuss feedback and make necessary adjustments to the vision statement (Delphi approach).
7. ***Finalization and adoption***: finalize the vision statement, incorporating all agreed-upon changes. Obtain formal endorsement or adoption of the vision by relevant authorities or leadership (at the ministry and/or government and parliament level).
8. ***Implementation planning***: define how PVB is linked to CSP and this down to individual parts such as need prioritisation, intervention setting and others. CSP can be seen as an important part of an action plan how to achieve the vision, including roles, responsibilities, timelines, and resources.
9. ***Communication and dissemination***: communicate the vision to all stakeholders and the broader community through various channels. Ensure ongoing engagement and dialogue to maintain momentum and commitment.
10. ***Monitoring and evaluation***: establish mechanisms to monitor progress towards the vision. CAP Monitoring system is the key mechanisms for this.

By following these steps, MAs can create a shared vision that is inclusive, forward-thinking, facilitating the preparation of the CSP and linking its individual parts into a coherent whole.

Implementation challenges

PVB in agriculture and rural development involves a wide variety of challenges and considerations for managing authorities, which are related to the sector's complexity, diversity and growing societal interest:

1. Diverse stakeholder interests:
    - *Challenge*: Agriculture involves a wide range of stakeholders, including farmers, agribusinesses, policymakers, environmentalist, public health and nutrition professionals, animal welfare activists and rural dwellers, researchers, and consumers, each with distinct interests and priorities.
    - *Consideration*: Ensure inclusive representation and facilitate open dialogue to balance competing interests and foster mutual understanding.

2. Cultural and socioeconomic diversity:
    - *Challenge*: Agricultural and environmental interest groups often embody diverse cultural and ideological discourses, knowledge and paradigm, which may lead to varying perspectives and needs.
    - *Consideration*: Respect cultural and knowledge differences and consider socioeconomic and environmental factors when engaging stakeholders, ensuring that marginalized voices are heard.
3. Complexity of agricultural systems:
    - *Challenge*: Agriculture is influenced by numerous factors, including environmental conditions, market dynamics, geopolitical tensions, trade relations, political development and technological progress.
    - *Consideration*: Aim to incorporate a systems-thinking approach to account for the interconnectedness of these factors and their impact on the vision.
4. Environmental and social sustainability:
    - *Challenge*: Balancing productivity and income concerns with environmental (climate, soil, water, nature conservation) and social sustainability (fairness, social disparities, marginalization) is a critical concern in agriculture.
    - *Consideration*: Emphasize sustainable practices and long-term ecological health and social fairness in the vision-building process.
5. Climate change and resilience:
    - *Challenge*: Climate change poses significant risks to agricultural productivity and food security.
    - *Consideration*: Integrate climate resilience and adaptation strategies into the vision to ensure future sustainability.
6. Policy and regulatory environment:
    - *Challenge*: CSP, other public policies and regulations can significantly influence vision outcomes.
    - *Consideration*: Engage all relevant policymakers and regulatory bodies early and deeply in the process to align the vision with existing frameworks and advocate for more targeted and tailored CSP in the future.
7. Capacity building and education:
    - *Challenge*: Limited knowledge or skills among stakeholders can impede effective participation in the PBV.
    - *Consideration*: Provide additional training and capacity-building opportunities to empower stakeholders and enhance their contributions in the PVB process.
8. Communication and collaboration:
    - *Challenge*: Effective communication and collaboration among diverse stakeholders can be challenging.
    - *Consideration*: Utilize clear communication strategies and collaborative tools to facilitate information sharing and cooperation for PVB in the entire CSP programming cycle.
9. Monitoring and evaluation:
    - *Challenge*: Tracking progress and evaluating the impact of the vision can be complex.
    - *Consideration*: Establish robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to assess progress in CSP (with the link to the vision) and make informed adjustments.

3.4 Best practices and examples

Some of the best practices for using the **Participatory Vision Building** tool effectively in CAP Strategic Planning involve **structured stakeholder selection**, **consistent feedback loops**, and **clear guidance for consensus-**

building. By applying these practices, policymakers can maximize the tool's impact, ensuring that their CSPs are inclusive, transparent, and aligned with EU goals.

Structured stakeholder selection: a combination of the **Quadruple Helix Approach** (Prainsack, 2012) and **Stakeholder Salience Model** (Mitchell et al., 1997) can be used to identify the representative stakeholders from **policy, society, business, and research**, and include them into the policy process of interest based on their **urgency, legitimacy, and power.** This ensures that all relevant voices are included, with a particular focus on groups traditionally underrepresented in policymaking. **Assigning weight** to stakeholders based on these criteria allows decision-makers to differentiate between highly influential groups (e.g., policymakers, national industry leaders) and those with specific local insights (e.g., smallholder farmers or local environmental organizations).

Establishing consistent feedback loops: the **Delphi method** (Linstone & Turoff, 1975) allows decisionmakers to reduce complexity by implementing iterative feedback mechanisms throughout the vision-building process (or any other decision-making procedure). By holding **multiple rounds of focus groups** and **surveys**, stakeholders can collectively refine and prioritize ideas and converge on consensual, well-considered final conclusions.

Guidance for consensus-building and transparency: it is important to use **unbiased moderators** in focus groups to ensure balanced dialogue and clearly document and communicate the outcomes of each session. These moderators can theoretically be selected among the participating experts, but it is better to engage one or more impartial individuals, as their responsibilities are to ensure balance and achieve consensus; separating these roles can prevent conflicts of interest and help to ensure integrity of the process and thus legitimacy of the final vision. Consensus meetings should be held to finalize vision statements, with transparent records of stakeholder contributions and decision rationales.

Good practice example: **The SHERPA Project** – co-constructing a common **Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas: t**he Horizon 2020 SHERPA project developed a Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas using a multi-stakeholder approach to bring together policymakers, citizens, businesses, and researchers. SHERPA established multi-actor platforms at national level to foster dialogue between stakeholders across EU countries, creating a consensus-driven vision for rural areas by 2040. The insight from the national level were then integrated at the EU level by ¸an EU-level multi-actor platform, equally composed of diverse stakeholders providing their input. The process involved iterative consultation and feedback to align it with EU sustainability and social objectives, while taking into account the specificities of Members states.

In the Tools4CAP project, the PVB tool was applied in the Slovenian Case study. While used as part of a broader combination of policy support tools, the case study highlighted the importance of clear process design, iterative consensus-building exercises and effective moderation for achieving meaningful stakeholder engagement. The exercise aimed to provide structured input into subsequent steps of the policy process, particularly in relation to needs identification and prioritisation, illustrating the role of PVB as an upstream tool in CSP design.

3.5 References and further reading

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4 Tool B: IOI Matrix

4.1 Description of the tool

The primary objective of the Intervention-Objective-Impact (IOI) Matrix is to help policymakers with the process of policy design and the selection of a set or package of CAP interventions that align with CAP objectives in an effective and coherent way. As the name suggests, the tool approaches the optimal policy design by way of a matrix structure, in which (for example):

- The columns represent policy objectives (e.g. the specific objectives of the CAP or derived refined objectives, as they have for example been defined during a SWOT-analysis.
- The rows then represent the different policy interventions that could be chosen and/or applied (e.g. the relevant articles of the CAP legislative text, or specific refined interventions fitting in these article-categories).
- The crossing of columns and rows create cells in which it is indicated how a specific intervention contributes to achieving a specific policy objective. The 'values' in the cells will usually be of a qualitative nature (e.g. plusses and minuses, with the sign indicating the direction of the impact, and the number of plusses and minuses providing an indication of the order of magnitude of the impact).

The concept of the IOI-matrix relies on the policy optimization approach developed by the Dutch economist and Nobel laureate Jan Tinbergen. The contributions of interventions to policy objectives are indicative, where however the indicator (the plusses and minuses) should be based on empirical evidence that provides evidence-based information about the mechanism and expected type of impacts (Tinbergen, 1956). Ideally, one would further quantify these impact relationships with quantitative models (which is what Tinbergen later did when he developed his optimal policy theory). However, the IOI-matrix has been developed as a simple tool, which can be used as an instrument to structure a rational policy design process, and which has a relatively simple and easy-to-apply nature. A subsequent step, after having applied the tool, could be to do a quantitative modelling analysis to further assess quantitative impacts, and the contributions to output and result indicators measuring 'the performance' of the policy.

The IOI-matrix in this way serves as a basis for assessing an instrument's relevance for a specific policy objective. Moreover, it recognizes that a specific policy intervention can simultaneously impact several policy objectives. In addition, it recognizes that a specific policy objective can be achieved with multiple policy instruments, and that there are alternative choices for policymakers. Additionally, the matrix can serve as a basis for coherence analysis as it can show where interventions may interact with each other in the way they impact policy objectives. However, detecting 'incoherence' at individual intervention level should not necessarily be seen as 'wrong', as just a combination of policy measures, in which they 'compensate' each other in weak points, can bring about a good joint effort on all policy objectives. When the selected total package of policy interventions leads to a wrong direction with respect to one or more policy objectives, then the coherence issue is a real thing to consider and solve for. The IOI-matrix approach thus shows how various instruments contribute to the same objectives and their potential interactions—whether they work synergistically, independently, or in conflict. This information is essential for evaluating the coherence of implementation choices (Ecorys et al., 2016).

Conducting an IOI exercise can prove to be a valuable **learning experience** for the included stakeholders by making **policy linkages, such as trade-offs and synergies**, explicit. Best suited for use during the development phase of CSPs, the tool serves four main goals: (1) to establish **coherence** by **systematically** connecting CAP goals with specific challenges and corresponding interventions; (2) to **support evidence-based policymaking** by employing a comprehensive analysis of relevant documents; (3) to enhance **transparency and accountability** through documentation of decision rationales; and (4) and to **foster inclusivity** by engaging stakeholders from diverse sectors in the decision-making process. By addressing gaps in policy alignment and promoting collaboration, the IOI Matrix strengthens policy relevance, coherence, and stakeholder acceptance, ensuring a more effective and sustainable CAP implementation.

Using an IOI Matrix to support CSP preparation may entail the following elements:

Structured **policy analysis** and **involvement of different divisions of MoAs and other involved agencies**: the IOI-approach involves a comprehensive review of CAP objectives and defining relevant selections of policy

interventions with the aim to improve in an integral way on the achievement of pre-defined policy objectives (on the part of the CAP authority). The approach can be complemented by interviews, workshops, and focus groups with stakeholders such as farmers, environmentalists, and food processing industry representatives. By involving them using this method, these stakeholder groups may get a better feeling for the specific trade-offs that policy makers face, which may increase their understanding and final support for selected (combined) policy intervention choices. It is important to highlight that conducting a good level of analysis requires thorough **theoretical knowledge** in each are included in the analysis (such as farm economics or sustainable management of natural resources); expert and researcher consultation can inform the identification of interactions by providing information on different disciplinary aspects relevant to each instrument and objective.

Scenario development and analysis: based on the information gathered in the IOI matrix preparation phase, policymakers can design and analyse alternative policy scenarios by **combining interventions**. As indicated above, the IOI can make clear that there are, at least for some objectives, alternative sets of interventions that could help to achieve these objectives. It could also highlight whether there are policy objectives for which few alternatives exist and where only one or a few instruments are available to do the job. Scenario analysis tools and simulations can project outcomes across economic, social, and environmental dimensions, helping to identify the most impactful approaches. The specific tools used in the scenario analysis can be either quantitative or qualitative, and the results can be presented to experts and stakeholders for further validation. Importantly, the interventions can also be 'weighted', i.e. linked with appropriate **corresponding budgetary resources**, to assess the contribution of each intervention's budget towards its respective policy objective (e.g. Erjavec et al., 2018).

The most important outcome of a successful implementation of the IOI Matrix during CSP preparation is a **coherent and impactful CSP** that aligns interventions with CAP objectives, reducing redundancies and optimizing **resource allocation. In addition, active stakeholder engagement** throughout the CSP design process can improve **transparency**, increasing the plan's legitimacy and acceptance.

4.2 The place/role of the tool in CSP

The IOI Matrix is most effectively applied during the **design and planning s**tages of the CAP Strategic Plan (CSP), as it provides a **structured and evidence-based framework** to align interventions with the CAP's overarching objectives. By making synergies and trade-offs explicit, the tool is well-placed to **address the complexity** of pursuing multiple policy goals at the national and EU level, as well as coordinating between them, i.e. aligning local needs with EU-wide objectives. The IOI Matrix thus enhances **intervention targeting** and **policy coherence**, helping to ensure that CSP interventions are aligned with the CAP's strategic goals; it also directly supports the CAP's **performance-based governance model** by integrating both theoretical knowledge and empirical data into decision-making, fostering transparent, data-driven policymaking that avoids conflicts, redundancies and overlaps between instruments. This approach is crucial for **effective policy** design and could help in **resource prioritization**, as it allows managing authorities to focus on interventions with the highest cost-effectiveness and potential impact.

When combined with participatory approaches, the IOI Matrix brings diverse policy divisions in Ministries and potentially also stakeholder groups into the decision-making process, ensuring that the CSP **reflects local realities** while **addressing overall CAP objectives**. When collaborating on a policy intervention package, while using the IOI Matrix-approach as a facilitating tool, government officials with different responsibilities become engaged to provide **reasoned and structured insights** on policy challenges, and to evaluate the expected impacts of proposed interventions and budgetary allocations. Through this process, the IOI-Matrix-approach helps in organizing complex inputs and links interventions to potential results, yielding a **transparent CSP**. It can also contribute to a policy community that is more aware of trade-offs between policy objectives, reducing resistance during implementation.

The IOI Matrix can also be applied in **ex-post analyses** of CAP interventions or **during their implementation**, supporting ongoing performance monitoring and thus adaptability during the current policy cycle (as emphasized by the NDM), or improved policies in future policy cycles. This adaptive management process enables CSPs to remain **relevant and effective** over time. As challenges evolve and new data emerges, CAP authorities can refine their CSPs and reallocate resources, ensuring that CAP objectives are met even as external conditions shift.

4.3 Resources, roadmap and challenges related to implementing the tool

Time needed

Using an IOI matrix is as time consuming as the scope of the activity envisaged by its user. It can be used to assess the achievement of objectives and the coherence of one or more objectives. The wider the scope, the longer the process. On the other hand, it is also a participatory tool involving experts and representatives of different governmental and non-governmental organisations. It can be carried out cyclically in several rounds (Delphi), each of which can further prolong the implementation. A rough estimation of the necessary time expenditure for preparing an IOI matrix would be around 2 months for a small-scale implementation and 6 months for a more ambitious, participatory implementation.

Infrastructure

The implementation requires the creation of a team of evaluators to carry out an evaluation of the different aspects provided by the IOI matrix. It is a good idea to use a computer programme, or at least an electronic spreadsheet, to record the evaluations. Someone should facilitate the process itself. It is a good idea to do a literature review beforehand. The key is the composition of the evaluators, who should have an in-depth knowledge of the objectives, interventions and impacts. Depending on the scope and aims of the implementation of the I/O/I matrix it can be helpful to draw on (ex-ante) evaluations and monitoring data of previous funding periods and include uptake data into the evaluation of the impact of different interventions. The more detailed and broader the data basis for the evaluation the better.

The role of MoAs and other ministries

It is the Managing Authority that lends political and strategic legitimacy to the IOI matrix-based assessment. It is important that the team includes key officials who are knowledgeable about the interventions and their outcomes. It is also appropriate to involve officials from other ministries that have responsibility for legislation relevant to strategic planning (e.g. nature conservation) in the assessment process. Without the direct involvement of the ministry in the assessment, it loses some of its political legitimacy, although even fully external expert assessments can be useful and perhaps even more objective.

The End users

The main users of the IOI matrix assessment are the CSP drafters, who are provided with comprehensive information on the impact of individual interventions in terms of achievement of objectives, coherence and other elements offered by the IOI. Indirectly, a well-done IOI assessment can also help to explain to stakeholders' changes in the selection or introduction of new interventions.

The Implementers

The IOI matrix requires good professional support to manage the process, check the rankings and write the reports. Ideally, this should be in the hands of the MA, but certainly with external expert support, not so involved in day-to-day politics, can contribute to a more neutral and objective outcome. The implementation team should consist of at least three people who will facilitate events, manage the inputs into the programme, and prepare analytical reports.

Civil society, science and business representatives

In order to carry out a good IOI matrix assessment, it is important to include representatives from civil society, academia and business among the assessors, who can provide additional insights into the impact of interventions and the achievement of objectives. These groups can contribute to a more careful identification of the relevant need, to which policy objectives can then be defined at a proper granularity level. Moreover, stakeholder involvement can help to improve the understanding of the acceptability and 'stakeholder-limits' with respect to specific policy interventions. Throughout the process of stakeholder selection and implementation, it is important to ensure that they are objective and do not act simply as advocates for their own interests. Scientific representatives can be

particularly useful in areas where they are researching specific issues related to the design and impact assessment of agricultural policy.

Communication

The IOI matrix is a rather technical activity that does not necessitate additional communication activities beyond those that are already part of the general communication and stakeholder engagement process (however, if MAs do opt for a deeper level of stakeholder engagement, we refer readers to Tool B for guidance). However, from a transparency point of view, we recommend that the methodology and results be presented to the wider public following the development of the strategic plan.

Stepwise guidance and roadmap

The IOI Matrix for CSPs is a structured framework that can guide the planning, implementation, and evaluation of interventions as part of a broader effort to ensure that the plan is effective, efficient, and aligned with overarching national and EU goals. However, it does not have a fully defined implementation process. The implementation is adapted to the objectives set by the designer or client, the scope of the assessment (how many objectives are checked) and, of course, how participatory the tasks are and how they are implemented. The following are some general stepwise guidance and roadmap that may help in the use of this tool:

1. ***Select and define objectives***: clearly outline the objectives of the CSPs selected for assessment, which could be complemented or refined based on identified (local) needs.
2. ***Identify interventions***: list the specific interventions that will be implemented to achieve the objectives. These could include the measures from the 1st and 2nd CAP Pillar, as well as other potentially relevant policy instruments to get the full picture about the impacts. These instruments can even range across policy areas to assess coherence. It could be relevant to also include the role of national policy instruments within the framework.
3. ***Develop indicators***: optionally, to achieve a more quantitative design of the assessments, establish key performance indicators (KPIs) for each intervention related to the individual objectives. These indicators will help measure the outputs and impacts of the interventions. Indicators should be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART). (This stage is not strictly necessary as part of the IOI-approach and usually avoided due to a lack of relevant data, as well as adding time to the process; it could also be addressed in subsequent policy design stages).
4. ***Construct the matrix***: create the matrix by organizing the interventions and their corresponding link to objectives in a tabular format. This matrix should show the relationship between objectives – interventions and expected impacts. An example of such a matrix is shown in Figure 1.
5. ***Analyse interventions and impacts***: evaluate the potential outputs (immediate results of interventions) and impacts (long-term effects) of each intervention reaching particular objectives. Consider both positive and negative outcomes, as well as direct and indirect impacts. This analysis requires one or several workshops and a broad discussion and coordination of views among the participants. This can be done in several rounds, with the results being refined according to the discussion and findings (including additional research, involvement of additional experts).
6. ***Prioritize interventions***: based on the analysis, prioritize interventions that are likely to have the most significant positive impact on the objectives. Consider resource availability, feasibility, and potential risks. Moreover, the combination of several interventions might be relevant to the prioritization and can be part of different pathways to impact. This usually takes place in meetings with public official of various divisions of the MoA, where it could be good to have an (external) independent chair of the strategy-secretariat organizing the policy design process. Again, it is possible to do this in a workshop within the same focus group.

7. ***Reporting and communication***: a report is drawn up on the basis of the work carried out and is presented to decision-makers and the public. Effective communication at this stage can help build trust and support for the strategic plans.

Measure	Sub-measure	Motivation	Expected impact on sustainable management of natural resources and climate action			
			Greenhouse Gas Emissions	Biodiversity	Soil	Water
Voluntary payment for farmers in areas with natural constraints		This specific direct payment is aimed at providing additional support for farmers who are in a disadvantaged competitive position because of the natural constraints they face. As a direct payment, the payment for areas with natural constraints (ANC payment) is aimed at supporting farm income. So it adds to farm income in a direct way. Depending on land ownership and impacts on land prices/rental rates there might be leakage to non- farmers (e.g. landlords).	No direct impact. Indirect impact possible as likely to maintain marginal agriculture above counterfactual level, equates to more farmland and more livestock, so could increase local emissions. Without the support, there could be less production in LFAs and more production outside the EU and even in intensive areas within Europe - neither of which is likely to be more GHG intensive. Inhibits growth of scrub and afforestation and so reduces carbon sequestration. But maintains areas of permanent pasture and where these are not ploughed and reseeded regularly, it will enhance carbon stores.	No direct impact. Support may lead to indirect biodiversity benefits, particularly where payments help to maintain extensive livestock grazing systems.	No direct impact. Support may lead to indirect benefits for soil quality, particularly where payments help to maintain extensive livestock grazing systems, which in turn maintain soil carbon and help avoid soil erosion.	No direct impact expected.

Figure 3: Example IOI matrix for the impact of the intervention Payments for farmers in areas with natural constraints on the objective 'Sustainable Management of Natural Resources and Climate Action'. Source: Ecorys, 2016.

Implementation challenges

The development and implementation of the IOI matrix under the CSPs framework present several challenges and considerations. These challenges and considerations are crucial for ensuring the effectiveness and sustainability of strategic initiatives. Some key challenges are following:

- ***Complexity of contextual analysis***: understanding the complex socio-economic, political, and cultural contexts in which interventions are to be implemented can be difficult and it can consequently be time-consuming to find a consensual assessment.
- ***Data availability and quality***: access to reliable and up-to-date data is essential for composing the IOI Matrix, yet it can often be scarce or of poor quality.
- ***Measuring impact***: defining clear, measurable objectives and evaluating impact of interventions that are often not targeted and tailored can be difficult and complex.
- ***Ideological underpinnings and discourse***: often, different impacts of interventions are given different levels of importance, especially when influenced by ideological biases; this is especially common in the interactions between production- and environment-oriented stakeholders and can also hamper achieving consensus.

4.4 Best practices and examples

Implementing and IOI matrix methodology and conducting coherence analysis for CSPs based on it requires a considerable amount of preparatory work, if it is truly to provide reliable results and improve policy alignment, transparency, and effectiveness. Specifically, the following elements should be given particular attention:

Strong **theoretical foundations and empirical evidence base**: depending on the phase of the policy cycle that the methodology is applied in, the engaged experts and/or CAP authority should identify **which policy objectives** are being pursued and the legal or political basis for them (e.g. the CSP regulation or national-level sectoral strategies). To assess the relationships between interventions, objectives, and impacts, regionally **relevant data and empirical research** should be used as much as possible. It is also an advisable practice to employ predefined indicators from the PMEF to ensure alignment with the EU policy process.

Broad engagement of policymakers having different responsibilities or coming from different divisions in the MoA: in case a participatory approach is used, a broad set of policymakers should be included throughout the process to capture diverse aspects, perspectives and ensure mutual understanding and shared ownership of results. Furthermore, it is highly advisable to accessible language and visuals to explain how interventions might align with objectives and their anticipated impacts.

The **process of IOI construction should be iterative** to allow for mutual learning; applying a supporting methodology such as the Delphi process (Linstone & Turoff, 1975) can be helpful (such as e.g. (Erjavec et al., 2018; Lovec et al., 2020). Incorporating stakeholder feedback to refine priorities and improve decision-making can also be done at later stages of the policy cycle to revisit and revise the matrix as new data or challenges emerge, helping to maintain its relevance.

Ensuring appropriate documentation and transparency through **comprehensive record-keeping** on assumptions, decisions, and methodologies, will help ensure accountability.

These principles are exemplified in the following examples of CAP evaluation:

The Netherlands used the IOI approach in its CSP design-process (Baayen et al, 2022). A number of two-weekly meetings were held to develop together a coherent planning on interventions. In addition to policy makers, a small group of researchers was at hand, which had to work out relevant research questions that came up after each meeting, for which they had to gather evidence from the literature that would support certain assumptions that were made during the process. When such support was not found, it could lead to adjustments and corrections. The Dutch application made use to develop in an initial stage some scenarios using the IOI-approach, which acted as a preparation to later grow to a consensus within the Ministry about what their preferred optimal choice would be. In the Netherlands, currently another IOI-matrix approach is being undertaken, which focusses on the facilitation of the Dutch agri-environmental transition (»Nitrate crisis«). The new element is that the IOI-matrix tool, which has been specifically tailored and designed for the policy issue at hand, has been complemented with a simple budgetary tool, which helps to see the budgetary implications of specific policy intervention choices (Jongeneel et al, forthcoming).

Slovenia utilized the Delphi method (Erjavec et al., 2018) to involve experts in evaluating the relevance, coherence, and impacts of agricultural policy measures. This approach fostered structured input from a range of stakeholders, ensuring that the interventions were assessed against national needs stated in the country's strategic documents. Expert panels were convened to systematically assess interventions' impacts, refining their assessments of policy measures over multiple consultation rounds.

At the EU level, an implementation study on the CAP (Ecorys et al., 2016) conducted case studies across Member States to assess, using IOI matrices, how specific interventions align with objectives like food security, natural resource management, and territorial balance.

In the Tools4CAP project, the IOI matrix was applied in the German case study focusing on coherence between eco-schemes and AECM in Hesse. Given Germany's multi-level CAP governance, the tool was used to analyse how interventions under Pillar I and Pillar II jointly contribute to environmental and climate objectives. Based on desk research and expert consultations, selected measures were mapped against expected outputs and impacts, allowing for a structured assessment of coherence, synergies, and potential overlaps. The exercise facilitated dialogue with regional authorities and highlighted interactions between national and regional funding streams. The case study demonstrated that the IOI matrix is particularly useful for visualising coherence and supporting informed discussion, thereby providing a basis for refining intervention design. At the same time, its application was constrained by data gaps, limited availability of quantified impact estimates, and reliance on expert judgement, as well as limited stakeholder participation due to administrative capacity constraints. Overall, the IOI matrix proved to be a flexible and transparent tool that can support evidence-based coordination in a multi-level governance context.

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5 Tool C: Intervention logic

5.1 Description of the tool

More than just a tool, Intervention Logic (IL) is a systematic framework for planning, implementing, and evaluating policy interventions. By clearly mapping the connections between resources (inputs), actions (activities), immediate results (outputs), and long-term impacts (outcomes), the objective of IL is to establish clear **causal pathways** that support evidence-based decision-making and improve transparency and accountability. The 'tool' is widely applicable across various policy domains, offering policymakers a systematic approach to **optimize resource allocation** and **adapt to changing conditions through** clear monitoring mechanisms. It can ensure that all CAP interventions contribute meaningfully to strategic objectives.

Mapping the connections between different elements in the IL helps policymakers ensure that every step of an intervention is logically aligned with overarching policy objectives. By breaking down complex policy challenges into manageable components, the IL tool supports **evidence-based decision-making**, enabling the identification of synergies, trade-offs, and gaps in coherence. It incorporates **measurable indicators** to monitor progress and allows for adjustments during implementation, making it a dynamic and adaptable tool for achieving effective and transparent policymaking.

While the IL for a CSP intervention can theoretically be developed solely by policymakers as an internal exercise (similar as the IOI matrix), incorporating stakeholder consultations and expert input during its design will significantly improve both the quality of the policy framework (or intervention) and its acceptance by the affected groups, as well as increase the likelihood of fast CSP approval by the European Commission. Best suited for use during the initial planning phase, implementing IL involves several key elements, such as defining clear objectives, mapping the central elements (inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes), developing impact pathways and selecting appropriate indicators for monitoring and evaluation.

The most significant **outcomes** of using adequate IL are improved policy coherence and transparency, efficient resource allocation, and adaptable policymaking. By defining logical pathways and integrating real-time feedback, the tool ensures that interventions are both purposeful and flexible, responding effectively to **changing conditions and stakeholder needs**.

5.2 The place/role of the tool in CSP

IL is a key element in CAP Strategic Planning; its role in structuring interventions to align with the CAP's overarching goals and achieving policy coherence and effectiveness using a systematic, transparent, and adaptive approach

cannot be overstated. The tool is an effective way to address the inherent complexity of the CAP, which arises from its **multi-level governance structure** and the diverse areas that the policy encompasses. By providing a structured framework, IL thus helps Member States design CAP Strategic Plans (CSPs) that are vertically and horizontally **coherent**, i.e. to align local and regional priorities with EU objectives, ensuring consistency across policy levels.

More formally, IL ensures **compliance with Regulation (EU) 2021/2115**, which mandates a "sound intervention logic" for CAP interventions (Article 109), thereby aligning specific policy measures with broader objectives. This framework is instrumental in both ex-ante impact assessments (evaluating planned interventions) and ex-post evaluations (assessing implemented measures). The IL links identified problems, their underlying drivers, and the policy options available, enabling a **logical pathway from actions to expected outcomes**. This structure is particularly important in the CAP, as it involves a complex structure of numerous instruments across Pillar 1 (direct payments and market measures) and Pillar 2 (rural development measures) (Matthews, 2015).

IL further enables **evidence-based and adaptive policymaking** by establishing a **framework for monitoring and evaluation**. Using predefined output, result, and impact indicators from CAP's Performance Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (PMEF), IL allows Member States to track progress, assess effectiveness, and refine CSPs in response to changing conditions. This adaptability ensures ongoing policy relevance, enabling CAP to address evolving challenges in agriculture and rural development.

By integrating transparency, stakeholder engagement, and evidence-based adjustments, IL strengthens CSPs, making them more coherent, accountable, and capable of achieving goals. It also allows stakeholders to understand and contribute to the decision-making process by documenting how resources are allocated, activities are conducted, and outcomes are achieved. This transparency enhances trust and accountability, helping CAP authorities meet stakeholder expectations and comply with the Better Regulation guidelines, a framework established by the European Commission to ensure that EU policymaking is effective, evidence-based, and aligned with overarching objectives. The Guidelines emphasize IL as a vital framework for effective policy design and implementation that serves as the logical link connecting policy problems, their drivers, and the measures to address them.

Finally, the IL underpins the PMEF, by providing an indicator-based hierarchy to track outputs, results, and impacts. This enables policymakers to measure the performance of interventions and adapt strategies based on evidence, supporting accountability and learning.

Resources, roadmap and challenges related to implementing the tool

It is difficult to assert that IL is a tool in the strict sense of the word. It is a theoretical approach to establish a relationship and understanding between the objectives, the chosen intervention(s), which defines the intervention logic, and the expected impact of that intervention. It is therefore difficult to define more precisely the processes, timeframes, resources, roles of actors and challenges related to IL. We therefore only present a specific framework and principles that can help to define IL.

Time needed

The intervention logic for a given measure is developed throughout the agricultural policy planning process; it may change during the implementation process, or it may even be predefined from previous analyses and definitions. Therefore, the timeframe cannot be precisely defined.

Infrastructure

Intervention logic is a thought process that does not require any special infrastructure, except, of course, the human resources that play a decisive role in defining it. However, in order to define it precisely, past experience, data sources, indicators, studies, basic and specialised literature in the various fields that determine agricultural policy are important.

The role of MoAs and other ministries

IL is the exclusive domain of officials dealing with CAP programming. This is an important area for the quality of policy, but unfortunately it is not as prominent. Agricultural stakeholders are usually more concerned with the distribution of financial resources for a given measure and less with the dilemma of what we are actually trying to achieve with particular interventions and what we are actually achieving. This neglect of an important element of policy strategy is, of course, also reflected in the involvement of stakeholders other than the MA administrative structure.

This is particularly the case for CAP Pillar 1 measures, whereas IL is better established in CAP Pillar 2 interventions, likely due to the existing obligation of strategic planning for Rural Development Programmes in the previous periods, and the stronger interest of other stakeholders. In the case of individual interventions, particularly those of an environmental nature, other relevant ministries can and should play a more important role.

The End users

IL does not have direct end users. Broadly speaking, its beneficiaries are all those affected by the overall quality of the policies and interventions defined by the CSP – including (and perhaps especially) taxpayers.

The Implementers

The implementers or designers of the intervention logic are the government officials who design the interventions and thus directly define the IL. As a rule, they should ensure that there is a clear link between the objectives set, the interventions chosen and the expected effects of the interventions. In order to retain the IL's relevance, they should also be attentive to any feedback on the implemented instruments, e.g. from farmers, advisors and the paying agency.

Civil society, science and business representatives

IL can be greatly improved if it is designed using a participatory tool or approach, with each type of stakeholder contributing in their own way. Representatives of science can contribute the results of their studies, in-depth theoretical frameworks and help to guide an objective debate. Civil society representatives present their interest and the need for interventions that will have a real impact, as do business representatives; they can also provide feedback on the success of current and past interventions and their IL. This is particularly relevant today, when CSPs are increasingly incorporating elements of all three pillars of sustainability. Unfortunately, this practice of inclusiveness is generally not found in the formulation of the ILs, frequently resulting in a lack of comprehensive explanation of what individual interventions mean, what objectives they actually pursue and what effects they have.

Communication

IL does not require a specific communication treatment. Communication within the general approach discussed in Chapter 2.1 is sufficient.

Stepwise guidance and roadmap

As IL is not so much a tool but more of a frame of mind, it can be implemented in different ways. The implementation depends primarily on the nature of the intervention, but also on the extent of targeting, i.e. whether the intervention targets only one goal or a broader set of objectives. Regardless of this distinction, however, the approach to designing, implementing, and evaluating policy measures should be structured. Below is a very general outline to guide this process:

1. ***Step 1: Define objectives:*** clearly articulate the overarching objectives of the intervention, informed by strategic and legislative documents, as well as situational analyses and stakeholder inputs (potentially using supporting tools such as SWOT analysis). Break down the overall goals into specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART) objectives. These objectives guide the selection of actions and help structure the intervention logic.

2. ***Step 2: Analyse the current situation:*** evaluate the current agricultural and rural development landscape to assess existing needs and potential areas for intervention. The identified needs should dictate the selection of interventions.
3. ***Step 3: Develop an intervention strategy:*** map the necessary resources (inputs), planned actions (interventions), immediate results (outputs), and intended impacts (outcomes) for each intervention. This mapping ensures that every step is aligned with broader policy goals and contributes to measurable results. The selected policy interventions should align with your objectives and address identified needs. Outline how each measure will be implemented, including resources, and activities, and, if possible, timelines and responsible persons. Identify and elaborate the logic of how short-term outputs will lead to long-term impacts. Figure 2 shows an example illustration of such a mapping exercise. Consider documenting the strategy in an adaptable form that can function as a living document and be changed and or added to within the monitoring and evaluation process.
4. ***Step 4: Establish a monitoring and evaluation framework:*** establish key performance indicators (KPIs), output target indicators and impact target indicators to measure progress towards objectives. Develop a system for collecting and analysing data to monitor implementation and outcomes. Connect this to the broader evaluation framework of the CAP policies in your context.
5. ***Step 5: Implement the intervention:*** allocate necessary financial, human, and technical resources. Engage with farmers, local communities, government agencies, and other stakeholders for effective implementation.
6. ***Step 6: Monitor progress:*** set up a schedule for regular progress reports and reviews. Be prepared to make adjustments to the intervention based on monitoring data and feedback.
7. ***Step 7: Evaluate outcomes:*** Evaluate the overall impact of the intervention on agricultural and rural development. Use evaluation findings to inform future policy decisions and improve intervention strategies.

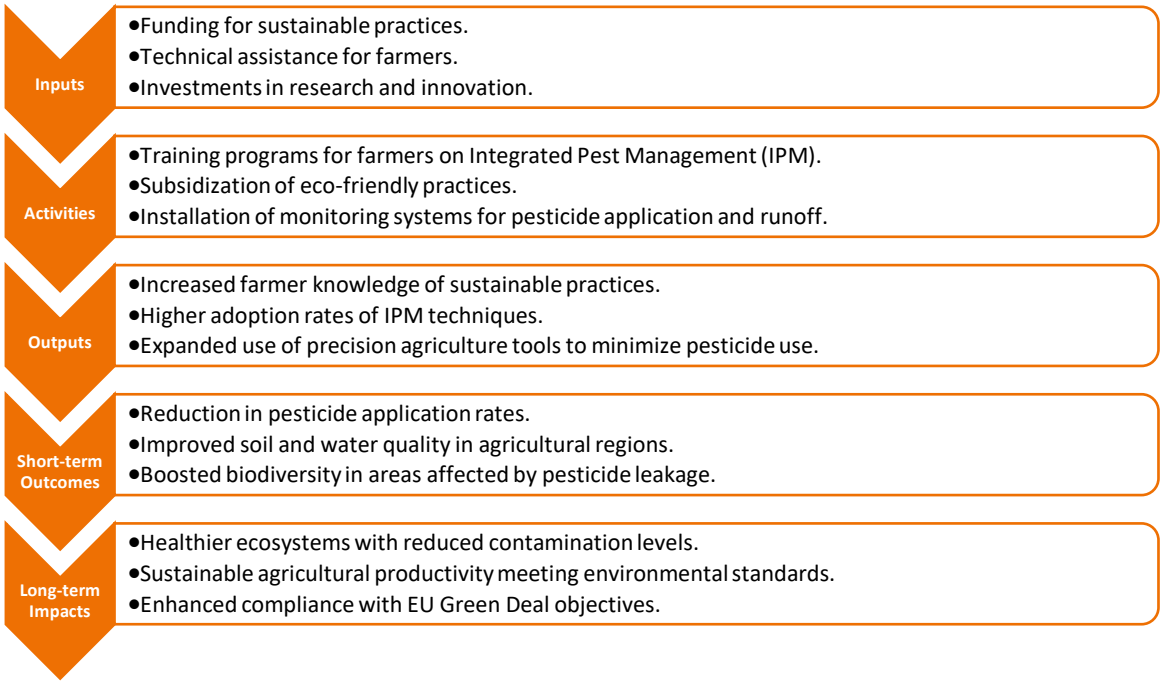

Figure 4: Example logic model for reducing pesticide runoff.

Implementation challenges

It is important to understand the challenges and considerations that come with developing and implementing such a logic in the context of a CSP. Here are some key points:

- The CAP aims to address multiple objectives such as food security, environmental sustainability, rural development, fair incomes, and market stability. Balancing these diverse goals can be challenging.
- The interests of various stakeholders, including farmers, environmental groups and consumers, can sometimes conflict, making consensus difficult. This is why it is important to base the design in sound data and situational analyses in the framework of an overarching evidence-based approach.
- Reliable data is crucial for designing effective interventions. However, obtaining accurate and comprehensive data can be challenging, particularly in relation to newer topics covered by the CAP, such as social issues.
- External factors such as market volatility, climate change, and geopolitical events can impact the effectiveness of CAP interventions, requiring adaptable and resilient strategies.
- Ensuring that CAP interventions are coherent with other EU policies, such as those related to trade, environment, and health, is necessary, but challenging.
- Implementing CAP interventions requires significant administrative effort, and complexity can lead to inefficiencies and increased costs.

5.3 Best practices

For a CSP's IL to be effective, planners should strive towards aligning objectives through comprehensive analysis, fostering participatory processes, and integrating dynamic evaluation mechanisms. By following good practices outlined below, policymakers can ensure that the IL framework promotes coherence, accountability, and responsiveness, aligning CSPs with EU objectives and local needs. By applying these practices, CAP authorities can maximize the effectiveness of the Intervention Logic and, by extension, ensure that CSPs remain impactful, transparent, and well-aligned with the shifting needs of agriculture and rural development.

Aligning objectives through comprehensive analysis: While the basic (general and specific) CAP objectives are primarily derived from EU legislation and any national programming or legislative documents, a structured SWOT analysis is an important step in defining clear, context-specific operational objectives. This analysis helps to identify pressing needs and strategic opportunities, ensuring that interventions address both local challenges and EU-wide priorities.

Following a **clear, explicit logic** between the different elements of the intervention logic and linking its elements as closely as possible to different indicators of the PMEF. Incorporating tools like **theory of change and logic models** provides a framework for connecting inputs to outcomes in a transparent and logical manner. This alignment helps policymakers ensure that **resources are allocated efficiently**, with each intervention contributing measurably to objectives.

Fostering participatory processes: Stakeholder engagement is an important resource when designing the IL. Participatory approaches, such as workshops and consultations, allow actors to contribute to defining objectives, identifying resources and unanticipated issues or improving intervention pathways and validating intervention strategies. This improves and refines the overall intervention logic. It is highly advisable to stakeholders early and consistently, using structured methods such as stakeholder mapping and consultations to ensure balanced representation of different perspectives. Tools such as the Quadruple Helix Approach and Multi-Criteria Analysis can support the incorporation of stakeholder input.

Integrating dynamic evaluation mechanisms: Monitoring and evaluation are critical components of a functional IL framework, ensuring that it remains relevant over time. Establishing appropriate (SMART) indicators ensures that interventions are tracked systematically and provide actionable insights for adaptation. Feedback loops, informed by performance reviews and real-world data, allow policymakers to revise the IL if needed, refine interventions and reallocate resources. This adaptive management approach aligns closely with the CAP's New Delivery Model, emphasizing continuous learning and flexibility in CSP implementation.

In the Tools4CAP project, the intervention logic (IL) tool was applied in the Irish case study to strengthen the linkages between CAP interventions, outputs and outcomes. In response to limitations of existing PMEF indicators, the exercise aimed to develop a more detailed framework mapping causal pathways for key measures, including direct

payments, eco-schemes and areas with natural constraints. Drawing on literature review, expert workshops, a Delphi survey and farm-level data, the IL helped to clarify expected outcomes, identify suitable indicators, and highlight data gaps relevant to national priorities. The case study demonstrated that IL could support the coherence and transparency of CAP planning and evaluation, while also supporting communication and indicator selection. At the same time, its application requires substantial analytical capacity and iterative validation with stakeholders. Overall, the IL proved to be a valuable tool for structuring evidence-based policy design and for informing future monitoring and policy cycles.

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6 Tool D: Prioritization and decision-making

6.1 Description of the tool (guidance)

Prioritization in CAP Strategic Planning (CSP) is the process of ranking policy needs and interventions to align budgetary spending with the most critical and impactful areas. This kind of ranking of needs ensures efficient use of limited resources by focusing on actions that deliver the greatest benefits.

The **Prioritization and Decision-Making** Guidance presented here is a structured, participatory framework designed to rank and allocate resources effectively across the CAP's policy areas. It enables policymakers to optimize resource use, balance stakeholder preferences, and ensure that decision-making processes are **transparent and evidence based**. The tool is particularly valuable in addressing the challenges of **competing priorities and limited budgets**, providing a methodical approach to align actions with overarching policy objectives.

One of the key objectives of the tool is to enhance resource efficiency by prioritizing policy needs and interventions according to their **relevance and impact**. This is particularly important in contexts where administrative capacities and financial resources are constrained. The tool also aims to promote **inclusivity and legitimacy** by involving diverse stakeholders in the prioritization process, ensuring that decisions reflect a broad spectrum of perspectives and interests. Additionally, it facilitates **transparency and accountability** by documenting the rationale behind each decision, making the prioritization process accessible and justifiable to stakeholders.

The ultimate purpose of the guidance is to assist policymakers in selecting interventions that best meet strategic policy objectives. By providing a clear framework for **ranking needs** and explaining why certain objectives are prioritized over others, it helps navigate competing priorities while ideally also maintaining alignment with broader goals.

The methods used in the Prioritization and Decision-Making Guidance include stakeholder consultations, workshops, and surveys to gather insights on needs and priorities. Concrete techniques such as SWOT analysis and visioning exercises help structure and align identified needs with policy objectives, which can be the followed up by prioritization techniques like Cumulative Voting (CV), Multi-Criteria Analysis (MCA), and Constrained Cumulative Voting (CCV) (see more on the methods below).

The outcomes of using the Prioritization and Decision-Making Guidance have important repercussions in subsequent stages of the policy cycle. It produces a prioritized list of policy needs or projects that (ideally) serves as a **foundation for resource allocation**. The participatory approach also fosters stakeholder support and trust, as contributors can see how their input shaped the decision-making process. Moreover, the tool's emphasis on transparency and accountability ensures that policymakers can **justify resource allocations to oversight bodies, the public, and other stakeholders**.

6.2 The place/role of the tool in CSP

The Prioritization and Decision-Making Guidance is an instrument that comes into play during the formulation phase of the CSP, helping Member States rank priorities and allocate limited resources to align with the CAP's overarching (and sometimes competing) goals and their own nationally and regionally recognized needs. The tool's structured approach enables authorities to systematically identify and prioritize interventions, ensuring that CSPs maximize resource efficiency and deliver significant impacts aligned with CAP objectives.

The tool can support CAP Managing Authorities in navigating the requirements associated with CSP formulation in several ways. First, it ensures objective-driven resource allocation by ranking policy needs and interventions, ensuring that the most impactful measures are prioritized and optimizing resource use. Secondly, it enhances stakeholder inclusivity and legitimacy by employing participatory methods like Cumulative Voting (CV) and methods of Multi-Criteria Analysis (MCA) to integrate stakeholders' perspectives. Additionally, the tool helps promote transparency and accountability in CAP governance: by making each step of the decision-making process explicit, it allows stakeholders to trace the rationale behind resource allocation and policy choices, strengthening public confidence.

This guidance aligns directly with the regulatory requirements of CAP as outlined in Regulation (EU) 2021/2115, which mandates that MSs include in in their CSPs an assessment of needs, with one of the elements a »prioritisation of needs, including a sound justification of the choices made« (Article 108). By using methodologies such as SWOT analysis, stakeholder consultations, and prioritization techniques like Cumulative Voting (CV) or Multi-Criteria Analysis (MCA), CAP authorities can thus not only identify and focus on high-impact interventions in a structured way, but also substantiate their choice to the European commission, oversight bodies and taxpayers.

The guidance also supports adaptive management by providing a clear, revisitable framework for prioritization. As policy needs inevitably evolve, the tool's structured criteria allow CAP authorities to re-evaluate and adjust priorities either within one programming period or over several ones, allowing Member States to refine their CSPs over time without losing strategic focus.

6.3 Resources, roadmap and challenges related to implementing the tool

The Prioritisation and Decision-Making Guidance (PDM) comprises different techniques leading to participatory decisions on different issues arising in CSP preparation. What they have in common is that they try to determine the weight of each issue in the preparation of a CSP, based on the responses of the participants. The following are some of the common features that can be attributed to these techniques and to prioritisation in decision-making in general.

Time needed

In terms of time, PDM techniques can be implemented in a relatively short period of time, up to a maximum of one month. In addition, there is the time needed to prepare the techniques, which is not excessive, ranging from a few days to a maximum of perhaps one or two months. The duration depends on whether the tools are available, the implementer's skill in their use, and the time spent on preparation and execution.

Infrastructure

Human and technical resources are needed to implement the various techniques. It is necessary to outline the issue well in terms of content (preferably with the support of additional tools, such as SWOT analysis) and then to prioritise, usually using a digital form of decision making. The preparation of the tool requires technical staff with the technical capacity to implement it. This, of course, requires the questions to be asked with sufficient technical competence, which requires experience and reflection. It is also necessary to have a pool of stakeholders that is continuously formed; in the case of expert prioritisation, this can encompass a smaller circle. This is not the case with Internet-based quizzes, which have their own disadvantages in that they cannot be representative.

The role of MoAs and other ministries

The Management Authority (MoA) is also key for these tools. It is the decision-makers who say whether or not to support decision-making with additional techniques. It is important that there is a support team within the MoA that is capable of carrying this out technically. If this kind of decision-making is applied more frequently, having an internal team is sensible, but outsourcing is also an appropriate approach. Other parts of the government do not habitually get involved in this kind of decision-making. However, a clear line needs to be drawn between the final political decisions and the nature of such democratic participatory approaches. Trust in this kind of decision-making is very important, and it is also a tool to counter the otherwise purely interest-based decision-making that is often a characteristic of the CSP process.

The End users

The proposed techniques make it possible to make decision-making more objective, which means that the end users are all those who are interested in CAP interventions, including and especially potential beneficiaries of the interventions resulting from the CSPs. More directly, PDM techniques provide input to the developers of CSPs, i.e. the relevant directorates and individuals in the MoA system responsible for the strategic planning of agricultural policy.

The Implementers

PDM practitioners can be divided into three groups: decision makers who set the contextual framework for prioritisation; the subject-matter experts who prepare the questions for each technique; and those who then implement it.

Civil society, science and business representatives

Stakeholders from civil society, business and academia are an important part of PDM processes, as they can be involved both in legitimising the substantive framework of the different techniques and in the decision-making procedure itself. They can work in small groups that are transparent and balanced in composition, or they can promote the prioritisation method to their constituencies, who then become involved in the prioritisation process themselves.

Communication

This type of work and activities can be covered by general process communication activities. However, it is important that the announcements of the process and the publication of the results are well communicated. Such a participatory approach can significantly increase confidence in the preparation of CSPs.

Stepwise guidance and roadmap

Each of the PDM techniques has its own technical instructions and steps of implementation, whose detailed description exceeds the scope of this Guideline. Figure 3 illustrates an example of the use of Cumulative voting in Italy to prioritize needs and priorities. While the conceptual approach is rather simple, applying such a technique does require a certain level of technical expertise. However, here are some basic rules that are common to all prioritisation procedures:

Step 1: **Choice of purpose and prioritisation technique**. Decision on the choice of the area to be prioritised and the choice of the technique, the way of collecting opinions/votes. The key actors are the decision-makers of the CSP preparation. Following are two examples for concrete prioritization tools:

- Cumulative Voting: The cumulative voting method is a decision-making mechanism that empowers participants to distribute a fixed number of votes among various options or candidates based on their preferences. Unlike traditional voting systems where each voter selects one option, cumulative voting allows voters to allocate their votes strategically, reflecting the intensity of their preferences. For instance, voters

can concentrate their votes on a single option they strongly support or distribute them among several options to express varying levels of preference.

This approach is often applied in contexts like corporate governance, policy decision-making, and participatory budgeting, where balancing diverse interests is crucial. While it enhances minority representation and provides a more nuanced view of stakeholder priorities, the method can be challenging due to its complexity and the potential for vote-splitting. Overall, cumulative voting offers a flexible and equitable way to navigate decisions involving multiple stakeholders or competing interests.

- The Multi-Criteria Analysis (MCA) tool is a decision-making framework widely used in policy design to evaluate and compare options based on diverse criteria. It is particularly valuable in situations involving conflicting objectives, multiple stakeholders, and a mix of qualitative and quantitative factors. MCA assesses options across economic, environmental, social, and technical dimensions, offering a more comprehensive evaluation than traditional cost-benefit analysis. The process begins by defining the policy objectives and identifying the alternatives to be assessed. Next, criteria relevant to the policy goals—such as economic efficiency, social equity, environmental sustainability, or feasibility—are selected and clearly defined. Each criterion is then assigned a weight based on its relative importance, often through stakeholder consultation or expert input. The alternatives are evaluated against these criteria, using qualitative or quantitative measures, to score their performance. These scores are aggregated, typically through a weighted sum or other decision rules, to determine the overall ranking of the options. Sensitivity analysis is often conducted to test the robustness of the results to changes in criteria weights or scoring methods. Finally, the outcomes are reviewed and discussed with stakeholders to guide decision-making, ensuring transparency and alignment with broader policy objectives.

  The framework's flexibility allows it to integrate quantitative data like costs and emissions with qualitative factors such as social acceptability. While MCA provides a holistic and transparent evaluation process, challenges such as subjectivity in assigning weights, complexity in managing data, and the time-intensive nature of stakeholder participation require careful management to ensure robust and equitable outcomes.

Step 2: **Definition of the themes**. These are the themes or topics to be submitted to the stakeholders for evaluation. The key actors are the CSP preparation support group (may include external assistance).

Step 3: **Technical preparation of questions and tools**. Preparing the implementation of each technique. The implementers are IT and technical support for the process.

Step 4: **Implementation**. Prioritisation according to the selected technique.

Step 5**: Analysis, report and presentation of results**. The expert group analyses the data and prepares a report. This is presented to the interested public following the development of the CSP.

Step 6: Transfer of results to the CSP.

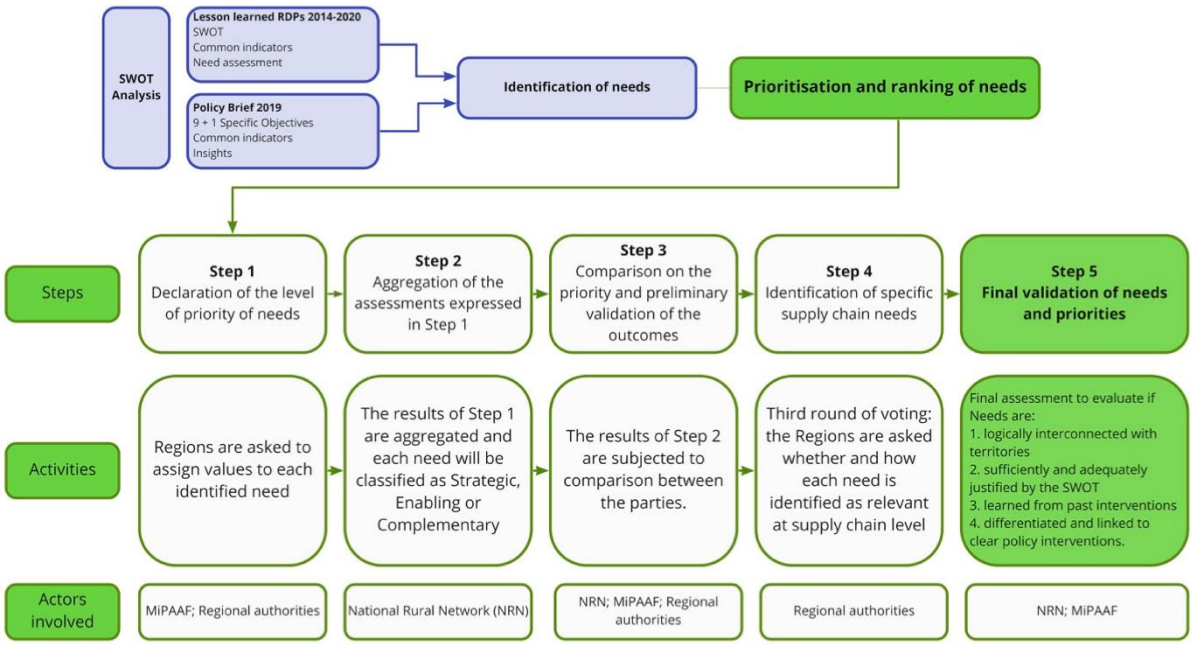

Figure 5: The process used to validate the needs and priorities in Italy using Cumulative voting. Source: Cagliero et al., 2021

Implementation challenges

There are a number of challenges with PDM, all of which are mainly related to the representativeness of the participants and the acceptance of the results by key stakeholders. Representativeness is very difficult to achieve, whether it is the interested public, i.e. representatives of the organisations (who have the most interest in the CSP output), members the general public who respond to a public initiative, or even opinion polls conducted with the support of professional providers (which can probably be the most effective in reaching a representative sample). The complexity and conflictual nature of the issues raised by the modern CSP process makes it difficult to achieve balanced results, as there is often disagreement even on the issue of which population should even be represented in the first place (e.g., only farmers as the CAP's primary beneficiaries, or the general public).

6.4 Best practices and examples

PDM provides structured methodologies for ranking and allocating resources in CAP Strategic Planning, ensuring that interventions align with strategic goals and respond effectively to the needs of stakeholders. Best practices for applying this tool include a **balanced approach to stakeholder engagement**, **systematic methods for prioritization**, and **mechanisms for ensuring transparency and accountability**. Applying methods that foster inclusivity, accountability, and data-driven decision-making can thus ensure that limited resources are allocated effectively, contributing to coherent and impactful policy outcomes.

One key practice is to **engage a broad spectrum of stakeholders** early in the prioritization process. Methods like cumulative voting (CV) or different multi-criteria analysis (MCA) techniques allow stakeholders to participate in ranking identified needs, ensuring that the resulting policy decisions appropriately reflect a variety of perspectives, ensuring balanced representation and avoiding dominance by any single interest group.

Another best practice involves using **evidence-based criteria to prioritize interventions**. This includes assessing needs against **specific metrics** such as feasibility, cost-effectiveness, and alignment with CAP goals. A structured approach can ensure that the selected needs are clearly justified and supported by data, enhancing transparency, stakeholder trust and overall credibility.

A third best practice is the establishment of **iterative feedback mechanisms** to refine prioritization outcomes. Tools like cumulative voting allow for recursive rounds of evaluation, enabling stakeholders to revisit rankings and ensure that emerging data or stakeholder concerns are incorporated.

There were numerous examples of the use of PDM tools use in the formulation of Rural development programmes (RDPs) and the first round of CSPs (for the period 2023-2027):

- In Italy, constrained cumulative voting (CCV) was employed to engage stakeholders in ranking needs while balancing regional input with national CAP objectives. Intervention areas were prioritized by allowing stakeholders to allocate points across options, reflecting their relative importance. This method aggregated regional and provincial preferences, enabling a collective decision-making process to identify territorial needs. The tool was first applied nationally using spreadsheet-based software and later replicated regionally and locally. It was also scaled out in research on organic farming, aligning with the European Commission's requirements to support a well-founded intervention logic.
- Spain implemented multi-criteria analysis (MCA) to apply evidence-based criteria in prioritizing 85 identified needs. These needs were categorized into economic, environmental, and social priorities and evaluated based on feasibility, relevance, and alignment with CAP goals. A territorial criterion was also applied, incorporating regional extent and intensity to contextualize needs locally, ensuring evidence-based and regionally relevant prioritization.
- Germany combined participatory feedback with scenario analysis to evaluate the impact of interventions in its RDP formulation for the previous programming period. In two federal states, participatory workshops on biodiversity and abiotic topics (water, soil, and climate) engaged experts from state authorities, associations, academia, and institutions, selected for their expertise in development programs, familiarity with regional differences, and ability to contextualize program effects. Trend analysis, using indicators to assess environmental conditions and past trends, and an impact matrix to evaluate measure contributions, were applied to align interventions with CAP goals and ensure evidence-based prioritization.

In the Tools4CAP project, prioritisation and decision-making tools were applied in the Polish case study through a constrained cumulative voting (CV) approach to support needs assessment in CAP Strategic Plan design. In response to limited time for transparent discussion during the CSP preparation process, the tool was used in a facilitated workshop with stakeholders from administration, business, academia and civil society to structure and make explicit trade-offs between competing priorities. Participants allocated a fixed number of points across identified needs under defined constraints, forcing consideration of multiple objectives and revealing tensions between production-oriented and environmental priorities. The case study demonstrated that such structured participatory methods could enhance transparency and stakeholder ownership, while reducing the perception that prioritisation is predetermined. At the same time, the exercise highlighted important limitations: results were sensitive to the formulation of needs, the choice of criteria, and stakeholder composition, while complex or multi-dimensional needs proved difficult to assess consistently. Although the method itself was relatively easy to understand, meaningful participation required careful preparation, clear definitions, and strong facilitation. Overall, the tool proved to be a flexible and low-cost instrument for supporting inclusive and evidence-informed prioritisation, but its impact depends on sufficient time, representativeness, and a clear link to actual decision-making processes.

7 References

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8 Tool E: Scenario building for Policy Impact assessment

8.1 Description of the tool

The Scenario Building for Policy Impact Assessment (SBPIA) tool provides a structured and systematic method for **evaluating potential policy impacts** through the **development and analysis** of scenarios that reflect different policy choices and external conditions. This approach is particularly useful in CAP Strategic Planning, as it addresses the **complexity** of policy environments and the **interplay** of economic, social, and environmental variables, enabling evidence-based decision-making and enhanced strategic planning.

The primary objective of Scenario Building is to assess the potential impacts, risks, and trade-offs associated with policy options. By constructing baseline (normally business-as-usual) and alternative scenarios (depending on the policy field, e.g. optimistic/pessimistic, extreme/balanced, productivism/environmental), the tool allows policymakers to explore how varying interventions might perform under different conditions, fostering transparency and accountability in policy design. When done in a participatory fashion, it also encourages stakeholder participation, enabling a more inclusive and collaborative policymaking process. This engagement, which is usually more aptly used in the development of scenarios (rather than their analysis), improves the alignment of policies with diverse stakeholder priorities while fostering greater trust and legitimacy.

Scenario analysis can employ a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. Baseline and alternative scenarios are developed to examine potential outcomes, often involving economic models, expert judgment, and stakeholder consultations to evaluate risks, opportunities, and trade-offs associated with different scenarios. Quantitative models may include economic, environmental, or territorial impact assessments, while qualitative methods, while potentially less precise, can help ensure that nuanced and context-specific factors are considered. Policymakers can use these insights to refine policy options, ensuring they are resilient to future uncertainties and adaptable to changing conditions.

Outcomes from the use of Scenario Building in CAP Strategic Planning include well-documented and transparent decisions, evidence-based policy choices, and improved stakeholder collaboration. By identifying both opportunities and vulnerabilities related to implementing proposed interventions, the tool helps create robust policies that effectively balance different goals, as well as long-term objectives with short-term challenges.

8.2 The place/role of the tool in CSP

The **SBPIA** tool is well-suited for use during the **design and planning** phases of the CSP. It provides a structured approach to **anticipate the outcomes** of policy decisions, **evaluate policy options**, anticipate the impacts of their decisions under various conditions, and assess how interventions align with CAP's overarching goals. By **explicitly modelling trade-offs and synergies**, the tool helps **address the complexity of balancing multiple objectives** across economic, social, and environmental dimensions. This structured process supports CAP authorities in making informed, data-driven, forward-looking decisions that are aligned with both national priorities and EU-wide objectives. Additionally, Scenario Building facilitates a forward-looking approach to strategic planning, enabling policymakers to adapt to emerging challenges and ensure alignment with the CAP's **performance-based governance** model.

While the tool is valuable for internal planning, integrating stakeholder engagement into the process enhances its **legitimacy and effectiveness**. Stakeholders provide diverse perspectives on potential trade-offs and synergies, fostering inclusivity and building trust in the decision-making process. The tool's effectiveness is thus enhanced when combined with participatory processes, allowing CAP authorities to engage stakeholders in scenario development and evaluation. By involving farmers, rural organizations, environmental groups, and other stakeholders, Scenario Building reflects diverse perspectives and ensures that CSPs are responsive to local needs while adhering to CAP objectives. Stakeholders can provide **insights into the feasibility and potential impacts of different scenarios**, contributing to a CSP that is transparent, inclusive, and better understood by all involved. This collaborative approach fosters trust, mitigates resistance, and builds support for the selected interventions during

the implementation phase. It furthermore builds capacity in the policy community, as it requires stakeholders to consider trade-offs between different policy objectives. The inclusion of stakeholders does require additional considerations, as it can be a time-consuming element.

Scenario Building is also valuable for **ongoing performance evaluation and policy adaptation**. The tool can be applied **during CSP implementation** to model the impacts of current interventions under changing conditions, such as economic fluctuations or environmental crises. This adaptability is in line with the CAP's **New Delivery Model**, which emphasizes continuous monitoring and flexibility. Quantitative analysis can also support **ex-post evaluations** by assessing the effectiveness of interventions from previous CSP cycles, offering lessons to improve policy design and implementation in future cycles. By incorporating updated data and stakeholder input, CAP authorities can refine strategies and reallocate resources, ensuring CSPs remain relevant and effective in achieving long-term objectives.

8.3 Resources, roadmap, and challenges related to implementing the tool

Scenario analysis can be used at different stages in the preparation of a CSP and is presented here in conjunction with impact assessments (SBPIA). Again, there are no clear rules for this tool. However, it is a combination of a qualitative participatory approach, and quantitative tools used to assess the potential impacts of different policy options. These are complex approaches and different options, which can take quite different forms and implementations. We can therefore only outline some of the basic features of the tool in terms of resources, implementation and challenges.

Time needed

SBPIA is a very time-consuming process. While scenario building is quite manageable in terms of time (it can be implemented in a participatory way in 2-3 months), scenario quantification is an extremely demanding process that cannot be carried out in the short time available for the preparation of the CSP. This is especially the case if the quantitative tool has to be developed from scratch. Therefore, the impact assessment process usually uses already developed quantitative tools, mathematical models, which are slightly adapted for the purpose of this type of analysis only, in order to be able to simulate different policy options in the future. The adaptation alone can be carried out in a few months, so that we can estimate that a full SBPIA can be carried out in 6-9 months (depending on its scope – e.g. over the whole policy perspective, or only partially addressing certain types of interventions).

Infrastructure

It is a tool that requires a lot of specific skills and also software tools – mathematical models. It is necessary to have permanent research support in the Member State in order to acquire sufficient competence and experience for this type of work. Modern mathematical models in decision support are sophisticated tools, based on a large data system, a theoretical framework, a mathematical construction of the relationships between variables, a link to indicators to show the context of change and allow the impact of policy changes to be assessed. The experts involved must be capable of critical analysis, familiar with the status of the various agricultural policy priorities and, while having an excellent knowledge of the theoretical laws of economics and, increasingly, of ecology, sociology and other sciences, must also be able to programme and simulate real situations in a mathematical framework.

The role of MoAs and other ministries

The MA and the line ministry cannot implement SBPIA alone. There have been several unsuccessful attempts to do this in the past decades in different Member States. SBPIA requires thorough research, specific skills and links with research groups in other countries and at EU level (e.g. JRC Seville) that develop and apply models to support agricultural policy decision making. There is a need for an ongoing and stable relationship between the MoA as the funder and the research groups (either in research institutes or universities), which requires investment in the group, commissioning of studies and building a relationship between the funder and the contractor. It is necessary to be aware of the possibilities that mathematical models offer for answering different kinds of questions. Usually, no single model can provide a comprehensive answer due to data limitations and theoretical underpinnings, so it is often necessary to combine different models. The bottleneck is the new agricultural policy issues related to health and

nutrition, as well as social issues; on the other hand, models can provide correct answers to economic and, increasingly, environmental questions.

The end users

End users are the public stakeholders involved in planning and monitoring agricultural policy. Directly, of course, it is the decision-makers and CSP drafters who, through SAPIA, are helped to set priorities and select interventions.

The implementers

SBPIA is thus normally prepared as an external study, but it must have all the necessary elements to be included in the preparation of the CSP. Since it is not an individual's work, research groups are formed over a longer period of time, usually composed of top researchers who have worked for years on mathematical models and have carried out applied studies for the MoA. Not all countries have the same kind of experience and culture that is exhibited for example in how European Commission works with its JRC in Seville and external contractors. Similar good practices can be found in the Netherlands, Ireland, and in the past in Austria, Slovenia and elsewhere.

Civil society, science and business representatives

Stakeholders can improve SBPIA. Firstly, they can contribute their understanding of needs and solutions, and secondly, they have their own data systems that can be integrated into the modelling. It is therefore necessary that they understand not so much the theoretical and modelling basis, but rather the possibilities and limitations of the models and the applicability of the results. On the one hand, there is a need to lower expectations while still emphasising the importance of dealing with complex agricultural policy issues quantitatively.

Representatives of the scientific community who are not part of the research team can provide an objective assessment of what has been achieved and help to ensure that the application of the models and scenario analysis reflects the state of the art and that users of the results are provided with an additional interpretation of the results.

Communication

Communicating the results of scenario analysis and quantitative modelling requires considerable expertise, and it is therefore necessary to involve the authors of the study in dissemination and dialogue with stakeholders in order to understand the expectations and views of the broad stakeholder community on agricultural policy. Communicating results is also an important part of raising awareness of the evidence-based approach and the complexity of the issues.

Stepwise guidance and roadmap

SBPIA can be implemented in many ways, with a variety of different purposes and models. Therefore, only a general roadmap and steps of implementation can be given:

1. **Define objectives and scope**: policymakers begin by identifying specific policy questions or challenges to address. This scope-setting phase ensures that the scenarios are relevant and targeted to the policy's goals.
2. **Construct baseline and alternative scenarios**: policymakers create a baseline scenario (continuing current policies) and alternative scenarios that reflect different policy options or external changes. These scenarios incorporate assumptions about variables like economic growth, environmental factors, or demographic trends.
3. **Quantitative and qualitative analysis**: scenarios are evaluated through both quantitative models (such as economic or environmental impact models) and qualitative assessments. This mixed-methods approach provides a comprehensive view of potential impacts.

4. **Stakeholder consultation**: input from stakeholders (e.g., industry representatives, environmental groups, and community organizations) is gathered to ensure that scenarios reflect diverse perspectives and priorities.
5. **Impact comparison and mitigation strategies**: policymakers compare the baseline and alternative scenarios to identify positive and negative impacts. Strategies to enhance benefits and mitigate adverse outcomes are developed, helping refine the final policy options.

It is crucial to employ an appropriate level of expertise at each of the stages and to use reliable data. As the famous adage goes: Garbage in, garbage out.

Implementation challenges

Conducting a PIA entails a number of challenges and considerations. Below are some key aspects to consider:

- Inadequate human and institutional resources for SBPIA; there is no practice in the Member State to build capacity for such studies in an evolutionary way. There are not enough qualified researchers and teams to do this kind of work, and there is a lack of understanding on the part of clients (MoAs) of the need for this kind of approach regarding agricultural policy strategic planning.
- Accurate data is essential for assessing impacts. However, data may be inconsistent or unavailable across different strategic issues and particular model requirements. In relation to the first issue, the ability to recognize data gaps, issues and inconsistencies is an important asset in building scenarios, calibrating models and interpreting the results of modelling exercises correctly.

8.4 Best practices and examples

SBPIA is widely used to evaluate policy options, identify trade-offs, and design strategies for effective policy development. Best practices in its application include defining clear objectives, integrating mixed-methods analysis, and fostering adaptive policy management.

Starting with **clearly defined objectives and policy questions** ensures that the generated scenarios are relevant to the current and future policy context. Furthermore, involving an **appropriate level of expertise** encompassing different fields relevant to the CAP (such as micro- and macro-economics, environment, trade, internal relations, etc.) will help provide a comprehensive image of all the different factors that may affect the overall policy environment, increasing the real-world relevance of the resulting scenarios and their analyses, as well as their relevance over a longer time period. Relatedly, **involving stakeholders throughout** the scenario development process enhances the relevance and acceptance of the results of these analyses.

Documentation and transparent communication of scenario outcomes are also important, especially in more participatory variants of the process. At the very least, they should be used to communicate with those affected by the policy after the process is concluded. Clearly presenting assumptions, methods, and expected impacts builds trust and enables stakeholders to understand and evaluate policy decisions.

Methodologically, using a **combination of quantitative models and qualitative analysis** strengthens the depth of scenario evaluation. For example, quantitative tools such as economic impact models provide measurable projections, while qualitative insights from stakeholders and experts can enrich the understanding of societal and environmental dimensions. This is especially relevant in the current data landscape, where information on social variables relevant to the CAP are still scarce and unstructured in many places, and gathering expert insight is necessary for building an evidence base for policy instruments.

In preparing its CSP, Netherlands applied scenario-building approaches to explore the trade-offs between different policy goals, such as increasing yields v. reducing environmental impacts, and competitiveness v. social policy. By modelling different futures, Dutch policymakers could visualize the outcomes of various policy choices built around these dimensions.

In the Tools4CAP project, scenario building was applied in the Slovenian case study as part of an integrated approach combining participatory vision building, scenario analysis, and indicator development. The exercise

supported the development of a long-term strategic vision for agriculture and rural development, exploring alternative pathways towards sustainability and aligning CAP interventions with broader food system objectives. Scenario building was used to structure discussions on future developments and policy trade-offs, helping stakeholders articulate and compare different trajectories (e.g. in terms of environmental ambition, production systems, and rural development). The case study demonstrated that scenario-based approaches can support strategic thinking, enhance stakeholder engagement, and improve the coherence of policy planning. At the same time, their effectiveness depends on strong facilitation, iterative engagement, and the ability to translate both quantitative and qualitative insights into operational policy frameworks. Overall, scenario building proved to be a valuable tool for supporting long-term, integrated CAP planning in a multi-stakeholder context.

8.5 References and further reading

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9 Conclusions

Using appropriate participatory decision-making and multi-level governance (PDMMG) tools play a critical role in ensuring the effectiveness and inclusiveness of CAP Strategic Planning and aligning plans with the demands of the New Delivery Mode, creating robust, adaptable, and transparent CSPs aligned with EU-wide objectives. These tools ensure that CAP interventions are performance-driven and evidence-based, shifting the focus from compliance with prescriptive rules to achieving measurable outcomes and empowering Member states and their constituencies in formulating plans that better meet local needs. They enhance policy coherence by systematically linking interventions to CAP objectives and provide structured frameworks for balancing economic, environmental, and social goals. By fostering stakeholder participation and inclusivity, these tools improve the legitimacy, accountability, and relevance of CSPs. Moreover, PDMMG tools enable adaptive management, allowing MSs to respond effectively to changing conditions and stakeholder feedback during the policy cycle, including in cases of extreme dissent (farmer protests) or when policy failures such as ineffectiveness of measures or misallocation of funds become readily apparent. While the NDM includes a certain level of policy adaptation, stakeholder engagement is only necessary in the preparatory phase, and it might be worth considering extending this demand to subsequent phases, as well.

The successful implementation of PDMMG tools in CAP Strategic planning depends on several factors:

- Capacity building: policymakers and stakeholders must be equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to use the tools effectively. Training programmes and accessible resources are vital for fostering informed participation and decision-making. In many cases, this includes investment in capacity within the Managing authority and other institutions active in CAP management (such as the Paying agency and advisory service), the research community, as well as stakeholders.
- Stakeholder engagement: tools must be designed to engage a diverse range of stakeholders, including traditionally underrepresented groups. Structured and transparent mechanisms for input, such as digital platforms and workshops, are crucial for inclusivity. The better the stakeholder engagement, the greater the legitimacy and effectiveness of the CSP, and the higher the likelihood of its success.
- Integration of data and evidence: reliable quantitative and qualitative data must inform the application of PDMMG tools. Evidence-based policymaking relies on robust monitoring systems and clear performance indicators aligned with CAP objectives. In the absence of reliable data, leveraging (excellent) expert support is justified.
- Relatedly, collaboration between CAP authorities and the scientific community is essential for improving the quality and application of PDMMG tools. This would e.g. entail partnerships with universities, research institutions, and advisory services to integrate research and novel methods into CSP processes; establishing platforms for sharing best practices and lessons learned among MSs; developing accessible,

user-friendly tools that incorporate insights from multiple disciplines, such as environmental science, agricultural economics, and social studies.

- At the EU level, it would be reasonable to consider compulsory application of a specific set of PDMMG tools. This kind of demand would have to be accompanied by institutional support through the establishment of clear, harmonized guidelines for implementing the tools across MSs, as well as funding and technical assistance for capacity-building initiatives and the development of participatory tools.

Evidence from the Tools4CAP case studies (D5.2) confirms the relevance of PDMMG tools for enhancing transparency, coherence, and stakeholder involvement in CAP Strategic Planning, but also highlights important practical limitations. Their effectiveness depends strongly on context-specific factors such as data availability and quality, stakeholder composition, and administrative capacity. Several case studies revealed constraints related to limited time, resource availability, and difficulties in ensuring broad and representative participation. Moreover, the impact of participatory tools on actual policy decisions is not guaranteed, with a risk that such processes remain symbolic if not clearly linked to decision-making. The findings also suggest that PDMMG tools are most effective when applied in combination rather than in isolation, and when embedded in iterative, tailored, well-facilitated processes supported by adequate analytical and institutional capacity.

The future of participatory and multi-level governance decision-making tools lies in their comprehensive integration into every stage of CAP planning, implementation, and monitoring. Achieving this will require significant enhancements to research support and data infrastructure (including digital tools), enabling continuous and inclusive stakeholder engagement, even (or especially) in remote or underserved regions. Institutionalizing participatory practices through mandatory guidelines and dedicated funding could embed these approaches as standard components of CSP processes. Adopting innovative engagement methods, such as virtual consultations and scenario simulations, should ensure that participatory and multi-level governance decision-making tools evolve alongside technological advancements and shifting stakeholder needs. By addressing these priorities, MSs can fully harness PDMMG tools to develop CSPs that are effective, inclusive, and aligned with the EU's broader goals for sustainable and resilient agriculture.

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