

Guidance for the Strategic Planning Process



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Terminology

Many governments have developed approaches to supporting organic agriculture, which are variously called policies, strategies and plans/action plans. Except for certain political policy declarations, these approaches are the result of a planning process. In this toolkit, the term **policy** is used flexibly, but mainly with reference to the general pathways in which governments translate their visions and broad goals into programs. Some governments have issued broadly stated organic agriculture policies, leaving the planning of strategic actions to implement these policies for further down the road in time. It is a matter of governance style and tradition if the policies themselves will include detailed actions or if the policy is more general and concrete actions are formulated in an action plan. It also relates to the decision-making processes involved. If the policies are set in the parliament, it is likely to be better to have the action plan separate and approved by the relevant Ministry or the Government.

In this toolkit “**strategic plan**” refers to a comprehensive document describing the aims (goals) and related policies and the strategic actions for going from the present situation towards achieving the aims and implementing the policies, often over a specific time period. The hallmark of the strategic plan is the plan for specific actions that will be taken to effect the desired change. These actions represent choices among a larger group of possible actions that could be taken to bring the change. A good strategy will optimize these choices in the context of the particular country. In the EU strategic plans to support organic agriculture are called “Action Plans”, reflecting the importance of this aspect, and they sometimes carry out the planning into specific actions, activities, timelines and budgets. Although called action plans, these documents also address the context, current situation, policy goals, objectives, and decision process as well as the actions. They could also be called strategic plans or strategic agendas. The collection of chosen **strategic actions** in a strategic plan, once approved, constitute the work program of the government agency or several agencies. The work programs may contain even more specific activities.

Note: The case examples in this toolkit may vary in the way planning terms are used. There is no one, clear universal usage of these and other words related to planning. For example, the word “objective” can refer to general aims in some cases and to specific and measurable targets in other cases.

Strategic Planning

Policy Approaches

General and organic agriculture policies should support each other to the greatest extent possible to promote effective policy coherence, especially if organic agriculture is promoted as a mainstream solution. The most conducive policy framework is obtained when organic agriculture is recognized and integrated in main

policies of the country, e.g. the agriculture policy, food and health policies, environmental policies and poverty eradication policies. Through that, organic is mainstreamed and will be considered in main programs and in budget allocations. However, even when such integration is accomplished, there are merits to formulate one consistent organic policy to ensure that all the needs of the sector are properly addressed. It may be useful to review the main policies either prior to starting the planning process or when assessing the situation of organic agriculture.

Why an “Organic” Strategic Plan?

There is a high interdependency between single policy measures and actions addressing organic farming. Policy packages are more relevant than the sum of individual policy measures and appear more effective if they are embedded in the general policy environment, contain strategic aims and consider directly the needs of the sector. Furthermore, all the actions should be based on a shared understanding of the aims and objectives to which they will contribute.

To choose the right mix of measures that will be most appropriate and most effective in a given context requires a strategic planning exercise. This takes time (several months to a couple of years) and some resources. However, it is a worthwhile exercise because:

- It creates and catalyzes a positive local dynamic around organic agriculture development.
- It forces policy makers and other actors of the sector to adopt a more comprehensive and strategic, and therefore more effective approach to organic support, than leaving single policy measures to be discussed and adopted in isolation.
- It provides the framework for a constructive public-private cooperation and organized stakeholder involvement in policy formulation.
- It constitutes a clear government-supported statement of the major societal benefits of organic farming and contributes to the expression and visibility of medium and long-term government commitment to organic support, which is a crucial signal for the private sector to invest.

It is often not too difficult to secure resources to conduct such a planning process. Several developing countries (e.g. Costa Rica, Bhutan, Kyrgyzstan) have got the development of their national organic action plan financed in the context of a development cooperation project.

One government agency (often the Ministry of Agriculture) should serve as the lead agency on the planning and representatives from other relevant agencies should be assigned to the process.

What constitutes the plan?

The development of an organic strategic plan is a complex exercise. The plan should be based on an in-depth analysis of:

- Aims for organic sector development in the country based on the specific economic, environmental and societal potentials of organic farming and food. (What general societal and environmental aims can organic agriculture and food help us achieve? How do these fit in with the aims of other general and agricultural policies?);
- Situation analysis. What is the current state of organic sector development in the country? What is the current state of policy support for organic sector development? Who are the stakeholders?;
- Strengths/weaknesses/opportunities/threats (SWOT) for the organic sector- related to further development in a region or country (both on the side of production and on the side of demand);
- Objectives for the development of the organic sector in the country. In light of the SWOT results, what pieces of the puzzle make the most sense to focus on – e.g. attract more farmers to produce organically? Increase domestic demand? Increase exports? Solve specific production challenges?;
- Balance and interplay of strategic actions in recognition of the dual impacts of other policy measures on the organic sector (agricultural policy and other policy areas) and decisions on how to address them. Do we see any policies that hold the organic sector back or policies which, if changed, can significantly advance organic agriculture?

Who Plans?

The impetus to develop an organic strategic plan may either come from the government (top-down) or from the sector (bottom-up). For example, in the EU, some strategic action plans were developed on the basis of bottom-up initiatives (e.g. Andalusia 2001, England 2002, Italy 2001, Netherlands 2004); where the sector itself demanded political action designed by the sector itself to help solve sector problems. Other action plans were developed on the basis of top-down initiatives (e.g. Czech Republic 2002, Denmark 1998, Germany 2001, Slovenia 2004), actions pursuing politically defined goals designed by political decision makers. In any case it is critical to involve a mix of stakeholders, at least including relevant government agencies and/or departments, and private sector and civil society.

Stakeholder involvement is more likely to become successful if it uses several methods and runs even throughout the policy cycle of an organic strategic plan (design, policy formulation, decision making, implementation and evaluation). Methods for stakeholder involvement include: electronic consultations, creation of committees and expert groups, workshops, surveys. There are various collaborative models and case examples for stakeholder involvement in organic policy planning and implementation, which can be accessed in the Foundation

section of the toolkit under [Dimensions of Cooperation](#).

In some Pacific countries, it might not be readily apparent who should be engaged in the planning process. POETCom can be asked to assist in identifying stakeholders from the private sector and civil society. Targeted financial support may be offered to key NGO stakeholders to enable their active participation (this could be in the form of a project, or similar). In countries where there are few producers and other actors and government is just starting on the topic, some capacity building activities of stakeholders and government representatives on organic issues can be organized prior to commencing the policy formulation process, so that all are acquainted and empowered to make a meaningful contribution once the planning process starts. International development agencies and intergovernmental organizations working in the country may be valuable stakeholders to include in the process.

Policy formulation

Agreeing on Aims

The strategic plan should identify the aims on which the planning is based.

The reasons why Governments support organic agriculture and sector development vary. In some cases, Chile for example, it is clearly income generation through exports that is seen as the main point; in Malaysia, it is the development of a profitable domestic market niche and substitution of imports. In Denmark and Costa Rica, the key aims are to protect the environment and promote rural development through organic farming. In a number of countries, the reasons to support organic and the aims of policy measures are not so well spelled out, which can lead to misunderstanding and frustration among those responsible and in the sector itself. It is worthwhile to clarify explicitly what an organic policy is supposed to achieve – both for the private sector and for the Government itself. Is it mainly to boost export markets? Is it to protect the environment? Is it to develop the local market?

Obviously, the appropriate objectives and strategic actions will be different for these different aims. General aims can include:

- 1 • Increased income to the agriculture sector;
- 2 • Protection of environment, e.g. water;
- 3 • Protection of biodiversity;
- 4 • Climate change mitigation and adaptation;
- 5 • Strengthening the competitiveness of small-holders;
- 6 • Rural development; e.g. rural employment, gender-equality,
- 7 • Protection of human health;
- 8 • Increased exports/ foreign exchange revenues;
- 9 • Promoting quality over quantity as a market strategy.

From a policy-maker's perspective, the development of the organic sector is more a means to an end in pursuit of societal level objectives, not an end in itself, whereas

organic sector stakeholders are more likely (but not exclusively) to see the development of the organic sector as an end in itself. Thus, reconciling the interests of different stakeholder groups is central to the development of strategic plans. Of course, there can be several aims, but in this case they should be prioritized.

For more information on the aims, review the [Potentials of Organic Agriculture](#) in the Foundation section of this toolkit.

Reviewing Existing Policies

The general agriculture policies should be assessed as to what extent they are encouraging, are neutral or are biased against organic agriculture or represent a threat to it. Examples include subsidies or tax breaks on fertilizers and other conventional inputs and commodity support policies that are biased toward large-scale monoculture production as opposed to diverse small-scale systems, and policies allowing GMOs in agricultural production. The review may give rise to inspiration on how to integrate consideration of organic agriculture into all agricultural policies. An example of high-level policy guidance for consideration of organic agriculture in general agricultural policy and programs is the [Organic Policy Guidance of the United States Department of Agriculture](#). Although this example is from a massive bureaucracy that regulates organic agriculture, several useful examples can come from it relative to organic working groups, knowledge and training of government staff, research agendas, and integrating organic agriculture into the strategic plan.

Conducting a Situation and SWOT analysis for the organic sector

A reasonable starting point for identifying the situation and needs is to investigate the strengths and weaknesses of the current state of the organic sector and the opportunities and threats that impact future development— a SWOT analysis. Strengths (and weaknesses) are those features of the organic sector that distinguish it positively (or negatively) from other sectors in the economy (such as conventional agriculture) or from organic sectors in other countries. Opportunities (and threats) are developments outside the influence of those seeking to develop the organic sector and likely to influence organic farming. Stakeholder workshops are an ideal method for collecting the information necessary to this step.

Two case examples from [Macedonia](#) and [Rwanda](#) illustrate the format and nature of SWOT results. A [“SWAN” analysis for POETCom](#) illustrates a similar exercise in the Pacific context.

Defining objectives

When the general aims that organic agriculture can help fulfill are recognized, and the needs for developing the organic sector relevant to both policy makers and the other stakeholders have been defined, the next step is to identify objectives of the strategic plan. Objectives are targeted changes that will be the basis for developing strategic actions. Typical objectives found in organic plans include increasing the

percentage of organic farmers, organically managed land area, and market share of organic products. However, these may not be specific enough to guide the choice of good strategic actions. The SWOT provides opportunity to also identify more specific but also key objectives that represent desired changes to advance the sector, for example to decrease the risk of conversion to organic, to increase the knowledge of organic production techniques among farmers, to solve production problems, to increase domestic demand for organic products. From these key objectives strategic actions (policy measures) can be chosen from an array of possible actions. For one example, if production challenges are preventing farmers from converting to organic systems and solving organic production problems is an important objective, then actions in the area of government support to research and producer support to access extension/expert advisors would be indicated.

Objectives should respond to the needs – as defined by the weaknesses (internal to the sector) and the threats (external to the sector) but they also represent changes that exploit the potentials – as defined by the strengths (internal to the sector) and the opportunities (external to the sector). For example, if there is a strong culture of community and cooperation in villages, then strategic actions could be to support the development of organic villages or clusters of villages (which are described elsewhere in the toolkit) linked to supply chains. Ideally all the objectives will be SMART ones – specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-scaled.

When selecting objectives it is also good to consider balancing them in terms of supply and demand for organic products. Selecting objectives that only boost organic production when there is low market demand can lead to oversupply and discourage producers. Selecting only objectives to increase demand when there is low or even no supply will discourage buyers including consumers. Selecting only supply and demand objectives without considering the required infrastructure to facilitate the value chain can be another misstep.

From this stage through formulating strategic actions it is also important to ensure that monitoring and evaluation (M&E) issues are addressed appropriately from the outset and that resources are at least envisioned if not allocated for them, as this will be an essential element to steer implementation and an input into the next planning phase. Setting targets in the planning of objectives and strategic actions is not only useful for the M&E, but also to express the level of government ambition regarding the organic sector development, which will also send an important message to the private investors.

Selecting Strategic Actions

This step consists in selecting, integrating and prioritizing strategic actions (policy measures) related to the objectives. The Organic Agricultural Policy Tree facilitates organization of the possible actions into four categories:

1. “Push” strategies: Those that support the development and availability of the supply of organic products. This includes research, capacity building and

- financial incentives for producers and other value chain actors.
2. “Pull” strategies: Those that stimulate demand for and access to organic products.
 3. Enabling strategies: Those that provide a supportive environment for the organic sector. They include sector development actions.
 4. Eliminating negative impacts: Removal or adjustment of other policies and programs that create unfavourable conditions for organic farmers and/or other supply chain actors.

At this stage the planning process will develop many ideas for actions. In terms of the policy tree, there will be many branches and the tree must be coherently shaped through priority setting and pruning out some of the potential actions. Logical analysis provides a means of doing this by considering required capacity, financial resources and expected impacts. The [decision framework](#) in this toolkit can further assist the process to decide on strategic actions.

After agreement has been found on the various strategic actions to be implemented, budget allocation might need to be done, which may be, depending on the context, splitting a given overall amount into the various strategic actions, or estimating what each measure would require, to calculate the total needed budget. In some cases, organic strategic plans do not directly involve financial means, but are an instrument for governments to make the strategic role of organic farming transparent, while the budget to support the various activities in the plan will come from more general agricultural policies budget lines.

Based on this guidance, and generic [outline for a strategic organic plan](#) is included in the toolkit.

Implementing the Plan

Although not within the scope of this toolkit, a process for implementation should be developed, which will normally involve work programs for one or more government agencies and possibly assigning roles to stakeholder groups. Monitoring and evaluation should be built into this process.