

Data is most valuable when it is collected over time in a reliable, consistent, and frequent manner. Therefore governments should ensure that there is permanent funding for this activity and for maintaining long-term networks of data providers.

## **b. Support the institutional development of organic associations**

### *Political justification*

Organic (national) associations play a decisive role in the development of the organic sector. Historically, organic associations have initiated most elements of the organic sector, ranging from certification (with pioneers like the Soil Association in the UK and CCOF in the USA), to training and advice to farmers, organic consumer fairs, national organic logo, and consumer awareness campaigns. Organic associations, particularly if they are federated at the national level, and provided that they are strong politically and financially, can take on many of the “public interest” tasks that are necessary to build the organic sector. Hence, as civil society organizations, they can relieve the government from directly managing some of these tasks, even though they will still benefit from overall government support.

A well-federated organic sector at the national level is also key to involving the private sector in policy making, and to setting-up public-private partnerships for organic development. In terms of policy development, a national organic association can play a strong role in resolving divergences of opinion within the organic community, and forming consensus and compromises needed for advancing policies, for example the details of standards. Governments often emphasize the importance of sector constituents speaking to them “with one voice”.

The risk of exclusion by the local farming community is still a factor for many farmers considering converting to organic farming. Organic farming associations play a vital role in offering a community in which organic farmers can feel a sense of belonging and interact with fellow organic farmers. Thus, government support for organic associations is connected to policy aims to convert more producers and land to organic farming. Beyond the political and social usefulness of organic farming associations, there are various examples of where a national organic association has played a decisive economic role in the development of the organic supply chain. One example is NOGAMU, the organic umbrella organization founded in Uganda in 2001. NOGAMU’s work has been the principal factor in the growth and development of Uganda’s organic sector. The work has included capacity building, PGS development, and consumer awareness. But also NOGAMU has assumed a very pro-active marketing role, acting as a supply chain facilitator, and creating the first specific organic market outlets and basket home-delivery scheme. Another example of a national organic association with high impact on organic development is Bio Suisse in Switzerland. They fulfill a number of functions, including standard and common logo management, public awareness raising campaigns, and market data collection.

Despite the importance of organic associations, they often struggle to establish themselves. Especially in countries with an emerging organic sector, public support, whether through the local government or through foreign aid, is often necessary to kick start an organic umbrella organization. This however is usually a good public investment because such an “organic infrastructure” organization, once well established, will be able to find other resources (in their membership and through external funding) to carry out many of the “public interest” tasks such as data collection, capacity building, political facilitation and ownership building, market development and advocacy for organic agriculture. Governments may also consider providing institutional funding on an ongoing basis to such organizations to support the provision of some of these services (such as capacity building, data collection, and communication to producers and consumers).

### *Suitable contexts*

National organic associations are useful in all cases. This means, regardless of the stage of development of the sector, of the regulatory framework or even of the policy objectives, supporting the institutional development of organic associations will be a suitable and relevant measure. The only case in which this measure might not be realistic is in cultures of no government intervention in the agricultural sector, as supporting a sector organization may be considered market distortion.

### *Possible modalities of implementation*

Generally, governments provide funds for organic associations to implement particular activities, such as consumer education, capacity building of producers, or participation in policy design.

However, some governments have provided institutional support to organic associations by funding their core activities and expenses such as staff salaries, contribution to administrative costs, or purchase of office equipment. Institutional support presents the advantage of empowering members of the organization to democratically set priorities for the organization, while funds given for specific projects tend to impose external (government) priorities.

Many organic umbrella organizations in developing countries have received support not from their government directly but from foreign donors. Local governments can nevertheless prioritize the inclusion of such support measures in their action plan for organic agriculture – which increases their chance of being supported by external donors – and in their negotiations for development cooperation projects.

### *Country examples*

At the **EU** level, the EU Commission has been funding IFOAM EU (the umbrella association for organic agriculture in the EU) for many years. About 60% of the IFOAM EU budget comes from EU grants, of which half is provided in the form of operational

grant by DG ENV (the Environment department of the EU Commission). From 2004 to 2013, IFOAM EU also received a yearly Operational Grant of EUR 50,000 per year from the Flemish Government of **Belgium**.

In **Austria**, the 1988 Agriculture Act and subsequent legislation provided for support (at the rate of 50% of eligible salary and other costs) for the development of appropriate sector structures, including organic farmers' organizations.

The development and/or enhancement of the organic sector infrastructure is also an important aim of support in the **Netherlands**. Between 2001 and 2011, organic associations were supported with an average of around EUR 550,000 of public money per year, for general institutional support.

In **Belgium**, since 2009 the Flanders region government gives annual structural funding to BioForum, the regional sector association. In 2015 and 2016, this amounted to EUR 612,000 per year, funding BioForum core activities. The budget for this is allocated from the budget for the organic action plan.

In **Denmark**, the national organic umbrella organization, Organic Denmark, derives an important part of its yearly budget from governmental, or governmentally administered funding sources. The biggest part consists of levy funds - funds generated through a tax on pesticides and through contributions from the agro-food sector companies – which are redirected to agricultural sector organizations according to the Danish law. Another part is national government funding sources. See more information in the Best Practice textbox below.

The government of the Québec province in **Canada** has provided various supports to the *Filière Biologique du Québec*, the umbrella organization representing the organic sector in the province. For example, in 2014, they received around EUR 33,000 from the Ministry of Agriculture of the provincial government for an institutional funding project aiming to strengthen the association's role as a sector organization within the organic industry.

In 2014, as part of the PLANAPO (the government plan for organic agriculture development) **Brazil** launched a program named ECOFORTE that allocated EUR 70 million to support 30 organic agriculture, agroecology and wild collection networks of organizations. For more information, see Best Practice text box below.

In **Saudi Arabia**, the Saudi Organic Farming Association received financial support through the Organic Farming Project financed by the Saudi government.

In **The Philippines**, in 2012 the Organic Producers and Trade Association (OPTA) received about EUR 15,000 funding from the Philippines Department of Agriculture to implement several activities including national and regional events, as well as market research.

*Best practice example(s)*

**Best Practice Example 1: Support to agroecological and organic networks in Brazil**

In 2014, as part of the PLANAPO (the government plan for organic agriculture development), Brazil launched a program named ECOFORTE (Program to strengthen and increase the networks on agroecology, wild collection and organic agriculture). The program allocated EUR 70 million to support 30 organic agriculture, agroecology and wild collection networks of organizations within 2 years.

The program was implemented through public calls for proposals to select networks of organizations to be supported. Networks of organizations were defined as groupings of at least three organizations such as producer's cooperatives or associations. The networks should mobilize, build capacity and disseminate information and technology to strengthen their organic and agroecological member organizations.

Each network applicant could request up to EUR 504,000 to implement their activities within two years. These activities could include: purchasing of machinery and equipment; building or infrastructure development; support for value chain development and marketing; increasing women and youth participation; institutional capacity building through exchanges, workshops, training, meetings; research (feasibility and impact studies); financing and business plans; technical assistance for compliance with the national regulation on organic production; integration with education institution and creation of study and research centers within education institutions. The financial assistance requested had to include 50% of infrastructure development costs and 50% of management, capacity building and technical assistance costs.

**Best Practice Example 2: Supporting Capacity development in Denmark's Organic Association: a model of cooperation**

There is a long tradition in Denmark of avoiding direct operational support to organizations. But there is also a tradition of doing some serious capacity building through funding projects. A prime example is the case of Organic Denmark, a membership association representing the organic sector in Denmark. The organization's affiliates include 1000 farmers, 3700 supporting professionals and consumers, and 200 food companies, representing over 90% of organic sales.

Prior to 2002 eight non-governmental organizations, focused on developing various aspects of Denmark's organic sector. A funding decision by the Danish government in 1999 was an exception to the rule of no direct organizational support, and one that led to positive outcomes for building government cooperation with the organic sector. That year the government allocated about EUR 670,000 towards establishing the House of Organics, wherein the offices of the eight organizations came together in one building and formed a joint secretariat. The resulting knowledge and trust among these organizations, with complementary expertise in organic production, marketing, policy advocacy etc., led to their consolidation in 2002 into one new organization, Organic Denmark. This consolidation enabled government agencies to focus funding and other support for organic sector development. Organic Denmark works in close cooperation principally with the Ministry of Environment and Food, and also with several other ministries. All government funding is structured as project funding for various activities. This ensures communication and collaboration between Organic Denmark and ministries on sector development.

About 40% of Organic Denmark's budget is based on government funding for projects related to consumer information, solving problems out in the fields, advisory services, marketing, product

development advisory services, promoting conversion to organic farming etc. For the first six years of operation, the House of Organics received about EUR 400,000 annually for ongoing project activities, which had to be approved by the ministry each year. In 1998, at the request of Organic Denmark, the government used pesticide fees to establish a special “Organic Agriculture Fund,” funded at about EUR 1.3 million annually, rising to about EUR 5.3 million in 2011, as funding from the Rural Development program (“Quality Organic Food Products”) was reduced. About 40% of funding from the Organic Agriculture Fund is allocated to projects in Organic Denmark, ranging from export promotion, consumer information and conversion of public kitchens, to technical advisory projects. Financial support is also received for projects under various other government programs related to green growth, biodiversity preservation, exporting, etc.

Other government financial supports are indirect. The Program for Quality Organic Food Products, under the Danish Rural development program, made, until 2011, made about EUR 6 million available to finance 70-100% of approved projects by groups of companies that collaborate primarily on consumer information and marketing campaigns. These groups frequently contract with Organic Denmark for project planning and implementation. The Danish government has also supported Organic Denmark’s efforts to gain organic financing from Denmark’s Agricultural Funds, financed by assessments on all production of milk, meat, etc.

Cumulatively these ongoing project supports have built critical capacities in Organic Denmark, enabling it to drive organic market development, farm conversion and innovation in farm practices and product development. Furthermore, by acknowledging Organic Denmark as a main actor in Danish agriculture, the Ministry of Environment and Food has further supported its visibility, networking and capacity development.

### *Pitfalls and challenges*

If the government is too proactive in supporting the development of a national organic sector association in a rather top-down approach, the risk is that there isn’t enough buy-in from the stakeholders, and hence the representativeness and the sustainability of the organization will be affected. It is therefore safer for the government to support existing organizations including, in case no umbrella organization has emerged yet for the organic sector, supporting a variety of NGOs and associations active in organic agriculture, and encouraging and supporting financially their own initiatives to consolidate when the time is right.

Legitimate minority interests (e.g. of farms with unusual production, disadvantaged groups, etc.) are not always properly represented by national associations or federations. Also, the interest of non-organic farmers who might want to convert to organic may be under-represented by organic associations. There might be cases where a national organization favors support to existing organic farmers rather than support to conversion of new farms.

The organic business sector, processors and traders, are often less inclined to cooperate and share information, than the farmers. There are very few countries where a sector body has managed to organize both farmers and traders in the same association.

In some countries, it has not, to date, been possible to reach a consolidated national

organic umbrella organization. It requires a democratic culture, as well as a culture of compromise to resolve conflicts. Even in countries that manage to overcome divergences and build such umbrella organization, a challenge will often be the lack of own resources, if members are not willing to commit resources to pay for open access common good services.

### **c. Build organic expertise within the public sector**

#### *Political justification*

When a government decides to implement a series of policy measures to promote organic and/or if the government is implementing an organic regulation, a competent authority will be appointed to oversee the resulting programs. The mere appointment of a “competent authority” does not ensure the actual competence of the government employees that will be working on organic topics (sometimes, they also work on many other topics in parallel). One key element of sound policy implementation is to ensure that government personnel who will be in charge of organic development understand very well what organic agriculture is, the national sector and its constraints, and the positions of the various stakeholders on technical organic matters. Building capacity of government staff is therefore a prerequisite for further policy design and implementation, particularly of the staff of the unit in charge of organic agriculture, but it can also be relevant for other staff that will have to deal with organic issues one way or another.

Beyond the fact that government staff working on organic should be knowledgeable on the topic, there is a value in creating specific organic expertise within a public institution (this could be public or semi-public), which can serve as the go-to institution for all national matters organic and coordinate between ministries and agencies. Such an institution can produce statistics, resources for the sector, policy recommendations, organize national events, etc. It can serve the role of public facilitator and knowledge hub for organic agriculture and ensure that government decisions will be informed by well-versed experts working with the public interest in mind. There are also many experts in the private sector but those might often have private interests at stake. The other advantage of having a public institution specialized in organic agriculture is that it can retain knowledge and carry out activities over many years, based on more or less permanent funding.

#### *Suitable contexts*

If government is going to intervene in favor of organic agriculture in any way (whether it is just to regulate it or also with supportive measures), it is important that some personnel in government institutions be knowledgeable about the organic sector. Regardless of the stage of development of the sector, of the culture of government intervention, of the regulatory framework or even of the policy objectives, building