

Networking: Community building and engagement



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Introduction

NGOs are organizations created to support communities, to have a positive impact on society. Their efforts are senseless without the communities. Therefore, developing community relationships is essential for NGOs. For a more effective activity, communities should be engaged and encouraged to take action themselves. Community engagement and empowerment are, therefore, at the core of NGO activity.

Outline of Community development

Community relevance for NGOs

Knowing the community

Community planning strategies

Community engagement



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Advancing the Third Sector
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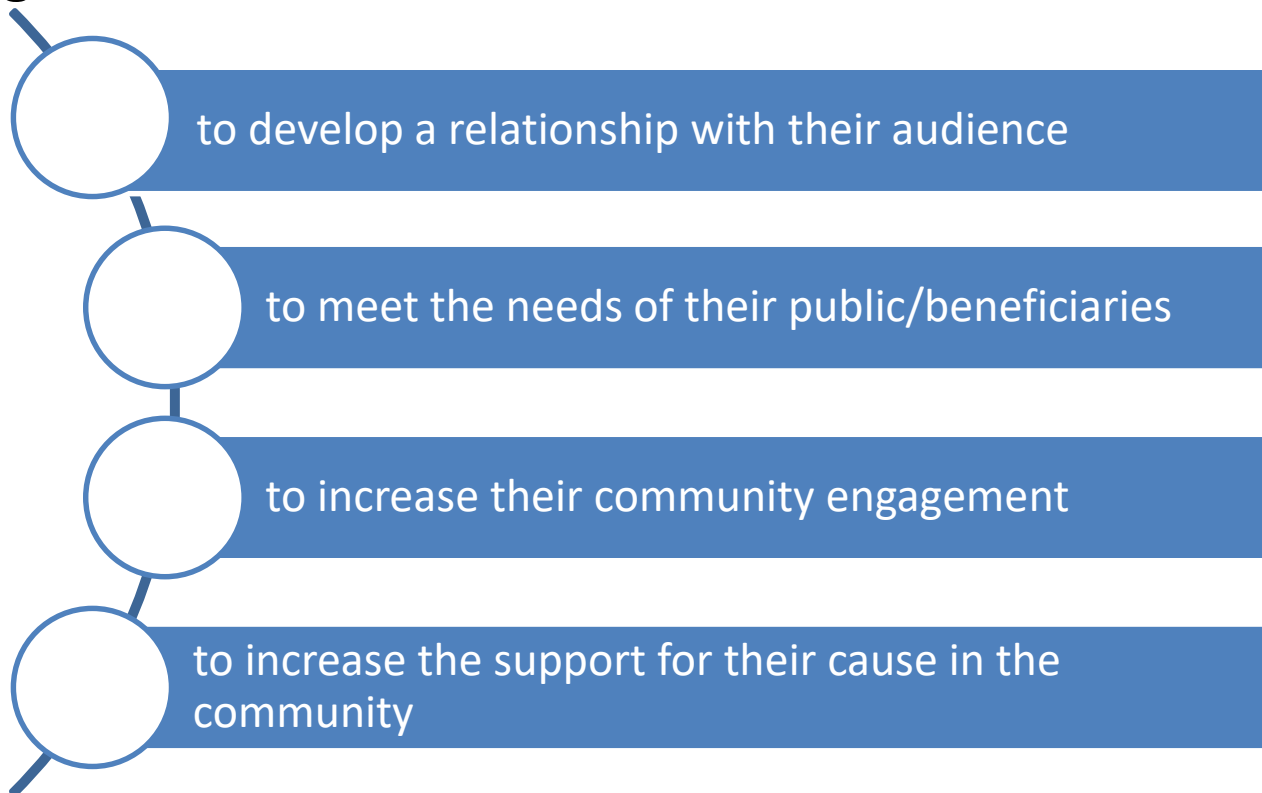
Community relevance for NGOs



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Framework

Community development is a term referring to the strategies and activities undertaken by NGOs aiming at the following:



What is the community of an NGO?

The community of an NGO is the **audience** it addresses through its projects and activities. An NGO should have mutual beneficial relationships with its community.

These **relationships** are being developed over time, following a strategic approach.

Community structure

- Beneficiaries of the activity of an NGO
- Families of the beneficiaries
- Employees
- Volunteers
- Other formal or informal organizations

How do NGOs identify their communities? (1)

Observe who gets involved in the projects of the organization

Search social media accounts of the NGO to identify who is active and comments, shares information etc.

Identify people/ organizations who contact NGO representatives

Connect with beneficiaries of the projects of the organization

How do NGOs identify their communities? (2)

Contact the families of the beneficiaries of the projects developed by the NGO, if relevant

Identify local stakeholders

Monitor social media discussions of various stakeholders

Conduct research to find out who is being influenced by the organization and who is interested in the activity of the organization

FINANCE REPORT

ACCOUNT REPORT

DASHBOARD > INCOME

DAILY WEEKLY MONTHLY



TOTAL INCOME



LINE ITEMS	16.15 M\$
SHIPPING	0.15 M\$
TAXES	0%
TOTAL	16.3 M\$

LINE ITEMS	13.5 M\$
SHIPPING	0.2 M\$
TAXES	0%
TOTAL	13.7 M\$

LINE ITEMS	13.00 M\$
SHIPPING	0\$
TAXES	0%
TOTAL	13.00 M\$

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Knowing the community

Understand your community

- In order to efficiently achieve the mission, an NGO would need to develop a **functional community and a functional relationship with the community.**
- Unless the active **support** of the community is achieved, the NGO could not have a **long-term impact.**
- The NGO should respond to the complex needs, wishes and motivations of various audiences and stakeholders, should satisfy the exigencies of its community overall.
- However, this is not easy to accomplish, and understanding the community is a key in this framework.

Segmentation

Understanding the community is difficult, especially when considering that it is **not homogenous**. The community is actually formed by several segments of the audience, sometimes quite different in terms of socio-demographic and economic characteristics, interests and needs, or vision towards the future. Therefore, we could talk about several communities.

Observing and understanding the various communities of an NGO is challenging, it requires to take an **interdisciplinary** approach: economic, sociological, psychological etc.

Connecting vs. understanding

NGOs are generally connected to their communities, interact on a regular basis with various representatives of these communities. Nevertheless, this does not mean that they profoundly understand their communities and stakeholders. Therefore, **systematic research** is recommended to eliminate guesswork and be able to develop relevant projects, based on **actual facts and needs**.

Constraints

Community research helps organizations to better design both community building strategies, as well as development programs. There are many factors that make NGOs refrain from direct community research:

Lack of
funding

Lack of time

Lack of
qualified
people

Lack of
understanding
the benefits

Listen to your community

Research should be complemented by a willingness to listen to the members of various communities.

Monitoring messages and feedback from community members, partners and other stakeholders, together with direct research, leads to the **increased relevance** of NGO strategies and activities because they are based on facts and knowledge, not on assumptions and impressions.

Plan the research

Research planning implies several steps:

Research objectives to better understand communities, to check ideas, to explore development prospects, to evaluate past activities etc.

Research plan to achieve objectives. Main aspects to be defined are the research method(s) and the participants.

Results to explore the findings and define implications.

Acting on the results in implementing community building programs.

Types of investigations

Quantitative research aims at identifying numerical results.

It is developed when the organization knows what it is looking for. Typical results show how frequently something occurs. The main method applied is the survey.

Qualitative research is explorative in nature. Findings show how and why community members react, think etc. The main method applied is interviews (individual or in focus-groups).



Survey planning

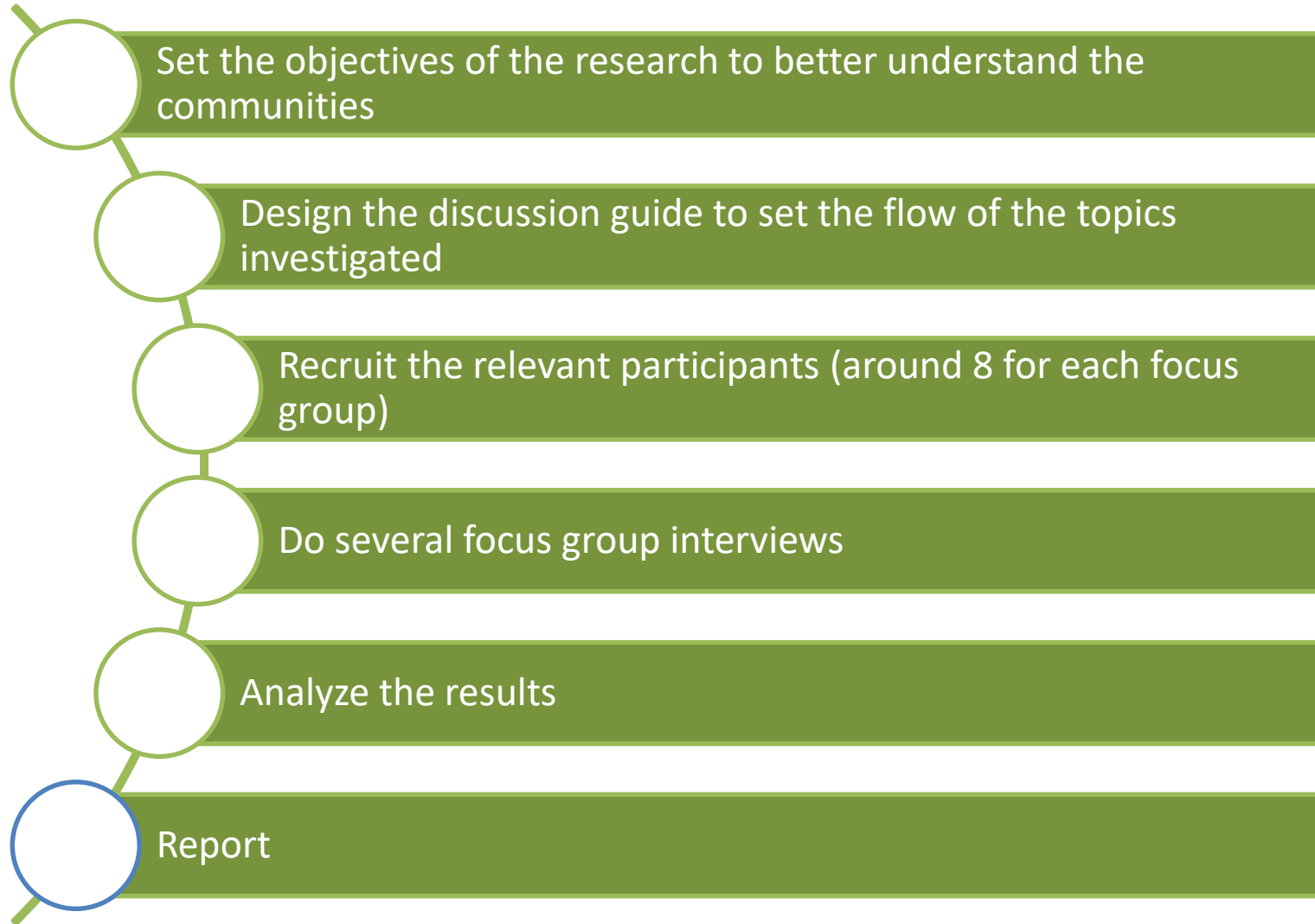




Focus group

A focus group is a type of research **interview**, consisting of a small group of people who meet under the directions of a moderator to discuss / communicate their opinions about a cause, an organization, a community or any other given issue. These discussions would help an NGO to better understand its public, community and stakeholders, as well as to better plan its strategy and activity.

Focus group planning



How to use the research findings

Develop the agenda related to the community and stakeholders

Develop programs involving community members

Design promotional materials

Increase participation in the NGOs projects

Increase the fundraising base

Develop awareness for the cause

Community-based participatory research

This type of research is a relatively new approach, based on a simple and effective principle: **all change should be done for and with the communities**. The aim is to increase knowledge and understanding of a given phenomenon and integrate the knowledge of community representatives into the expertise of the NGO in order to develop better organizational strategies, policies and social change and improve **quality of life** in the community.

Community-based participatory research is a form of partnership which aims to establish accurate insights on the community, relevant to the community members. This is a form of research involving both community and organizational representatives, as well as researchers in all aspects of the research process. All partners involved contribute with their expertise and perspective, and contribute to decision-making.



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Community planning strategies

Principles of community planning

Well-framed
purpose

Shared values and
understanding

Based on
research/evidence

Collaboration
inside and outside
the organization

Balanced
resources

Evolving planning /
flexibility

Understanding
community and
stakeholders

Transparency

Evaluation and
follow-up

Well-framed purpose

Defining a relevant and realistic **goal** is a key to an effective community planning. It has to be related both to the mission of the NGO, as well as to its **stakeholders**. A well-framed purpose refers to the alignment of the main goals of the organization to its internal and external environments, to its mission and its stakeholders.

A well-framed purpose allows targeting both long-term and short-term objectives. It helps NGOs to stay **focused** and to address effectively challenges, in harmony with its stakeholders and community.

Shared values and understanding

The stakeholders and the community of the NGO are key to the objectives, strategies and activities planning. They all have to share the same values and vision to implement change.

The route-map to achieve the purpose should be agreed by all actors involved.

Collaboration

Collaboration inside and outside the organization should be a common practice, both when designing and when implementing community strategies. The process is based on **openness** and on explanations of all aspects involving the community.

The NGO should create a framework to facilitate community **involvement** and cooperation.

Multiple resources

The necessary resources are not only financial. Planning should consider the following resources:

- Needed budgets
- People
- Skills
- Material/consumables
- Information

Community development is an **on-going process**, it should be considered a routine approach including low complexity activities with low level budgets.

Flexibility

Planning should take into consideration that the implementation framework might be modified in time. Therefore, community development planning should be flexible in order to evolve. The organization should review it and adapt it to the changing community and environment.

Understanding community and stakeholders

An NGO should define the **benefits** for the community, who and how they can **contribute** to the community development plans. This is based on evidence and facts resulting from research on the present community and stakeholders and their future evolution.

Understanding them is not enough if these data are not incorporated in the planning process, and if the community and the stakeholders are not aware of the **relevance** of the actions developed.

Transparency

This principle entails explaining to the community and stakeholders the strategies and activities undergone. Transparency will ensure the NGO:

- Trust
- Image development
- Community cooperation
- Increased revenues and resources

Evaluation

Including a plan for evaluating the community and the impact of the community development strategy would help increase **effectiveness** of the strategy.

Timely community follow-up leads to better cooperation and support for the activities of the NGO.



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Community engagement

Defining community engagement

Community engagement strategies aim to activate communities, to stimulate their communication and involvement, to facilitate exchanges inside the communities and between the community and the NGO.

It does not only allow for a better understanding of the communities, it also builds relationships between communities and NGOs. Additionally, it ensures a more effective process of intervention.

Lines of action

Determine the members of the community to help themselves by helping an NGO

Local leaders should be identified and involved

Identify, motivate and train a group of people that could get repeatedly involved

Activities which the local community could undertake should be planned

Provide information and support

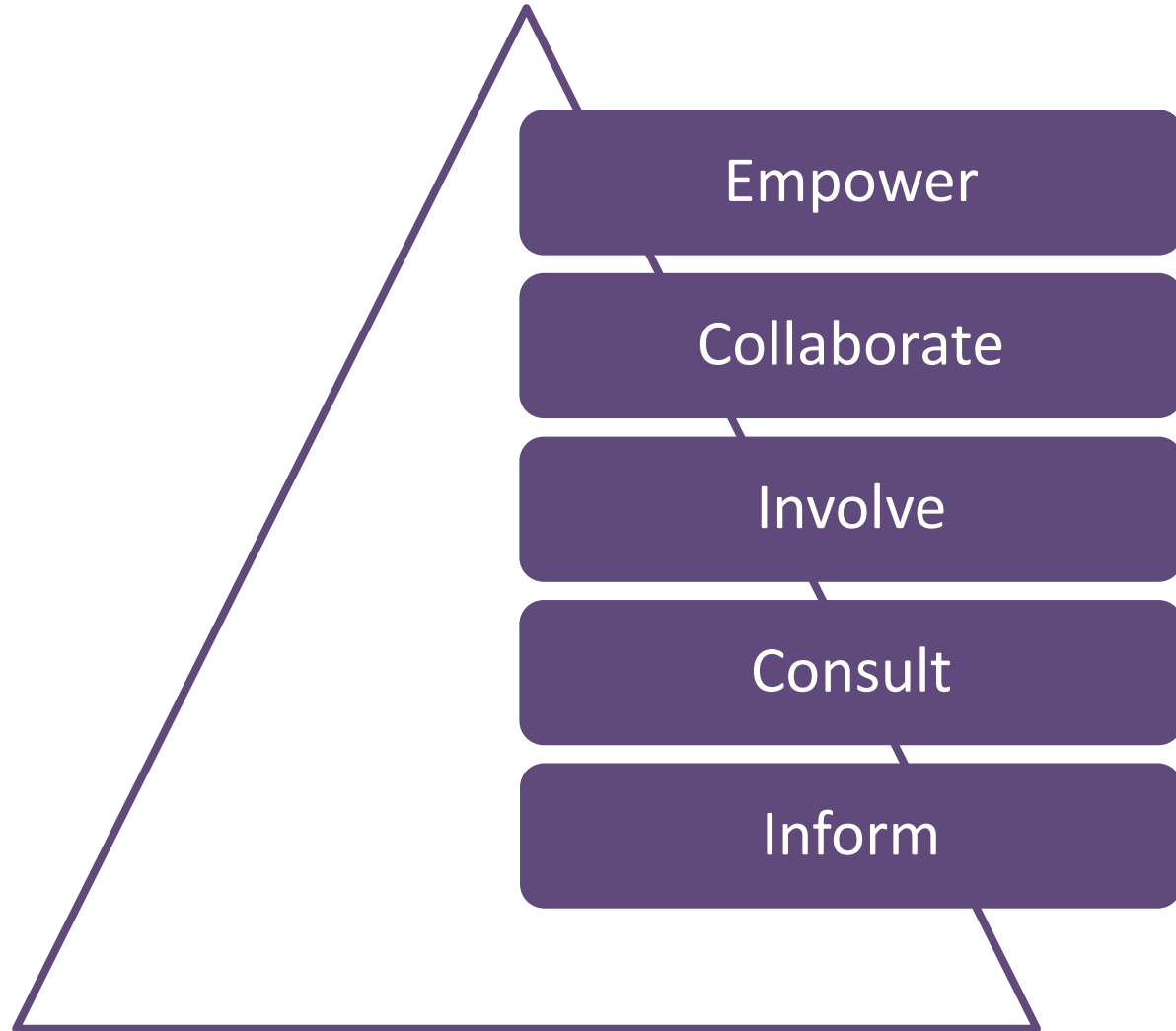
A follow-up strategy addressing the community should be implemented

Communities should act

Community development should be led by communities themselves.

NGOs could be facilitators / partners / coordinators and guarantors of some formal aspects. They could **mobilize resources and energies** of the community in their development efforts.

Levels of community engagement



Methods

Newsletters

Testimonials

Discussion
forums

Meetings with
stakeholders

Public art
sessions

Awareness
raising events

Workshop
sessions

Citizens jury

Other

Newsletters

Newsletters are forms of media through which organizations present themselves, their activities, events and achieved goals. Electronic newsletters offer at a low cost the possibility of interaction between NGOs and their stakeholders.

They could be an effective way to keep stakeholders informed and close to an NGO.

Benefits of newsletters

- Added value for the recipient
- Provide instant and updated information
- Offer discussion platforms
- Could provide exclusivity in information, in taking part to special events etc.
- Are convincing since they can utilize story telling
- Could stimulate donations
- Could stimulate other benefits according to the specific strategy and context

Designing an e-newsletter

Set objectives

Define the target (consider who and why somebody reads a newsletter)

Tailor the newsletter having in mind the needs of the audience (content) frequency

Design the form to reflect the brand / characteristics of the NGO

Measure the reaction of the audience/impact of the newsletter

Main approaches of newsletters

advocacy newsletters

- aim to persuade readers to have a certain opinion or change their attitude and behavior.

subscription newsletters

- Specialize on a topic/field of activity/industry, providing very specific information and analyses

Testimonials

Members of the community could be engaged and start cooperating with an NGO after following the examples of other members of the community. Direct connection with involved members, as well as testimonials are drivers for this mechanism.

Testimonials are statements made by influencers or simple members of the community -a beneficiary, a stakeholder presenting the merits of the NGO, its programs, positive outcomes etc. Testimonials are presented on the organization's website, social media accounts or other presentation materials. It is recommended to be developed as images and videos.

Discussion forum

An online discussion forum allows the community to debate on topics of interest to them, as well as to virtually cooperate with an NGO. The objectives associated to setting up discussion forums are:

- To inform
- To share knowledge
- To generate ideas
- To identify solutions
- To promote best practices

Note that the discussions are asynchronous, each member of the forum entering and contributing at her/his convenience.

Public art session

The aim of this tool for community engagement is to give to the members of the community/ stakeholders the opportunity to express their values, beliefs and ideas, as well as to raise the awareness for certain topics and issues of relevance for the community and society at large.

The activity consists in creating an art work in a public space, with the participation of the community/ stakeholders of the organization. It is recommended to promote the result of the public art session, as well as to organize further involvement around it.

Citizen jury

A citizen jury is a method of involving the community of an NGO in the decision-making processes.

A “jury” is developed by inviting representatives of the community. They are informed in-depth on a certain issue to be debated. Several alternatives are presented to the jury; they discuss them and decide which is the best one for the community. In the end, they present the output in the form of a report, as well the recommendations for future actions.

August	September	Oktober	November	Dezember
	1 Di	1 Sa	1 Di	1 Do Kampagnen NL
	2 Mi	2 So	2 Mi	Jubi Kracher Nov
	3 Do	3 Mo	3 Do	
	4 Fr	4 Di	4 Fr	
	5 Sa	5 Mi	5 Sa	
	6 So	6 Do	6 So	
	7 Mo	7 Fr	7 Mo	
	8 Di	8 Sa	8 Di	
	9 Mi	9 So	9 Mi	
ap. Fussball HW16	10 Do	10 Mo	10 Do	Kampagnen NL
Kampagnen NL	11 Fr	11 Di	11 Fr	
	12 Sa	12 Mi	12 Sa	
outermin	13 Do	13 Do	13 So	
	14 Mo	14 Mo	14 Mo	
	15 Di	15 Di	15 Di	
	16 Mi	16 Mi	16 Mi	
	17 Do	17 Do	17 Do	
	18 Fr	18 Fr	18 Fr	
	19 Sa	19 Sa	19 Sa	
	20 So	20 So	20 So	
	21 Mo	21 Mo	21 Mo	
	22 Di	22 Di	22 Di	
	23 Mi	23 Mi	23 Mi	
	24 Do	24 Do	24 Do	
	25 Fr	25 Fr	25 Fr	
	26 Sa	26 Sa	26 Sa	
	27 So	27 Do	27 Do	Prosp. Winter Opening
	28 Mo	28 Fr	28 Fr	
	29 Di	29 Sa	29 Sa	1. Streutemin
	30 Mi	30 So	30 Mi	
	31 Do	31 Mo	31 Mo	

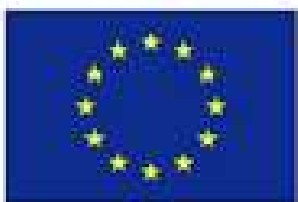


Additional resources

- <http://www.seerc.org/atsiv/vle/>
- <https://www.facebook.com/trainingNGOs/>
- www.ngotraining.eu

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