

Towards RAI Principles: Final considerations

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In order to complement the report submitted to **FAO** that was prepared by **Research Group GESPLAN of the Technical University of Madrid** on the RAI Principles, some lessons of experience are synthesized. These ideas are developed after having reflected on the RAI Principles in different contexts, as a way to highlight their usefulness, their limitations and their potential for greater efficiency and sustained success. These considerations may therefore be of interest in other contexts where these Principles may be applied.

About the usefulness of the RAI Principles

- To reflect, together with the civil society, the business world and universities, upon how to address Responsible Investment in Agriculture, in order to contribute to food security and nutrition as well as improving sustainable livelihoods for small farmers. A comprehensive, responsible and environmentally friendly vision, supported by the right to having access to adequate food in the context of national food security is needed.
- To create strategic and public-private partnerships between producers and universities, integrating research, teaching and capacity building.
- To be able to link agents' experience and knowledge from different countries, with the concurrence of different spheres, specially taking into account the civil society, the business world and the academia.
- To strengthen the entrepreneurial skills of farmers based on the experience of entrepreneurs in the food industry with values and social sensitivity.
- To create opportunities to launch joint projects with the aim of sharing good business practices of local and international impact, incorporating academic, business and civil society actors.
- To provide opportunities for young university researchers to help conceptualize and disseminate experiences and incorporate new knowledge from other food systems and rural development actors.
- To support responsible and selfless investments in social sensitive companies.
- To export business knowledge and develop skills in order to help improving the governance of professional organizations in developing countries' rural communities.
- To help rural communities to develop the principles on environmental and food chain sustainability based on the successful experiences of Spanish companies.

About the RAI Principles use efficacy

- From the territorial research workshops and conferences for dialogue, the conceptual framework synthesized in "Rural Development as Working With People (WWP)" has been validated as a new approach to sustainable planning and management of rural development projects and the use of RAI Principles in different international contexts.
- Supported on the WWP model, the RAI Principles can be applied based on the professional practice developed in cooperation, linking knowledge and action through **joint projects** that integrate and develop learning and values in those people who are involved in the context of projects that aim to promote responsible investment in agriculture and food systems.



- The sustainable success of RAI Principles' implementation implies, according to the conceptual framework of the model WWP, adopting actions from **three strategic components: ethical-social, political-contextual and technical-entrepreneurial**.
- From the **ethical-social component**, the sustainable success in the implementation of the RAI Principles requires complementary actions that ensure influence on the behaviours, attitudes and values of the people that are involved in promoting, managing or guiding the RAI Principles. It is a priority to influence the behaviours and moral conducts of the people and to lay the “foundations” for people —from different public and private spheres— to work together with commitment and trust. RAI projects should not have a “neutral” character, but be should based on an ideal of service guided by values. This therefore requires employers to assume the RAI Principles values which exceed purely economic, structural and technical aspects, and which allow them to work with less influential and cultural diverse groups, giving priority to growth in quality instead of growth in quantity and to incorporate sustainability and the equality of people.
- From the **technical-entrepreneurial component**, the sustainable success in the implementation of the RAI Principles requires being able to formulate projects as investment units and “technical” tools that integrate different actors in the value chain and that are capable of generating a stream of goods and services in accordance with certain requirements and quality standards. These investments should be promoted from the role and initiative of the private-business sector. The RAI Principles should therefore be adopted as a “business function” that mobilizes human, economic, public and private resources, that lead to consultation and negotiation between several actors, involving a commitment to take risks.
- From the **political-contextual component**, the sustained success in the implementation of the RAI Principles requires providing RAI projects and companies with the fundamental elements to interact appropriately and respectfully with the rural communities of the context in which the project is inserted. It is also about rural communities developing capabilities to “relate” with business actors, political organizations, different public administrations and research entities at different levels international, national, regional and local.
- The sustainable success in the implementation of the RAI Principles requires of **social learning processes** as an alternative to development planning models from the public sphere. Through these social learning processes, it should be ensured that the agents of the above three-dimensional WWP model interact in order to strengthen themselves and to guide the implementation of the RAI Principles. It is an integrating component that ensures social learning spaces among the different subsystems that aim to achieve learning from the project's actors. It means emphasizing the need of knowledge and practice coming closer together to the planning of actions where RAI principles get integrated.
- The presence of agents as **University Research Groups** with expertise on the demanded themes by the productive sectors increase the efficiency of RAI Principles, acting as planners and practitioners responsible for mobilizing resources and coordinating public and private energies to turn them into innovative solutions to the challenging problems of rural communities. These **research groups** have showed to be a great initiative to connect the academy with the business world and the needs of society, providing an entrepreneurial vision and identifying themselves with the business function.

About the scope and limitations of RAI Principles

- Companies that assume the RAI Principles should be able to overcome purely commercial and economic aspects, also focusing on the “intangible” ones and the invisible benefits in the form of knowledge spread and social and cultural aspects.
- The success of the RAI Principles depends on entities that are able to articulate an adequate social integration at an early stage and throughout the entire value chain investments, to integrate knowledge and get people from the different societal spheres to work with them.
- University research groups, due to their stable and neutral character, and their experience in processes of high social complexity with stakeholders, happen to be suitable for formulating RAI projects that behave as “living laboratories” and open system entities that are able to enter into relationships of “dialogue” and working with people.
- These integration processes go beyond the mere participation of Public Governments with little stability. The application of the RAI Principles requires time, negotiating, developing the ability to “listen” and seeking shared responsibility from reliable and credible entities, that consider the participation of the population, in order to reach a mutual enrichment.
- University-company and other project’s stakeholders relationships are a means to exploit individual and collective creativity when integrating and applying the RAI principles in projects for the benefit of people and the common good, undertaking innovations and actions, as an emerging movement that bursts from the people.
- With the WWP approach, each project, as a technical business investment unit, becomes an innovation, a unique experiment, and no matter what their results are, they will always inform society.
- The scope and limitations of the RAI Principles will also be based on the capacity of rural communities to achieve an internal organization that facilitates their relationship, participation and social dynamism.
- The limitations and success of the RAI Principles will depend on the effective learning achieved from the experience of changing reality, based on the behaviours, attitudes and values. It is therefore required that actions to integrate the **experienced** knowledge of rural communities and businesses, with the **expert** knowledge of other agencies and planning agents are taken, and thus generating mutual learning.
- Limitations in the application of the RAI Principles will also depend on the existence of entities that show an ability to perceive the intrinsic qualities of others and understand their views. These public and private entities must have an instrumental character of service to the people and therefore must be flexible and changing depending on the learning and the new information generated.
- It is also important to consider that in order to encourage the application of the RAI Principles it is not appropriate to take isolated decisions, integrating all areas of the social relations system such as business, academia and research is needed. The application of the RAI Principles in certain territories can thus be “living laboratories” that transmit values to society and help to change behaviours and priorities for the benefit of the population.

