



# Report of the 7<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Permanent Sub-group on LEADER and CLLD

Brussels, 4 February 2020



## Morning session

### Introduction

9.30 – 9.45

Welcome and  
Introduction  
Neda Skakelja, DG  
AGRI

**Note:** Presentations can be directly accessed by clicking on the links provided.

Ms Skakelja welcomed the participants to the 7<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Permanent Subgroup on LEADER and Community-Led Local Development and reminded them that much had changed since the last Sub-Group meeting, mentioning the EU Green Deal, the Farm-to-Fork strategy (F2F) and the EU's 'Long-term Vision for Rural Areas'.

Significant progress has been made in the implementation of Measure 19, including the doubling of the utilisation of funds from 14 % to 28 % in the last year. Yet this may not tell the whole story, as LEADER projects take time to develop and deliver their results on the ground. Ms Skakelja emphasised that LEADER continues to be implemented and to deliver results under the current rules. The Sub-Group meeting provided an opportunity to discuss past and present experiences in LEADER implementation and ways to move forward.

*The ENRD CP team introduced the [agenda of the day](#) and proposed an 'ice-breaker' exercise.*

9.45-10.30

[CAP legislative framework post-2020 –proposals relating to LEADER](#)

Guido Castellano,  
Karolina Jasińska-  
Mühleck, DG  
AGRI

Guido Castellano and Karolina Jasińska-Mühleck (DG AGRI) presented the state of play of legislative proposals for the CAP and LEADER post-2020, highlighting the key implications for Member States (MS).

Mr Castellano noted that considerable progress had been made, with a number of changes being introduced to address some MS concerns, including in relation to 're-nationalisation' and strengthening of environmental objectives. The performance review and clearance of expenditure are still to be agreed. Under the Transitional Regulations, Member States may decide to extend the current RDPs by one year, using the 2021 allocation from the new Multiannual Financial Framework. In addition, provisions have been made with regard to several measures to help ease the transition to CAP Plans.

Q&A

Ms Jasińska-Mühleck confirmed that LEADER support can continue until the end of the current RDP implementation period (i.e. for non-extended RDPs until end 2023 and for extended ones until end 2024). Under extended and non-extended RDPs, EAFRD can be used to prepare and select multi-fund Local Development Strategies (LDS) in accordance with the new Common Provisions Regulation rules. Preparatory support for the development of LDS will be available and not linked to result indicators. Ms Jasińska-Mühleck also provided clarification related to the use of the Lead Fund option within multi-funded strategies.

Participants raised several points and questions to which Ms Jasińska-Mühleck and Mr Castellano responded. Clarification was given that preparatory support will be available regardless of whether RDPs are extended or not. The calculation of the unit amount for LEADER will be based on the output indicator 'number of Local Development Strategies' and the unit amount can then be the average value per LDS.

In the context of the Lead Fund option, the rules of the chosen fund will apply to all funds under the strategy. Payments stay within the contributing fund, unless formally delegated to the Lead Fund (delegation of EAFRD payments is not

possible). The scope and eligibility rules of the fund (for example ERDF) need to be maintained even in a scenario when the EAFRD is the Lead Fund. Concerns were raised by some Managing Authorities that, under the new proposal relating to the Lead Fund option, there may be an increase in complexity and as a result, a need for new capacities. Ms Jasińska-Mühleck agreed that the additional tasks taken over from the other funds by the lead authorities could require some additional resources. This could be true in particular in order to ensure appropriate IT solutions for fund-specific data collection and controls of all the funds covered by the option. Ensuring eligibility conditions of each fund should not represent a particular burden, especially if the conditions to be respected are clearly defined for each fund (e.g. via a checklist). More clarification is needed on how co-financing will be organised under the Lead Fund option in order to make use of both public and private contributions. [In the meantime, it has been clarified that the EU co-financing rate will remain Fund specific as it is strictly related to payments].

It was confirmed that under the Annual Review the Managing Authorities will only need to report on the common result indicators, which means no additional burden for LAGs under EU rules. The shortlist of indicators relevant for LEADER will be defined in each CAP Strategic Plan. They could be limited to a couple of the most meaningful ones, reflecting the main aspects of the sustainable development towards which LEADER contributes.

### Overview of ENRD CP LEADER support activities and lessons learnt

10.30 – 11.15  
[LEADER Support activities and lesson learnt](#)  
Peter Toth,  
ENRD CP

The CP presented an overview of its LEADER support activities and lessons learnt throughout the year, including a summary of TNC work, information sources and an overview of upcoming CP activities and events. One key lesson learnt from ongoing work with LEADER stakeholders is that national delivery systems have a very strong impact on LEADER/LAG activities. Increased cooperation and coordination in the LEADER delivery chain will be required to ensure LEADER performs well under the CAP Strategic Plans. The importance of involving LAGs in designing and enabling a LEADER delivery system was also highlighted. Finally, the CP encouraged participants to access resources and information via the ENRD CP [website](#).

Q & A and  
comments from  
the floor

Participants acknowledged the work of the ENRD CP to be very useful, particularly the information sharing, the opportunity to network with colleagues in other MS, access a wide range of views and being part of a bigger group. Working with such contacts has benefitted work on Simplified Cost Options and the hope that this type of work can continue in the transition period and beyond was expressed. A key point for the future is to focus on results.

Requests were made for an opportunity to discuss multi-funding at the LEADER Seminar on 10 March 2020, where good practice examples could be shared to enrich the discussions on the Commission's intentions regarding Lead Funds.

### Overview of current LEADER achievements and how these are incorporated in the planning for LEADER in the next period – various EU MS perspectives

11.45 – 13.00

Representatives of Managing Authorities and National Rural Networks, drawn from Austria, Finland, Slovenia, Spain, Poland and Germany, provided an overview of current LEADER achievements and how these would be integrated

## Presentations from Member States

### [Achievements and planning for the future in Austria](#)

Christa  
Rockenbauer-Peirl  
(Austria, MA)

### [Achievements and planning for the future in Finland](#)

Laura Janis, Juha-  
Matti Markkola  
(Finland, MA and  
NRN)

### [Achievements and planning for the future in Slovenia](#)

Marjeta Jeric  
(Slovenia, MA)

### [Achievements and planning for the future in Spain](#)

Cristina Simón  
Palacios (Spain,  
NRN)

### [Achievements and planning for the future in Poland.](#)

Joanna Gierulska  
(Poland, MA)

in the planning of LEADER for the next programming period. The presentations also addressed planned changes for LEADER under the CAP Strategic Plans.

**In Austria**, a key success factor is good communication in the LEADER delivery chain through the LEADER Forum; this bottom-up element will be strengthened for the future. The representation of women in LAG Boards will be specified at 40 % minimum; evaluation studies have shown that diversity in LAG Boards promotes and facilitates social innovation, so this will also be maintained and strengthened. A stronger strategic focus is planned in selection criteria for LDS and the successful thematic approach in LEADER will be extended to include climate, energy and sustainability.

**In Finland**, LEADER will continue with full country coverage and LAGs will act as development 'hubs' for all aspects of rural life. The evaluation of the LEADER method in the current period has shown that both aspects are important. A future dilemma may relate to the potentially reduced funding and how this might affect maintaining full country coverage. Finland aims to improve and strengthen networking further based on an ongoing dynamic network analysis. A Finnish benchmarking exercise looking at the Polish flat-rate and lump sum method for running costs and the umbrella projects method used in Austria is underway. Two rounds of LAG applications are planned, with the second round to close in 2021.

**In Slovenia**, LEADER has been implemented through a multi-funding approach and this is planned to continue. Their main method for communication and coordination about the future of LEADER is the LEADER Coordination Committee. Slovenia plans to use all four ESIF in a fully integrated CLLD approach with simplified procedures; discussions are ongoing as to which will be the Lead Fund. Full country coverage of LAGs is expected to continue. Future plans include new and simpler ways to modify and update the LDS, the use of more Simplified Cost Options, and simpler procedures for cooperation.

**In Spain**, the NRN has supported the development and implementation of a survey to inform the consultation process on the next generation of LEADER, supplemented by focus groups for LAGs and Managing Authorities. A LEADER Sub-group was set up in 2019 based on demand from LAGs and LAG networks in Spain. Their report was considered in the assessment of needs and the SWOT preparation process. This highlighted issues such as difficulties with multi-funding, depopulation, a prolonged transition period for LAGs, the need for a clear legal status for LAGs at national level and potential increases in the complexity of procedures.

**In Poland**, under the CAP Strategic Plan, the scope of LDS themes will be as open as possible and proposed by LAGs. Job creation will still play an important role, while new themes such as climate change and renewable energy are gaining significance. There will be a strong focus on animation (with a separate budget for animation activities being considered) and reduction of administrative burden. The multi-fund approach will only be applied if the Lead Fund option offered under the new regulation is feasible. There will be common rules and deadlines for LDS selection for all funds. The LDS will become a simpler, shorter document for the inhabitants of the area.



[Achievements and planning for the future in Germany](#)

Andreas Griess  
(Germany-Saxony, MA)

**In Germany**, the shift to the new CAP Strategic Plan requires a change from 13 regional (Länder) programmes to a single plan for 2021-2027. The design process currently being undertaken aims to retain the best elements of the existing programmes and their transfer into the new programme, whilst respecting regional specificities. Simplified Cost Options are among the strategic themes and design choices being developed in an enhanced way for the future. A strong causal line will be ensured from the SWOT linking to targets and measures in the LDS. The project selection criteria will be designed based on quality and ranking, whilst ensuring these are flexible enough to reflect individual cases.

Q&A

Participants noted the number of good examples from Member States, including the simplifications proposed, and colleagues were encouraged to follow their lead. The limited use of the multi-fund approach was questioned. Finland explained that unfortunately there was not sufficient buy-in from colleagues in other funds; they do however encourage LAGs to use whatever national and European funds are available and to also include urban areas. In Poland, enhanced use of Simplified Cost Options is planned, including their use in investment measures in the next period. It was also emphasised that while focusing on the simplifications, the LEADER community should not forget the importance of making LEADER 'local' and to use it as a laboratory.

## Afternoon session

Workshop session: Ensuring that LEADER delivers in a performance framework under the CAP Strategic Plans – key success factors and how to maintain them in the future

14.30-16.00  
[Workshop discussions](#)  
ENRD CP

Participants initially worked as single stakeholder groups i.e. of LAGs, National Rural Networks, and Managing Authorities and Paying Agencies to develop recommendations for the future. In the second half of the session mixed stakeholder groups validated the earlier findings, which were then fed back to the whole group as final recommendations.

**Local Action Groups** recommended:

- More simplification;
- A single Managing Authority to work with (even in a multi-funded context);
- More trust in the delivery system;
- The minimum required level of controls that are essential to make LEADER perform well in the next period; and
- Ensuring that sufficient resources are in place to maintain local structures and linkages to local territories and stakeholders during the transition period.

**National Rural Networks** emphasised:

- The importance of considering, and working with, LAGs as 'social entrepreneurs' whose social innovation processes can be supported by NRNs;
- Simplification of LEADER delivery as a very important prerequisite of success; and
- The need for frequent exchanges, both personal and digital.

**Managing Authorities** recommended:

- A sufficient 'minimum' LAG budget - at least proportionate to the size of the LAG territory - to ensure efficiency;

- A sufficient minimum number of staff dedicated to running the programme effectively (to ensure this, LAGs could consider sharing resources for specific tasks);
- Collect and share experiences from other Member States through good practice examples;
- The importance of communication throughout the delivery chain between LAGs, NRNs and MA; and
- Involve auditors in the preparations for SCOs right from the start to ensure all requirements are met.

MS Skakelja thanked everyone for their valuable inputs and called on participants to make sure that messages from the day do not remain only within the venue. Communicating messages effectively is important – in a clean, clear and targeted manner.

### Communicating LEADER practice and achievements

16.00-16.45  
[Communicating LEADER practice and achievement](#)  
David Lamb,  
Elena Di Federico,  
ENRD CP

The final discussion session focused on communication. Participants were asked to share their take-away messages from the day; their priorities included:

- The valuable and useful content from the presentations;
- The importance of clear communication;
- Intentions to share the knowledge gathered at the event with a wide range of stakeholders in their Member States (MS);
- Include representatives from other Directorate Generals at relevant LEADER events;
- Vary meeting formats – e.g. use webinars and hold meetings in other MSs;
- The ENRD should use varied channels to communicate with stakeholders –e-mail was the most popular amongst the people in the room; and
- One participant wrote: ‘It’s not easy to make it easier, but I hope we manage.’

Ms Skakelja noted that DG AGRI tries to work with other European Commission DGs as much as possible and acknowledged the importance of such collaborations. She encouraged participants to take part in the upcoming ENRD LEADER Seminar on 10 March and the Rural Inspiration Awards 2020, inviting stakeholders to nominate relevant projects.

### Closing session and next steps

16.45-17.00  
Neda Skakelja,  
DG AGRI

Ms Skakelja wrapped up the event mentioning her take-home messages. She highlighted that the presentations of LEADER implementation experiences from the six Member States were very valuable to share lessons learned.

The need for simplification – an outcome of the day’s discussions – has been taken on board; DG AGRI is already taking steps to ensure that this is addressed in the next programming period. All the simplification tools that are already available should be used more widely and SCOs need to be further explored (a second such ENRD workshop is expected to be considered). Finally, networking and exchanges such as those which happened during the event are important for the roll out of the future LEADER approach.