Strengthening Local Development through Cooperation

LEADER/CLLD Conference

Milan, 25 September 2015

Contents

Session 1.

Setting the scene – introduction to the day	
9.00 – 9.30 Welcome and introduction by Mihail Dumitru (DG AGRI)	*Note: Presentations can be directly downloaded by clicking on the link provided* Mr Dumitru welcomed the participants, in particular those from non-EU countries. He stressed the importance of the LEADER policy approach to empower local actors, build social capital, and serve as a governance tool. In the 2014-2020 programming period, LEADER, which covers approximately half of the EU's area, is anticipated to generate around 50,000 jobs. The conference puts cooperation at the core of local development. There are numerous practical examples and many additional opportunities to further enhance cooperation. There are also challenges. The European Commission (EC) has made efforts to set up a more enabling regulatory framework. Financing for cooperation with partners outside the EU remains a challenge. The ENRD and NRNs have a key role to play in supporting cooperation among local actors and the EC will pay particular attention to encouraging this. LEADER-like tools and bottom-up approaches are supported across the world and today's conference is also a great opportunity to get in touch with partners outside the EU.
Keynote presentation (Raúl Hernández Garciadiego)	Mr Hernández Garciadiego made the key note presentation on 'Key strategic elements for regional sustainable rural development'. This was a powerful and inspiring example from Mexico of bottom-up rural development where the primary issue to address is water scarcity.

Session 2.

LEADER and beyond: examples of cooperation projects	
9.30 – 10.45 Presentation by Kristiina Timmo (EE)	*Note: Presentations can be directly downloaded by clicking on the link provided* *"Living on the edge: South Estonia"* Project presented, involving 30 partners from 7 Estonian LAGs, aimed at strengthening regional identity and brand Estonian rural areas to increase national and international tourist interest. A key aspect of this multi-funded project was to involve not only the tourism stakeholders, but also other entrepreneurs as well as training centres, incubation programs and specialists in rural-urban linkages.
Presentation by Helle Bøge Breindahl (DK)	*"Transnational LAG cooperation: developing gastronomy and local food"* Starting during the summer of 2012, LAGs from Denmark and France have been engaged in this transnational project that explores the linkages between gastronomy and local food production. Through different phases in the process that included study visits and workshops the LAGs and their partners have explored local food distribution, marketing of the products, and the development of new technologies to shorten the supply chain. The project has had a strong impact on the partners' local development strategies and will be continued in the next funding period.
Presentation by Nadia Di Liddo (IT)	*"Partnership between the LAG Ponte Lama and the FLAG Terre di Mare"* In the Puglia region (South of Italy), the territorial overlapping between the LAG Ponte Lama and the FLAG Terre di Mare raised the question of whether creating a partnership between the two could open up opportunities to bring advantages to their stakeholders. The decision was taken to start joint promotion of fish and agricultural products, which has resulted in greater visibility and better marketing opportunities for local producers of both sectors. As a result of stakeholder consultation and working meetings with local authorities, public institutions and the private sector, a new model of governance, in which the different economic and productive sectors are in touch, has been built. The new approach ensures interaction between funds and opens the way for a new integrated strategy which will allow the agricultural and fisheries stakeholders to work together towards a common goal.

Questions and answers	Brief summary of discussion
	Participants at the conference expressed their interest in the projects presented, especially in the cooperation between funds. There is a request to list, develop into project examples and share these practices to gain insights on how the multi-fund approach can work.
	The representatives from the European Commission and the Contact Point promised to take this suggestion on board and stressed the role of Partnership Agreements for understanding the strategic role the territorial approach can play in the development of a region or country.
	The need to keep promoting inter-territorial cooperation was also mentioned, especially in regionalised countries (also in cases where two regions do not share the same language) where LAGs may not be used to think of their own neighbours in the context of cooperation. Such cooperation can sometimes be a way to achieve positive long-term effects between regions.
	The presenter from Estonia, Kristiina Timmo, reminded the audience about interesting projects that are being developed in the Baltic states, for instance in the framework of the Interreg Programme.

Session 3.

The EU implementation framework for LEADER cooperation	
11.15 – 12.15 Presentation by Karolina Jasińska-Mühleck (DG AGRI) Background document: "Key lessons about cooperation under LEADER"	*Note: Presentations can be directly downloaded by clicking on the link provided* Ms Jasińska-Mühleck delivered the presentation "Cooperation under LEADER: Overview of implementation framework – key changes in relation to the previous period". In the 2007-2013 programming period there was a drop in the share of LAGs involved in cooperation and spending on cooperation did not progress as anticipated. This was due to several factors, including the rigidity of the regulatory framework. The ENRD conducted a Focus Group designed to examine these regulatory and programming constraints and make specific recommendations to overcome them. For the current programming period, the EC has adopted these recommendations where practicable and made the new framework more supportive to LAGs. There is more flexibility in programming, the role of the ENRD and NRNs is enhanced and more harmonised rules are being introduced. Key specific changes relating to cooperation are: obligatory preparatory support; less restrictive eligibility conditions (recommended); the selection of projects by LAGs to be the 'norm'; LAGs explicitly allowed to cooperate with other types of areas (e.g. urban); MAs advised to use the same rules for ERDF and ESF as for the EAFRD for cooperation projects. The points raised by Ms Jasińska-Mühleck were also summarised in a background document prepared for the conference: "Key lessons about cooperation under LEADER: overview of results from 2007-2013 period".

Panel discussion with Karolina Jasińska-Mühleck, Sévérine Bressaud, Boban Ilic and Petri Rinne	A panel discussion and interventions from the floor followed. The main discussion points are summarised below (and a graphic presentation of some keywords can be found here).

Important changes needed to enhance cooperation:

- There was a consensus that the inclusion of mandatory preparatory funding is an important and positive step, as is the less restrictive and more flexible EU-level regulatory framework.
- Experience from Finland indicates that as LAG managers' administrative role increases engaging dedicated LAG-level TNC expertise becomes important. Several LAGs can share such a resource. It can also be provided directly through the NSU.
- Opening up LEADER/CLLD cooperation with urban areas and other types of local partnerships is important.
- EU candidate countries' access to LEADER-like cooperation funds is often primarily effected through IPARD. More emphasis on supporting the development of LEADER and LAGs 'on-the-ground' would be beneficial.
- Cooperation with local actors from candidate and pre-candidate countries would be easier if they were given observer status at European Rural Networks' governance meetings.

NSU support to cooperation and related harmonisation of rules

- It would be helpful if the use of Technical Assistance (TA) funds by NSUs to support preparatory actions was allowed in all MS, even modest funding would be extremely helpful for very initial exchanges. Currently, different rules apply in different MS.
- The EC reminded participants that preparatory support for cooperation projects is mandatory and shall be available to all LAGs having a concrete project idea. Additional support activities may also be offered through the vehicle of the NRN/NSU. Similarly, investment support for cooperation projects can be found in most MS, though not always through LEADER. Support for seminars and events is also provided for.

Role of MAs

- The EC recommends that the [TNC projects] selection process should proceeded as quickly as possible and that decisions on these projects should be made at the most "local" level possible (i.e. the norm should be that LAGs, not MAs, select these projects).
- In this context, some participants pointed out that MA approval of cooperation projects (which is the situation in some MS) is not necessarily inappropriate. The important thing would be for MAs to ensure that they add value through brokering and facilitation rather than command and control.

Issues to overcome relating to TNC projects involving non-EU partners |

	• EAFRD funding cannot be used in some MS or regions to cover non-EU travel and subsistence costs. Participants requested that this approach be reviewed. • In some MS securing national co-financing for non-EU cooperation activities (specifically the 'third country' partner costs) is problematic. In such cases NSUs and other stakeholders should consider other possible funding sources (not just EAFRD) and develop links with other networks. *Concluding message*: It is paramount to remember that cooperation is not just about the money – it is about real commitment and a desire to work together.

Session 4.

Introduction to the Exchange Platform	
12.15 – 12.30	The poster presenters introduced themselves and the place where they came from (location of their project) was shown on an interactive map. For more information about the Exchange Platform see below, Session 6.

Session 5.

Practical approaches to strengthening local development through cooperation (parallel workshops)	
14.00 – 15.30	*Note: Presentations can be directly downloaded by clicking on the link provided*
Working Group 1: How to develop cooperation with third countries	
Objectives and method	This workshop aimed at: • Giving **greater visibility** to the cooperation experience between LAGs and the territories of third countries; • Gaining a **better understanding** of the specificity of the cooperation between EU and non-EU territories by sharing first-hand experience from practitioners to define and explore the motivations, challenges, possible limitations and success factors of this kind of cooperation. To get the most out of this workshop, and given the significant experience of some of the participants that had subscribed to this session, the dialogue was facilitated in a way so **everyone could share their knowledge with the others while expanding the collective understanding of the subject**.

Discussion	**1. Motivations to cooperate**
	Transnational cooperation projects give the unique opportunity for members of two communities to meet, exchange and create new circumstances for local development responding to specific needs. The most motivating aspects of such exchange are the numerous learning opportunities offered by an understanding of the needs, the living circumstances and the culture of the cooperating partners. It is a great opportunity to learn and understand how differently rural development can be organised in response to very different issues.
	Reflecting on the rural development and social circumstances of the partners triggers a natural process of analysis of own economic and social situation so that cooperating communities gain a better understanding and awareness of their own issues. This self-analysis helps the communities to look at their own objectives and solutions from a different point of view.
	Furthermore, transnational cooperation projects involving communities normally not in contact with each other, are in many cases a source of great inspiration for the communities involved. The opportunity to meet, understand and work with a different culture, together with all the learning outcomes, represents an incredible experience and, therefore, a motivation to engage in cooperation projects.
	Some of the participants indicated that in the past, transnational cooperation projects were set up thanks to the will to share the experience gathered in rural development and make it available for other communities. The LEADER approach is recognised as a strong tool to address many rural challenges. Trusting that the LEADER method can help communities facing very hard economic and social issues, some communities in Europe have engaged with African, Asian and Latin American communities to transfer them the LEADER bottom-up approach.
	Participants from EU neighbouring countries confirmed their great interest in learning about LEADER from more experienced communities. Cooperation with this purpose already happened in the past and should be strengthened in the future.
	2. Challenges, technical difficulties and finance
	One of the first challenges that cooperating communities have to face when engaging in a project is, of course, to find each other: the discussion highlighted that it is of crucial importance to find a good partner with matching needs. Both communities need to have something to gain from cooperating. Some cultural aspects and differences were identified as a barrier 'much bigger than what they might look like'.
	Along with the cultural differences, the two communities have to face the challenge of working in a completely different framework of informal and formal laws, power structures, funding and tax systems. In order for a cooperation project to happen, all the elements of the different contextual

	frameworks need to be understood, considered and integrated in the plan. Also for this reason, each cooperation project should have a professional management structure to face all the emerging challenges and to arbitrate a clear decision-making process. Project management is very important, especially in projects involving a very high number of stakeholders.
	Project objectives should be realistic, not too ambitious, and take into account the different local development contexts.
	There are a number of funding opportunities that combined with EAFRD LEADER funding might give the opportunity to strengthen transnational cooperation between Europe and third countries: one of these is the ENPARD programme for EU neighbourhood countries. The main issue is to identify partners offering real growth opportunities. The experience of some participants shows that once the partners are ready to cooperate, funding sources can be found.
	Finally, the discussion brought attention to the transnational cooperation rules set up for the 2014-2020 programming period, in particular the rule limiting the expenses to the EU territory, seem too restrictive.
Conclusions/ recommend-ations	The group came to the conclusion that the stakeholders who want to be engaged in cooperation with territories outside of the EU would benefit from: • Networking opportunities to create links with networks outside the European Union. These linkages could be facilitated by ENRD CP and National Rural Networks, structures that could provide information, project examples and guidance. • Promoting the importance of cooperating with third countries. • Knowledge of the funding opportunities available for cooperation with third countries; ideally, the explicit possibility to support the initial set-up of projects (seed money) could be considered under RDPs.

Working Group 2: How to design a supportive delivery system for TNC	
Objectives and method	To explore how delivery systems can be improved to overcome some of the obstacles that have been experienced in implementing TNC projects. This workshop sought to draw on the experience of LAGs, National Networks and MAs to identify key elements that an enabling delivery system should contain and what needs to be done to make this happen early enough in the process.
	Three opening speakers presented their views on the delivery system in Finland, Greece and France from the perspectives of MA, LAG and networks, respectively, including what has worked well and key weaknesses to be avoided. Then participants followed the twinning method to work in pairs, then groups of four, then groups of eight to identify the most important features of an enabling delivery system.
Presentations	In terms of the most **significant obstacles to TNC** success:
	Sanna Sihvola (Finland - Ministry of Agriculture) highlighted the different timing in decision-making and different rules in different countries, the different expectations towards beneficiaries in different programmes and different kinds of information needs.
	Anastasios Perimenis (Greece - Lesvos Local Development Company) highlighted an overly complicated, rigid and time-consuming national administrative system, interference from the MA on the scope and objectives of projects, a lack of support for TNC implementation and a lack of consideration of specific local characteristics (e.g. on islands).
	Dorothée Duguet (France - FARNET Thematic Expert on cooperation) highlighted delays in the definition of cooperation rules, the potential for non-equal treatment of LAGs in different regions in terms of procedures or available assistance, and an overall lack of clarity on the ambition for TNC projects and acceptance of risk taking.
	All three speakers reflected positively on elements of the revised EU framework, but also noted the importance of how it has been implemented by Member States.
Discussion	The presenters also made reference to many positive aspects of the design and implementation of existing delivery systems as well as thoughts and ideas on what is needed to better support more TNC in the future (see slides). These ideas fed into the focus group discussions which led to the following conclusions.

Conclusions/ recommend- ations	The group identified six key features of an enabling delivery system: 1. A shared understanding of TNC is crucial to creating shared ambition and overcoming some of the more fundamental obstacles to TNC (this understanding is needed horizontally and vertically throughout the chain of actors). 2. Relationships throughout the chain are key in relation to the above point and also in overcoming practical and administrative barriers that can emerge during the process. e.g. it would be very helpful to have MA peer support and nominated country contact people on TNC in each MA. 3. Harmonised rules (and even forms) – co-designed with LAGs – would make it much easier for partners under different programmes to coordinate their applications. 4. Clear and transparent rules communicated as early as possible in the process are another precondition of enabling rural development actors to work their way through the system more easily and effectively. 5. Open ongoing calls are a simple practical means of ensuring that partners in different countries can apply for funding at the same time and not find themselves blocked because of a mismatch between funding rounds. 6. Partnership development support is an underrated aspect of the delivery system which could significantly strengthen the quality and impact of TNC partnerships. Linked to this is the value of providing practical and user-friendly partner search tools that can enable stakeholders in different MS to find each other – it is important to think about and address potential language issues here.

Working Group 3: How to build capacity for TNC	
Objectives and method	Workshop 3 aimed: • to identify **practical networking methods and tools** to support LAGs in identifying partners, developing and implementing cooperation projects; • to **develop recommendations on how networks can most effectively support LAGs** and other stakeholders in developing and implementing cooperation projects. Following the initial presentations, discussion groups were formed: 2 for LAGs and 3 for NSUs/MAs. The two types of groups were discussing the following questions (as well as existing and needed tools): • What kind of support do LAGs need the most to start up and implement cooperation projects? • What can NRNs & ENRD offer to support LAGs in cooperation? Each group then developed one key suggestion/idea on **What** kind of support is needed? **Who** should be involved/provide this support? **When** this support should be provided? Each group fed back to the whole workshop information on the suggested key support needs/tools.
Presentations	**Juha-Matti Markkola** from the **Finnish** NRN presented the support the MA and NSU are providing in Finland to support LAGs in transnational cooperation, including the successful practice of TNC coordinators, cooperation between Managing Authorities and LAGs, road-shows, NSU platforms/TNC table and TNC days. **Christa Rockenbauer** from the **Austrian** MA presented the new approach on working in TNC cooperation with the Arts and Culture Division of the Federal Chancellery with regard to the selection of culture-related transnational cooperation projects, including the joint development of selection criteria. **Jørgen Hammer** from LAG Bornholm in **Denmark** spoke about the main obstacles that LAGs were facing when establishing TNC projects, including: • the different administrative procedures and rules in different Member States; • TNC requires a lot of creativity and guidelines and examples/good practices are needed to facilitate this process; • very often each partner is responsible for only part of the total project, and the Lead Partner is missing; • funds are needed for a preliminary investigation of the possible benefits of a TNC; • it may be easier to apply and implement TNC projects under INTERREG.

Discussion	The main outcomes/suggestions from the five discussion groups can be summarised as follows (the common messages can be found under 'Conclusions' below): • **The promotion of initial contacts is needed,** as well as exchange of ideas and inspiration, especially at the pre-project stage; e.g. LEADER Exchange Group in England provides this support already during the development phase. LAGs need to request this support and the ENRD and NRNs should scan and disseminate ideas. • **Transparent sharing of information** (including LAG themes, language knowledge, NRN information, selection of projects – LAG or MA – budget available, national rules, etc.) is needed as soon as Local Development Strategies and processes are finalised. • **The use of other networks** (like cultural networks) in TNC implementation is a useful practice. • **A separate budget line only for TNC within the RDPs** is to be considered. • **The need for a common implementation manual for TNC projects** (at national/transnational level), as well as common regulations on financing issues and eligible actions. • **A recognition/co-responsibility at the national level** of the added value of transnationality and results of projects to build up a new reputation for TNC projects and communicate better the result.
Conclusions/ recommend-ations	A few practical suggestions emerged from the workshop that the ENRD Contact Point, NRNs, MAs could use when developing future TNC support for LAGs: • **Information sharing about the details of the national conditions/rules for TNC at the European level is crucial**. The ENRD CP can play a major role in this. However, NRNs, MAs and LAGs need to be willing to provide the necessary information. • **LAGs need clear guidance** (about rules, eligibility, etc.) on how to develop and implement TNC projects – a practical TNC manual would be useful in this regard (complementing the Commission Guidance). • **LAGs need inspiration** for projects and project ideas (this can be provided e.g. through study visits or targeted seminars, as is already happening in some MS). • **Support/capacity-building from NRNs/MAs on how to animate projects and involve local stakeholders**, especially during the pre-project stage is also important. **TNC implementation experts (coordinators)** at the local level is a good practice (e.g. in Finland). • **Regular meetings among MAs and LAGs that focus on TNC issues and challenges** are needed (at national and at European level). A specific suggestion concerned the organisation of EIP-type focus group on TNC. • TNC requires more attention; **its added value and the results it brings should be better understood** at the national (especially MA) level and should be promoted; LAGs also have a crucial role in this regard.

Working Group 4: How to facilitate cooperation between different CLLD funds	
Objectives and method	The objectives of the workshop were as follows:
	• To facilitate exchange between people involved in different EU funds (DG representatives, MAs, NRNs, LAGs) about practicalities of cooperation between stakeholders from different funds;
	• To identify barriers to cooperation across funds and potential solutions which may be useful elsewhere;
	• To identify possible joint actions to be taken at EU, national/regional, local levels.
	Following the introductory presentations, discussion was carried out in working groups (bringing together the same type of participants, i.e. one group for MA and DG representatives, one group for NRNs and two groups of LAGs). Proposals for solutions/joint action developed in small groups were prioritised, with participants indicating in which solution/action they are prepared to be involved in the nearest future.
Presentations	The discussion was kicked off by a few short presentations:
	Urszula Budzich-Tabor (ENRD CP), the workshop facilitator, provided an overview of the issues involved in inter-fund cooperation at different levels (EU, national, regional, local), stressing that good cooperation between higher levels is a pre-condition for good integration of funds on the ground.
	Joanna Gierulska (LEADER MA from Poland) presented what has already been achieved in coordination between different EU funds in Poland (one regional institution, common rules and selection criteria, agreed role of the LAG across funds), and what still remains a challenge (getting integration at implementation phase, harmonisation of monitoring and assessment of LDS milestones).
	Hans-Olof Stålgren (Swedish NRN) presented the system of integrating the four funds in Sweden (by a common Managing Authority, a special OP for CLLD under ESF and ERDF) and the role of the NRN (working with all CLLD LAGs, organising meetings at national and regional levels, helping establish the national LAG association).
	Jan Drázsky Florian (LAG network of the Czech Republic) presented a system of peer learning between LAGs: in Czech Republic in the new period many LAGs are new, so the LAG network together with the NRN put in place a twinning system (involving training, excursions, internships, trial selection procedure) where the less experienced LAGs can learn from the more experienced ones.
	Marta Quiñonero-Candela (DG MARE) and **Vincent Caron** (DG EMPL) outlined briefly what was envisaged in terms of CLLD cooperation in the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and in the European Social Fund.

Discussion	In the first part of the discussion, participants working in small groups focused on barriers which make cooperation between different funds difficult. The following issues were raised:
	- differences in the level of governance between funds (ERDF and ESF are usually managed at the regional level, EMFF – at the national level and EAFRD varies between MS) which make it difficult to develop a common implementation system;
	- differences in time schedules and rules between MAs responsible for different funds;
	- lack of a common understanding of CLLD, combined sometimes with a lack of interest or even prejudices against CLLD among decision-makers that do not know this approach;
	- lack of coherence between ESI Funds, in general EU funds tend to be designed "thematically"; a broader vision, "big picture" is lacking;
	- differences in "communication culture" at different levels;
	- the urban-rural divide;
	- lack of capacity at LAG level to deal with insufficient cooperation at higher levels;
	- risk of diluting the bottom-up approach of LEADER.
	In the second round of discussion, the small groups identified the following existing or potential solutions to address these barriers:
	- one set of rules, procedures, forms for all the ESI Funds, including a harmonised system of monitoring, evaluation and controls; ideally, one should aim to have a single MA for the whole CLLD;
	- "regulation with an open mind" is needed, and decision-making should take place, as much as possible, at the LAG level in line with the bottom-up principles;
	- meetings and workshops that would bring together LAGs, MAs, PAs and approval authorities from the different funds are necessary; possibly, a Communication Committee to ensure better understanding of CLLD for all stakeholders;
	- meetings should be organised at the EU level for MAs responsible for CLLD in different funds;
	- mutual learning and peer-to-peer support for new LAGs is needed; TA funding could be mobilised to extend support provided by NRNs;
	- a better picture is needed about how CLLD is used in ESI Funds across Europe.

Conclusions/ recommend-ations	The workshop participants indicated their willingness to be involved, as a first priority, in the following action points:
	- ensuring coordination and common understanding among LAGs, MAs and PAs of different CLLD funds through improved communication;
	- peer-to-peer learning to ensure that new LAGs, MAs and PAs are taken on board;
	- in the long term, the best solution would be to programme CLLD in all ESI Funds under one MA and following the bottom-up process.
	A link to the summary feedback presentation from the 4 workshops can be found below, in Session 7.

Session 6.

Exchange Platform
16.00 – 17.15   *Note: Posters can be directly downloaded by clicking on the link provided*

The participants had the opportunity to visit posters presenting cooperation projects, mainly those involving third countries, to hear short presentations and exchange with the project promoters. The session involved two rounds of short presentations, followed by discussion, of the following projects:

1. Boban Ilic, Regional Rural Development SWG (Macedonia):

'The Rural Development Standing Group & the Area Based Development Approach in the Western Balkans'

2. Petar Gjorgievski, Rural Development Network of the Republic of Macedonia (Macedonia):

'The Balkan Rural Development Network-BRDN'

3. Maria José Murciano Sánchez, Spanish Network for Rural Development (REDR, Spain) and Manuel Lemus Kourchenko, Coordinator of Chiapas (Mexico) Network for Rural Development:

'CLLD in Mexico: 2 LAGs in Chiapas open to EU'

4. Marjo Tolvanen, LAG Sepra (Finland):

'Rural Youth Camps'

5. Kristiina Timmo, LAG Tartu Rural Development Association (Estonia) and icola Vita, Local Action Group La Cittadella del Sapere (Italy):

'LINC: an innovative way to network & be inspired'

6. Caroline Tukugize, PiL Uganda board (Uganda) and Kay Dawson, PiL Mitchelstown (Ireland):

'Linking Communities for Shared Learning and Mutual Gain'

7. Sanaa Moussalim, REMADEL (Morocco):

'REMADEL'

8. Inga Krekele, Daugavpils and Ilukste district partnership "Neighbours" (Latvia) and Sergiu Mihailov, Pro Cooperare Regională (Moldova):

'A network for regional development between Latvia and Moldova'

9. Petri Rinne, Rural development expert (Finland):

'LEADER Local Action Group in the Zambesia Province of Mozambique'

10. Ramirez Marlene, AsiaDHRRA Secretariat (Philippines):

'AsiaDHRRA'.

A short description of each poster can be found in Annex 1

Session 7.

Drawing lessons from the exchange: summary and recommendations	
17.15 – 18.00	*Note: Presentations can be directly downloaded by clicking on the link provided*
[Feedback from workshops and discussion](#)	The rapporteurs from the four parallel workshops: - Yves Champetier (Workshop 1) - Dorothée Duguet (Workshop 2) - Sévérine Bressaud (Workshop 3) - Petri Rinne (Workshop 4) presented briefly the key conclusions of their workshops. Comments from the audience invited by the conference facilitators (John Grieve and Urszula Budzich-Tabor) mostly focused on the importance of cooperation for rural development within the EU and beyond; many of them also said they appreciated the opportunities of sharing experience and ideas which the conference offered. See quotes from participants' feedback forms in Annex 2.
Closing comments by Paul Soto (ENRD CP)	Paul Soto, the Team Leader of the ENRD Contact Point, expressed thanks to all the people that contributed to the event and, in particular, to presenters and participants who had travelled from very far.
	Summarising many of the messages voiced throughout the day, Paul Soto pointed out that the possibility for fruitful cooperation depends fundamentally on the motivation to build bridges and establish relations between different communities. The conference shows that, although transnational cooperation can be challenging, there is a great interest from both EU and third countries to engage in strengthened cooperation initiatives.
	Looking at the new legal framework for LEADER cooperation, it is clear that, although it opens many new possibilities, for instance, greater flexibility or obligatory support for the preparation of cooperation activities, certain limitations are unavoidable. In particular, LEADER cooperation cannot cover the costs of third country partners or investments in third countries. However, the discussions during the conference highlighted that there are many other funding sources dedicated to cooperation that could support the LEADER cooperating partners in third countries. The Rural Networks should have an active role in trying to map out these alternative sources and to inform the potential beneficiaries.

Another key message from the discussion concerns procedures and delivery systems for cooperation whose complexity and rigidity in the past have been major barriers. The new policy framework for LEADER cooperation was designed to ensure more supportive, flexible and transparent delivery procedures. However, the effects of these changes depend upon their interpretation in each Member State and region. In this context, Managing Authorities should play a key facilitation role to achieve better results through cooperation.

On the basis of the discussions, Paul Soto proposed the following points for action:

- Sharing information among different MAs concerning LEADER cooperation procedures and support systems put in place for this new programming period (e.g. developing country profiles of LEADER cooperation delivery systems);
- Ensuring contacts between all stakeholders involved in delivering LEADER cooperation in MS and regions;
- Using all the potential of web-based tools to share ideas, examples, and questions in real time;
- Identifying and supporting clusters of MAs and LAGs that want to cooperate around specific key themes or specific common geographical challenges.

Closing comments by Matthias Langemeyer (DG AGRI)	Matthias Langemeyer felt encouraged by witnessing the high level of commitment and willingness to exchange between the conference participants with regard to cooperation in LEADER, and reassured the audience that the Commission is also very committed to this issue.
	In the programming period 2007-2013, LEADER cooperation started too late in relation to other LEADER activities and was characterised by a much lower expenditure rate. To improve this and other aspects of inter-territorial and transnational cooperation, the Commission developed a new legal framework for LEADER cooperation, better able to tackle its challenges and opportunities. Furthermore, the Commission is already trying to address the theme of LEADER cooperation at the time when the programming period is at its very early stages.

The Commission is aware of the fact that the legal framework for cooperation in LEADER still presents some barriers. The conference offered an opportunity to clearly identify some of them. A lot of attention was paid to the rule establishing that the budget allocated to LEADER cooperation can only be spent on the EU territory. Although the request of using LEADER resources for cooperation activities with third countries might be motivated by the best intentions, the Commission has the important duty to ensure that the limited resources of the CAP benefit EU rural areas.

Matthias Langemeyer advanced a number of recommendations:

- Considering the complexity and the challenges presented by cooperation, it is of crucial importance that MAs, NRNs and LAGs have a strong motivation to engage in and support LEADER cooperation activities, especially transnational cooperation.

- In particular, the National Rural Networks should play a key role in facilitating the implementation of cooperation activities.

- Furthermore, substantial effort should be made to overcome the language barrier. While at the beneficiary level English language is increasingly used in Europe, MAs and NRNs should support the exchange of information between countries by supporting the translation of key national documents and guidelines in English.

- Although at this stage of the new legal framework implementation the multi-funding approach might be perceived as more of a challenge, it is important to keep in mind that above all it is an opportunity - *"hence, let's use it!"*

- It is important that discussions concerning simplification of policies and delivery procedures do not happen only in Brussels, but also within every MS.

LEADER can be the right method to face increasingly important social issues such as the recent inflow of refugees from conflict areas. Such people looking for a place to live might be an opportunity for the increasingly depopulated rural areas of Europe. Transnational cooperation might be a way to address some issues of regions in crisis and, at the same time, it might be used to prepare rural areas of third countries to be ready to welcome back the people that had to leave their homes.

Annex 1. Exchange platform: Summary of posters

Europe

LINC: an innovative way to network & be inspired

- Kristiina Timmo, LAG Tartu Rural Development Association (Estonia)
  kristiina@tas.ee
- Nicola Vita, Local Action Group La Cittadella del Sapere (Italy)
  vita@lacittadelladelsapere.it

Now in its sixth year, the LINC conference continues to highlight the value of LEADER by providing networking opportunities for communities interested in cooperation. Local actors from different countries meet and exchange ideas on thematic issues and methodologies, participate in interactive competitions and use the relaxed atmosphere to make new friends and to strengthen existing relationships. Participants learn from each others' experiences and head home inspired by new ideas for supporting development in their own area. All of this is fully self-organised by the LAGs and local communities, with support from the National Network Units.   Info at: www.info-linc.eu

Latvia - Moldova

A network for regional development between Latvia and Moldova

- Inga Krekele, Daugavpils and Ilukste district partnership "Neighbors" (Latvia)
  inga.krekele@gmail.com
- Sergiu Mihailov, Pro Cooperare Regională (Moldova)
  pro_co_re@yahoo.co.uk; www.procore.md

In spring 2014 the *Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development of the Republic of Latvia* invited the Latvian Rural Forum to develop and enrich the existing cooperation between Latvia and Moldova. From a selection of potential partners identified by the Northern Development Region in Moldova, *Pro Cooperare Regionala* was selected as the most suitable partner. A productive and dynamic cooperation was created between the two organisations, its members and the rural inhabitants of Latvia and Moldova in a partnership between public administration and NGOs.

The purpose and benefits of the cooperation are: expanding international contacts; finding new ideas and inspiration; exchange of experience and good practices between local communities from Latvia and Moldova; developing a better understanding of the functioning of society and the development prospects in the context of both the European Union and Eastern Partnership countries.

Spain – Mexico

CLLD in Mexico: 2 LAGs in Chiapas open to EU

- Maria José Murciano Sánchez, Spanish Network for Rural Development (REDR, Spain)
  mjmurciano@redr.es
- Manuel Lemus kourchenko, Coordinator of Chiapas (Mexico) Network for Rural Development
  mlemusko@gmail.com

This project is another example of the interest of REDR in illustrating LAGs as an effective tool for implementing territorial rural development policies in Europe and in countries outside the EU. As part of the project consortium "Laboratories of social cohesion in Mexico" funded by EuropeAid, REDR had the opportunity to support the implementation of a process of 'Sustainable and Integrated Local Development' in depressed areas of the State of Chiapas.

This process enabled the creation of two LAGs representing the broad spectrum of interests of their communities, whose objectives are to provide a better quality of life to all their citizens and to implement development strategies through government organisations, producer associations and civil society groups.

South East Europe

The Rural Development Standing Group & the Area-Based Development Approach in the Western Balkans

- Boban Ilic, Regional Rural Development SWG (Macedonia)
  boban.ilic@swg-seerural.org

The Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group (SWG) in south east Europe (SEE) is an International Intergovernmental Organisation consisting of governmental institutions responsible for agriculture and rural development in their respective countries and territories. SWG aims to improve rural livelihoods in the SEE countries, boost rural development and promote innovation and sustainability in agriculture.

The SWG is active in south east Europe in the implementation of the Area-Based Development (ABD) approach. This is an innovative approach enabling a breakthrough in sustainable economic growth by targeting defined geographical areas in cross-border regions, which are characterised by a set of common, complex development problems. It is considered as an effective approach to facilitate sustainable growth in declining rural areas.

Western Balkan Region

The Balkan Rural Development Network-BRDN

- Petar Gjorgievski, Rural Development Network of the Republic of Macedonia (Macedonia)
  petar.g@ruralnet.mk

The Balkan Rural Development Network (BRDN) is a regional platform of NGO-based rural development networks in the Western Balkans. BRDN brings together the rural development networks from Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Serbia, Montenegro and Kosovo. BRDN has an overall aim of strengthening civil society and promoting multi-national exchanges in rural development, particularly between EU Member States and accession, candidate and potential candidate countries. Its general objective is to facilitate the identification of mutual needs and interests, to promote joint planning of projects and to support different institutions in fulfilling the needs of the Western Balkan countries in the area of rural development.

Morocco - Algeria - Tunisia – Mauritania

REMADEL

- Sanaa Moussalim, REMADEL (Morocco)
  sanaa_moussalim@yahoo.fr

REMADEL, the Maghreb network of rural local civil society organisations, was founded in 2008 by some thirty civil society organisations from Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Mauritania. These NGOs are all active in the field of local development in rural areas. The creation of the network was supported by some Local Action Groups (LAGs) from Spain, France and Italy, as well as by agricultural research institutions from several Mediterranean countries.

The network develops an active partnership based on bilateral, multilateral, and decentralised cooperation and between civil society organisations within the South and between the North and the South Mediterranean. REMADEL develops capacity-building activities for its members, promotes active advocacy focused on the problems of the rural world and encourages the exchange of experiences between the different actors of the Maghreb rural development network.

Ireland - Uganda

Linking Communities for Shared Learning and Mutual Gain

- Caroline Tukugize, PiL Uganda board (Uganda)
  tukugic@yahoo.com
- Kay Dawson, PiL Mitchelstown (Ireland)
  kaydawsonfinegael@gmail.com

Partners in Learning (PiL) is a new concept - a hybrid created from the merging of the best characteristics of overseas local development policy, Irish local development policy and the concept of 'linking' which has evolved since the 1970s. PiL is described as a grassroots approach to community development. It bypasses the traditional donor aid dependency and directly links those communities actively involved in community development, empowering through shared experiences and through learning towards mutual gain. The concept came from development professionals and was supported by LEADER+ funding but the approach was developed by the communities themselves. These same communities want to share their learning so that other communities can experience the benefits of a PiL link.

Asia

AsiaDHRRA

- Ramirez Marlene, AsiaDHRRA Secretariat (Philippines)
  asiadhrra@asiadhrra.org

AsiaDHRRA was born in 1974 from a dialogue between rural development practitioners in Asia on the theme of development of human resources in rural areas. With 11 member DHRRAs (Development of Human Resources in Rural Asia) and working partners in 14 countries, AsiaDHRRA responds to issues of food insecurity and rural poverty through its three-pronged strategic objectives. These are to develop strong rural people's organisations (RPO), to develop capacities for effective participation in public and private programs, and to build a stronger AsiaDHRRA network. These contribute to the goal of economically empowered RPOs and the vision of rural communities that are self-reliant, prosperous and living in solidarity with each other. AsiaDHRRA while facing challenges in its work, has celebrated significant milestones: acting as a catalyst for the formation of a major alliance of farmers' organisations in Asia, mobilising direct financing to RPOs coupled with advisory services and developing social capital through earning the trust and confidence of RPOs, CSOs, governments, and UN agencies for agriculture and rural development.

Finland - Mozambique

LEADER Local Action Group in the Zambezia Province of Mozambique

- Petri Rinne, Rural development expert (Finland)
  petri.rinne@joutsentenreitti.fi
- Leonide Francisco Soares Uaquico, Rural development expert (Mozambique)
  uleonideuaquico@gmail.com

A pilot LEADER Local Action Group (LAG) has been running in Zambezia Province, Mozambique since 2008, supported by Finnish Development Aid funds and the Joutsenten Reitti LAG in South West Finland. The LEADER Local Development Strategy developed for the Alto Ligonha territory, an area characterised by extreme poverty, focuses on improving agricultural cooperatives and commercial production, trade services and community forestry. 35 projects were selected and supported with 100% public funding in 2009-2012. The mid-term evaluation in 2011 showed that the projects had offered job opportunities to more than 500 people. In 2012-2014 the project extended to cover the whole Gile District and in the future it may be extended to new districts. The Finnish project promoter, Joutsenten Reitti LAG, and its territory benefited from the cooperation through cultural exchanges involving people from Finnish media, arts and business. The project proved that LEADER could help resolve issues in very poor countries, including ones in post-conflict contexts like Mozambique.

Finland – Estonia – Russia

Rural Youth Camps

- Marjo Tolvanen, LAG Sepra (Finland)
  marjo.tolvanen@sepra.fi

Finnish and Estonian LEADER LAGs gained their first experience of a transnational cooperation project with a Russian partner between 2011 and 2013. The need for cooperation was obvious due to the cultural and historical background and experience of these areas and the fact that the one common topic to rural areas in all three countries was the need for investment in young people. Three camps were successfully organised in 2012, one in each country. The EU LAGs had a pilot LAG in Russian Karelia as their partner in Russia. 24 youngsters aged 11-13 participated in the camps and formed a social media network. The participating LAGs and youth organisations gained valuable experience in the benefits of cooperation.

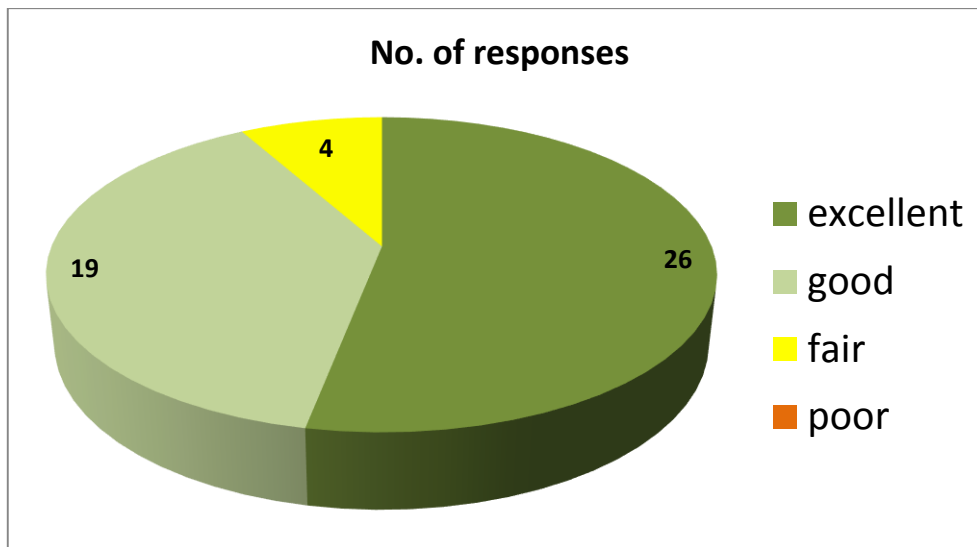# Annex 2: Summary of information from feedback forms

Overall organisation of the event (average answer for 5 sub-questions):
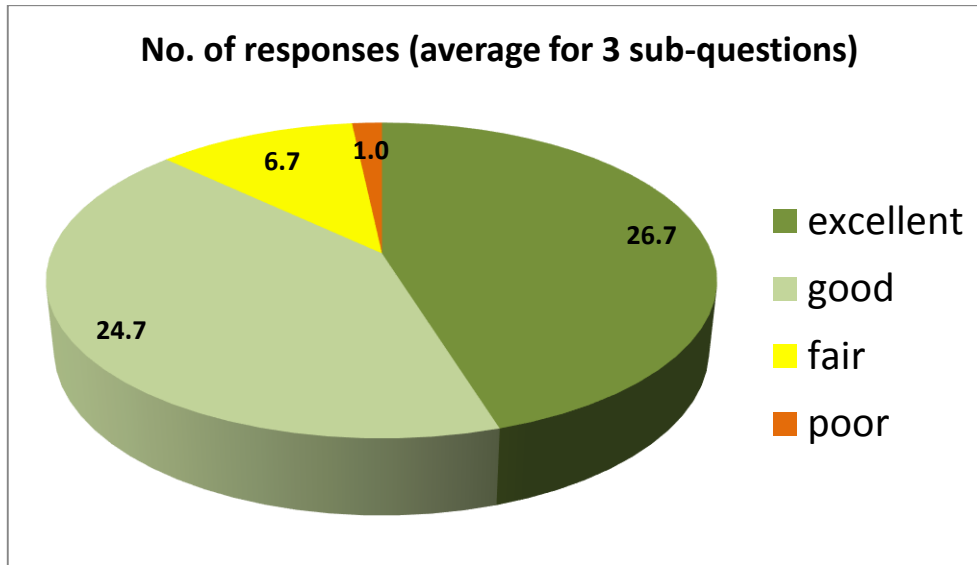Total no. of responses: 59

No. of responses (average for 5 sub-questions)
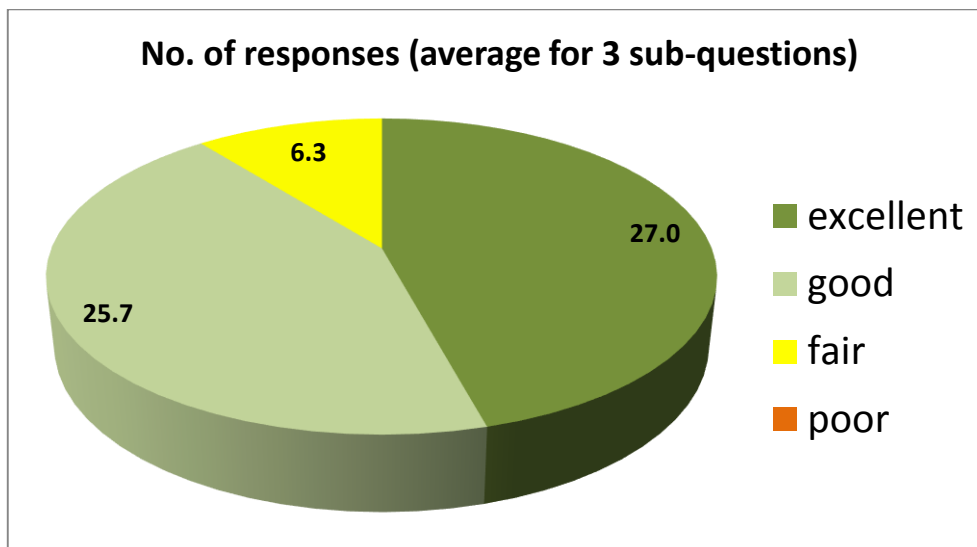
- excellent: 26.6
- good: 24.2
- fair: 4.8
- poor: 1.6
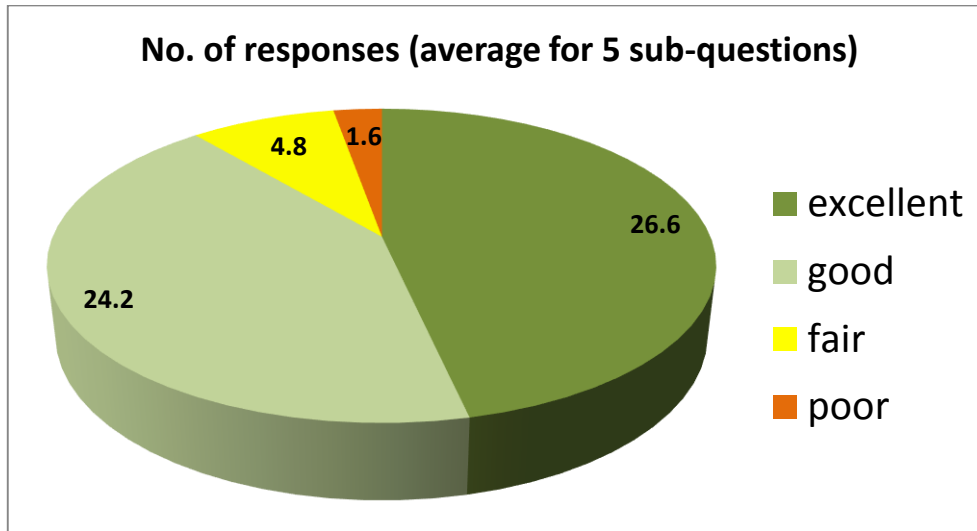
Keynote speech
Total no. of responses: 49

No. of responses

- excellent: 26
- good: 19
- fair: 4
- poor

LEADER and beyond: examples of cooperation projects
Total no. of responses: **59**

No. of responses (average for 3 sub-questions)

- 6.7
- 1.0
- 26.7
- 24.7

Legend:
- excellent
- good
- fair
- poor

The EU implementation framework for LEADER cooperation
Total no. of responses: **59**

No. of responses (average for 3 sub-questions)

- 6.3
- 27.0
- 25.7

Legend:
- excellent
- good
- fair
- poor

Parallel workshops

Workshop 1
average of 4 sub-questions (10 answers)

0.8	
1.8	4.3
3.3	

- excellent
- good
- fair
- poor

Workshop 2
average of 4 sub-questions (12 answers)

1.8	5.0
4.8	

- excellent
- good
- fair
- poor

Workshop 3
average of 4 sub-questions (17 answers)

1.5	0.5
7.8	7.3

- excellent
- good
- fair
- poor

Workshop 4
average of 4 sub-questions (18 answers)

4.3	0.8
	7.5
5.3	

- excellent
- good
- fair
- poor

Exchange platform
Total no. or responses: **54**

No. of responses (average of 4 sub-questions)

- excellent
- good
- fair
- poor

Values: 1.8, 10.5, 21.8, 18.3
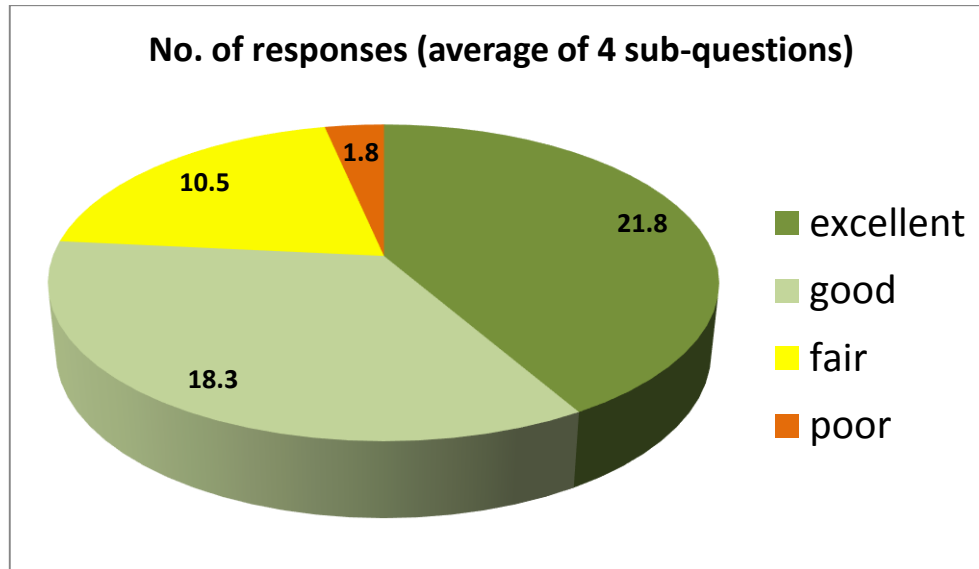
Closing session
Total no. of responses: **52**

No. of responses (average of 4 sub-questions)

- excellent
- good
- fair
- poor

Values: 0.7, 7.7, 15.0, 27.7
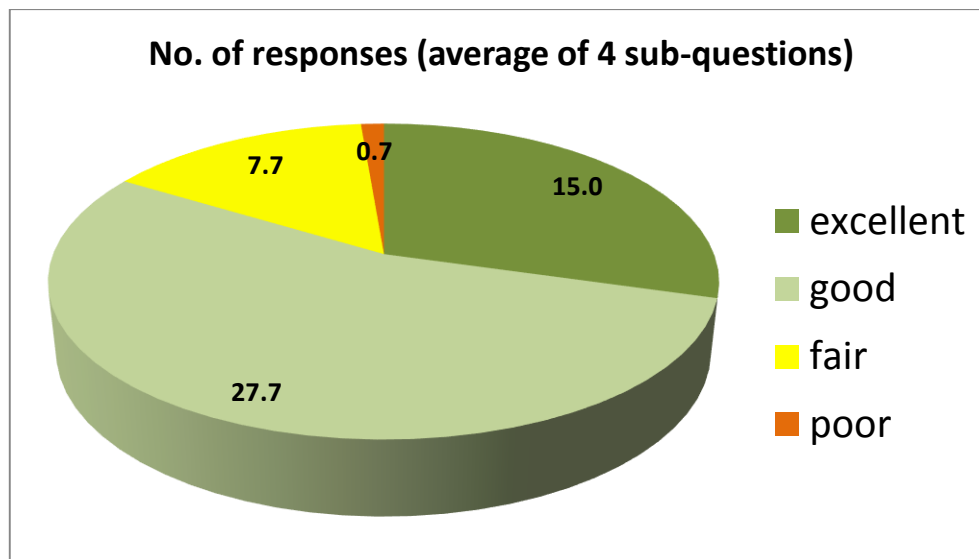
Selected participants' comments:

"LEADER TNC should be used more than before. This is key for EU cooperation and unity."

"There is help and guidance for cooperation projects outside the EU."

"Cooperation is very valuable and also feasible, although financing can be an issue."

"Learning abroad has double the value of learning at home."

"Cooperation between LAGs and transnational actors is important in addressing local opportunities and challenges."

"MAs and PAs continue to dominate the cooperation programmes."

"I would advise for this kind of meetings to invite persons from national Paying Agencies as well."

"If you want something to happen badly enough, you will find a way, but we must make the process as smooth and easy as possible for all."

"Outcomes of workshops are only useful if they are implemented."

"Didn't realise we could cooperate with third countries."

"Facilitating the first contact is really important."

"Cooperation projects should be discussed in the field!"