



Report of the 2nd Meeting of the European Rural Networks' Assembly

Brussels, 26 November 2015



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Unlocking the potential of the RDPs

9.30 – 10.45

[Preliminary findings on the RDP programming process](#), Petr Lapka, DG AGRI

[RDP Conference 2015/16 Survey among registered participants](#), Doris Marquardt, ENRD CP

Panel discussion

Panellists:

Wolfgang Löhe, German MA

Thomas Bertilsson, COGECA

Note: Presentations can be directly downloaded by clicking on the link provided

Petr Lapka drew some initial conclusions from the **ex-ante evaluation of the RDPs**, stressing among others the importance of better and more direct communication with regard to the implementation of the programmes (as evaluations often come late in the process).

Doris Marquardt presented the main **findings from a survey** that was carried out by the ENRD CP in preparation of the RDP Conference (planned for the 24 November, postponed due to the security concerns in Brussels).

She presented both differences and commonalities in the challenges and opportunities highlighted by national/regional stakeholders (MAs/NRNs) and European stakeholders (especially from DG AGRI).

At the beginning of the panel discussion, Martin Scheele (DG AGRI) emphasised **how important it is that the RDPs are relevant to stakeholder needs**. He therefore invited panel members to share their views on how well RDPs take into account the needs of their constituencies.

Wolfgang Löhe stressed that we have to prove that the programmes deliver and that we contribute to the objectives of 2020. In this programming period we have a comprehensive approach, including ex-ante evaluation and the performance framework. The latter is an important instrument to support the result-based approach.

In Germany there are regional programmes, all with different milestones and projects. Stakeholders were involved at an early stage, when the strategies were discussed. There are good experiences, e.g. in the field of LEADER, where the involvement of rural stakeholders has been extensive.

However, there have also been difficulties, e.g. with regard to the involvement of green NGOs. Generally, the regional MAs are quite risk-averse and there is a lack of trust; so the 'dark green' measures in some regions are only implemented through national money. There is scope for improvement for the next programming period.

Thomas Bertilsson used the Swedish example to highlight the great variety of rural stakeholders, especially a great diversity of farmer groups (small farms, big farms, farms with different products, etc.). This creates challenges, but there have been some positive developments, such as good cooperation between farmers and villages in extending rural broadband.

He argued that we need to keep farming activities alive, because if there is no farming, there is no point to talk about the environmental impact. We also

<p><i>Joelle Silberstein, French NRN</i></p>	<p>need to take into account the issue of volatile prices and address these through relevant instruments.</p> <p>He also highlighted that more harmonisation is needed with regard to mapping areas, as currently we will have three different types of map covering the same areas, if we include mapping of the new Areas with Natural Constraints (ANC).</p> <p>Joelle Silberstein talked about the decentralised decision-making with regard to the 27 RDPs in France (in addition to the national programme). In some of the French regions big administrative reorganisation took place, which had a direct impact on the programme.</p> <p>Stakeholders' needs were taken into account by the regional authorities including through specific working groups. At the same time, they were facing some difficulties with regard to consultations and coordination between the national network and the regional networks. Notably, the specific needs of LAGs were not taken into account in some of the regions (LAGs were brought together at the national level).</p> <p>The coordination of objectives between regional and national levels (e.g. with regard to LAGs or EIP network) needs to be improved.</p>
<p><i>Trees Robijns, Birdlife Europe</i></p> <p>Plenary Discussions</p>	<p>Trees Robijns highlighted the importance Birdlife attaches to the RDPs and the 'investment' it has put into monitoring RDP development in all 28 Member States. However, there are capacity issues to contribute effectively - especially in MS with regional RDPs – for many organisations such as Birdlife who have valuable expertise to contribute.</p> <p>Getting access to much of the information on the RDPs was very resource intensive, often requiring multiple requests for access to specific documents and even the involvement of lawyers. By the time analysis could be conducted it was often too late to influence the programme.</p> <p>Whilst current legislation and the Code of Conduct has generally improved the implementation of the partnership principle and recognised the role of different stakeholders in the programming process, it could be interesting for the ENRD to conduct a survey on how it has been implemented on the ground.</p> <p>It seems that in many cases organisations have only been consulted on specific technical aspects e.g. environmental organisations consulted on biodiversity issues, but not more generally on investment measures. Organisations should be involved early and better consulted on the strategies behind the programmes.</p> <p>Assembly participants gathered in small groups of 2 to 3 participants to discuss, identify and write on post-it notes: a) opportunities within the RDPs; and b) potential activities of the Rural Networks to maximize these opportunities.</p>

The post-its were collected and the contents are presented in some detail in Annex I. In summary, the main **RDP opportunities** identified were:

- i) Strengthening the integrated approach
- ii) Strengthening cooperation
- iii) Triggering innovation
- iv) Supporting advisory services
- v) Financial engineering
- vi) Tackling specific implementation challenges

The main **suggested Rural Network activities** were around:

- i) Improved networking and exchange
- ii) Identification and dissemination of good practice
- iii) Development of guidance/guidelines
- iv) Organisation of training events, thematic workshops and webinars

Key points raised from the floor during the plenary discussion were:

- **Focus should not only be on competitiveness.** One of the major issues is the need for effective support for small farmers, micro-enterprises etc. to improve local livelihoods. For instance, many semi-subsistence farmers were excluded from agri-environmental measures during the last period.
- **Simplification is still a big challenge**, especially the implementation of Simplified Cost Options (SCO) and the lump-sum procedure. Several MAs are trying to implement such aspects, but are not sure how to make them better.
- **Continuity between programming periods is crucial.** It is not good to start again from scratch at the start of each period. This is especially true in areas, such as local food, where progress requires long-term strategies.
- **Measure 16 and the European Innovation Partnerships are vital** to unlock the potential of research organisations. New innovative ideas could be explored with small farms, with matchmaking organised by NRNs.
- **Networks have an important role to play in promoting shared understanding** of policies and objectives between MAs and stakeholders 'on the ground', as well as for benchmarking RDP implementation (e.g. comparison of different measures/ sub-measures).

Opportunities for improving RDP implementation through Rural Networks

11.15 – 12.30

Note: Presentations can be directly downloaded by clicking on the link provided

Rural Networks' Common Strategic Framework,

Antonella Zona, DG AGRI

Antonella Zona (DG AGRI) presented the common Rural Networks' strategic framework which harmonise the objectives and activities of both networks - the EIP-AGRI and the ENRD.

Priorities and activities of the ENRD Contact Point,

Paul Soto, ENRD CP

Paul Soto (ENRD CP) presented the ENRD Contact Point priorities for 2015-2016: three capacity building priorities to support: a) more effective and simpler RDP implementation; b) NRNs & NSUs; and c) more effective roll out of LEADER/CLLD; and two thematic priorities 1) 'Smart and Competitive Rural Areas'; and 2) 'Greening the Rural Economy'. He concluded with the provisional roadmap of activities until July 2016.

Priorities and activities of the ENRD Evaluation Helpdesk,

Hannes Wimmer, Evaluation Helpdesk

Hannes Wimmer (Evaluation Helpdesk) presented the activities and outputs that the Evaluation Helpdesk is planning to deliver to achieve the overall objective of improving the evaluation of EU rural development policy.

He explained how the Helpdesk had worked to identify key stakeholder needs and the main emerging topics, such as resolving methodological evaluation issues and creating the evidence for robust evaluation. He finally presented the specific Helpdesk activities foreseen to achieve six main objectives, highlighting those areas of work where Assembly Members are involved.

Priorities and activities of the EIP-AGRI Service Point,

Pacome Eyenga, EIP-AGRI SP

Pacome Eyenga (EIP-AGRI) presented the priorities of the Service Point and the activities which are being carried out, including Focus Groups, workshops, seminars, good practice identification and communication tools.

He presented an outline of some key upcoming EIP-AGRI events until early 2016. In addition, he highlighted that various MS have translated specific EIP-AGRI outputs into their national languages.

Update on the Rural Networks' assessment activities,

Antonella Zona, DG AGRI

Antonella Zona (DG AGRI) presented the recent work on the rural networks' self-assessment, notably an ENRD self-assessment workshop, and discussions at the latest Steering Group meeting.

Important messages were about the need to clearly separate evaluation (carried out by external experts and complex) from the self-assessment exercise. The latter should be simple to implement (in terms of indicators, methods, etc.), embedded in the Rural Networks' Strategic Framework and aimed at ongoing improvements to the performance of network activities.

<p>Q&A</p>	<p>Assembly participants raised several points in relation to the above presentations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It is important that the activities of the different network units complement the activities implemented by the different network members (e.g. the Portuguese NRN will discuss the results of the EIP Focus Groups with national experts to plan further actions). - It will be useful to maximise the linkages and synergies between the work of the EIP-AGRI and the ERND CP (e.g. EIP Focus Groups with ENRD Thematic Working Groups) as well as with other initiatives (European Parliament Intergroups, Rural Parliaments etc.). - It could be beneficial to apply a longer-term view than one year to the ENRD Thematic Working Groups where the topics are relevant. - It is important to make sure the information and analysis of the RDPs (by measure, Focus Area and Priority etc.) reaches regional MAs. - Pass down to the national/regional level information developed and communicated at EU levels (e.g. on innovation). - Simplification work needs also to focus on simplifying things from the point of view of beneficiaries. - There is a need to increase promotion of CLLD/LEADER and develop supporting tools (e.g. use of an electronic system to collect data that enable marketing of the LEADER programme). - There was a call from the floor for the European Commission to produce a White Paper on Rural Areas.
<p>Introduction to the afternoon workshops, Michael Gregory, ENRD CP</p>	<p>Michael Gregory (ENRD CP) briefly introduced the work of the afternoon workshops on the following three themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Workshop 1: Rural Networks: contributing to Smart and Competitive Rural Areas - Workshop 2: Rural Networks: advancing the green economy - Workshop 3: Tackling key issues in RDP implementation

Parallel Workshops Activating Rural Networks to achieve results

Workshop 1: Rural Networks: contributing to smart and competitive rural areas	
<p>14.00 – 15.30</p> <p>Workshop 1</p> <p>Refining the topics, David Lamb, ENRD CP</p> <p>Short Food Supply Chains, Jan-Willem van der Schans, University of Wageningen</p>	<p><i>Note: Presentations can be directly downloaded by clicking on the link provided</i></p> <p>The workshop started with a short welcome and introduction from Thomas Bertilsson, COGECA.</p> <p>Two presentations to launch the conversation followed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • David Lamb, ENRD CP, presented a breakdown of the broad theme of ‘Smart and Competitive Areas’. • Jan-Willem van der Schans, University of Wageningen, presented short food supply chains, their potential benefits and business models and the finding of a recent related EIP Focus Group report. <p>Following lively group discussions about what is meant by ‘smart and competitive rural areas’ the following key messages and priorities were identified:</p> <p>Key messages:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many rural areas face a spiral of decline as more people leave and more services close. • When we say smart and competitive, we (should) mean viable and sustainable rural areas. • Sustainable and viable rural areas require integrated territorial approaches – not isolated initiatives. • Entrepreneurship is key. Innovation can be small and it can be social (e.g. community-run services). <p>Priorities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Viable villages/territories (demographic decline; services; territorial approaches) (13 votes) • Knowledge sharing (including between Operational Groups) (12 votes) • Support for entrepreneurship (6 votes) • Using big data (aggregating info on markets, systems etc.) (6 votes) • Rural broadband (5 votes) • Added value to products and chains (5 votes) <p>See Annex II for more details on the workshop discussions.</p>

Workshop 2: Rural Networks: advancing the green economy

14.00 – 15.30

Workshop 2

[Advancing the Green Economy,](#)

Paul Soto, ENRD CP

[Introduction and overview on the state of play in programming,](#)

Clunie Keenleyside, IEEP

[Promoting rural green economy,](#)

Hilkka Vihinen, Natural Resources Institute Finland

[Case bioenergy,](#)

Teemu Hauhia, Agency for Rural Affairs, Finland

[Celebrating Diversity,](#)

Jan Hartholt, NSU, NL

Note: Presentations can be directly downloaded by clicking on the links provided

The workshop started with a welcome and introduction from **Paul Soto (ENRD CP)**

Four presentations to launch the conversation followed:

- **Clunie Keenleyside, Institute for European Environmental Policy (IEEP)**, provided an overview of what the 'Green Economy' means and the potential contribution of the RDPs to its achievement
- **Hilkka Vihinen, Natural Resources Institute Finland**, presented an example of promoting the green economy in practice
- **Teemu Hauhia, Finland Agency for Rural Affairs**, presented an example of using local timber resources to produce bioenergy
- **Jan Hartholt, Dutch NSU**, presented a community project to safeguard the future of the local agricultural landscape.

Following discussion in two groups, participants identified the following key messages and priorities:

Key messages:

- Mobilise local resources by involving people and share and stimulate their enthusiasm.
- Show it is not Utopia; it is happening!
- The social process is the fuel for the movement.
- Identify RDPs with strong support for green economy.
- Show the links to green economy and the possibilities of RDP.

Priorities:

- Identify RDPs and measures and use them as a starting point for the work
- Tools, guides, examples for dealing with the topic of green economy e.g. method by Hilkka Vihinen

See Annex III for more details on the workshop discussions.

Workshop 3: Tackling key issues in RDP implementation

14.00 – 15.30

Workshop 3:

[Tackling key issues in RDP implementation,](#)

Doris Marquardt & Urszula Budzich-Tabor, ENRD CP

[RDP project selection criteria,](#)

Stefan Østergard Jensen, Danish MA

[Developing/using guidance,](#)

Wolfgang Löhe, German MA

[LEADER as a tool for reaching out to small scale farmers,](#)

Nancy Samargiu, Romanian NRN

Note: Presentations can be directly downloaded by clicking on the link provided

The workshop started with a welcome and introduction from **Mike Gregory (ENRD CP)**

Four presentations to launch the conversation followed:

- **Doris Marquardt and Urszula Budzich-Tabor, ENRD CP**, presented planned ENRD CP activities around the theme
- **Stefan Østergard Jensen, Danish MA**, presented example processes of defining and disseminating project selection criteria
- **Wolfgang Löhe, German MA**, presented the German approach to preparing guidance for EIP OGs and umbrella schemes under LEADER
- **Nancy Samargiu, Romanian NRN**, talked about how LAGs can support small scale farmers in accessing EU Funds.

Participants broke into three groups, each discussing one of the examples presented and exploring what can be done to address issues similar to those in the example. The following key message and priorities emerged:

Key messages:

- A number of practices already in place or planned by Member States were identified in each small group and these could usefully be followed up.
- The list of 14 themes identified previously by the ENRD CP remains relevant
- The need to simplify RDP delivery, including the use of Simplified Cost Options;
- The importance of rural networks for integrating all relevant delivery actors and especially connecting local actors and local needs to the Commission
- The need for two-way communication, using simple language
- The importance of implementing of the partnership principle at MS level where the Monitoring Committee composition can be very different.

Priorities:

- Simplification – Financial Management
- Simplified Cost Options
- Focus on Individual measures, in particular Measure 16 Cooperation
- Use of selection criteria / Arranging selection processes

See Annex IV for more details on the workshop discussions.

Closing plenary

Points of information	
<p>16.00 – 16.10</p> <p>European Rural Manifesto, Michael Dower, European Rural Parliament</p>	<p>Professor Michael Dower of PREPARE - also speaking on behalf of the European Rural Community Alliance and ELARD – reported that the second meeting of the European Rural Parliament was held in early November in Schärding, Austria. It was attended by 240 delegates - from 24 Member States and 10 non EU countries - including NGOs, rural stakeholders, NRNs, Ministries, etc.</p> <p>Mr Dower highlighted that the European event focused on the findings of a series of 36 national campaigns conducted to gather ideas from rural people. These ideas were reflected in a 100-page report titled <i>'All Europe shall live'</i>.</p> <p>After detailed debate, the Parliament concluded by adopting a six-page European Rural Manifesto. This calls for action on 30 key issues for improving the quality of life in rural areas. In particular, it advocates a territorial, partnership-based approach to rural development.</p> <p>Mr Dower explained that the Manifesto will form the basis for continued campaigning to promote progress in addressing the needs of rural areas and encouraged Assembly members to collaborate in that process.</p>
Priorities for 2016	
<p>16.10 – 16.30</p> <p>Feedback from workshops, Workshop Rapporteurs</p> <p>See above Workshop Summaries and Annexes II, III & IV for full workshop reports</p>	<p>The key outcomes of the workshops (as reflected in the above workshop summaries and more detailed Annexes to this report) were presented to plenary by the workshop rapporteurs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshop 1, “Rural Networks: contributing to smart and competitive rural areas”, Thomas Bertilsson, COGECA • Workshop 2, “Rural Networks: advancing the green economy”, Jan Hartholt, Dutch NSU (Regiebureau POP) • Workshop 3, “Rural Networks: Tackling key issues in RDP implementation”, Stefan Østergård Jensen, Danish MA

16.30 – 17.00

Discussion on the priorities and 2016 activities of the Rural Networks

Key emerging messages from the Assembly concerning the Rural Network's future work were reflected upon by the Heads of the three European Network Support Units: Paul Soto - ENRD Contact Point; Hannes Wimmer - Evaluation Helpdesk; and Pacôme Elounga Eyegena – EIP-AGRI Service Point.

Highlights from the interventions:

- The Assembly is potentially an incredibly powerful organisation and the Networks will need to think about how to make the most out of it and fully exploit the potential of all its participants.
- There was a common understanding emerging from the Assembly that there is no need of new subjects but rather on how to roll out and make the work on the current ones more practical on the ground, starting from building up a better understanding of what the needs are for LAGs, NRNs, MAs, etc.
- Two-way communication between the Networks and the national level is of critical importance for the effectiveness of the Networks. It was reminded that the function of the networks also depends on their members being active in exchanging and sharing information.
- The need to re-emphasise the human factor at local level was underlined. The Networks should invest in it further as RDPs provide a range of soft measures that can be used intelligently such as cooperation, LEADER, training, innovation, advisory services, etc.
- Concerning evaluation, a wide range of possible themes were indicated for future work on the implementation of the policy. These could include for instance how to evaluate effectively knowledge sharing, communication activities, Financial Instruments, TNC, etc.

Next steps and Closing

17.00 – 17.30

[Upcoming RN events](#), Matthias Langemeyer, DG AGRI

Closing remarks
Aldo Longo,
Director,
Directorate H, DG
AGRI

Note: Presentations can be directly downloaded by clicking on the link provided

Matthias Langemeyer (DG AGRI) presented some highlighted events of the EU rural networks' calendar for 2016. This included confirmed dates for some Assembly sub-group meetings and the next Steering Group meeting, as well as provisional dates for future SG meetings and the next Assembly.

Director Aldo Longo (DG AGRI) made the closing speech for the Assembly. He highlighted in particular the following elements:

- The work of the Networks can make a vital contribution to achieve effective implementation of the newly adopted RDPs.
- Active participation in networking activities is the best guarantee to ensure the improvement of rural development policy and ultimately, to achieve the best possible results for rural areas.
- The outcomes of this meeting on how the needs of the different stakeholders have been reflected in the RDPs, will feed into the work carried out by DG AGRI on stocktaking and analysis of the programming process. The exchange of views on this matter will be continued at the RDP conference to be held at the beginning of 2016.
- It is vital for rural development policy to be able to demonstrate the sound management of the funds and how it concretely benefits rural areas. To this aim, strategic programming links budget allocation to clearly defined targets and performance milestones. This process leads to results that make a difference for farmers, the environment and the society.
- The Assembly as the strategic governance body of the Rural Networks has a great potential to provide solutions to the main bottlenecks that stakeholders experience in the implementation of rural development policy. In 2016, the ideas emerging from the Assembly will be translated into actions under the supervision of the Steering Group.
- Networks can become a hub for sharing experience and best practices across and between the national and EU levels, for example on issues like unlocking the potential of the use of Financial Instruments, or addressing challenges such as the migration and refugees crisis.

Annex I – Morning plenary session: Unlocking the Potential of RDPs

Assembly participants gathered in small groups of 2 to 3 participants to discuss, identify and write on post-it notes: a) opportunities within the RDPs; and b) potential activities of the rural networks to maximize these opportunities.

Following the exercise, 33 sets of post-its were collected. The following maps out the detail of the responses received, which is summarised on page 6 of the main report above (note that allocation of topics under the headings is approximative – some topics are relevant for more than one area):

RDP opportunities

i) Strengthening the integrated approach

- Addressing all stakeholder groups (including women, youth, migrants, SMEs, small farms, young farmers)
- Broader implementation of CLLD
- (Simplification of the) multi-funds approach
- Strengthening links between agriculture and other sectors
- Improving agri-environmental measures
- Focus on the 6 RD priorities
- Adequately incorporating social issues, e.g. refugee crisis
- Stimulating diversification

ii) Strengthening cooperation

- Using the potential of Measure 16
- TNC
- Cooperation between MAs and PAs
- Establishing clusters e.g. of SMEs' activities
- Linking LAGs to EIP OGs

iii) Triggering innovation

- Strengthening links between scientists and other actors, especially farmers
- Strengthening links to Horizon 2020
- Activating SMEs and farmers
- Matchmaking for forming OGs

iv) Supporting advisory services

- Short supply/ Value chains
- Facilitation of access to market
- High value projects
- Growth and Green Economy in rural areas
- Decreasing the “image of complexity of the RDPs”

v) Financial engineering

- Financial instruments (FIs)
- Risk management
- Access to co-financing
- RDPs to leverage public and private resources

vi) Tackling specific implementation challenges

- Stakeholder/ partner involvement
- Tackling RDP implementation problems
- Strengthening the involvement of the Monitoring Committee
- Simplification
- Introducing SCOs
- Ensuring continuity especially in the context of LEADER

Rural Network activities

i) Improved networking and exchange

There is particular value in supporting improved networking and greater exchange of information and experience. Specific topics or approaches for such work highlighted by participants were:

- Implementation approaches applied in the different MSs
- Informal exchange of experience between MSs
- Thematic exchange between interested NRNs without going via EU level
- Greater sharing of information/figures and policy documents between MS
- Preparation of articles for NRNs for further dissemination
- Stronger involvement of “former” networks in the development of instruments
- Observing differences in implementation between funding periods
- Practical tools to support partner search in various measures
- Field visits
- Achieving good coordination and coherence between ENRD CP and EIP SD
- Sharing communication outputs – e.g. videos and approaches for addressing farmers in “their language”

ii) Identification and dissemination of good practice

As a more specific form of experience sharing, rural networks should be helping in the identification and dissemination of good practices. Priority topics for such work highlighted by participants were:

- Simplified Cost Options (SCOs)
- Simplification
- Financial Instruments (FIs)
- Risk management
- Use of specific measures
- Implementation of advisory services

iii) Development of guidance/guidelines

Rural networks can help by collating and preparing specific guidance or guidelines in technical areas of interest. Relevant topics for such guidance suggested were:

- Access to finance and FIs
- Risk management
- Precision farming
- Smart technologies
- Avoiding gold plating

iv) Organisation of training events, thematic workshops and webinars

- Stimulating creativity and innovation
- Business models
- Marketing
- Diversification
- Integrated development
- Addressing specific stakeholder needs e.g. LAGs, small farmers, micro-businesses
- Communication of scientists to other stakeholder groups
- Training for advisory services to better adapt communication to target groups

Annex II – Workshop 1: Rural Networks: contributing to Smart and Competitive Rural Areas

Objective of the workshop: To identify the priorities for the RNs' activities for 2016: building on but not necessarily limited to the on-going activities.

Method: An introduction was given on three topics of Smart and Competitive Rural Areas – smart agriculture, smart supply chains and smart villages, and the tools and options available to RNs and through RDPs.

There were two interventions delivering the perspective of the participants. Thomas Bertilsson of Copa-Cogeca presented his interpretation of opportunities for cooperatives and producer groups, while Jan-Willem van der Schans of Wageningen University presented some of the opportunities which arose from the EIP Focus Group on Short Supply Chains.

Some discussion of the topic related back to the original title, with an expressed desire from some participants that the overall topic should include a focus on improving the viability of rural areas, and that territorial development should be a core part of the delivery. This was followed by facilitated discussion around the room of what the priority topics should be, with 15 minutes given for each topic, followed by voting.

Key workshop messages:

- Many rural areas face a spiral of decline as more people leave and more services close.
- When we say smart and competitive, we (should) mean viable and sustainable rural areas.
- Sustainable and viable rural areas require integrated territorial approaches – not isolated initiatives.
- Entrepreneurship is key. Innovation can be small and it can be social (e.g. community-run services).

Priorities identified:

- Viable villages/territories (demographic decline; services; territorial approaches) (13 votes)
- Knowledge sharing (including between Operational Groups) (12 votes)
- Support for entrepreneurship (6 votes)
- Using big data (aggregating info on markets, systems etc.) (6 votes)
- Rural broadband (5 votes)
- Added value to products and chains (5 votes)

Annex III – Workshop 2: Rural Networks: advancing the Green Economy

Objective of the workshop: to identify specific topics / actions, good practices or suggestions for networking tools and activities that would enable the Networks to best contribute and improve the RDPs' results on advancing the green economy in rural areas

Method: Paul Soto (ENRD CP) introduced the workshop and explained the process as well as the key outputs to be achieved.

Following the introductory remarks, four contributors presented different perspectives on supporting the transition to a Green Economy in order to set the framework for the workshop's discussion.

- ✓ Introduction and overview on the state of play in programming - Clunie Keenleyside, from the Institute for European Environmental Policy, provided an overview of the definition of the Green economy as well as its key components. Ms Keenleyside also underlined the importance of rural development policy as an instrument for enabling this transformation and provided indicative information on RDPs programming arrangements to support this priority.
- ✓ Promoting rural green economy – suggestions for transition steps - Hilikka Vihinen, from the Natural Resources Institute Finland, presented a concrete example on the different steps through which the green economy can be achieved and the social processes required to support this transition.
- ✓ Case – bioenergy - Teemu Hauhia, from Agency for Rural Affairs, Finland, presented an example of how local resources (timber) are used in Finland for the production of bioenergy and thus contribute in a practical way towards the establishment of a green economy.
- ✓ Celebrating Diversity: towards a green economy - Jan Hartholt, from the Dutch NSU, presented the example of a community project which was formed in order to safeguard the future of the agricultural landscape in Friesland, the northern part of the Netherlands.

Following the presentations, participants discussed in two groups on how the Networks should advance towards improving the RDPs' effectiveness in supporting the transition to a green economy. Highlights from the discussions are presented below.

- Participants underlined that the work of the ENRD Thematic Group on the Green Economy is very much linked to the work of the other ENRD Thematic Group on Smart and Competitive rural areas. It is needed to ensure there are linkages between the two Thematic Groups and it should be taken into consideration that when talking about the green economy sustainability, innovation and competitiveness that fall under Priority 2 are also very relevant.
- The RDPs can promote the green economy in various ways. All RDP measures are relevant but at the same time other programmes and ongoing activities beyond rural development policy can contribute. Therefore, it will be important to find ways to show these interlinkages.
- Networking has a fundamental role in promoting the green economy. Networking should bring together all actors at different levels from the local level up to policy makers and initiate the process to rethink about changes.

- The social process was commonly considered as a key factor for promoting the transition to a green economy. Local actors need to start pursuing what they consider beneficial in their local context and then take advantage of RDP funding to realise it. However, as a starting point it is important to get the local people involved and ensure their commitment on a common objective. In this process LAGs can play a key role in raising awareness about green economy issues.

Key workshop messages

- It is important to identify the steps for a transition in different contexts.
- The process must involve (as a first step) mobilizing local resources, involving people and making them enthusiastic, stimulating green habits, awareness and demand.
- It is (then) necessary to identify the opportunities for (green) value chains at local level.
- Logistics and supply chain integration are vital.
- Problem solving, technical innovations are required all along the chain.
- We need good practical examples which show that this is happening, how and that this is not utopia.
- This could be the basis for a toolkit for Green LAG (local) strategies
- RD programmes can help create the conditions for this to happen. It is important to identify and analyse RD programmes whether there is strong political support for the green economy.
- Many focus areas and measures can contribute – not just those that are explicitly directed at the environment.

Priorities identified:

- Identify RDPs and measures and use them as a starting point for the work
- Tools, guides, examples for dealing with the topic of green economy e.g. method by Hilikka Vihinen. In addition to the examples presented, participants indicated other case studies to be further explored:
 - ‘Innovation camps’ in Finland
 - ‘Green Deals’ in the Netherlands
 - The examples presented at the EIP-AGRI Workshop ‘Building new biomass supply chains for the bio-based economy’

Annex IV – Workshop 3: Tackling key issues in RDP implementation

Objective of the workshop: To identify the priorities for the RNs' activities for 2016 by building on ongoing activities, which might be adapted if necessary.

Method: The workshop started with a welcome and introduction by Michael Gregory (ENRD CP) and a presentation of planned ENRD activities on supporting more effective and simpler programme implementation by Doris Marquardt and Urszula Budzich-Tabor (ENRD CP). Participants were encouraged to reflect on their relevance and priority as well as to supplement the list of themes, if deemed necessary.

This was followed by three presentations of examples of Member State methods and practices which can improve RDP implementation. After these presentations, participants broke into three groups, each discussing one of the topics presented and exploring further what is already done or can be done by rural networks (at national and EU level).

Finally, the workshop participants shared the findings of the small group discussions and agreed some key shared messages.

Small group discussions by sub-theme:

(1) Discussion on demonstrating RDP results

Initial presentation to the whole workshop: Stefan Østergard Jensen (Danish MA) explained their process of defining project selection criteria for M01 & M16 and disseminating them to beneficiaries.

Discussions focused on the MA task of setting the **measures' selection criteria** in the RDPs. This task is difficult because of the need to use criteria which focus projects on achieving the measure's aims without overly restricting the use of the measure or innovative projects. The MAs felt that the RDP planning process did not allow enough time to properly consider and arrive at the right criteria.

Participants highlighted that MS have very different consultation processes for the setting of the selection criteria: the process involves the Monitoring Committee whose composition varies among MSs and very often did not involve the NRNs.

Participants from Scotland flagged the involvement of an academic panel external to the MA and hired for setting both target and selection criteria for the Scottish RDP. In Wallonia, selection criteria tried to build on the experiences – including type of beneficiaries and projects - with similar measures in the previous programming period.

Rural Networks could support MAs by:

- Disseminating information concerning the setting of selection criteria and processes (e.g. open calls) that work and for which measures – including good and bad examples
- Establishing working groups at EU level able to provide suggestions.
- Promoting the creation of a 'one-stop-shop' internet page where the measures' calls can be filtered according to the type of beneficiary.

(2) Discussion on developing/using guidance

Initial presentation to the whole workshop: - Wolfgang Löhe from the German MA presented 2 examples: how the German guidance for EIP Operational Groups (OGs) was prepared; and the work in progress on developing guidance for umbrella schemes under LEADER at the EU level.

Handbook for EIP Operational Groups

The handbook seems to have been highly appreciated. Further discussion highlighted that there appears to be need for two kinds of guidance documents related to the implementation of OGs: a technical handbook having project leaders, PAs and MAs as target group; and an attractive brochure for (potential) beneficiaries/partners.

It was further considered that along with representatives of DG AGRI and beneficiaries, other stakeholders should also be targeted/brought into the discussions to tackle problems related to setting-up and running OGs, such as Horizon-2020 and evaluation experts.

There was support amongst the group for the ideas of jointly developing the handbook to take account of experiences gained in the different MS and translating the handbook into English. Participants from the Netherlands and Finland stated that they are also working on a guide for OGs, or plan to do so. The participants from DE, NL & FI committed to bring this initiative forward.

Umbrella projects within LEADER

Many participants, primarily MAs and LAG representatives, showed interest in following the initiative planned by the MAs of Germany, Luxembourg and Austria. Among these were a LAGs from Portugal and Slovenia.

The Finnish and English MAs were also interested in the experience presented in the context of similar work they are doing on SCOs.

Generally, it was agreed that clarification on the application of relevant EU regulation by the Commission, auditors and MAs needs to be elaborated and communicated. More examples of the practical application of umbrella projects were desired.

(3) Discussion on LEADER as a tool for reaching out to small-scale farmers

Initial presentation to the whole workshop: Nancy Samargiu from the Romanian NRN showed how LEADER Local Action Groups can be used to disseminate information and support small scale farmers in accessing EU Funds.

Most participants were interested in the potential of LAGs as ‘antennas’ within local communities. They can play a role as neutral (independent from political influence) multipliers. To support this, Rural networks can:

- provide examples of additional activities carried out by LAGs in addition to implementing LEADER (this is already done by the Czech LAG network);
- provide information in simple language adapted to rural stakeholders;
- use LAGs and other NGOs as multipliers, but there needs to be a systematic effort to include all LAGs in this outreach process, and not always rely only on the best, most active ones;
- provide funding (in some MS, NRNs have the capacity to provide financial support to networking initiatives);
- develop ‘standardised’ projects which are easier to explain to rural beneficiaries;
- integrate actors instead of competing with them (activities in this field are already carried out i.e. by the Latvian Rural Forum and by ELARD).

Key workshop messages

- A number of practices already in place or planned by Member States were identified in each small group and these could usefully be followed up.
- The list of 14 themes identified previously by the ENRD CP remains relevant
- The need to simplify RDP delivery, including the use of Simplified Cost Options;
- The importance of rural networks for integrating all relevant delivery actors and especially connecting local actors and local needs to the Commission
- The need for two-way communication, using simple language
- The importance of implementing of the partnership principle at MS level where the Monitoring Committee composition can be very different.

Priorities identified:

- Simplification – Financial Management
- Simplified Cost Options
- Focus on Individual measures, in particular Measure 16 Cooperation
- Use of selection criteria / Arranging selection processes

Annex V – Summary of Participants’ feedback

How would you rate the organisation of the event?	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
Communication about the event and prior-planning	4	9	3	
Suitability of the venue	9	6		1
Organisation of the event whilst in Brussels	9	6	1	
Opportunities for networking and making new contacts during the event	4	8	4	
TOTAL	26	29	8	1
How do you rate the content?				
1. Unlocking the potential of the RDPs	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
Relevance of the topic of the session	5	9	2	
Quality of presentations	3	10	3	
Relevance of the panel discussion	3	5	8	
Usefulness of the outcomes for your work	3	7	5	1
TOTAL	14	31	18	1
2. Opportunities for improving RDP implementation through the Rural Networks	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
Relevance of the topic of the session	4	11	1	
Quality of presentations	3	12		
Relevance of the discussion	2	5	7	1
Usefulness of the outcomes for your work	2	10	3	1
TOTAL	11	38	11	2
3. Activating Rural Networks to archive results	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
WS1 Rural Networks’: Contributing to smart and competitive rural areas				
Quality of the information shared at the workshop	1	1	2	1
Usefulness of the outcomes for your work	1	3	1	
WS2 Rural Networks’: Advancing the green economy				
Quality of the information shared at the workshop	1	1	1	
Usefulness of the outcomes for your work		2		1
WS3 Rural Networks’: Tackling key issues in RDP implementation				
Quality of the information shared at the workshop	1	4	3	
Usefulness of the outcomes for your work	1	4	3	
TOTAL	5	15	10	2
4. Priorities for 2016	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
Quality of the report back of workshops	4	11	1	0
Relevance of the discussion		7	7	0
Usefulness of the outcomes of the session	1	8	6	0
TOTAL	5	26	14	0
5. Next steps and Closing	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
Relevance and usefulness of the session	2	8	3	0