



Report of the 7th meeting of the European Rural Networks' Steering Group

Brussels, 17 May 2017



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	<p>networking events are planned for OGs, with links to Horizon 2020. These will be on Organic Farming and on Supply Chains (early 2018).</p> <p>Peter Pascher (Copa Cogeca) raised a question on how the ENRD and EIP-Agri network ensure complementarities and synergies in their work. In this respect, Mario Milouchev pointed out that the role of the Steering Group is to guide the work of the networks and ensure synergies.</p> <p>In addition, Antonella Zona (DG AGRI) outlined two examples of good cooperation between both the ENRD and EIP-Agri network i) the 7th National Rural Networks (NRNs) meeting in the Azores on the links between Advisory Services and NRNs and ii) the Thematic Group on Resource Efficiency built upon the outcomes of the EIP-Agri Focus Group. She also highlighted the forthcoming Agri-Innovation Summit in Lisbon, which will be undertaken as a joint activity.</p> <p>A second question from Peter Pascher concerned the relationship between the EIP-Agri network and the Horizon 2020 programme. Willemine Brinkman clarified that the EIP-Agri is underpinned by two distinct policies, the Rural Development policy, with its focus on innovation and funding for Operational Groups, and the Horizon 2020 programme, which funds multi-actor projects and thematic networks. These three types of projects, i.e. Operational Groups, multi-actor projects and thematic networks form the building blocks for the EIP-Agri network.</p> <p>She also pointed out that the EIP-Agri network is open to anyone with an interest in innovation in agriculture and forestry. As more Operational Groups are funded by the RDPs, the EIP-Agri workshops seek to bring together Operational Groups and H2020 projects around specific themes, in line with the aim to build bridges between research and practice.</p>
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Planned Network Activities– ENRD Evaluation Helpdesk

<p>11.30 – 12.00 Planned Network Activities– ENRD Evaluation Helpdesk, Hannes Wimmer, ENRD Evaluation Helpdesk</p>	<p>Hannes Wimmer (Evaluation Helpdesk) presented the main activities of the Evaluation Helpdesk, among which: the Thematic Working Groups ‘Evaluation of LEADER/CLLD’; the ‘Evaluation of innovation’ and ‘Assessment of RDP impacts in 2019’; the ‘Synthesis of evaluation components integrated in the AIRs submitted in 2017’ (Q4/2017); the Good Practice Workshops on ‘How to report on evaluation in the Annual Implementation Reports’ (19-20 Sept. 2017 in Latvia) and on ‘Evaluation and National Rural Networks’ (Q4/2017, tbc); the Yearly Capacity Building Events on ‘Follow-up of the Annual Implementation Reports in 2017’ (Q4/2017) and ‘Evaluation of LEADER/CLLD’ (Q1-Q4/2017).</p>
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	<p>In the discussion, the Steering Group members asked how far the work of the high-level group on simplification will be taken into account and if the Commission will postpone the deadline for the AIRs to be submitted in 2019. The Commission explained that the work of the high-level group on simplification is independent from the work of the Evaluation Helpdesk. There are currently no plans to postpone the deadline of the AIRs to be submitted in 2019. Steering Group members also suggested showcasing good practices on the evaluation of innovation in LEADER/CLLD and also making the guidelines more useful for LAGs.</p>
<p>RN self-assessment framework</p>	
<p>12.00 – 12.45 Rural Networks' self-assessment framework, Antonella Zona, DG AGRI</p> <p>Draft Outputs Report and Self-assessment questionnaire, Sari Rannanpää, External Expert, ENRD</p>	<p>Antonella Zona (DG AGRI) reminded participants of the process agreed by the Assembly in December 2016 for the EU Rural Networks' self-assessment. She described the progress achieved so far and the next steps to be undertaken before presenting the final self-assessment report at the next Rural Networks' Assembly meeting.</p> <p>Sari Rannanpää (ENRD External Expert) then updated the Steering Group on the Rural Networks' self-assessment.</p> <p>During the question and answer session, SG members made some suggestions for improving the self-assessment questionnaire and the procedure for collecting information. They recommended:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Setting up a process for interpreting and validating the findings. For example, the organisation of working groups in the next SG meeting to further discuss the results of the survey; - Formulating an additional question on the collaboration between the two networks (ENRD and EIP-Agri); - Developing an optional tool to enable respondents to share the questionnaire with peers and collect answers (e.g. paper format); - Clarifying whether the questionnaire will only be sent to those involved in the RN governance bodies or to a wider audience (such as farmers' associations, all MAs, etc.); - Presenting a summary of the results of the feedback forms received at the various networks' events in the final RN self-assessment report. <p>The EC representatives explained that since this is the first time this exercise is being carried out, further improvements or adaptations may take place in the future if considered necessary. As for respondents, it was stressed how for the</p>

	first exercise it would be considered enough if the replies were submitted by RN governance bodies.
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Afternoon session

Proposals for future ENRD activities – ENRD Contact Point	
<p>14.15 – 14:20</p> <p>Overview of proposals, Paul Soto, ENRD CP</p>	<p>Paul Soto (ENRD CP) explained the links between the ten priorities of the first RN Assembly, the ten points of the Cork 2.0 Declaration and the initial proposals for future capacity building and thematic activities of the ENRD CP. He clarified that these initial proposals are the results of the feedback provided by ENRD stakeholders during the year and brainstorming sessions with DG AGRI representatives.</p> <p>Following this, SG members had the opportunity to discuss the proposals in specific working groups organised according to each of the six ENRD CP priorities.</p>
Group discussions	
<p>14.20 – 15:15</p> <p>Capacity Building: Interactive exercise and discussion</p>	<p>ROUND 1: CAPACITY BUILDING</p> <p>Working Group 1: Support more effective and simpler programme implementation</p> <p>Participants recommended focusing on three main topics for future workshops and related CP outputs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Preparing for the Performance Review: Participants indicated that it would be extremely useful to have a workshop to explain the procedures relevant for performance review exercise. - Simplification: Participants recommended taking into account the conclusions of the high-level working group on simplification and the proposals of the Omnibus Regulation in order to look at how results-based approaches and simplification could be applied to certain key Measures (e.g. the use of SCOs in M4) and continuing simplification work in LEADER (M19). - Knowledge Transfer (M1) and Advisory Services (M2). There is a need for mapping how these RDP Measures are implemented in different Member States and identifying the implementation bottlenecks and potential solutions. There was a particular interest in exploring the

	<p>implementation of M2 in a way that builds on the work that EIP-Agri has already carried out on Farm Advisory Services.</p> <p>Working Group 2: Strengthen NRNs and NSUs</p> <p>Participants supported the proposals put forward. Key comments were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Communication: Participants outlined the need for general training on communication (for example, by producing videos and communicating through websites). They also pointed to the usefulness of analysing NRN communication plans in regionalised Member States as well as the tools they use to reach different types of stakeholders. - Sharing good practices among NRNs: Participants highlighted the importance of harmonising the criteria and procedures for the identification, definition and description of good practices. - Specific topics for future workshops: There was strong interest in topics such as ‘rural proofing’, continuing the work on generational renewal and enhancing linkages with third countries. <p>Working Group 3: Simpler and more effective rolling out of CLLD</p> <p>Participants made a number of recommendations for implementation of all proposed activities. They identified two challenges: the administrative burden in LEADER and the need for more involvement of local stakeholders and LAGs themselves in discussions.</p> <p>They suggested focusing on three cross-cutting aspects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Building the LEADER ‘Community’: LAGs should be more involved in peer to peer exchanges. The proposal to hold a major LEADER/ LAG conference was also welcomed. - Better information: there is a need for sharing more information, in particular about delivery models which reduce bureaucracy in LEADER implementation, about ‘What LEADER does best’ and about the self-evaluation of LAGs. - Improving implementation: participants suggested covering elements related to simplification of LEADER (as a crucial priority for this programming period), aiming also to contribute to the discussions about the CAP post 2020.
<p>15:45-16:30 Thematic Priorities: Interactive exercise and discussion</p>	<p>ROUND 2: THEMATIC PRIORITIES</p> <p>Working Group 4: Smart and Competitive Rural Areas</p>

Participants agreed that the focus should be on **Rural Services**. They argued that this topic could be tackled from two distinct but to some extent interrelated angles:

- Firstly, the opportunities created by digitisation in the provision of services in rural areas: (health, education, social care, transport, retail, tourism, etc.) This might also cover strategies for the provision of broadband - such as demand aggregation, attracting new sources of finance (links to other EU funds and private funding);
- Secondly, community-led and organised approaches to service regeneration in rural areas.

The thematic work could identify examples of both social and technological innovation in service provision in different rural areas across Europe, analysing both the opportunities and the bottlenecks at local level. It would also be useful to explore the strategic use of certain RDP Measures such as basic services and village renewal (M7) and LEADER (M19) in coordination with other public and private sources of funding.

Working Group 5: Supporting the transition to the Green Economy

The participants acknowledged that all the issues identified for discussion were very relevant. It was important to ensure that the outcomes are practical and closely linked to the needs of implementing bodies such as Managing Authorities. The following topics were considered:

- **Water management**, looking at different levels of policy delivery at national, regional and farm level;
- **Biodiversity** is an overarching strategic issue in which work would mainly need to focus on communication, as so much has already been done in this field.
- **Climate change** was also considered to be a very broad subject in which substantial work is already being carried out by EIP-Agri. One approach could be to analyse the contribution of the different RDP Measures for preventing climate change, how to best communicate the importance of the issues and the role of Rural Development policy.

Working Group 6: Responding to demographic change and promoting social inclusion in rural areas

The initial suggested themes were further structured and refined by participants. The overarching theme proposed was '**Social Support Systems**', in

	<p>particular to retain or attract young people and to strengthen social cohesion in rural areas. This would include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Supporting access to housing, to land – and other support services - especially for young people and new arrivals to rural areas (including young farmers or migrants); - Strengthening local communities, e.g. through animation or cultural activities; - Technical advice and support, e.g. assisting young farmers who would like to start farming but have no family connections, supporting women entrepreneurs, etc.
<h3 style="background-color: #008080; color: white; padding: 5px;">Outlook</h3>	
<p>17.00 – 17.30 Preliminary ideas for the next Assembly</p>	<p>Mario Milouchev (DG AGRI) introduced a series of potential topics that could be addressed at the next RN Assembly meeting. These included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The results of the EU Rural Network’s self-assessment; • The state of play of the discussions on the future of the CAP and the communication that will be published by DG AGRI; • Further information on initiatives to support digitisation. <p>In the discussion that followed, SG members suggested a series of additional topics for consideration:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentation of the results and findings of the <i>ex-post evaluations</i> of the 2007-2013 Rural Development Programmes (RDPs). DG AGRI will check whether the synthesis report of <i>ex-post evaluations</i> will be ready for the next Assembly; • Simplification (including LEADER) and the main findings from the High-level Group on simplification; • Results-based approaches; • The contribution of rural areas to the Circular Economy; • Information on the main outcomes from the next European Rural Parliament; • Feedback from different countries on what it is going on with regards the future of the CAP as well as examples on the implementation of the current RD policy which could support discussions on the future of the CAP.

	<p>Some SG members made the point that the Assembly meeting provides an excellent opportunity for building common approaches to specific topics (as happened at the Cork 2.0 European Conference on Rural Development).</p> <p>SG members also asked for clarification about the role of the Steering Group and Assembly in discussions about the future of the CAP. They argued that the Assembly has the advantage of bringing together a very wide range of rural development stakeholders.</p> <p>DG AGRI stressed that discussions will be taking place at the Civil Dialogue Group. At the Conference planned for 7 July 2017 the results of the public CAP consultation will be presented. Depending on the timing, the Communication on the future of the CAP will be also presented and discussed at the next Assembly.</p> <p>DG AGRI agreed to consider the points made by SG members. The future role and potential outputs expected from the next Assembly meeting can be discussed in the next SG meeting in October 2017.</p>
<p>Closing remarks</p>	
<p>Closing remarks</p>	<p>Mario Milouchev (DG AGRI) thanked participants for their active participation and stressed the key role they play in guiding the work of the Rural Networks. He also insisted on the importance of maintaining the momentum around the Cork 2.0 Declaration, and reaffirmed the central role that the Declaration will play in future policy discussions.</p> <p>He repeated that ‘rural proofing’ could become a crucial tool, as rural and agricultural policies increasingly need to interact with the other European policies and instruments in a wider context.</p> <p>He also referred to the complementarities and synergies between EIP-Agri and ENRD activities. He particularly stressed the relevance of the Agri Innovation Summit, which is to be organized jointly by both networks together with Portuguese authorities.</p> <p>As regards the self-assessment, it was reiterated that the questionnaire will be launched over the summer, and the valuable suggestions of the SG members will be taken into account. Valuable suggestions for future activities of the ENRD and for the next Assembly, which will be discussed in more detail within DG AGRI, were also acknowledged.</p>

	Finally, M. Milouchev encouraged participation in the coming Governance meetings.
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Annex – Original list of proposals for topics under ENRD CP priorities

NRD CP Y4 AWP, Capacity building – initial ideas and suggestions

Priority 1 Capacity building and peer exchange to support more effective and simpler programme implementation. What are the key opportunities and bottlenecks for improving RDP implementation at this stage of the programming cycle. How can networking help?		
Possible topic/activity	For	Against
1. Workshop: From compliance to results. Financial management + performance.		
2. Capacity building for RDP delivery chain actors – related to 1		
3. WS: How to carry out the performance reserve exercise		
4. WS: M1 Knowledge Transfer + M2 Advisory services		
5. WS: Nutrient management plans		
6. RDP Screening: Assessment of enhanced AIRs		
7. Other ideas? (e.g. WS on strategic use of M7 for smart villages)		
Priority 2 Capacity building and peer exchange to strengthen NRNs and NSUs How can EU activity best strengthen NRNs and NSUs to fulfil their key objectives of increasing stakeholder involvement, improving RDP implementation and communicating more widely?		
1. WS on NRNs as a tool for improving RDP implementation in <i>regionalised countries</i>		
2. WS and possible 'community of practice' on <i>NRN communication</i>		
3. 3 NRN meetings - possible topics: entrepreneurship, exploring the possibilities for building links with Rural Development Networks outside the EU, strengthening NRN engagement with specific stakeholders		
4. Good practice competition for projects from MS linked to NRN meeting		
5. Structured exchange/capacity building with MS and regions with newer or less developed networks		
6. Continue active involvement in/joint workshops with stakeholder networks – CEJA, COPA, advisors,..		
7. Other ideas?		
Priority 3 Capacity building and peer exchange to support a simpler and more effective rolling out of CLLD How to spread good practice among LEADER actors on a) simplification and performance based approaches b) responding to emerging rural challenges		
1. WS and associated work package on “putting simplification into practice” (SCOs, Umbrella Projects, reasonableness of costs and other improvements possible in the current period as the result of recent developments).		
2. Consolidating an EU wide Community of Practice around a) cooperation and b) innovation. Use of strategic cooperation between LAGS as a peer to peer improvement tool.		

3. A major LAG Conference now LAG selection in EU is (almost) completed: “Doing it right. Making a difference”.		
4. Strengthening information and analysis of what works and does not work in CLLD (from enhanced AIRs, ex-post evaluation, survey, longitudinal case studies, PWG work....)		
5. Contributions to joint DGs CLLD event (led by DG REGIO and EMPL) and Open Days Event. Active involvement and contribution to Lisbon Innovation Summit		
6. Active involvement and communication through LEADER networking events –		
7. Other ideas?		

ENRD CP Y4 AWP –Thematic activities – initial ideas and suggestions

<p>Priority 4 Smart and competitive rural areas (for P4 the suggestions are not necessarily mutually exclusive) How to use the RDPs to promote technological improvements in connectivity and other (social) innovations revitalise rural areas through:</p>		
Possible topic/activity	For	Against
1. Regenerating <u>public and private services</u> – such as retail, transport, health, care, education, culture...		
2. Creating a more attractive rural <u>business environment</u> – for food chain, tourism, distance workers and other tradeable activities		
3. How specific RDP measures can be used more strategically to build smart villages (especially, M7 for basic services and village renewal, LEADER, M16, etc)		
4. “Proofing” other EU policies from a rural perspective and extending good examples of synergy and complementary.		
5. Other ideas?		
<p>Priority 5 Supporting the transition to a green economy in rural areas (for P5 1 activities should focus on 1 topic) How the RDPs can support a more resource efficient rural economy through:</p>		
1. Water management: focusing both on its supply, its use and its quality. There are clear links to climate change.		
2. Biodiversity possibly linked to the Natura Directives Action Plan		
3. Climate change focusing on carbon sequestration and land use, land use change and forestry (LULUCF) type actions and/or mitigation. Encouraging further MS investment and stakeholder take-up		
4. Nutrient management plans (MA WS under P1.)		
5. Other ideas?		

Priority 6 Responding to demographic change and promoting social inclusion in rural areas.

How to use the RDPs to Invest in people and build a more “social Europe in rural areas?”

1. Attracting and retaining young people (both into farming and other rural businesses)		
2. Continue work on role of RD policy for integrating migrants in rural areas		
3. Social proofing rural policies/rural proofing other policies		
4. Other ideas?		
6. Climate change focussing on carbon sequestration and land use, land use change and forestry (LULUCF) type actions and/or mitigation. Encouraging further MS investment and stakeholder take-up		
7. Nutrient management plans (MA WS under P1.)		
8. Other ideas?		