



European Rural Networks' Steering Group

Report of the 4th Steering Group Meeting

Brussels, 4 March 2016



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Introduction

09.30 – 09.45

Welcome and introduction by Aldo Longo, DG AGRI

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

Aldo Longo (DG AGRI, Director) welcomed the Steering Group (SG) members and introduced the agenda of the day. The objectives of the meeting are:

- Strengthen the involvement of SG members in the Rural Networks' activities
- Further fine-tune priorities for 2016
- Reinforce synergy and complementarity between activities
- Make progress on methods for monitoring and assessing the results of the Rural Networks' activities

He highlighted that the morning session focuses on the **coordination of the capacity building activities** carried out by the various European Network Support Units, in order to ensure that this work supports a better take up of the opportunities provided by the RDPs.

During the afternoon session, SG members have the possibility to provide their views on how to **strengthen the synergies between the main thematic areas of work of the networks** - (a) Smart and Competitive rural areas and (b) Transition to the green economy - as well as to provide input for the focus of the Rural Networks' Self-assessment.

[Overview of activities of the networks, Matthias Langemeyer, DG AGRI](#)

Matthias Langemeyer (DG AGRI, acting Head of Unit) presented the main activities carried out by the two European Networks (ENRD and EIP-AGRI) in line with the EU Rural Networks' Strategic Framework and the priorities identified by the RN Assembly in December 2015.

The focus of the activities are around capacity building and the two thematic areas: (a) Smart and Competitive rural areas and (b) Transition to the green economy.

Capacity building activities to support the implementation of the RDPs

09.45 – 10.30

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

Part I

[ENRD capacity building activities](#),
Paul Soto, ENRD
CP

▪ Making network activities more useful for stakeholders

Paul Soto (ENRD Contact Point Team Leader) presented the main **capacity building and peer exchange activities** that will be carried out in the first half of 2016 by the ENRD-CP to support better RDP implementation.

[EIP-AGRI capacity building activities](#),
Pacôme Elouna
Eyenga, EIP-SP

Pacôme Elouna Eyenga (EIP-AGRI Service Point Team Leader) introduced the main **capacity building activities** conducted to support the EIP-AGRI's implementation in the RDPs.

Open discussion

Buzz-group discussions looked at ideas for making network activities more useful for stakeholders.

Discussions highlighted **good practices** as a key instrument. In this context, SG members called also for the sharing of negative experiences/lessons learnt. However, to make these lessons more useful, **dissemination methods and channels** could be usefully enhanced and extended (e.g. more videos).

Need was seen in better **coordinating the transfer of information** from the three units at European level to networks in the Member States and regions, e.g. by establishing focal points with an overview of the activities of the ENRD CP, EIP SP and Evaluation Helpdesk (HD).

There was demand for more **translation of materials** into the different European languages. The need to produce outputs in a **more accessible style** was also highlighted – for example, by producing Focus Group reports in less scientific language. These approaches could hope to make outputs more useful for more stakeholder groups.

Some SG members questioned how strong the links are in practice between **Focus Groups** (FGs) and Operational Groups (OGs) and contended that FGs do not appear to be demand-driven from the bottom up. It was explained that FGs can inspire work on the ground and further the creation of more OGs.

Participants also highlighted the importance of more information and greater clarity around **implementation of certain Measures**, notably the Cooperation Measure (M16), support for setting up Operational Groups and the implementation of advisory services.

11.00 – 11.45

Part II

[ENRD capacity building support to NRNs](#), Edina Ocsko, ENRD C

[Strengthening the role of NRNs in EIP-AGRI](#), Margarida Ambara, EIP-SP

[ENRD LEADER/CLLD capacity building](#), John Grieve, ENRD CP

Open discussion

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

▪ **Strengthening the role of NRNs**

Edina Ocsko presented an overview of the ENRD's ongoing and **planned activities in support of NRNs**, as discussed at the NRN meeting held in Slovenia on 1 March 2016.

Margarida Ambar presented the EIP-AGRI Service Point capacity building activities **strengthening the role of NRNs in fostering innovation** through the EIP-AGRI.

John Grieve presented the main action points that emerged during the 3rd LEADER/CLLD Sub-group meeting and ongoing ENRD **activities in support of LEADER and CLLD**.

Buzz-group discussions looked at Ideas for strengthening the role of NRNs

Participants were asked to express their interest in specific activities of the networks in which they have a particular interest and/or would like to get involved.

Participants commented that **exchange of good practices** would be very useful on a broad range of topics, notably:

- how **Simplified Cost Options** are applied across other funds
- effective **CLLD implementation**
- how to set up **networks that effectively engage stakeholders**, etc.

Participants also pointed out that there are specific capacity building needs for NRNs, notably around: **LEADER; evaluation; fostering innovation; Measure 16 cooperation; Operational Groups**, etc.

Other highlighted activities for the networks included **engaging actors/institutions that have a continuous role in rural areas but may not be recipients of RDP funding**, e.g. advisory services.

Useful approaches may include disseminating summary information on all events that might be of interest to the NRNs' stakeholders, providing support on the development of the LAGs' electronic platforms under development, etc.

11.45 – 12.30

[Capacity-building activities to support the evaluation of RDPs](#), Hannes Wimmer, ENRD Evaluation Helpdesk

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

Supporting the evaluation of RDPs

1. Increasing the knowledge on evaluation in the Member States

Hannes Wimmer, team leader of the *ENRD Evaluation Helpdesk* presented the “Capacity building activities to support the evaluation of RDPs”. The Evaluation Helpdesk address evaluation needs in the Member States by offering **capacity building activities on four topics**: (1) the Common Monitoring and Evaluation System, (2) setting-up the system to answer Evaluation Questions, (3) evaluation of LEADER/CLLD and Local Development Strategies, and (4) evaluation of National Rural Networks.

The **events were targeted at different stakeholders**: representatives from Managing Authorities, ministries, evaluators, LAGs, NSUs, and others. In total since May 2015 more than 850 participants attended these capacity building events. Participants had rated the quality of the events as very high and confirmed a significant increase of evaluation-related knowledge.

2. Sharing experience from capacity building activities

During the presentation, **Maria Custódia Correia** (Direção Geral de Agricultura e Desenvolvimento Rural), **shared her experience** when hosting the Evaluation Helpdesk’s capacity building event on “evaluation of LEADER/LDS” in Lisbon in May 2015. The training participants, approximately 70 representatives from Local Action Groups, could learn how to define and use indicators, understand how to answer common evaluation questions, and learn the role of different actors in the evaluation process.

Open discussion

After the presentation, an interactive exercise was conducted with the SG members in order to gather **ideas concerning the needs for future capacity building activities related to the evaluation of RDPs**. Three questions were discussed by the participants in little working groups, namely:

1. Who needs to build evaluation capacity in your Member State?
2. On what topics does capacity in evaluation need to be built in 2016?
3. How can networks support the building of evaluation capacity in your Member State?

Answers were reported to the plenary and collected in worksheets. The results are summarised in Annex 1.

Strengthening involvement and building synergy between the thematic work of the rural networks

14.00-14.30

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

Thematic Activities:
[ENRD Contact Point, EIP-Agri Service Point, Paul Soto \(ENRD CP\)](#)
[Pacôme Elouna Eyenga, \(EIP SP\)](#)

Paul Soto (ENRD Contact Point Team Leader) and Pacôme Elouna Eyenga (EIP-AGRI Service Point Team Leader) made a joint presentation of the main activities of the ENRD and EIP-AGRI respectively on the two thematic topics of:

- ‘Smart and Competitive Rural Areas’ and
- ‘Promoting the transition to the Green Economy.’

14.30 – 15.45
Parallel Group discussions:

Smart and Competitive Rural Areas

SG members separated into two groups to discuss key questions around strengthening involvement and building synergy between the thematic work of the rural networks.

Discussions in the ‘Smart and Competitive Rural Areas’ group focused directly on the practical aspects of communication and exchange between the networks: both at European level and with the broader network of stakeholders. The group agreed three recommendations for each question:

How can ENRD and EIP-AGRI feed in and out of each other’s work?

1. The two networks should send **representatives to each other’s meetings** to act as ‘messengers’ (feeding in) and ‘rapporteurs’ (feeding out);
2. Each network should actively contribute to **dissemination of each other’s outputs** and messages – this may require some tailoring to specific audiences (e.g. level of technical or scientific language);
3. There could usefully be **greater clarity on the distinct roles of the two networks** – and particularly on who specific activities/meetings of both networks are aimed at: “Fewer groups, better targeted”

What can the European Rural Networks do to ensure better take-up and use of the information by stakeholders?

1. Make better use of the **NRNs as dissemination channels** to reach stakeholders on the ground (requiring improved two-way communication with the NRNs)
2. Produce **more communicable outputs** – both in terms of shorter, easier-to-digest written materials (e.g. factsheets) and alternative – and more visual - formats (e.g. videos and use of pictures/graphs).
3. Provide for **better communication with SG members** – facilitating ongoing discussions between meetings, making preparatory materials available in advance of meetings.

Green Economy

Discussions in this group started with a general discussion in relation to the **definition of 'Green Economy'**. The concept still remains unclear for some of the stakeholders mostly due to the variety of related terms linked this wider policy area (e.g. bio-economy, circular economy). The work of the networks can be oriented to clarify the concept through good examples of projects and practices that show real and practical environmental and economic outcomes.

a) How can ENRD and EIP-AGRI feed in and out of each other's work?

Specific areas where EIP-AGRI's work can feed into other of the networks' activities include:

- The **results of EIP-AGRI Focus Groups** should be disseminated and communicated both to MAs and NRNs in order to feed into Operational Groups (OGs) more directly and into the capacity-building and thematic activities supported by the ENRD.
- The **results of the OGs** could also be communicated to the capacity building and thematic activities supported by the ENRD and used to inform future EIP-AGRI Focus Groups.

An important aim of the above would be for both networks to work together to **scale up areas of work which are producing useful results** related to the Green Economy.

Also, support to **scaling up the results of LEADER projects** can feed the work of the two networks. In this respect, the dissemination of good practices in those areas together with an effective dissemination of the information becomes crucial. The main starting points for this would be the ENRD Good practices projects and the outcomes of the various LEADER/CLLD capacity-building activities.

b) What can the European Rural Networks do to ensure better take-up and use of the information by stakeholders?

Often, the information developed by the different Support Units of the EIP-AGRI and ENRD are channelled to the stakeholders and the final beneficiaries primarily through the National Rural Networks. **Extending the immediate target audience of this information to EU organisations** (particularly, but not only, those in the Civil Dialogue Group) will enhance the outreach to the ground, as well as provide a reality check on the usefulness of the information developed.

Additionally, depending on specific interests and expertise, the two Networks could usefully **initiate exchanges with organisations which are not members of the Rural Networks' Assembly** and/or other networks. For the Green Economy, information exchange with the CDG on 'Environment and climate change' could be useful.

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| <p>16.15 – 16.30 Feedback from Parallel Groups</p> | <p>Ed Thorpe (ENRD CP) gave an overview of the main discussion points of the workshop on Smart and Competitive Rural Areas. (Please see above.)</p> <p>Mike Gregory (ENRD CP) presented the key outcomes of the workshop on Green Economy. (Please see above)</p> |
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Assessing results

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| <p>16.30 – 17.00 Assessing results of the European Rural Networks, Edina Ocsko ENRD CP</p> | <p><i>Note: Presentations can be directly downloaded by clicking on the link provided</i></p> <p>Edina Ocsko (ENRD CP) introduced the next steps in setting up an effective monitoring and assessment framework. She presented the draft proposal for the self-assessment framework for the EU Rural Networks.</p> <p>As a key feature, output indicators were introduced in the framework by the three European Network Support Units in relation to activities defined in the EU strategic framework for Rural Networks.</p> |
| <p>Open discussion</p> | <p>SG participants reflected on what would be valuable for them to know about the achievements of the EU Rural Networks. The results of these reflections are presented in Annex II.</p> |

Closing and next steps

17.00 – 17.30

Upcoming events,
Matthias
Langemeyer, DG
AGRI

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

Mr Matthias Langemeyer presented the dates for major upcoming events of the European Rural Networks, namely:

- 5th Sub-Group on Innovation – 02 June 2016
- 5th RN Steering Group – 16 June 2016
- 4th Leader/CLLD Sub-Group – 2nd half September (tbc)
- 6th Sub-Group on Innovation – October 2016 (tbc)
- 6th RN Steering Group – 25 October 2016 (tbc)
- 3rd RN Assembly – 01 December 2016

Mr Longo encouraged linking activities to actors and their needs, looking at national/regional needs, needs of Managing Authorities, Paying Agencies, auditors and final beneficiaries.

The risk of overloading stakeholders with the large number of events, workshops and circulating information was recognised. However, the coordination efforts that are being undertaken by the two European Networks while selecting themes and dates for upcoming events was stressed.

Closing remarks,
Aldo Longo, DG
AGRI

Mr Longo highlighted that the 4th Steering Group meeting represented another big step forward in moving towards full speed of operations of the EU Rural Networks.

The exchange and active participation at the meeting permitted to learn more about the dynamics and needs of the networks. This participation level should be maintained and brought forward to the next meetings.

It was suggested that the Rural Networks Assembly should look for demand-led 'clusters' of activity (e.g. around the umbrella project initiative that took place back to back with the LEADER/CLLD Sub-group meeting.)

At the next Steering Group meeting, there will be an update on the EU Rural Networks' self-assessment tool, and nominees to this Group will start looking into next year's priorities and planning to be then discussed at the next Assembly meeting.

Annex I: Outcome of groupwork on “Capacity building activities to support the evaluation of RDPs”

Steering Group members were asked to identify needs and ideas for future capacity building activities related to evaluation. The following tables summarise the answers that were found in relation to the three questions discussed during the group work.

Question 1: Who needs to build evaluation capacity in your Member State?

| WHO | WHY |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Managing Authorities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To know the legal evaluation requirements (e.g. what needs to be reported in 2017) - To know how to answer evaluation questions through indicators and data |
| NRNs and NSU/NRNs | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To enable them to provide support to LAGs on evaluation-related issues and self-assessment |
| Local Action Groups and Operational Groups | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To increase knowledge on the new CMES - To understand the purpose of collecting data for evaluation and self-assessment. |
| Monitoring Committee | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To be generally updated and informed on the CMES; - To have a coherent picture of the EU M&E system. |
| Evaluators | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To update them on the new CMES - To get to know the legal evaluation requirements - To learn more about the use of evaluation-results (intended/unintended) |
| Implementing bodies, service providers for Operational Groups etc. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To know why data are collected - To know how to use of evaluation results |
| Other stakeholders (NGOs, European Networks, beneficiaries) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To foster discussion, feedbacks, and use of evaluation results |
| All actors | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To integrate and consult actors from different thematic areas (environmental, social, economic, etc.) - To increase transparency of the overall system |

Question 2: On what topics does capacity in evaluation need to be built in 2016?

| TOPIC | CONTENT |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Evaluation of NRNs / LEADER/CLLD | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Purpose of evaluation - Developing evaluation questions and simple indicators for NRNs/LEADER/CLLD - Monitoring and evaluation of results indicators - Interrelation between evaluation and self-assessment |
| Data collection and data-management for evaluation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Data collection tools and methods at local level - Environmental indicators |
| Managing and planning evaluations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Long term planning of evaluation - Costs-effective evaluations - Good reporting on evaluation - Making better use of evaluation results - Showing failure stories to learn from mistakes |
| Evaluation of multi-fund approach | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - RDP contribution to Common Strategic Framework - Evaluation-set-ups in other ESI funds - How to integrate evaluation of RDP with other ESI Funds - Developing common tools to evaluate results from different funds |
| Evaluation basics | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Understanding the difference between CMES and CMEF - Common evaluation questions - Common understanding of indicators |
| Specific evaluation topics | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How to assess environmental and socio-economic effects? - How to assess efficiency (value for money) - Evaluation of delivery systems (project selection, implementation, etc.) - Measurement of jobs created, - Assessment of complementarity of RDP with other funds - Evaluation of administrative costs - Evaluation of innovative approaches |

Question 3: How can networks support the building of evaluation capacity in your member state?

| PHASE | Potential support provided by networks |
|-------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Preparation of capacity building activities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pre-testing the evaluation capacity of Member States - Highlight the results from previous evaluations - Initiative cooperation between Helpdesk and NRNs to act as multipliers of capacity building activities |
| Implementation of capacity building activities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Foster exchange of experience (e.g. data collection, new evaluation requirements etc.) - Support peer and self-evaluation of LAGs through cooperation measures; - To consolidate a common understanding of the evaluation requirements. - Fostering follow up actions of capacity building events and further capitalise on it. |
| Dissemination of evaluation findings | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Disseminate evaluation results - Support organisation of meeting/seminars during the dissemination phase - Interact with national/regional stakeholder organisations in sharing information and knowledge - Show good and bad practices. |

Annex II: Valuable elements to be considered in the Self-assessment of the EU Rural Networks

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| Impacts | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compare the impact of the work between the NRNs and maybe learn something about the results • Impact indicators is needed to define which are the impacts indicators |
| Effectiveness | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the effectiveness of the NRN work at national and EU level? • To what extent do the EU RN contribute to the achievement of the EU 2020 objectives? • How is the information produced by the EU RN used at NRN level? Article? Email? Seminar? • What happen with the results of EIP AGRI focus groups? Projects in MS? Good practice examples? Dissemination of information? • How actions points in the various meetings are transformed into real actions? • What went right? What went wrong? Analysis of why? |
| Results | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What kind of changes have been made in real life thanks to the proposal that EU RN have been proposed to the EC? • What is happening with those proposals after the meeting? • What is done with the collection of good practices (only informative? Real exchange?) • Good and bad examples. How were they used? • How innovations set in practice in as many MS as possible and farmers with an interest? • The share of innovation produced that was/will be applied in practice (useful for farmers) • Practical applications of the EU rural Networks. |
| Added value | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improvement of added value of Good Practices • What is the real value added of the new governance structure / EU RN? • To know about new and innovative initiatives (campaigns, contents, awards, brochures...) |

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|--------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Relevance | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent have the need of the stakeholders were addressed by the activities of the EU RN? • Relevance relevant is the information it generated/the exchange of information it facilitated (best practices, learning from each other, aiming to improve rural areas and the livelihood within). Furthermore, this also applies for the RDP measures which can be effectively measured by their uptake. • Assessment from the MAs and stakeholders |
| Other suggestions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment from the MAs and stakeholders • Concrete information (sheets, flyers, handouts,) on how to apply for support, assessment of already achieved projects (and dissemination of related information to potential stakeholders, circulation of information in regionalized MS). • Easily find examples of projects and contact persons to discuss practical aspects • How it is ensured that evaluation is done with the same method in all MS? • Examples of GPs • Translation of the FG results and TWGs |