



European Rural Networks' Steering Group

Report of the 1st Steering Group Meeting

Brussels, 25 February 2015



Table of Contents

I. Session 1: What is the Steering Group’s mandate?	4
II. Session 2: Topics and Priorities	6
Rural Networks’ workplan: possible topics and priorities.....	6
Group work on topics and priorities	6
III. Session 3: Workplan 2015	8
Workplan 2015 – Part I	8
2015 Frameworks of activities	8
Workplan 2015 – Part II	9
Group work on tools and activities	9
IV. Session 4: Assessment of ENRD’s and EIP-AGRI’s network activities	11
Evaluation and Self-assessment	11
V. Session 5: Coordination with other Groups	13
First exchange on expert groups and committees.....	13
Wrap-up session	14
Next steps and events	14
Annex I: Details of Group Work on topics and priorities (session 2)	15
Annex II: Details of Group Work on tools and activities (session 3)	18

Introduction

Who are the Steering Group's members?

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

9.30 – 9.45

Opening remarks by Aldo Longo, Director, Directorate H, DG AGRI

Director Aldo Longo opened the 1st meeting of the Rural Networks Steering Group (SG). He underlined the importance of discussing and clarifying the SG's mandate and the contribution the SG will make to guiding and coordinating the work of the two European Rural Networks.

Mr Longo noted the very high interest for participation in the SG. This interest is expected to have a very positive impact on the SG's work as it is crucial to have committed members that actively participate and contribute with ideas.

In the following icebreaker, participants shared expectations for the work of the SG in pairs. In addition to meeting specific information needs, participants generally expected the SG to be a space to discuss how best both to ensure coordination between the networks and support and empower rural areas and communities.

I. Session 1: What is the Steering Group's mandate?

The mandate of the Steering Group

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

9.45 – 9.55
[THE "MANDATE"
of the
STEERING GROUP,](#)
by Antonella Zona
(DG AGRI)

Antonella Zona of DG AGRI presented the main lines of the Steering Group's mandate and described its activities within the overall organisational structure responsible for the coordination of the networks.

Brief summary of discussion

Participants inquired about the capacity of the networks to pursue additional work proposed by the Steering Group and requested some guidance on the volume of work that is expected to be carried out by the networks.

DG AGRI clarified that this initial year is quite special since the activities of the networks had started before the coordination bodies were set up. However for the second half of the 2015 onwards, the activities will be framed by the strategic lines provided by the Assembly and coordinated by the Steering Group.

Participants asked whether it will be within the SG's capacity to make wholesale changes to the sub-groups' proposed work or whether the mandate of the sub-groups can only be modified by the Assembly.

DG AGRI confirmed that the sub-groups receive their mandate from the Assembly and they refer back to the Assembly. The mandate cannot therefore be changed by the SG. Appropriate information and feedback channels between the SG and the sub-groups will be arranged.

The need to receive documents associated with meetings in good time was highlighted, so that participants can discuss and exchange with the people they are representing on the SG.

It was also highlighted that LAGs need to be properly represented in the Assembly, as well as in the sub-groups on LEADER and Innovation. The Commission agreed, and assured that presence of nominated LAGs will be ensured in line with the composition of each group¹.

Thematic Subgroups' of the Rural Networks' Assembly

10.10 – 10.20
[Subgroup on
innovation for
agricultural
productivity and
sustainability,](#)

Iman Boot of DG AGRI presented the main lines of the mandate and composition of the Innovation sub-group. He also announced that the first meeting of the Innovation sub-group is envisaged for 10 March 2015.

¹ This point was actually raised in session 4, but recorded here based on the subject under discussion.

by Iman Boot (DG
AGRI)

10.20 – 10.30
[Subgroup on Leader
and Community-led
Local Development](#),
by Riin Saluveer
(DG AGRI)

Riin Saluveer of DG AGRI presented the main lines for the mandate and composition of the CLLD/LEADER sub-group and highlighted that more detailed information about the setting up of the sub-group can be found on the document 'EU Rural Networks Strategic Framework and governance bodies' distributed to all participants. The first meeting of the CLLD/LEADER sub-group is planned for 21 April 2015.

Brief summary of discussion

Responding to questions on the sharing of documents, minutes and agendas, DG AGRI confirmed that the principle is to share information and ensure transparency on the different thematic activities through the ENRD website. The ENRD website is still in a process of development and improvement for the new period.

DG AGRI underlined that SG members should not only expect to be delivered information. They should also proactively work along with the networks to find ways to further evolve and develop the exchange and flow of information.

The importance of having information always available was underlined. Therefore, it will be required to use all of the available web and communication tools.

II. Session 2: Topics and Priorities

Rural Networks' workplan: possible topics and priorities

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

10.55 – 11.10
Session 2
introduction: Topics
and priorities, by
Riin Saluveer (DG
AGRI)

This session aimed to discuss and further refine the most important topics for the work of the Rural Networks in 2015.

Participants were introduced to a number of priority topics for the Rural Networks as identified in previous work: at the first meeting of the Rural Networks' Assembly; during the last meetings of the ENRD Coordination Committee (2007-13) and the LEADER sub-committee (2007-2013); and from various organisations' direct suggestions to DG AGRI. RN Assembly suggestions and prioritisation were taken as baseline for further work during this session, as the Assembly provides for the strategic framework for the ENRD and EIP network and the SG will work along those lines.

To help identify the most relevant priority topics for the Rural Networks, participants were asked to keep in mind: the relevance of the topics across all EU Member States; the policy cycle and the current point in that cycle; and work already done in past years. Finally, participants were encouraged to find a balance between methodological and theme-based topics.

Group work on topics and priorities

11.10 – 12.15

The Steering Group delegates formed five discussion groups, each of which worked on the indicative list of themes provided by the Rural Networks' Assembly to further refine topics and highlight those deserving particular attention in 2015. In the last part of the session, all groups shared the results of their work allowing for an open discussion.

The outcomes of the exercise confirmed that, overall, all key and important topics to be considered for the future thematic work were included in the initial list produced by the Assembly. A certain balance was also recognised among categories of topics, embracing more horizontal methodological issues as well as themes related to the competitiveness of agriculture and forestry, sustainable management of natural resources and territorial development.

The discussion contributed to sharpening the focus of the original list of topics by clarifying the underlying issues, clustering and adding new topics. Seven additional items were identified by the Steering Group as specific/operational topics deserving attention.

In the last stage of the session, each discussion group expressed its view about which topics should be considered priority areas for the thematic work of the EU Networks in 2015.

In general, high priority for future work was attributed to the following topics: Management and performance of RDPs (with a particular focus on the rolling out of RDPs); **Empowerment of advisory services**, knowledge transfer and **innovation** (wide approach).

*See annex I for **the detailed list of topics and** more details of the group work.*

III. Session 3: Workplan 2015

Workplan 2015 – Part I

2015 Frameworks of activities

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

12.15 – 12.20

Introduction of speakers by Chairman

Marcus Holzer from DG AGRI opened the third session of the meeting and introduced the representatives of the Support Units. The purpose of the first part of the session was to present the full range of tools and resources that will be available for networking activities in 2015 and which the SG will need to coordinate.

12.20 - 12.30

[ENRD Contact Point activity plan 2015](#),

by Paul Soto (ENRD CP)

Paul Soto presented the main activities and tools of the ENRD Contact Point for 2015.

12.30 – 12.40

[EIP-AGRI Service Point activity plan 2015](#),

by Pacôme Elouna Eyenga (EIP-AGRI Service Point)

Pacôme Elouna Eyenga presented the main tools and activities of the EIP AGRI Service Point for 2015.

12.40 – 12.50

[Evaluation Helpdesk activity plan 2015](#),

by Hannes Wimmer (EHD)

Hannes Wimmer presented the main tools and activities of the Evaluation Helpdesk for 2015.

Workplan 2015 – Part II

Group work on tools and activities

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

14.30 – 15.45
Priorities for 2015
European Rural
Networks work:
Selected topics from
group works of
Session 2

This session aimed to discuss the most suitable tools and activities to address the topics identified as most important for the 2015 work plan of the European Rural Networks. On the basis of discussions in Session II, the ten topics considered as important by SG members were identified (not ranked):

1. Simplification for all (stakeholders) in order to achieve the relevant objectives
2. Empowering advisory services
3. Local food, short supply chain, rural-urban partnerships, small farms
4. Pillar 1: Pillar 2 linkages
5. Demographic change and social inclusion
6. Multi-fund approaches
7. Green economy related to jobs and growth
8. Starting up the NRNs
9. Evaluation of networking activities of NRNs
10. Climate change

A request to include the topic "Rural Services" within the list of identified priorities for 2015 was discarded in order to limit the list to the ten topics considered most interesting for immediate work by a majority of SG members.

Participants split back into five groups and each chose two topics from the ten highlighted during the morning session. For each topic, the groups discussed the relative usefulness of different tools¹ to meet different needs. This sought to provide some guidance on how different topics could best be addressed in practice by the networks. The groups proposed a number of specific activities. For the complete list of discussion points see Annex 1.

Group work

Four key messages are drawn from the feedback provided by the five working groups that took place in this session.

Firstly, the ten topics discussed obtained a considerable degree of consensus among the representatives of the steering group. This list can always be

¹ For a list of tools see Annex 2

adapted by the Steering Group within the strategic framework provided by the Assembly, e.g. to include topics of interest in most Member States at this stage of the programming cycle. Besides, there is further need for discussion to fine-tune and prioritise the topics.

Secondly, it is clear that all the tools available to the networks are interrelated and all have the potential to contribute to all the topics discussed. Nevertheless, certain combinations and sequences of tools are more suited to certain topics. There is more work to be done to choose the best 'packages'.

Thirdly, to choose the most appropriate combinations of tools, it will be necessary to define each topic more precisely, to break it into manageable subtopics, and to identify the aims and target groups. The time-frame of the workshops did not provide sufficient time to achieve this and, as a result, the SG will revisit the issue.

Fourthly, the tools that were mentioned most frequently concerned the need for more analysis on rural development, the identification and transfer of good practices and guidance and training.

IV. Session 4: Assessment of ENRD's and EIP-AGRI's network activities

Evaluation and Self-assessment

15:45 – 15:50

Director Aldo Longo introduced the session, ongoing assessment of the ENRD and EIP-network being one of the defined tasks of the Steering Group. Experience from previous programming periods showed that assessment of activities is important to demonstrate the added value of networking. This time around it has been formalised in the monitoring and evaluation system through indicators that should facilitate the assessment of the networks' tasks.

The presentations that follow in this session are based on past networking evaluation and self-assessment experience.

15:50 – 15:55

[Ongoing evaluation of EU Rural Networks 2014-2020](#), by Jela Tvrdonova (HED)

Presentation

Jela Tvrdonova of the Evaluation Helpdesk gave a brief presentation on the principles of ongoing evaluation.

Networks should be evaluated as any other activity or intervention to show evidence of achievements – particularly of improved implementation of RD policy - and to support common learning, transparency and accountability.

It is important to set-up an intervention logic at the beginning, where the evaluation questions are linked to the strategic framework, indicators, and sources of information.

15:55 – 16:00

[\(Self-\)assessment of European rural networks: Key issues & challenges](#), by Edina Ocsko (ENRD CP)

Presentation

Edina Ocsko of the ENRD Contact Point gave a brief presentation on key issues related to self-assessment of the networks. Networking is just a tool, not an end result in itself. Therefore, networks need to be assessed against the improvements made in the rural development policy context (such as increased stakeholder involvement in rural development or the improved quality of RDPs).

Identifying the right result indicators is highly challenging and continuous exchange between evaluators and networks is important to define these. The main added value of network self-assessment is that it helps on-going reflection and improvement of activities.

16:00 – 16:15

Brief summary of discussion

Mr. Longo opened the debate posing the following three questions.

1. *How should the process be led, who should be involved in this process?*
2. *What do members need to be able to carry out the assessment of the Rural Networks and the activities within them?*
3. *What calendar and deadlines should be put forward in this process?*

The SG is the body to build up the evaluation framework for Rural Networks' activities and can develop indicators for this purpose.

Participants' comments and remarks:

- Evaluation and self-assessment need to take account of the actual impact on the ground as perceived by beneficiaries rather than purely focusing on measuring Rural Networks' activities from a top-down perspective;
- The Evaluation and self-assessment of the Rural Networks should take better account of the EC's growth strategy, as well as of reports by the Court of Auditors;
- Any framework developed for the networks' Evaluation and self-assessment should not include new sophisticated indicators, but rather start moving "little by little", from "output" indicators to "outcome" indicators, to a broader assessment of the impact of the activities on the rural economy.

Mr. Longo concluded the session by inviting the four experts on evaluation within the SG (and other interested members) to be actively involved in defining the SG work related to this task. The SG secretariat will be in touch to discuss further this matter before the next SG meeting.

V. Session 5: Coordination with other Groups

First exchange on expert groups and committees

16.15 - 16.30

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

Chairman's introduction on the Steering Group task of coordination with other expert groups

One of the tasks of the SG is to ensure coordination with other expert groups and committees established in the context of the ESI Funds or of the Civil Dialogue Group on Rural Development. This is a matter that needs some reflection and it is expected that the next SG meeting will reach conclusions on future coordination.

Exactly which expert groups the RNs need to establish a working relationship with is still an open question and suggestions from the SG are welcome.

Brief summary of discussion

Achieving true complementarity with groups within other programmes and financial instruments is a real challenge. Which ones in particular could be most relevant to the RNs, therefore, requires deeper reflection.

It was highlighted that regular contacts are already established between the ENRD and the Civil Dialogue Group on Rural Development.

Some SG members highlighted that they take part in bodies set up by EU institutions (Commission, Committee of the Regions, European Parliament etc.).

The SG secretariat will be in touch with SG members to discuss further how the coordination with other groups can be organised.

Wrap-up session

Next steps and events

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

16.30 – 16.45

Next Steps

Events, by Markus
Holzer (DG AGRI)

Markus Holzer of DG AGRI presented important forthcoming meetings of the Networks. He highlighted that the Networks and their Units will continue providing the necessary tools to support the SG, but that achieving positive results also needs the direct commitment and initiative of SG members themselves.

Dates of future Contact Point (CP), Service Point (SP) and Helpdesk (HD) meetings were presented along with RN Assembly meetings.

Given the number of events and required early planning, it will be unavoidable to have clashes with other meetings of SG members. However, as part of the ongoing coordination work, more efforts will be made to avoid conflict with other events in the future using web-based events calenders.

The preparatory documents for the first SG meeting are only available in English so far, henceforth the Assembly and the SG outcomes will be translated and made available also in German and French. Notes of the meetings will be distributed to all members.

To ensure ongoing participation and engagement in the work of the SG between meetings, the use of online tools – such as forums or LinkedIn – will be explored.

Annex I: Details of Group Work on topics and priorities (session 2)

The following table summarises the results of the group work around topics to be included in the thematic work of the EU Rural Networks and particularly those that would need to be prioritised in 2015. The group work was based on an initial list of 16 topics indicated by the Rural Networks' Assembly at its first meeting (26/02/2015). These included horizontal themes (e.g. related to RDP administration and management) and sectoral ones. The group discussions contributed to a better definition of the key issues within each theme as well as giving indications on how topics should be clustered and harmonised. Seven additional themes were identified during the discussions.

n	Topics (original working titles)	Comments and issues	Priority for 2015
1	Management and performance of RDPs (reducing error rate)/ simplification of administrative procedures & rules for support (e.g. simplified cost options) / Financial viability and feasibility / Financial instruments	Timely topic for 2015, the focus should mainly be on the rolling out of the programmes. There is also scope for clarifying the role of Networks in this respect. Simplification should be for 'all' i.e. for administrations at all levels, but also for beneficiaries, the overall scope being to better achieve the policy objectives. Issues regarding the linkages between CAP Pillar 1 and Pillar 2 should be included as a discrete topic (see topic n° 8). Specific sub-themes can be singled out for practical working reasons.	++
2	Empowering advisory services (translating innovation needs, sustainable farming, etc.) / knowledge transfer	This topic should be intended to help advisors in widening their scope and expertise. The focus should be on: moving towards more sustainable farming (i.e. in relation to topics n° 6 and 10) particularly providing concrete examples and information to farmers; the diversification of the rural economy; and taking up innovation (link to topic n° 3). There is scope for supporting farmers' access to funding mechanisms.	++
3	Market innovation / food production and processing /social innovation (marketing skills of farmers etc.)	The topic should be broadened to include competitiveness of agriculture and rural business. The focus should be on all types of innovation (not only EIP-related). The topic is strictly related on the one hand, to the support provided by advisory services (topic n°2) and on the other hand, to the setting up of EIP OGs (both enablers for innovation).	++
4	Local food / short-supply chains and rural-urban partnerships	Connected to the previous theme (innovation). The concept of rural-urban partnerships should be strengthened and extended. It should not be limited to food but become an integral part of an overall territorial approach (rural-urban as functional area).	+

n	Topics (original working titles)	Comments and issues	Priority for 2015
5	Risk management at farm level	It would deserve a better definition: a very broad topic that can cover many different issues in the context of other priority themes. May not deserve attention on its own.	
6	Sustainable management of natural resources: raise awareness and show benefits /focus on outcomes / biodiversity	It is important to clarify what is meant by 'sustainable management of natural resources' (it may refer to many different things as specified under theme n°7, for example).	
7	Sustainable and efficient input use / farming methods and systems / soil quality / water management	(Together with topic n° 6) The topic covers a great diversity of issues; it would probably be useful to focus on specific sub-themes. Organic farming and animal welfare should be included.	
8	Pillar 1 – Pillar 2 linkages	Closely connected to topic n°1. The issue mostly concerns environmental measures. Networking aspects should also be considered: how to bring Pillar 1 beneficiaries into Pillar 2 networking activities (i.e. identifying common topics for exchange, such as 'greening').	++
9	Climate change	Vitally important topic and inter-linked with other themes (e.g. topics n° 6 and 7) and issues (e.g. air quality), but currently too broad formulation; it needs to be better elaborated.	+
10	Circular economy / waste management / energy efficiency	-	
11	Demographic change in rural areas: attracting young farmers / young entrepreneurs raise awareness and understanding of their needs, involving older people	Inclusiveness is a very important topic. The focus should be on enabling young people to stay in rural areas (e.g. through investing in infrastructure, services etc.) without neglecting the flip-side of the issue, i.e. recognising the ageing population and supporting activities for older people. When talking about young farmers both 'generational renewal' and 'new entrants' (i.e. those with no agriculture-background in the family) should be considered. The issue is closely related to social inclusion aspects (topic n°12).	+
12	Social inclusion (involving ethnic minorities) / unemployment / education	This should address cultural issues and integration of marginalised groups. There is scope for exploring how RDPs deal with the issue of minority groups. Cross-linkages exist with the previous theme (n°11).	+
13	Cooperation for diversification / integrated approaches to territorial development	-	
14	Multi-fund approaches	It is essential to involve input from other concerned DGs and funds.	+

n	Topics (original working titles)	Comments and issues	Priority for 2015
15	Support for M&E of CLLD strategies / multi-funded strategies	Should cover broader M&E aspects (beyond CLLD)	+
16	Evaluation of local development strategies / LAGs' self-assessment	-	
New proposed themes			
17	Green Economy		+
18	Rural tourism		
19	Rural Services	Investing in sustainable infrastructures (transports, schools, electricity)	
20	Small farming-based communities	Particularly relevant in south-eastern European countries (e.g. RO; BG; IT; SK). Closely connected to issues related to short supply-chains / rural-urban linkages (topic n° 4)	+
21	Evaluation of Networking activities / NRN assessment and evaluation	Very important issue; it needs to be distinguished from the role of NRNs in disseminating evaluation findings of the RDPs.	+
22	Starting-up the 'new' Networks	A priority topic in this programming stage as Networks are rolling out their action plans. Material and practical guidance are needed to 'set NRNs back on their feet'.	+
23	Setting up of Operational Groups	(Covered under topic n° 3)	

Note: For practical reasons, priority topics were clustered for the discussion session on tools and activities.

Annex II: Details of Group Work on tools and activities (session 3)

The document '[EU Rural Networks Strategic Framework and governance bodies](#)' lists the main tools available for carrying out networking activities. During session 3 the work groups discussed the relevance of each of these tools for the 10 topics identified during session 2 as most important for networks' work in 2015.

The Groups discussed the most appropriate tools / groups of tools for the 10 topics identified by the RN Assembly and indicated by the SG as deserving priority attention in 2015 and including climate change (given its defined priority in all RDPs).

The following tables present the main points of discussion of the work groups clustered by tool.

1. Thematic groups/ focus groups

Thematic groups and focus groups were considered highly important, especially for the Networks' tasks that represent an innovation in the programming period 2014-2020. Thematic groups could help address important topics such as the multi-fund approach where they could, for example, provide an important opportunity for different DGs to meet and discuss together. Thematic groups could also address the topic of innovation by looking at innovative approaches to deliver advisory services and to empower knowledge transfer.

Thematic groups were identified as more efficient if organised in coordination with other tools such as analytical activities. For specific topics such as 'climate change,' but also 'administrative simplification', analytical work would be important to feed information into the work of the thematic groups. For the topic of simplification in particular, the thematic groups were identified as important only together with the work of other tools like good practices, trainings and guidance.

Thematic groups in coordination with training activities could create the opportunity for experts on evaluation of networking activities to meet and work together. Such focus groups could help to develop more scientific ways for measuring and evaluating networking activities. In the same way, focus groups on the topic of green economy could help to develop a common understanding of 'green economy', conduct an initial scoping of what has been done (also outside of work on the RDPs) and consider whether RD networks have the competence to work on this issue.

2. Analysis on RD and Innovation

Analysis activities were considered highly important for most of the topics discussed during session 3. The discussions identified lack of information in the following fields:

- '*Climate change*' with a particular interest in analysing how new measures tackling climate change have been applied, with what results, and which farming and/or other practices have the biggest impact on climate change;
- '*Demographic change and social inclusion*' with a particular interest in analysing examples of how the flow of young people away from rural areas has been successfully reduced e.g. through integrated approach across the funds and approaches using balanced interrelation among different age groups;

- *'Linkages between Pillar 1 and pillar 2'* with a particular interest in analysing how the coordination of the two pillars is organised in different Member States, how this is changing between different programming periods and how better coordination of the two funds can bring economic benefits;
- *'Local food and Short Supply Chains'* with a particular interest on how public authorities can support small farms;
- *'Simplification of administrative procedures'*;
- *'Multi-fund approaches'* with a particular attention to analysis capturing their utility not only in rural development but also in urban and peri-urban areas.

3. Good practices

The identification and dissemination of good practices were identified as two crucial tasks in the Networks workplan. In particular the group work identified the need for the collection of:

- Existing knowledge and experiences on the evaluation of networking activities;
- Experiences and practices tackling the problem of outflows of young people from rural areas;
- Experiences on starting-up NRNs and operational groups, identifying different needs and challenges in different MS;
- Good practices in delivering 'green economy';
- Good practices in the implementation of multi-funded approaches;
- Good practices in the field of administrative simplification;
- Good practices in integrating 'local food' concepts into farming businesses with the help of farming organisations.

For some of these fields the participants expect a progressive increase and evolution in the knowledge available. The collection of good practices on topics such as, for example, the implementation of the multi-funded approaches should therefore adapt over time according to the needs of the specific policy implementation phases.

The groups drew attention to both the importance of disseminating newly collected practices well and on increasing the visibility of good practices collected during the past years. The presence of rich databases such as the ones of the AEIDL and the ENRD that present valuable experiences from the past programming period was highlighted. Finally, the groups reported that timing in collecting and disseminating these practices is critical for their usefulness. Examples on how to start up an NRN, for example, are the mostly useful at the beginning of the programming period.

4. Events

The results of the discussion on the usefulness of events in the networks' activities highlighted that in order to tackle specific topics, it is necessary to involve specific groups of stakeholders. Depending on the kind of involvement desired it is therefore necessary to wisely choose at what level to organise the event, i.e. at a local, national or EU level. Events at a local level were identified as important to deal with the topic of climate change in order to increase awareness about this topic

among farmers. Events at EU level could give the opportunity for NRNs to exchange experiences concerning, for example, how to effectively start-up an NRN. Events at EU level engaging MAs and PAs could also be used to exchange experiences and disseminate results of analysis e.g. on virtuous coordination between pillar 1 and pillar 2 and on empowering advisory services. In the same way an international event on the topic of local food and short supply chains could inform local actors of different MS on practices used in other countries. For specific topics, such as administrative simplification, the participation of specific key people/categories of participants was considered of crucial importance.

5. Guidance/ Training

The production of guidance documents and trainings was identified as highly important concerning:

- how to conduct evaluation of networking activities, explaining the purpose/value of evaluation and self-assessment, and especially focusing on what information to collect to enable a comparable analysis;
- key networking activities where new NRNs would particularly need guidance from the more mature ones;
- how to trigger innovation for small and medium farmers, schools and vocational training institutes, and final consumers;
- how to use advisory services to stimulate innovation.

The discussion identified the possibility to use the pools of expertise present within the Steering Group to facilitate the creation of guidance documents on specific topics such as the evaluation of networking activities. Training on the topic of administrative simplification would achieve better results if organised in coordination with thematic groups, analytical activities and the collection of good practices. Finally, the discussion groups pointed out that guidance documents already available, e.g. on the topic of multi-fund approaches, should be revised over time to include new knowledge and experiences from Member States.

6. Publications

Publications were identified as of high or medium importance for most of the topics. More specifically, publications were identified as important for accomplishing two important tasks: disseminating information and making them accessible to different types of stakeholders.

The groups identified the need for the dissemination of guidance documents on the evaluation of networking activities, of studies concerning coordination mechanisms between pillar 1 and pillar 2, of analysis on how to empower advisory services and, finally, of guidance documents and analysis of strategies for administrative simplification. Secondly, the groups identified the need for publications with a more accessible format for the wider public which would help increase awareness on climate change and the green economy. Such publications should include examples of good practice with high transferability potential and should contribute to create a common understanding of the two matters.

7. Website and social media

According to their main and most immediate utility, website and social media were reported as very important for the dissemination of information. Websites and specifically on-line databases are the most important tool to share information across different stakeholders and across EU MS. For the topic of 'Local food – Short Supply Chains – Rural-urban partnership – Small farms' the Steering Group participants identified the need for the creation of a database of experts. Social media were identified as very useful to support the network of NRNs to exchange information and to create topic-specific discussions, as well as showcase information e.g. on demographic change and social inclusion.

8. Networking

The Steering Group participants identified that networking activities in the shape of Peer-to-peer meetings and discussions could successfully help NRNs in exchanging information on the evaluation of networking activities and on the establishment of new NRNs. More specifically, mapping exercises could help gathering valuable information on how the National Networks are tackling specific processes.

Networking activities at both local and national level could create more inter-generational, inter-sectorial and urban-rural linkages. Especially important would be to create networking activities targeted at young people and possibly to create a sub-group on youth.

9. Transnational cooperation

Transnational cooperation activities were identified highly useful for showcasing how different Member States are addressing demographic change and social inclusion issues as well as for exchanging good practices and experiences on strengthening short supply chains and local food sectors. Transnational cooperation activities between MAs could help mutual learning concerning empowering advisory services and knowledge transfer, and fostering innovation.