



Report of 4th Meeting European Rural Networks' Assembly

Brussels, 14 December 2017



Introduction

09.30 – 09.50

Welcome and
Introduction
Mario Milouchev,
DG AGRI

Opening Remarks

Mihail Dumitru,
Deputy Director-
General, DG AGRI

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

The participants were welcomed to the 4th European Rural Networks' Assembly. The [agenda](#) was presented by the Chair.

Mihail Dumitru, Deputy Director-General, DG AGRI underlined the importance of the Assembly and its wide range of stakeholders as well as the significant role rural networks have played and will continue to play in RDP implementation. He referred to the Commission Communication on [The Future of Food and Farming](#)' and the role it envisaged for the future CAP in contributing to wider EU Treaty and political commitments. He drew attention to four main directions outlined: strengthening environmental protection and climate change ambition; better targeting of farm support; a reinforced emphasis on research, innovation and knowledge as key drivers of change; and simplification. He also stressed the proposal to shift from a 'compliance' to a new 'performance' based delivery model, with a new distribution of responsibilities between EU and Member States.

He referred to a range of RN activities and events which were contributing to improved design and delivery of rural development policy, including the recent LEADER LAG Survey, work on innovation and digitisation, Smart Villages and the forthcoming OECD Rural Conference organised jointly with DG AGRI and the UK, and supported by the ENRD.

CAP Communication

09:50 – 10.30

CAP
Communication

Guido Castellano,
DG AGRI

[Guido Castellano](#) (DG AGRI) presented a comprehensive overview of the CAP Communication, anticipating that the legislative proposal for the new CAP is expected to follow in May/June 2018.

Questions from the Assembly members included concerns on the budget, not yet presented; the tight time frame available for adoption of the new legal framework in view of the current political cycle (EP elections 2019 etc); the lack of emphasis and reference to the LEADER/CLLD approach and the need to promote a wider transformation of rural areas and address disparities between urban and rural areas; the need for a better definition of active and young farmers and new entrants to ensure retention and renewal; on what would be the relations with other ESI Funds and how the new delivery model would work particularly related to the new framework for support of environmental and climate objectives.

Mr Dumitru explained that the CAP Communication had been issued in November, in order to allow more time for discussion before the delivery of the Commission's proposed legislative texts by end May/June 2018. He indicated that discussions were underway with other DGs on how best to ensure strong links and coherence of CAP with Cohesion Policy. He also stressed that the strategic CAP plans, covering both Pillar 1 and 2 and based on sectoral assessments, will be agreed with every Member State (MS).

The intention is to have a new, more ambitious delivery model. Each Member State will produce a CAP plan based on a SWOT analysis and ex-ante evaluation. This, together with performance targets, will need to be approved by the European Commission. The consequence of not meeting the targets remains to be determined. The key point is that the new architecture will be simpler, provide greater subsidiarity for Member States in designing support schemes adapted to their needs and will have to deliver more effectively.

In regard to generational renewal, in addition to the EU policy provisions, there is much that falls under MS competencies and therefore that can be done at national level. This includes support to improve access to land for new entrants, re-examination of inheritance rules and improving the coordination of EU and national support.

The CLLD/LEADER approach is greatly valued and will be continued. It was stressed that the CAP will remain inclusive and will continue to pay attention to vulnerable communities.

For the new delivery model and the framework for support of environmental and climate objectives, he emphasised that the intention was to simplify but also increase the level of ambition.

Synthesis of the Ex-post evaluation of 2007-2013 RDPs

10.30 – 11.00

Synthesis of the Ex-post evaluation of 2007-2013 RDPs

Agnieszka
Gogolewska,
DG AGRI

[Agnieszka Gogolewska](#) (DG AGRI) presented a summary of the Synthesis of the Ex-post evaluations of the 2007-2013 RDPs.

Assembly members asked whether the analysis from ex-post evaluations was available at Member State level. A comment was also made that there appears to be a gap in the appraisal of the LEADER approach, as it is fairly easy to count created jobs but harder to assess impacts on social inclusion which are more qualitative. It was also asked if 'value for money' was measured and incorporated into the results.

The Chair explained that each RDP had been evaluated at national or regional level and that these individual ex post evaluations had been published by the Managing Authorities. Notwithstanding this, the ex post evaluation reports varied greatly and the presentation could only provide a synthesis. 'Value for money' was confirmed as one of the questions explored in the ex-post evaluations, specifically how efficiently resources had been used to deliver outputs.

Regarding the assessment of LEADER, in the current programming period the European Commission (EC) has published non-binding guidelines proposing an approach to the assessment of LEADER/CLLD. These guidelines are available [online](#).

At the end of the session, the Chair provided a point of information on the rotation of Steering Group membership. The intention is to take this point

forward and explore the interest and scope of such a rotation exercise at the next Steering Group meeting in May.

Self-assessment of Rural Network Activities

11.30 – 12.30

Summary of the
outcomes of the
2017 RNs' self-
assessment exercise

Sari Rannanpää,
ENRD Contact Point

14.00 – 14.15

Feedback from
Parallel Workshops

John Grieve, David
Lamb

ENRD Contact Point

Margarida Ambar
EIP-AGRI Service
Point

[Sari Rannanpää](#) presented a summary of the findings and recommendations from the 2017 RNs' self-assessment exercise. Assembly members were invited to discuss these outcomes and indicate additions and/or modifications during the parallel working group session which followed. Each working group discussed all the recommendations (grouped by the RNs' General objectives).

Overall the Assembly members were in agreement with all 12 recommendations, which can be found [here](#). Summary points arising from the discussion include:

Enhanced Participation

- Exchange of good practices and how they have achieved results can be useful in this context.
- Consider how successful implementation can be shared rather than simply 'delivering' recommendations.
- EU level events could be replicated through NRNs - considering different levels, e.g. regional, national, clusters. This approach can take local initiatives to the EU and vice versa.
- Mass translation of all materials is expensive and may be wasteful as a means of increasing participation. Consider selective translation, adaptation of materials to local contexts and use a variety of dissemination channels/media.
- Encourage NRN peer-to-peer support. Use various forms of clusters; geographic, regional and thematic, within and between MS.
- NRNs should seek to capture and share inputs from local stakeholders. As NRN capacities are often limited, use other networks where possible.
- Different responsibilities of network members should be recognised and implemented in a mutually supportive manner. NRNs should lead efforts to enhance participation, supported by MAs.

Improve Policy Quality

- Identify where implementation bottlenecks have been resolved. Share positive approaches in partnership with stakeholders and enable discussion in networks.
- Share experiences of how multi-fund CLLD is working in practice from the bottom up. Involve LAGs, MAs as well as actors at European level, including the different DGs.
- Understand that there are different types of 'good practice', including good methodologies. Consider developing the concept of 'excellent practices'. To maximise the impact on implementation, these should ideally begin to be shared by mid-2018.
- Make sure that information is shared up and down the delivery chain and use experiences from other sectors and funds. To the extent practicable, NRNs should be able to interact with policy frameworks in seeking to improve delivery.

Increase Awareness

- Simplify communication, while ensuring the key messages are not lost.
- Improve targeting of the content and utilise a diversity of communication channels – remembering that not all are inclusive.
- There is a need for further efforts to identify the best multipliers. Consider making more use of other networks as additional ‘hubs’ and actively involve EU organisations (most of which are also active in MS).
- Various views were expressed about translations aimed at increasing awareness. Some participants recommended this should be done at European level, others nationally. Some NRNs (and other MS based organisations) already actively choose to translate what is relevant to them. To share relevant MS specific information, translation to English is required for wider dissemination.

RNs activities for 2018

14:15 – 15:00

RNs activities for
2018

Michael Gregory
ENRD Contact Point

[Michael Gregory](#) presented the planned activities of the ENRD CP for 2018. Clarification was given that the workshop led by DG AGRI on the newly proposed performance based approach to delivery of the CAP taking place in January is on this occasion targeted specifically at MAs and PAs.

A concern was raised that holding a workshop on the Omnibus regulation in May 2018 would be too late to influence the regulation. DG AGRI clarified that the objective of May 2018’s workshop would be on ‘how to use’ the new possibilities the Omnibus will open up for RDP implementation.

Hannes Wimmer,
ENRD Evaluation
Helpdesk

[Hannes Wimmer](#) presented an update on the ENRD Evaluation Helpdesk activities planned for 2018, explaining that discussions on the annual work programme have not yet been finalised.

A question was raised concerning the structure of the evaluation framework after 2020, given the proposed changes to the CAP. DG AGRI confirmed that evaluation would be even more crucial. Updating the evaluation framework is still at the development stage, it is envisaged to build on the existing system, with some new elements.

Koen
Desimpelaere,
EIP-AGRI Service
Point

[Koen Desimpelaere](#) highlighted the EIP-AGRI networking priorities and process for 2018, and indicated that the EIP-AGRI Service Point was aiming to build upon and further disseminate the outcomes of past activities, e.g. developing a digital toolbox to communicate the outcomes of past digitisation activities in a simple and accessible way.

Participants asked a wide range of questions including how information from the large number of meetings and workshops was disseminated; about agricultural land that is being used by aquaculture to produce protein; and to what extent innovation in forestry was included in EIP-AGRI activities, as it had a lot to offer.

It was explained that after each EIP-AGRI event an easy-to-read fact-sheet is produced and made available through the website, in addition to a more in-depth report. Aquaculture and aquaponics innovation was already discussed in the

focus group on circular horticulture and may be included in EIP activities, e.g. related to new feed for livestock.

The EIP-AGRI network has been active in past years with regard to the forest-based sector. Several activities in 2018 will concern wide themes that are likely to include forestry although not exclusively, for instance the workshop on diversification in the circular bio-economy.

DG AGRI assured participants that the EC makes good use of the large amounts of knowledge shared during seminars, including through internal dissemination to colleagues as appropriate. This knowledge is then fed back into processes that shape and influence new policies.

Key topics for the RNs

15:15 – 17:00

Key Topics for the RNs

Workshop
Rapporteurs

Assembly participants split into three parallel working groups, each focussing on an important topic, identified in the last RNs' Steering Group as being one where the RNs can add value. The main points arising from the group discussions were then fed back into the plenary.

Communication of Innovation

Participants agreed that there was a wealth of information generated at all levels and the greatest challenge was how to connect the European, national and regional levels. Topics that they thought should be communicated include data exchange, taking into consideration ownership (data protection); 'tried and tested' decision support tools; and digital marketing. It was considered that a mixture of the use of old and new technology (for example knowledge clouds) would ensure the widest coverage, always remembering the need to engage 'multipliers'.

Simplification

Simplification was discussed in separate stakeholder groups (MAs & PAs and LAGs & NRNs) to identify differences and similarities in perspectives. A number of areas were found where simplification would be beneficial to all: the current complexity of the programming structure which can lead to implementation delays; the rigidity of controls as they affect small and risky projects; state aids and public procurement.

For LAGs & NRNs the priority was to simplify the project approval process and increase the speed of payments. For MAs & PAs there was a desire to increase consistency and clarity. The danger that simplification at EU level could result in more complexity on the ground was highlighted. Care should be taken to understand the implication of actions for all levels.

Progress of NRNs

The topic tabled was about the methods NSUs use to engage with stakeholders and which stakeholder groups' concerns were heard the most. The different NSU/NRN delivery models can significantly influence this and several positive examples were shared.

Communication was emphasised as a key issue, particularly through less formal methods and the use of NRNs as multipliers to share information. Annual surveys were suggested as a way to reach out to stakeholder groups such as farmers and

rural entrepreneurs who may not to-date have engaged in NRNs as much as some others. Good practices in engagement methods could be gathered and shared between NRNs, and the concept of ‘excellent practice’ could be introduced. The need for NRNs to maintain a balance between taking on board individual stakeholder groups' main concerns and supporting full range of RDP(s) priorities was stressed.

Closing Session

17:00 – 17:15

Closing Remarks

Mario Milouchev

Two members' information points were made.

[Kristiina Tammets](#) of ELARD shared with the Assembly ELARD’s proposal for a CLLD multi-funded model post-2020.

[Goran Šoster](#) of PREPARE informed the Assembly Members about the outcome of the 3rd European Rural Parliament held in the Netherlands in October 2017, which concluded with the adoption of the Venhorst Declaration advocating a new unified basis for funding of local development. It calls for imaginative action to sustain rural services and diversify rural economies.

The Chair concluded by stressing the positive results of the RN's self-assessment and highlighting the important role the rural networks play in the transfer and sharing of knowledge. He reiterated that the Communication is only the start of the process of modernisation and simplification of the CAP, and stressed that the Assembly meeting had been a great opportunity to further elaborate key elements of importance for the rural networks.