NRN support for LEADER/CLLD implementation

Contents

A. Introduction

This report summarises the main findings of an ENRD Contact Point survey of NSUs activities to support improved LEADER/CLLD implementation. It particularly aims to facilitate exchange of experience among Managing Authorities and NSUs.

NRN activities in support of LEADER/CLLD implementation are diverse. As this report presents, one of the main added values of NRNs is bringing together different stakeholders not only from different administrative levels, but also across different policies / ministries managing different funds. These exchanges can largely support LEADER/CLLD implementation as they help stakeholders to work together to overcome implementation bottlenecks and come to a common understanding.

Another common activity of NRNs is capacity-building for LAGs. Experience from the 2007-2013 programming period shows that the performance of different LAGs in developing, implementing and monitoring Local Development Strategies (LDSs) varies significantly (see Chapter 3.3. of ENRD's NRN Guidebook. **Effective implementation of the LEADER/CLLD measure will be largely dependent on the capacity** of LAG members, staff and stakeholders.

There is clear value in undertaking capacity-building of LEADER/CLLD stakeholders. This is only amplified in the 2014-2020 programming period by the inclusion of new requirements towards LAGs and the increased complexity expected from the possibility of engaging multiple funds to support Local Development Strategies (LDSs).

The **NRNs' task of building capacity is recognised by the EAFRD Regulation,**[1] which sets out that the obligatory tasks of NRNs during the 2014-2020 programming period include to '*provide training and networking for local action groups and in particular technical assistance for inter-territorial and transnational cooperation, facilitation of cooperation among local action groups and the search of partners for the measure referred to in Article 35'*.

Substantial **networking experience on LAG capacity building** has been accumulated during and before the 2007-2013 programming period. The NRN Guidebook provides a detailed overview - and examples - of this experience (see Chapters 3.3 – training and networking activities for LAGs and 3.6 – support for cooperation).

Finally, NRNs (in line with the mandatory task set by the Regulation) provide a lot of support for LAGs to develop and implement transnational and inter-territorial cooperation projects. (See Section 3.3: Technical assistance for Transnational Cooperation (TNC) and inter-territorial cooperation of the NRN Guidebook for further details on common activities carried out in the 2007-2013 programming period).

The **NRN Guidebook draws some key conclusions on NRN capacity-building for LAGs**:

- **LAG training requirements evolve with the programme life-cycle.** For instance, during the early phases there may be training needs on the development (and refinement) of LDSs, but the focus will likely shift towards specific implementation issues (e.g. financial management or procurement procedures) and assessment and monitoring of LDS performance during later stages of the programming cycle.

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[1] EU Regulation No 1305/2013, Article 54(3b)

- The **level of expertise of different LAGs varies**, e.g. the needs of newly established LAGs differ from those who have been functioning for some time. Regular needs assessment helps to establish the needs and level of expertise of LAGs.
- Past experience showed that many training activities for LAGs were ad hoc and not based on a capacity-building strategy. It was suggested that a **strategic approach** be adopted based on identified training needs, and that NRNs think about LAG training as part of a more comprehensive capacity-building strategy (rather than single, stand-alone activities).

In preparation for the Special Edition NRN Meeting in Milan (24 September 2015), the ENRD Contact Point (CP) carried out a **survey among NSUs** to explore the kind of activities they are currently planning for LAGs. The survey results have been validated and updated with further information until January 2016. Of the 32 NSUs, 26 returned the questionnaire.

This report is structured according to the four main types of NRN capacity-building activity covered by the survey:
1. supporting **exchange between institutional stakeholders** involved in LEADER - to improve LEADER implementation;
2. supporting **exchange between various ministries** - in particular to support multi-funded CLLD and synergies of various programmes;
3. providing specific support and **guidance to LAGs**; and
4. support for **transnational and inter-territorial cooperation**.

B. NRN support for LAGs and LEADER/CLLD implementation

1. Exchange between institutional stakeholders to improve implementation
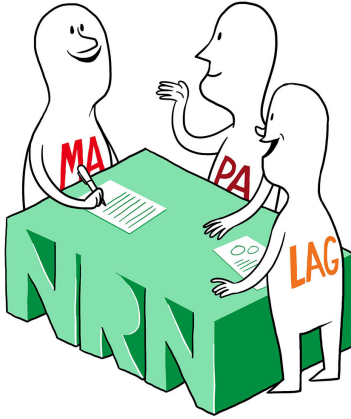
Experience shows that platforms that create an opportunity to exchange views among institutional stakeholders from all administrative levels (as well as from different policy areas) can bring **important improvements to the LEADER delivery system**. These can be structured as more formal/regular exchange platforms - such as regular LEADER events or smaller technical groups - or as ad hoc events, such as workshops and seminars. Further discussions are needed to explore the kind of improvements that these platforms brought (or aim to bring) in LEADER implementation; i.e. the focus needs to shift from analysing tools and methods towards assessing the changes that these resulted in.

Formal/regular platforms

Several NRNs organise **annual (or more regular) LEADER events** at national level, some of which have a specific thematic focus.

However, responses to the survey suggest that **smaller scale, more technical exchange platforms** can particularly contribute to improved LEADER delivery. They are organised, among other aims**,** to create ongoing dialogue between the MA and LAGs, and therefore, improve LEADER implementation and simplification, and develop solutions during transition. These platforms typically take the form of **LEADER/CLLD (coordination) groups and (thematic) working groups**

- ✓ **CZ, ENG(UK), EE, FR, SCOT(UK), ES, SE & WAL (UK) organised** national **LEADER events**

- ✓ **Wales (UK) - CLLD Group** created a consultation group on CLLD for the MA under the Welsh Government Rural Communities (Rural Development and Maritime and Fisheries Programmes).

- ✓ **Sweden - LEADER Coordination Group** now extended to include ERDF, ESF, county council, PA and national NGO representatives (See box below).

- ✓ **England (UK) - LEADER Exchange Group** used as a forum for LAG representatives to discuss strategic issues with the MA and PA.

- ✓ **Lithuania - LEADER working group** includes MA, scientific organisations, LAGs' networks and PA to prepare legal acts on LEADER strategy selection and provide suggestions on implementation.

- ✓ **Bulgaria - Thematic working group** for taking lessons from LEADER experience into the new programming period. Outcomes were provided to the MA.

- ✓ **Wallonia (BE) - Possible taskforce** bringing together delivery stakeholders for coordination, exchange of information, regular updates, projects state-of-play and difficulties.

Sweden - Bringing representatives of multiple funds into LEADER discussions

The Swedish Network has renewed its LEADER Coordination Group set up during the last programme period, when it consisted of LEADER representatives and the Managing Authority only. For the 2014-2020 period, it has **added representatives from other EU Funds**, such as ERDF, ESF, as well as representatives of the County Councils, Paying Agency and several national NGOs (including the Federation of Swedish Farmers, Nature Conservation Association, the 'All Sweden shall live' village movement and the Rural Economy and Agricultural Societies).

As an activity of the coordination group, the Network organises regional meetings for all LAGs as well as at least one national meeting for LAG members and staff every year. During the regional LEADER meetings the Network invites the regional ERDF and ESF representatives as speakers. The coordination group has also formed several sub-groups.

Ad hoc events

Several networks organise **workshops and seminars** bringing together various institutional stakeholders. More technical events are typically organised in the form of workshops, info-days and seminars, and include representatives of LAGs, MAs, PAs and regional LEADER/CLLD stakeholders.

- ✓ **Germany - Yearly workshops** for MA, PA & LAGs to exchange about LEADER implementation**.**
- ✓ **Estonia - Regular info-days** with the participation of MA, PA, LAGs and evaluators.
- ✓ **Latvia - Regional seminars** for LAG managers and board members, regional PA representatives, MA and PA central office representatives to discuss national regulation and simplification.
- ✓ **Austria - Meetings organised by the MA** to exchange between institutional stakeholders on (changes in) LEADER, results from evaluation studies, fostering innovation.
- ✓ **Luxembourg** - **Regular meetings between MA and LAG managers** & a meeting with intensive exchange between new LAG presidents, LAG managers and the MA in presence of the Minister of Agriculture was recently organised.
- ✓ **Croatia - Meetings with LAGs and representatives from the Croatian LAG** Federation were organised (at the end of the 2007-2013 programming period) to discuss and develop solutions to some implementation bottlenecks.

2. Exchange between various ministries to improve the coordination of funds

The NSU survey results showed that **several networks contribute to a more intensive cooperation with other funds and ministries**. This process is likely to lead to the improved coordination of funds, implementation of multi-funded local development strategies, introducing CLLD in non-rural areas, and improved cooperation among rural and non-rural areas.

The level of activity of networks in this regard much depends on the commitment of Member States and regions to implement multi-funded local development strategies (LDSs). The intensity of the level of coordination varies accordingly, and can be classified as follows:

- Ad hoc or semi-regular exchanges among ministries and/or invitation of other ministry/policy representatives to specific LEADER/CLLD events and meetings;
- Institutionalised exchange platforms between ministries and other relevant policy stakeholders.

In addition to these coordination platforms, networks have also organised specific **information events** to increase understanding of the opportunities to access other funds for multi-funded strategies or cooperation projects.

Ad hoc exchanges

Some of the Managing Authorities/ Networks initiated cooperation with other funds' stakeholders, **without establishing yet a formal or institutionalised form** of cooperation. These exchanges are often ad hoc.

Some Member

- ✓ **Poland - LEADER/CLLD thematic working group (TWG) will invite representatives of other ministries** (including Marshall Office, Regional and Infrastructural Ministry).
- ✓ **Czech Republic - LEADER/CLLD TWG with the Ministry of Regional Development (main coordinator of CLLD in the Czech Republic)**. The Ministry of Regional Development organises platform meetings with other MAs. The Paying Agency and the Czech National Network of Local Action Groups also participate at these meetings.
- ✓ **Wales (UK)** - Exchange between ministries & between ministries and stakeholders will be facilitated at **thematic events**.
- ✓ **Greece & Bulgaria - Invitation of other ministries to LEADER/CLLD conferences/events**
- ✓ **Austria - Ongoing exchange between implementation bodies and MAs** of the different funds and programmes (specially to ensure smooth

States try to establish **more regular exchanges** among ministries in order to facilitate the access to various funds.

implementation of LEADER in two regions: Tyrol & Carinthia).

✓ **Scotland (UK)** - Agreed with Marine colleagues that the Scottish Network will **include EMFF elements** in the discussions on LDS (including communication, cooperation and monitoring & evaluation).

✓ **England (UK)** - The MA, delivery bodies and **NSU work together with other government departments** to share plans and develop a collaborative approach.

✓ **Greece – Facilitation of technical consultation meetings** on measure 19 before the approval of the Greek RDP. Consultations brought together LAGs and partnerships from all Greece, Regional Managing Authorities and the ministries responsible for the other all EFSI funds.

Institutionalised coordination

More formal and institutionalised platforms are less common; however, there are some useful examples. The main advantage of such platforms is that they ensure regular exchange among delivery stakeholders from different funds, which is expected to contribute to an improved implementation of the multi-funded approach.

An extreme form of institutional cooperation is when funds are managed by the same ministry, which is sometimes the case for EAFRD and EMFF (see Lithuanian example below).

✓ **France - LEADER Consultation Committee** includes representatives from ERDF and EMFF, and a working group is planned involving representatives from all three funds.

✓ **Sweden - Representatives of ERDF and ESF are now included in the LEADER Coordination Committee.** Regional ERDF and ESF representatives are invited at regional meetings (see box above).

✓ **Slovakia - Thematic Group on multi-funded CLLD**

✓ **Luxembourg** - **Inter-ministerial committee** to exchange on the ongoing implementation of the different programmes (no multi-funded CLLD in Luxembourg)

Lithuania - Joint EAFRD-EMFF MA and other forms of multi-fund cooperation

Lithuania will finance multi-funded CLLD from EAFRD and EMFF. The **MA and PA is the same for the two funds**, therefore, coordination processes are smooth from an organisational point of view. The MA and PA are also in close cooperation with rural and fisheries LAG networks, and there are several communication events organised for target groups (including rural and fisheries communities and LAGs) in order to discuss and promote multi-funded LDS.

Furthermore, the Managing Authorities of EAFRD and EMFF **cooperate with the ministries responsible for CLLD in cities** (CLLD in cities will be financed from ESF). Financing of cooperation projects among rural areas, fishery areas, cities and multi-funded LAGs is also foreseen.

Information events

In addition to ensuring coordination among stakeholders from different funds/policies (as above), networks are also engaged with **organising information events** for stakeholders about the multi-funded approach.

Information and awareness raising is particularly important at the early stages of this programming period, to ensure that stakeholders (in particular LAGs) understand the possibilities to use other funds in rural development.

✓ **Germany** - **Conferences/workshops about the possibilities to fund projects** in rural areas, with a lot of information about other EU and national funds.

✓ **Netherlands - information event about EIP-AGRI and Horizon 2020** with the participation of diverse implementing bodies from different ministries and government departments.

✓ **Finland - A large seminar to be organised promoting CLLD-type of actions** with other funds. Selected projects to set up urban-LAGs.

✓ **France - Joint actions for awareness raising** about multi-funds are planned with other ministries.

✓ **England (UK) -** Co-promote the funds so that rural businesses can benefit from the whole of the Growth Programme (share plans e.g. through gov.uk website).

3. Specific support and guidance to LAGs

Networks generally have organised a large variety of capacity-building events for LAGs and/or support for peer-learning among LAGs. Training events are the most common form of LAG capacity-building. Other forms of support include the provision of online tools and support for LEADER branding and awareness. Networking support to LAGs is expected to **increase LAGs' capacity to implement local strategies effectively**. The way in which various capacity-building tools contribute to improved LEADER implementation needs to be explored further.

Portugal – Cooperation between the Portuguese NRN and LAG Federation (Minha Terra)

The Portuguese NRN works in close cooperation with the LAG Federation Minha Terra and the Managing Authority. Among others, in December 2015 they jointly organised capacity-building activities on new themes of specific interest for LAGs, including 'the analysis of small investment applications', and 'information systems' of the 2020 RDP; and in January 2016 organised a joint seminar on 'CAP (Pillar 1 & 2) & 2020 RDP'.

Training themes & format

Training **themes** vary largely, however, there are also some common topics mentioned by NSUs, including LAG self-assessment and LDS evaluation, LDS development, state aid and cooperation (see also information in the box).

Generally, themes for LAGs can be classified as:

- Capacity-building around the **LEADER method** (see example on Finland below)
- Capacity-building around **(new) themes** or rural challenges that LAGs can take up (see approach applied by Belgian networks below).

The **format** of training is also diverse. NRNs often work closely with and involve MAs in trainings, and in some cases also work closely with the Paying Agency (e.g. England and Denmark). Other formats include study tours, workshops and seminars.

✓ **LAG self-assessment & LDS evaluation** (e.g. Germany, Flanders, France, Austria, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Czech Republic, Greece)

✓ **LDS design and development** (e.g. France, Austria, Portugal, Romania, Croatia)

✓ **State aid and public procurement** (e.g. Wales, France, Romania)

✓ **Cooperation** (e.g. Spain, France, Scotland, Czech Republic)

✓ **Short supply chains** (e.g. Wales, Estonia)

✓ **Participatory methods / public participation** (e.g. Spain, Greece)

✓ **Social network skills & social media** (e.g. Spain, Germany)

✓ **Role of LAG manager and/or leadership** (Germany, Romania)

✓ **Innovation** (Romania, Estonia)

✓ **Social Inclusion/Integration, services in rural areas & youth involvement** (Sweden)

Finland - Continuous improvement of LEADER

The Finnish Network aims to move from selected capacity-building activities towards a process of continuous improvement of LEADER work. One very important element of that is a quality management system to constantly evaluate and improve the efficiency, effectiveness and flexibility of LEADER work. Quality can be divided into three stages: quality of planning; quality of actions; and quality of results and effects.

At the **planning** stage, the network has developed indicators for assessing the quality of LDS, as well as an indicative table of contents of the strategies.

At the **implementation** level (quality of actions) the Finnish Network organises trainings for LAG staff, chairmen and board members, and has developed a guidebook for LAG boards and a Quality Management Handbook for LAGs.

Indicators of the quality of **results** and effects include the compulsory indicators set by the European Commission, some national indicators and a pool of optional indicators at LAG level. Furthermore, the Finnish Network is concerned with "telling the stories" and distributing relevant examples, as it is believed that a strong LEADER brand can also improve implementation.

Peer-learning events are often organised on specific themes of interest for several LAGs. An interesting approach is offered by the NSUs in Belgium in this regard (see box below).

Belgium - Learning Networks for LEADER

The Flemish Network has set up Learning Networks for LEADER. All twelve LAGs had to choose three (out of 15 themes) for their LDS in the new programming period. LEADER projects must have a link with at least one of the three themes selected by the LAG. When comparing the themes chosen, the Flemish NSU realised that there are four main themes selected. The NSU decided to set up Learning Networks around these four themes. This idea was suggested by one of the LAGs, and others were also supportive of the idea. The main purpose of the Learning Networks, that started in the Autumn of 2015, can be summarised as follows:

- **What?** Informal meetings with one of the themes as subject (in consultation with the LAGs).
- **For whom?** LAG coordinators, LAG members, MA, Flemish NSU, and possibly experts
- **Why?** Learning from each other through informal meetings, creation of cooperation projects at a later stage, support of all LAGs

On 29 June 2015, there was a start-up meeting with the participation of LAGs, MA and NSU, where all LAGs presented the themes of their LDS. There was also a brainstorming session about the Learning Network for LEADER.

The Walloon Network organises thematic meetings called InterLAGs based on the expectations and demands coming from LAGs. InterLAGs are communities of practice bringing together members of LAGs working on similar themes (such as energy, mobility, tourism, etc.).

Other forms of LAG support

Besides specific training events, there are also other tools and methods that networks provide to build capacity among LAGs. A common form of support is **guidance** (that is often displayed through the networks' website) developed in cooperation with LAGs and MAs.

Some networks developed **specific IT tools** to support LAGs in strategy development and monitoring (e.g. Slovenia and Denmark).

- ✓ **Latvia - LEADER Manual** with practical information for project managers (worked out by bookkeepers and economists).
- ✓ **Sweden - Working Group gathering best practice** (see box below)
- ✓ **Croatia -** A **Guidance document** on LDS development was developed by the NSU, and presented at a workshop with a high participation from all Croatian LAGs.
- ✓ **Scotland (UK) - Guidance provided through website**, including guidance for MA (developed in partnership with LAGs); online expression of interest form, project case studies, information about LAGs.
- ✓ **Denmark - PROMIS** is a new on-line tool that helps the prioritisation and documentation of projects
- ✓ **Slovenia - Special software**, which would help LAGs to fill applications and to follow-up projects' implementation (and LDS).

Sweden - Gathering LAG management tools & guidance through the LEADER Coordination Group

Through the **LEADER Coordination Group** the Swedish Network is **supporting a working group gathering best practice** of LAG management, delegation policies, employment contracts, insurances, IT-security etc. These tools will be **presented as a "tool kit" to start a LEADER group**.

The network also actively coordinated the development of a common graphical design for the LAGs and will investigate the possibilities of setting up a common web portal for all LAGs. The activity plan for the coordination group is renewed every second year and new initiatives for other supporting activities can be started during the new programming period.

Further to the continuous exchange among LEADER stakeholders (including those from EAFRD, ERDF, ESF and EMFF), the Swedish LEADER Coordination Group will promote and update information about the LEADER method implementation to all NRN members, and will have a bigger support role for the development of TNC projects.

LEADER "branding" & exchange of practices

Awareness raising about the added value and benefits of the LEADER approach is a key area where networks can contribute. Activities related to the promotion and branding of LEADER are often carried out in cooperation with and/or for LAGs.

Among others they involve information dissemination about best practices in various LEADER areas and in this sense can also be seen as a tool for peer-to-peer learning.

✓ **Estonia - Best practice idea trips** to LAGs and LEADER projects for all institutional stakeholders

✓ **Finland** - Process of **branding LEADER** & quality management system (see box below)

✓ **Slovenia - Common excursions** for LAGs, MA and PA to visit good examples

✓ **Slovenia - Documentary films about LEADER**, which were broadcast on national television. The documentaries had an important role in raising awareness about LEADER in preparation for 2014-2020

✓ **Luxembourg - Five regional brochures** with all implemented LEADER-projects (2007-2013)

Scotland - Presenting LAG areas and projects

Towards the end of the 2007-2013 programme, the **Scottish NRN focused on a different LAG area each month and developed case studies from that area to share good practice**. A total of five LAG areas were covered, producing a total of 25 case studies. This helped LAGs to see what was happening in other areas and helped give credit to some of the successful LEADER projects. The Scottish NRN currently plans to extend this approach into the new programme, albeit with a new case study template. For further details see: www.ruralgateway.org.uk/en/node/9036

4. Support for transnational & inter-territorial cooperation

In addition to general capacity-building and support for LEADER/CLLD and LAGs, NRNs also provide specific support related to transnational and inter-territorial cooperation. In fact, this is mentioned in the Regulation as a specific aspect of the NRNs' task to support LAGs and other LEADER/CLLD stakeholders.
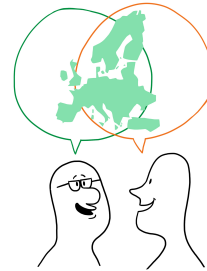
Collection & dissemination of cooperation ideas

Networks play a crucial role in **collecting and disseminating cooperation ideas** and through this helping LAGs to identify and find cooperation partners. The ENRD has played a particularly important role in sharing cooperation ideas transnationally.

It has been suggested by some networks, that sharing of ideas can be directly **linked to thematic work**; e.g. presented and discussed during thematic groups or events, bringing together LAGs interested in and concerned with the same topics.

Some networks cooperate strongly to disseminate cooperation ideas: Network Support Units within the United Kingdom started joint actions with regard to LEADER cooperation; whereas the Baltic Sea Region has long tradition in this regard (see 'coordinated cooperation support' below).

✓ **Wales (UK)** - Ideas for cooperation projects will be collected at **thematic events**.

✓ **Portugal** - Promotion of meetings and facilitate the establishment of partnerships (including thematic workshops).

✓ **Portugal** - Dissemination of good practices, cooperation projects, general information on cooperation through a **cooperation space on the NRN website**.

✓ **Greece –** two different events were dedicated to the dissemination of cooperation projects and to explore the methods for a more successful cooperation.

✓ **Sweden –** Based on the Finnish experience, for this period the NSU will have a coordination role. They will offer to some 3 to 5 LAG-managers or project leaders special training on TNC; LAGs will then be able to contract their expertise and receive support in setting up TNC projects.

Partner-search tools

A specific tool for disseminating cooperation ideas and requests is (on-line) partner-search tools. Several networks have been experimenting with this.

✓ **Spain - Online partner-search tool** including online forum, file folders, calendar, etc.

✓ **France - Database** of offers & requests (France)

✓ ENRD CP - On-line **partner-search tool** is being developed for the 2014-2020 programming period

Field trips & cooperation events

Field trips and study visits are commonly organised by some networks. These have relevance in supporting cooperation when LAGs from other regions and Member States are invited/involved.

Furthermore, several networks also **organise larger cooperation events and seminars,** including partner-search platforms. e.g Estonia, France, Scotland, Greece, Bulgaria, Slovenia, Denmark, Poland.

✓ **Spain** - 2-4 **field trips** per year ('LAG knowledge exchange in the territory'), involving foreign LAGs and LAGs interested in similar topics

✓ **Portugal**- events and study visits to promote exchange of knowledge and experience with foreign LAGs.

Other forms of support

Other (less common) forms of TNC support include **guidance documents** on cooperation, specifically targeted at LAGs and the development of a **catalogue of LAGs**.

In some cases **technical assistance/ training** is provided for LAGs on TNC implementation (including rules and procedures of cooperation).

Promoting the visibility of cooperation, and the results of cooperation projects has also been part of the core activities of NSUs. In some cases, **specific platforms** were set up to discuss issues related to transnational cooperation (see box on Finland and Scotland below). Some interesting and relevant approaches to support **cooperation within the cultural sector** were also identified (see Austria box below).

✓ **Wallonia (BE) - cooperation guide** developed in cooperation with LAGs: including partner-search & technical assistance

✓ **Greece - Manual for inter-territorial cooperation** and good practices: including the added value of inter-territorial cooperation, practices and stages of successful implementation

✓ **Latvia - Catalogue of LAGs** planned, including themes that LAGs are interested in (based on the Czech experience also to be used by other NRNs)

✓ **France - 'From idea to project'** – support provided to integrate cooperation within LDS

✓ **Bulgaria - Training** on rules and procedures for the implementation of measure 421 in the previous programming

✓ **Portugal** – a study and later book with results of the 2007-2013 LEADER TNC-projects were produced. The examples collected were presented at a seminar that included a poster exhibition of the cooperation projects

✓ **Scotland - Cooperation Working Group** involving representatives from the MA and six LAGs (see box below)

✓ **Austria** - activities to target the **regional cultural sector**, since part of the national co-funding is provided from the cultural sector (see box below)

Finland and Scotland - Stakeholder involvement in improving transnational cooperation implementation

The **Finnish Network** has set up a cooperation (TNC-) table to discuss transnational cooperation and rural development issues as a little bit wider concept. Rural policy committee, village movement, LAGs and NGOs are participating in discussions. The Ministry also requested a **small study about the**

results of 2007-2014 TNC-projects. The study was published in autumn 2015 and a seminar will be organised to present the results.

Over the past year, the **Scottish NRN** has organised and facilitated a **cooperation working group** involving representatives from the MA and six Local Action Groups. The group met five times and produced:

- A framework for LEADER cooperation in 2014-2020, setting out the whole process and roles/responsibilities of the NRN, MA and LAGs.

- Cooperation partnership agreement templates (separate ones for TNC and inter-territorial) that can be used by all LAGs.

- Cooperation business requirements for the central IT system.

This work should help simplify the process for cooperation projects, reduce the administrative burden for applicants and LAGs and encourage more cooperation in the new programme.

Austria - Doing it differently – Supporting transnational cooperation in culture

In **Austria**, part of the national co-funding for TNC is provided from the **cultural sector**. Therefore, the Austrian MA is experimenting with a new method to boost transnational cooperation. In partnership with the ministry responsible for cultural issues, the Austrian MA for the rural development programme **designed selection criteria for cultural TNC projects**.

In case of TNC project applications, these additional culture-related criteria will be applied to projects dealing with cultural topics. The culture-related projects shall contribute to specific targets on 'transformation of work/ jobs in the country', 'global world-local region', 'social creative innovation', 'multimedia and artistic transformation'.

Culture can be an excellent communication instrument, in particular regions can benefit from seeing things from a different angle and trying new approaches. Cultural actors often have very good international networks - LAGs could use these networks for finding cooperation partners.

Coordinated cooperation support

Finally, it needs to be emphasised that some Member States have implemented **coordinated actions to boost TNC** and inter-territorial cooperation.

These networks aim to boost cooperation through coordination with regard to inter-territorial and transnational cooperation.

- ✓ **Sweden & Nordic Baltic Network - Distributing requests for TNC** partners to all LAGs and through the NRN cooperation in the Baltic Sea, the Nordic Baltic Rural Development Network – including competition for best LEADER TNC having at least one partner from the region

- ✓ **UK & Ireland –** have a **common framework to support cooperation** actions among the four UK NSUs and the network in Ireland

- ✓ **The ENRD CP** is planning to develop cooperation fiches for each Member State in order to help the cooperation of TNC rules and procedures

C. Conclusions

This report aimed to provide a brief overview on the NRNs' support for LEADER/CLLD implementation based on a survey carried out among NSUs. The survey showed that NRNs carry out and plan a diverse set of activities in the 2014-2020 programming period, also based on past experience. These include:

- **Exchange platforms** between LAGs, MAs and PAs at the national and regional level, to exchange about and *improve the implementation of LEADER delivery*;
- *Ad hoc*, **regular and institutionalised forms of exchange between ministries** for an *improved multi-funded approach;*
- Facilitation of **peer-learning, training** and other forms of activities (e.g. manual, guidance, IT tools) for LAGs to *improve their capacity to implement Local Development Strategies and projects;*
- Specific **support for transnational and inter-territorial cooperation** in order to b*oost cooperation* among LAGs within and among Member States.

While there are a number of useful practices identified, some issues need to be explored further throughout the programming period. Among others, it is important to understand:

- ➢ What kind of improvements have exchanges brought in terms of improved LEADER delivery?
- ➢ Which are the most effective forms of cooperation among ministries?
- ➢ What are the most efficient forms of training and capacity-building for LAGs?

This document aims to support further exchange on various practices and tools and provide thoughts for discussions about the expected outcomes of various networking activities.