

ENRD Communicating Rural Development Event

Workshop 1: Communicating rural development to the broader public

Summary Report

Rationale – why the topic is important

Communicating rural development to the broader public has always been 'practised' by the national rural networks, local action groups, and other rural stakeholders, in particular non-governmental organisations to various degrees. In the 2014-2020 programming period, communicating rural development to the broader public has gained focus as the new rural development regulation describes it as one of the tasks of rural networks¹. This increase in emphasis is an opportunity and challenge at the same time. The workshop has attempted to explore various aspects of this theme with the help of a diverse mix of presentations from national rural network, local action group, NGO, and EC representatives.

Speakers and contributions

The workshop consisted in two sessions in each of which different experiences were presented.

Morning session:

Ave Bremse has work experiences in the field of heritage protection, ecumenical movement, vocational education and youth work. She was the Co-chair of Focus Group 3 "Implementation of the measure 'cooperation' in LEADER" of the ENRD LEADER subcommittee. She has also published handbooks, several articles and made interviews for international newspapers about LEADER and rural network in Estonia. **Focus of the intervention:** The story of the Nordic-Baltic Leader Cooperation Award initiated by the Nordic-Baltic Regions Rural Network Support Units – Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Sweden.

Luís Chaves has a degree in agricultural engineering, with a specialty in tropical agronomy, from the Agronomical Institute of Lisbon. Since 2002, he has been the coordinator of Minha Terra (Portuguese Federation of Local Development Associations) responsible for the coordination of training projects, communication and animation within the network of local development associations. Previously, he participated in networking and rural development projects in Portugal and other Southern countries. **Focus of the presentation:** The "Living Land" project - which consisted in producing and broadcasting 30 short radio programmes, each one presenting a LEADER project to raise awareness about LEADER approach in the framework of a broader communication strategy.

¹ Articles 52 and 54 of REGULATION (EU) No 1305/2013 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 17 december 2013 on support for rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005 refer to the roles of the European Network for Rural Development and that of National Rural Networks with regard to communicating rural development to the broader public.



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After his studies in music and computer-science, **Thomas Müller** started working as a music teacher and software engineer. Since 1999 he has been involved with LEADER. Currently, Thomas Müller is a LAG manager, advisor and rural development consultant in many European countries and for the European Commission. **Focus of the intervention:** The need of a new language to explain LEADER (and other EU programmes) in an understandable and enjoyable way.

Afternoon session:

Patricia Libert started her career in the marketing department of Siemens AG in Brussels where she mainly dealt with communication for industrial products. She joined the European Commission in 1996 in DG RTD, where she dealt with the mobility of researchers and communication aspects for fusion energy. She joined the Communication unit of DG AGRI in 2012 and is now in charge of the communication to the general public, mainly campaigns, fairs and events. In 2013, DG AGRI launched an EU communication campaign to promote the importance of the CAP among EU citizens, not only for the supply of healthy food, but also for the environment, countryside and economy. **Focus of the presentation:** Presenting the various steps undertaken in the development of the campaign "Taking care of our roots" and how rural development is tackled with various campaign tools.

Arūnas Svitojus is a board member of the Lithuanian Rural Network. He has published more than 85 publications, scientific papers and technical articles in local and international journals. **Focus of the presentation:** The Baltic Foundation experience in the implementation of Lithuanian Rural Network projects.

Cecile Schalenbourg has managed communication and cooperation within the Walloon Rural Network. Active in Rural Development for 14 years (Leader II, Leader + and RDP), where she collected numerous case studies, interesting experiences and shared them as stories (articles, videos, pictures, etc). Cécile is convinced that social media and ICT are very useful tools to bring people together and make them more connected. **Focus of the presentation:** Communicating Rural Development to the broader public or how can we make people aware of what types of projects are financed by EU Funds? How can we explain the achievements, the added value for rural and urban citizens?

Tamás Cselószki has been working for a local environmental NGO since 1997. A former participant of inter-ministerial committees as an NGO delegate, Tamás is active in rural development projects since 2003, with a focus on flood plain land management and environmentally-friendly land management projects. **Focus of the presentation:** The consistency between the communicated goals of rural development and the reality; the dynamics of acceptance and participation of the public in rural development projects.

Participants

On average the workshops attracted between 30-45 participants, mostly from National Rural Networks and national administrations (Managing Authorities and Paying Agencies), but also counting representatives from the EC, Local Action Groups and other stakeholders such as organisations and communication experts. NGO actors and representatives of the local level constituted a sizeable minority. The large majority (75%) of the participants were **not** communications 'professionals', but many now have to plan and execute communications actions as part of their job.



Concept questions and key points discussed

There were four key areas of focus that the Workshop explored:

1. Planning and implementing communication campaigns – are there systematic differences when the target is a broader public?
2. Are the ‘best’ communication tools to reach the broader public different for different types of organisations?
3. How is your communication approach coordinated with other institutions and organisations?
4. What role could networks (NRNs and others) play in communicating rural development to the broader public?

In order to approach the concept questions the workshop sessions attempted to define communication in the frame of communicating rural development to the ‘broader public’. The general agreement was that in this framework communication can be seen as one of the policy instruments, it is an essential part of rural development policy implementation, and an integral part of local, community level projects. Based on this starting point the four concept questions have been discussed and the discussion has been supported by the information provided in the relevant presentations.

Conclusions

The conclusions of the workshop are presented below in the order of the concept questions addressed. This is followed by the lessons learnt by the participants of the workshop (as they defined them).

Planning and implementing communication campaigns – are there systematic differences when the target is a broader public?

It is essential for successful communication to the broader public to tell real and true local stories with a focus on livelihoods. The stories told should also be based on/rooted in the values of the communities they are addressed to.

“People are ‘curious’ to know reality. Tools are videos, stories, photos and testimonials. Above all is the need for ‘human scale’ messages.”

Another important element is the ‘language’ used for the communication – this has to be kept simple, easy to understand, and adapted to the target group. When resources are scarce or not sufficient to enable a full outreach to the totality of the broader public, the multiplication effect of the media has to be considered: for this to work, journalists should be given a good story to report. Framing all communication activities about rural development policy is the actual experience of the people regarding the implementation of the policy.

In this respect, participants agreed that it is not possible to counteract the contradictions between policy statements and practice – if these exist – with communication only.

“There is very often a disconnect between peoples’ lives (as they experience them) and ‘programmes’”



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Therefore, the synergy between policy statements and implementation practice can have a positive impact on communicating rural development, while contradiction between these will have a strong negative impact on the effectiveness of communicating rural development to the broader public.

Are the 'best' communication tools to reach the broader public different for different types of organisations?

More and more effective use of existing tools (digital and printed media, radio, etc.) and keeping up to date with the `emerging` tools and using them (e.g. Storify) are important, but for a better use of communication tools, `testing` their effectiveness is essential. An example of this was the qualitative studies applied in the CAP communications campaign "[Taking care of our roots](#)". Targeting – i.e. the type of target group - can also affect the choice and combination of communication tools.

"Institutional communication is protective and very careful about social media. This is one reason why physical events (despite their cost) are still very often used."

When addressing the broader public, four important levels of communication have been identified based on the example of the Lithuanian project presented during the workshop: family, community, society, transnational networking.

In addition to these, it is essential to establish good communication between non-government organizations and public institutions. Time devoted to appropriate planning and the time required for results to become measurable and adequate are both factors that need to be considered.

How is your communication approach coordinated with other institutions and organisations?

The participants of the session shared the view that for successful communication a practical feedback loop to policy makers, implementing bodies and project owners is needed. Communication cannot and should not only be about information provision towards the broader public. Exchange is an essential component of success.

"In institutional communications – there is a strong need for coordination – for example on when information can be released – what can be said in public about policy changes etc. This is something that NRNs and MAs (and ENRD CP and Commission Services) need to bear in mind."

This puts rural networks in a unique position with regard to their potential role in coordinating the communication of rural development among various rural actors.

What role could networks (NRNs and others) play in communicating rural development to the broader public?

Rural networks are now formally mandated to communicate with the broader public and the multitude of intra- and inter-network connections potentially enables them to become the best multipliers of rural development messages. Networks are also good instruments for the `reality-check` of communicated messages.

However, for all of the potentials of the rural networks to be exploited in the best possible way, new ways of working need to be introduced (e.g. cooperating with communications agencies, employing regional communication experts, capacity building).

In addition to this, using different types of media in a mutually reinforcing way should also be explored (integrated approach for communicating the same message through different channels).



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For this, in addition to having the content (the main messages and information on rural development implementation) and the contacts (network contacts), rural networks also need to have the capacity to coordinate with various actors and among the use of various communication tools.

Key lessons learned from participants

Some of the most important lessons learnt by participants as they shared them with us are quoted below:

- Customise the communications approach to the audience and understand the relevant constraints.
- Make the message simple and use social media.
- Apply multi-purpose product planning.
- Speak 'the language of the people (not a reference to different EU languages – though of course for EU-wide communications this is also an important issue)
- It is a big challenge to communicate the diversity of RD actions (most positive) as they most usually don't make the headlines'.
- Getting journalists to take up a story is often very difficult (good news stories are not top of their list). As well as being powerful in other ways Social media is also a way of bypassing journalists.
- Institutional communication is protective and very careful about social media. This is one reason why physical events (despite their cost) are still very often used.
- It is a good tactic to get a senior politician or high level representative involved. Then other media attention can come for free. Don't assume that VIPs will not engage – just ask them.
- Celebrations – prizes – awards are good vehicles as many examples demonstrate.
- The simplicity of language used.
- According to the experience of the Lithuanian Tourism Association, newsletters cost time and money, but 20% of target audience did not open it.
- Numbers do not show efficiency.
- We have to find the best ways to evaluate efficiency and to make changes in the communication plan if needed.
- Communication is relevant. You have to be patient. Networking is the right tool.
- To find the right target group is the best way to start the communication.
- Test the communication method as part of developing it.
- Keep the message simple.
- Communicating through television is too expensive, so the real methods are videos, Facebook, newsletters.
- Share values, experiences, testimonies to support your strategy and policy implementation.
- The cultural framework must be kept in mind.
- Create emotion, atmosphere and passion.
- Communicate to encourage participation.
- Match the language to the target group.
- Communicate about real examples, relevant to life, tell true stories.
- Use communication for creating awareness and passion, to engage others with your ideas.



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- Think 'upstream' and 'downstream'.
- Use a comprehensive framework for planning.
- Use communication as an animation tool with a LAG.
- Regular updates are important for key stakeholders.
- Policy messages and practice must not contradict.
- It's very important to explain and show the importance of the work you are doing – about LEADER – then maybe more people will want to get involved.
- It was good to hear that communication of rural development is not a success story in other countries either.
- To produce a video does not necessarily require a lot of money. Use of local resources, skills, and alternative ways of filming can make it more efficient.
- Tell simple stories about project and processes behind the project.
- The importance of speaking the language of the audience.

Download link for presentations and videos

You can download the presentations and videos used in the session by clicking [here](#) and going to the "Outcomes" of the event.

