

Rural Network for Northern Ireland

1. Annual Work Programme (AWP) 2012: priorities supporting RDP implementation

- The network maintains an annual work programme which has been approved on December 2011.
- The main priorities of the current AWP include:
 - To further the work that the network has commenced on Thematic Working,
 - Continue with training on demand,
 - Consolidate the work on Information Exchange,
 - Date TWG focused on Women in Rural Development, Food, ICT.
 - Operate two additional Working Groups on Cooperation and Communications.
- NRN's activities typically used to implement its priorities are:
 - Thematic Working Groups, publication of good practice guides, attendance of meetings.

2. Thematic Initiatives launched by the Network

- **New thematic issues that the network is planning to address:**

- Recently the network commenced to work on a Children and Young People Thematic Working Group.

- **Status info and plans about continued thematic initiatives:**

- One of the key tasks of the Rural Network NI (RNNI) is to establish and support Thematic Working on key topics within the NI Rural Development Programme, incorporating cross-Axis working where appropriate.

- **Issues addressed by working groups:**

- The ICT and Food TWGs have both engaged experts in analyzing data and reporting. The Womens TWG has also worked closely with Queens University Belfast on a report entitled 'Gender Mainstreaming the Rural Development Programme: Updating a case study of Northern Ireland.

- Current thematic working groups:**

- i. Women**

The Women in Rural Development TWG comprises representatives from LAGs, Young Farmers Clubs of Ulster (YFCU), NIRWN and Countryside Services Ltd (CSL). The group coordinated the recent 'Inspirational Women in Rural Development' and is holding 2 additional events in the autumn/winter 2012 to ensure women are aware of the potential and possibilities of the NIRDP. The TWG has also worked closely with the Queens University Belfast research team with their work on gender mainstreaming the NIRDP and his fed into additional research on Gender Mainstreaming.

- ii. ICT**

The group was set up in April 2012 and has representation from across each of the clusters. The group's purpose is to examine the potential for ICT developments in rural areas and to consider how the Rural Development Programme (both current and future) can support growth in rural areas. One of the key tasks of the group will involve the gathering of evidence relating to ICT issues or solutions and the collation of reports which have previously addressed the issues.

- iii. Food**

The Food TWG has now been established and has representation from 6 LAGs and from Axis 1 and DARD. The first meeting took place in August 2012. This meeting took the form of a one day facilitated workshop where participants considered the scope and meaning of Local Food to them. Members of the Group engaged enthusiastically in the activities during the workshop and an agreed working definition of "Local Food" has been developed which has much in common with the short-supply chains and local food work currently being developed by among others ENRD and the French and Finnish National Rural Networks. A Position Paper has been produced and the group will continue to meet.

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iv. Children and Young People

14 LAG members, representing 4 LAGS, have registered interest in this group, the first meeting of which will take place in November 2012. The group will consider the level of engagement of children and young people within the NIRDP and look at ways in which other regions and countries encourage this sector to become involved in rural development.

Other working groups linked to programme delivery:

1. Communications

The Communications Working Group, set up to look at the issue of how information on the NIRDP is communicated, comprises representatives from each LAG, DARD Press Office and RNNI. The group is working well together to ensure good messages on the potential and successes of the programme are publicised effectively. Following the success of showcasing Axis 3 projects at 2 local agricultural shows in NI and 5 RDP assisted businesses had exhibition space at the National Ploughing Championships in Republic of Ireland in September 2012. In addition a further 5 businesses were included in a display space on the DARD stand at the show. This working group continues to meet.

2. NI Co-operation Working Group

In NI a Co-Operation Working Group was formed to share best practice and discuss issues relating to co-operation and the opportunities that it presents to improve the effectiveness of the programme. This group continues to meet to support the co-operation actions of LAGs and all 7 are currently engaged in developing or delivering co-operation projects, some with partners in NI, RoI and Britain, and some with partners as far away as Finland, Estonia and Italy. The various projects also cover a wide range of issues including for example renewable energy, tourism, business development, youth development and the delivery of rural services. The group continues to meet and RNNI are now considering a co-operation event among LAGs on a North-South basis in early 2013.

Events:

- June 2012 - Inspirational Women in Rural Development: held centrally in NI attended by 80 people.

Issues addressed by the events:

- RNNI has held a very successful event on the theme of Women in Rural Development. 2 further events are planned (on the topics of 'early steps into business' and a publication featuring a range of women who have begun their own businesses or diversified as a result of RDP support will be published pre Christmas 2012.

Issues subject of surveys/consultation/analysis:

- 3 of our TWGs have engaged with consultants / experts in the relevant field.

Thematic issues addressed in other ways:

- Through the Communications Working Group (a forum for good practice programme communications established by RNNI in association with the MA) projects which are 'thematic' such as women's projects have been highlighted through the media.
- In addition RNNI established a Renewable Energy Expert Reference Panel which brings together representatives from national energy generators, local regional colleges and the MA. This group is a reference panel which acts in an advisory capacity to those assessing /implementing renewable energy projects under axis 3.

Information about thematic initiatives available on:

- <http://www.ruralnetworkni.org.uk/>

2.1 LEADER-related activities

- RNNI support LAGS as part of the contract from the MA.
- RNNI provides (or facilitates provision for) a suite of training modules to address LAG needs. These include Assessment Panel; Appeals; Corporate Governance; Economic Appraisal; Effective Assessment; Equality; Promoting your Programme; Public Accountability.

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- Information about these events is available on: a full list of Training details is available from RNNI.
- RNNI delivers training based on the Programme Operating Rules which had been agreed by the MA.
- RNNI implements also other forms of support to LEADER implementation: RNNI holds regular Cluster Networking meetings (to accommodate Local Actions Groups and MA) and supports a consultant lead Review of LEADER in NI. RNNI hosts an annual Networking residential to bring together those delivering Axis 3.
- The NSU/MA staff support inter-regional and transnational cooperation: RNNI has a specific Working Group on Cooperation which is facilitated by RNNI, attended by MA and focused on LAG involvement.
- RNNI has facilitated attendance at Cooperation Fairs and is in the process of planning a Cooperation themed event in 2013.
- RNNI in association with the Ireland Rural Network has produced a guide on Cooperation Projects. RNNI also has a partner search facility on website www.ruralnetworkni.org.uk and posts all searches on the website news section and emails updates to all RNNI members.

3. Relevant Experiences/Good Practices

- **Identification of EAFRD-funded projects representing relevant experience:**

- RNNI works closely across to draw out good practice projects. Specifically the Axis 3 delivery bodies (LAGS) work collectively in conjunction with the MA and RNNI through the Communications Working Group. This system was initiated in 2011 whereby Project Publicity Templates are submitted to RNNI when a project has cleared audit within the LAG. At that stage those projects are posted on the RDP projects Database and a meeting with the Information Officer of the MA is scheduled to discuss further publicity. These projects will also usually feature in several of RNNI publications. In addition each of the 7 LAG Clusters have received publicity training from MA/RNNI. This capacity building is an attempt to encourage LAGs to generate their own 'good practice' publicity at a local level.

- **Communication and dissemination of relevant experience:**

- The network disseminates the collected stories through RNNI publications e.g Rural Report (bi annual), thematic publications such as Village Renewal and Development (2010), RDP in Action (2012), Rural Report series and Inspirational Women in Rural Development 2012.
- In addition electronic communication has become increasingly important to RNNI. The network communicates directly to the LAG administration units and our members by email. It also issue a monthly magazine and operate a busy website and Facebook page.
- Selected projects are highlighted in the wider media (through media pitches - such as those generated following the Womens TWG) and by the MA at central government level.
- Relevant experiences/good practices are available on: Good Practice and publications sections on RNNI website.

4. Monitoring and evaluation of networking

- The network regularly assesses its performance against AWP. The network is required to feed into the Programme Monitoring Committee and complete a monthly progress report in addition to an Annual Report.
- The network implements self-assessment activities: Evaluation Forms are completed and analyzed after each event; the website is regularly review; means of communications are reviewed too in order to ensure that the network is correctly targeting the correct audience with the message that it issue.

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5. Communication

- All of RNNI's Work programme is underpinned and focused on good communications activity. The Network's website acts as a communications hub for members and is operated in conjunction with a regular e-bulletin and e-mail circulars detailing best practice, events, and general information from across the EU, which may be of interest to members in the development and administration of their programme.
- RNNI has operated an RDP Communications Working Group since October 2011 which has members drawn from the MA and the seven Local Action Groups with the aim of promoting accurate, timely, useful and effective programme communications. The group discusses communication at a local, regional, national and European level; Publicity training has been delivered by MA/RNNI to each of the 7 LAGs; a Project Publicity Template system is operational whereby once a funded project has cleared audit a PPT is sent to the Network, placed on the database and then further publicity engaged in if project is deemed good practice, relevant to current trend etc.
- The rural network has a communication plan and a communication plan is also included in the RDP. The RDP communication plan is led by DARDNI, the Managing Authority.
- The RDP is published on the following website: www.dardni.gov.uk/index/rural-development/rdp-campaign.htm.
- The communication tools mostly used by the network are:
 - Email (190 members with Email addresses in addition to Administration Units);
 - Website;
 - Monthly magazine.

6. Cooperation interests of the Rural Network

- Fields in which the network seeks or offers cooperation with other rural networks:
- RNNI is fully committed to cooperative working between the individual constituents of the UK Network. In addition we have strong working links with ENRD and the Ireland National Network.

7. Documents

- A range of documents including factsheets, newsletters, publications and guides are available to download from the network's website: www.ruralnetworkni.org.uk.
- Managing Authority and the Rural Development Programme: www.dardni.gov.uk/index/rural-development/rdp-campaign.htm.
- National Rural Network: www.ruralnetworkni.org.uk.