

OPEN SPACE REPORT – 20TH NRN MEETING (DIJON, FRANCE. 28/11/2013)

This report has been prepared based on the discussion of two questions relevant to NRN communication tasks for the 2014-2020 programming period in an open space format. The questions have been raised and the discussion has been facilitated by the representative of the Swedish NRN. For further information – and courtesy of the Swedish NRN – a working paper developed in Sweden is also attached to the report.

Participants in the group represented the following EU MS: Sweden, Estonia, France, Portugal, Spain, Hungary, Lithuania, Romania, UK, representative of DG AGRI (G3)

Key questions

Question 1: The specific challenge of targeting RDP beneficiaries and the general public

Background to Question 1:

The questions aimed to stimulate discussion for exploring how the different articles related to communication tasks are interpreted in different member states and consequently to contribute to a clearer view of how communication tasks – as framed by the questions – are approached by the member states.

Article 73 in the EAFRD regulation:

“...ensuring publicity for the programme, including through the national rural network, by informing potential beneficiaries, professional organisations, the economic and social partners, bodies involved in promoting equality between men and women, and the non-governmental organisations concerned, including environmental organisations, of the possibilities offered by the programme and the rules for gaining access to programme funding as well as by informing beneficiaries of the Union contribution and the general public on the role played by the Union in the programme.”

Q: How should we read “informing potential beneficiaries, professional organisations..... and the general public on the role played by the Union in the programme” ?

Question 2: The specific challenge of increasing the involvement of NRN members in communication and dissemination activities of the network

Background to Question 2:

Considering how to better involve our members in our activities and especially when it comes to communication. One idea is to make the new members sign a contract where they state their intention with the membership. Members for instance who want to be active in working groups and benefit from them can influence which topics to address and have their say on different topics, should also be prepared to take a greater responsibility for information dissemination. Is this something that other NRN’s also are thinking about? Or how are they planning to better involve the members?

Summary of discussions – Question 1

- In the current (2007-2013) programming period the general public is not identified as a key target group – communication efforts are more focused on RDP beneficiaries. However, in the 2014-2020 programming period, the general public is specifically mentioned among the objectives of network activities (Article 55. EAFRD regulation proposal). In addition to this information and communication activities aimed at the broader public are also listed among the obligatory contents of the communication action plan to be prepared by the NRNs.

“Networking by the national rural network shall aim to:

(c) inform the broader public and potential beneficiaries on rural development policy;”

- Spain reported that in the current period – according to a recent survey – the level of awareness of the broader public of the RDP is relatively low.
- In Romania, communications is now the responsibility of the Managing Authority and the key target groups are the RD stakeholders, more specifically the municipalities and mayors.
- In Estonia, the NRN cooperates with external networks as well. It is important to create links with other networks that are present in all EU MS, e.g. EuropeDirect (DG COMM) which is present in all EU MS and the focus of its communication activities is the broader public, and capable of supporting MA/NSU communication efforts in this regard.
- In Estonia and Lithuania the public, national TV stations are used effectively for communicating RD and RDP successes.
- Eastern Europe is specific in the sense that the main aim for communication on the RDP is to increase the number of beneficiaries of the RDP.
- In France, one key objective of communications is improving media relations. This is because the media tends to “pick up” only the “problem” stories from rural areas. In this sense, the media as a target group for RD communications can be justified.
- Another difference that emerged during the discussion relates to the use of public resources for communicating RD(P). In new MS public money/support is considered as something the country should benefit from as much as possible. In old MS – and Sweden mentioned as a specific example – stakeholders expect a high level of transparency and efficiency with regard to the use of public money for RD(P) communications. This has an impact on the planning and choice of communications tools.
- Communicating RD? Or communicating the RDP? The answer to this question can affect the choice of target group and communication tool.
- Communicating CLLD is a special topic in itself. In particular, in a multi-funding context the questions – Whose responsibility is it? – can arise as a topical one. Is it the responsibility of the lead fund manager (if relevant) or each fund communicates its own content or is there a level of integration and harmonisation required?
- In terms of the new regulation, members of the group asked about what is considered by the EC the adequate level of communications.
- More details on the level of communications as minimum requirement will be included in the implementing regulation (to be published in January 2014). Representatives of MS in the group mention that timing can be an issue due to the fact that most EU MS are already planning their communication strategies.

Summary of discussions – Question 2

- Sweden is considering the introduction of a ‘contract based’ system for NRN members in which the services NRN members receive from the network will be related to their obligations for taking part in dissemination activities (the level of services received increases with the level of obligations undertaken).
- The transferability of such a system is rather limited to other EU MS. In some MS the NRN has no official membership, so there is no official basis for offering the contracts,
- Another aspect – emphasised by the representative of PLANED, a LAG in Wales, UK – was that participating in communication and dissemination activities should be based on “passion” and “belief” in the usefulness of the content disseminated. Sharing of information cannot be formalised, it cannot be a formal exercise, especially at the local level. At the level of a LAG and local community “voluntary” sharing of information is also an act of self-interest in a sense: it

increase the effectiveness of the LDS implementation and benefits the LAG area, and in turn the local “sharer” of information as well.

Annex: Working paper by the Swedish NRN

11. Communication

Overall guidelines for communication

One of the most important success factors for Rural and Fishing Network 2014-2020 is that the network is experienced as being a freestanding and independent unit that is not a part of the managing authority. It is therefore important to separate out the role of the network and how it connects to the The Board of Agriculture when it comes to communication dissemination

European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) Article 55

National rural network

3. EAFRD support in accordance with Article 51.3 is to be used for the following:

x) The preparation and implementation of an action plan which, as a minimum, contains a communication plan. The plan is to include rural development programme publicity and information, is to be agreed with the managing authority and is to include information and communication activities for a broader public.

The role of the managing authority are in connection to the network divided into three parts:

1. The managing authority role, and the associated responsibility for *“the publishing of the programme via the national rural network to its designated target groups...., about the opportunities which the programme provides and the regulations which apply to receiving financial support via the programme and also to inform those who receive support about the EU's contribution and to inform the general public about the role which the union plays in the programme. (Article 73).*
2. The role of the managing authority as recipient of the results and the learning from the network associated with the programme's implementation.
3. The role of participating party within the framework of the network, as for other stakeholders.

The joint communication plan which The Rural and Fishing Network develops with the managing authority, should clearly state the different roles:

The role of the managing authority:

The Managing authority in its first role, is responsible for ensuring that basic programme information

and the programme's implementation is correct. The managing authority is responsible for ensuring that information is included on the managing authority's web site and on other suitable channels.

The Managing authority in its second role, is responsible to take part of the information about the lessons learnt within the network. A clarification is required regarding the managing authority and the network in which way the lessons learnt are taken care of and incorporated within the organisation.

The Managing authority in its third role has a responsibility to spread information as a member within the network

When reactions within the network are based on misunderstandings concerning the basic programme information or the programme's implementation, then the managing authority is to however correct such misunderstandings and ensure that the corrections are also disseminated via the network's communication channels.

The role of the Rural and Fishing Network

The Rural and Fishing Network's role is to make their communication channels available for information dissemination, package the contents in an appealing way but also, in its independent role, bear responsibility for the communication which can arise within the framework of the network that relates to programme content and implementation. The Rural and Fishing Network is communicatively 'quick to adapt'. The network is, for example, to be able to distribute reactions to the programme and its implementation based on different perspectives. It is important that those in the managing authority who are involved in this are well informed of the network's role, structure and communication channels at an early stage.

The joint communication plan

The joint communication plan should contain 'campaigns' in which The Rural and Fishing Network's Secretariat, the managing authority and other network stakeholders simultaneously release information. Which campaigns are required and when and how they are to be implemented is discussed with the managing authority and with other stakeholders in the network. This can in some cases also take place in co-operation with The Ministry for Rural Affairs.

The regulation text particularly mentions information and communication activities for 'a broader public audience'. It may become clear over time that the requirements associated with information 'for a broader public audience' are different from those that apply to other information.

At the start of the programme period, target groups which include potential support applicants and organisations which have close contact with these, are assumed to have a greater need for information on the programme and the opportunities provided by the programme.

During and at the end of the programme period, the need to present the programme's effects to other target groups will however become greater.

A discussion about message, target groups and choice of channels for programme information should continue through the period, between The Rural and Fishing Network's Secretariat and the managing authority. Information should also be evaluated regularly throughout the programme

period. To assure the work with the communication plan, a person at The Board of Agriculture should be assigned responsibility for the coordination of programme information issued by the managing authority, to ensure transfer of communication between the managing authority and the network's secretariat and vice-versa. This person should liaise with the rural programme's programme management, evaluation functions, information unit, The Board of Agriculture's rural strategist and involved units. The coordinating person should also be given the opportunity to attend steering committee meetings.

The Rural and Fishing Network's communication strategy

The Rural and Fishing Network should have a communication strategy for the entire network operation which is updated continuously during the programme period. This should clearly define timetables, goals, tools, target groups and target levels for these, strategies, working methods, communication policy for members and the policy for the network's external environment monitoring. The strategy should also state that the network is *to disseminate information to key stakeholders within EIP and monitor and report research results.* (Article 53).

The Rural Networks Secretariat is responsible for developing the new communication strategy for The Rural and Fishing Network and is to be assigned by the network's steering group.

Different levels of ambition.

There should, in association with the establishing of an organization in the network, be prepared clear contracts that specify each organisation's obligation to ensure that relevant information/knowledge that creates within the network is disseminated both within the framework of the organization and to its respective target groups. This should be included in the communication strategy to ensure that information and knowledge which is developed within the framework of the network, is incorporated into the organisation. The point which relates to information within the framework of the organization also relates to the regional and local level. The authorities which participate in the network are to be determined at the GD level. Other organisations are to resolve this at the highest management level.

A basic level of information dissemination is to ensure that the entire organization is informed about the network and the network's activities and is to ensure that information on the network's communication channels is known.

This level applies as the lowest level to all stakeholders in the network, both those who have low networking target levels and those who have a higher target levels.

Higher information dissemination levels should be able to be set for stakeholders who have a higher target level. All stakeholders who take part in working groups are, for example, to contribute to dissemination of the working group's result.

Working groups communication

One of the appointed members of each working group which is formed within the framework of the network, should have communication competence. This person is responsible for ensuring that a communication plan is set up for each group and is followed up and that communication initiatives are implemented and are evaluated. This is carried out with the support of and in co-operation with

the network secretariat's communicator. It is important that the working groups are given the opportunity to use interactive tools in the programme period.

Continuous communication planning

The network's continuous communication planning should be linked to and continuously be updated with the network's annual activity plan and with the communication plan for the rural programme which is prepared with the managing authority.

Website design

The development of a new graphic profile and new communication channels, including a new web site, will be begun in the first six months. To ensure accessibility for the general public is maximized, this should be able to have a 'public' section which is adapted to the broader public target group and a 'network section' which is aimed at network stakeholders and is where meeting minutes etc. can be published. Both parts are to however be accessible on the web. Graphic profile, web site and tool are to be completed in the second half of 2014

Newsletter

Topical newsletters should also be prepared within the framework of the Rural Networks Secretariat. To ensure that this acts as a freestanding network, it is very important that the Rural Network's Secretariat publishes the newsletter and is the newsletter editor. The managing authority can only change the newsletter text if it contains incorrect factual information relating to the programme or the programme's implementation. I.e. not opinions about the programme and the programme's implementation or other aspects relating to newsletter content.

Collect information about the project, disseminate analysis and recommendations relating to programme implementation

The 'Wool-Ram' winners and The Rural Gala has been an efficient way to distribute information about good rural programme examples. To ensure the 'concept' is not lost, a virtual Rural Gala should be able to be implemented in the first two years of the programme. Otherwise refer to point 12.1.1.

The nomination process has been as important as Gala implementation. Implementing a virtual gala during the first two years will mean that the nomination process can continue and that the prize does not become forgotten.

A separate section should be written for the fishing section