

ENRD Pilot Network Support Unit (NSU) Peer-to-Peer Training Programme

PILOT MODULE 1: Strategic Planning Issues for NRNs

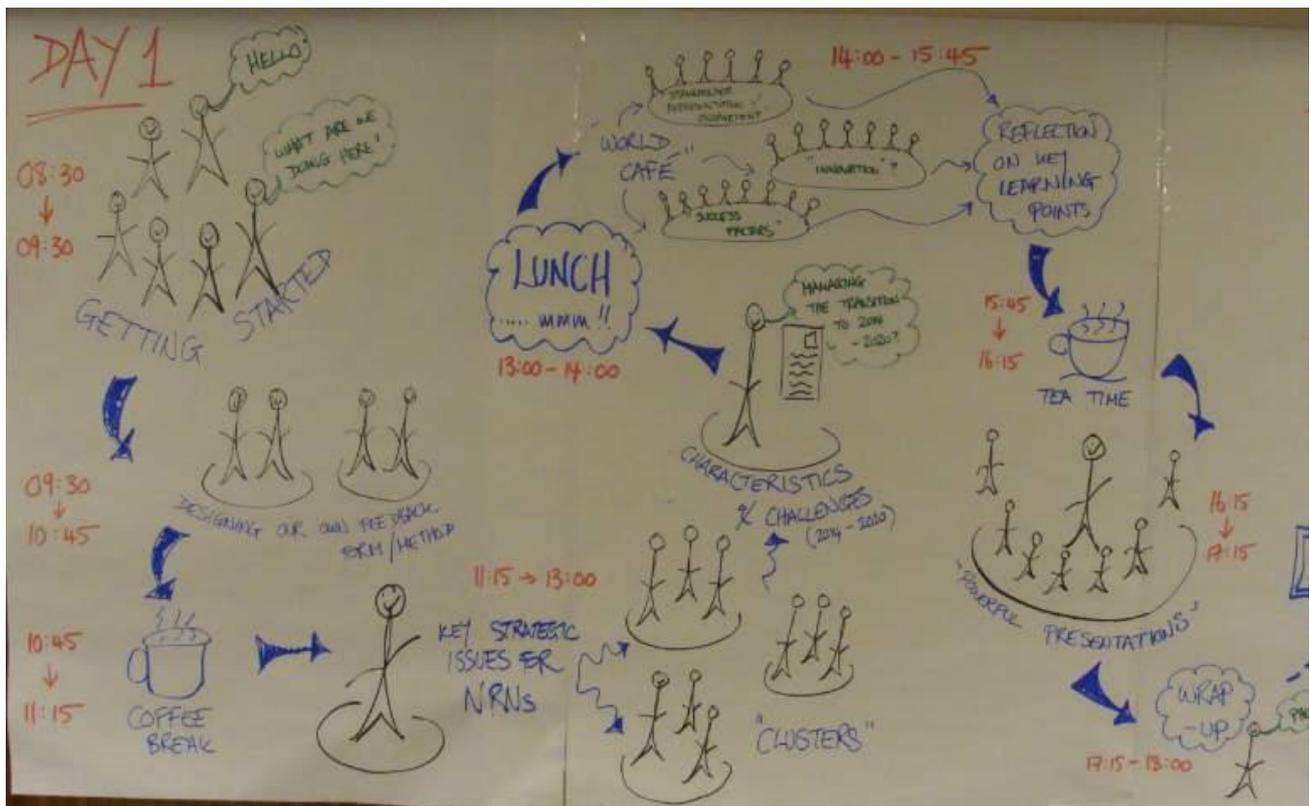
19 – 20 February 2013, Budapest



Notes, Observations and Outcomes from Pilot Module 1

Facilitated and reported by Mark Redman

With thanks to the Hungarian Rural Network for their hospitality and generous support of this training event



Tuesday, 19 February 2013

Getting Started

- Hello and Check-in** – a total of 34 participants joined the training from 15 network support units (plus DG Agriculture) – see Annex 1 for full list. The meeting was opened by Dr. Dávid Mezőszentgyöryi, Director General of NAKVI - the National Agricultural Advisory, Educational and Rural Development Institute. NAKVI is the agency with delegated responsibilities for the Hungarian network support unit.

We started the programme for the training day with a group **check-in**. This was used to bring focus to the start of the first training day and helped to put people into the right frame of mind. The technique used was simple, but effective, and went beyond the normal 'round of introduction' or 'tour de table'.

Sitting in a large circle we used a **talking piece** to introduce ourselves one-by-one (explaining who we were and why we had come to the training). The **talking piece** used can be any relevant object for passing from one person to the next and it is used to help to slow down the initial group discussion, to allow people to speak without interruption, to disperse any nervousness in the room and to generally encourage people to be more reflective in their opening comments.

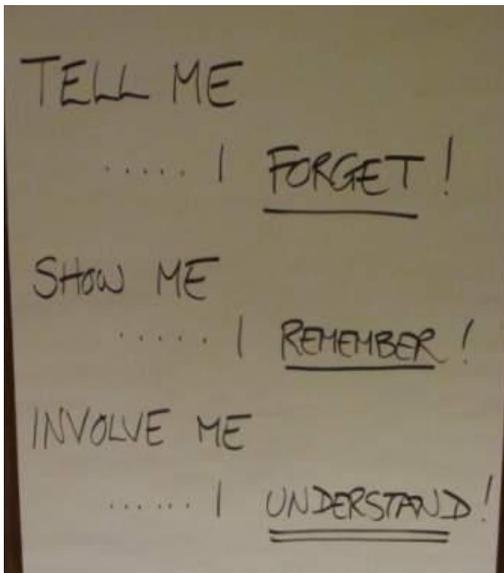
The same **talking piece** (in this case, a small smooth stone) was also used for the group **check-out** at the end of day 2.

- Ice-breaker Game** – 'ice-breakers' are activities that are undertaken at the beginning of a group activity, such as this training module, to help people feel at ease with the situation and to lay the basis for a more relaxed and informal interaction between the participants.

We played a simple line game. Firstly everyone lined up in order of their height – shortest at one end, tallest at the other. The line was then asked to re-arrange according to birthday – from January at one end to December at the other. Then finally, to re-arrange in order of the time that was taken to travel to the training event. This ranged from 10 minutes (a Hungarian colleague) to 12 hours (our colleagues

from Northern Ireland)! Numerous other variants can be used – plus, an additional twist can be introduced by re-arranging the line without talking or writing anything down!

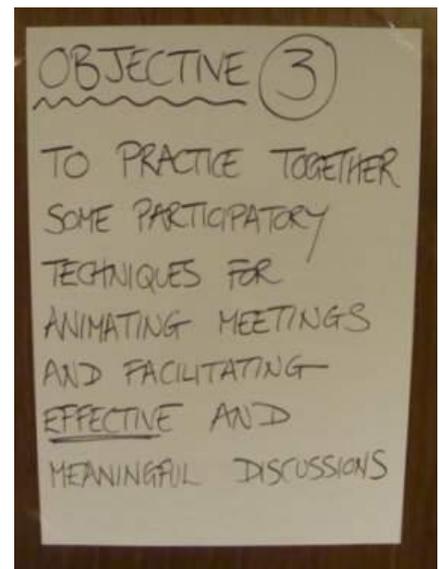
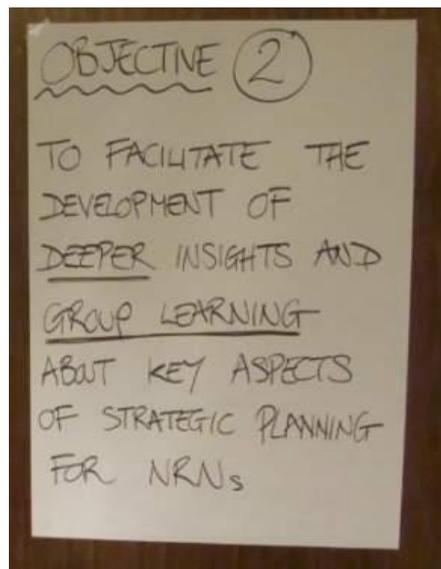
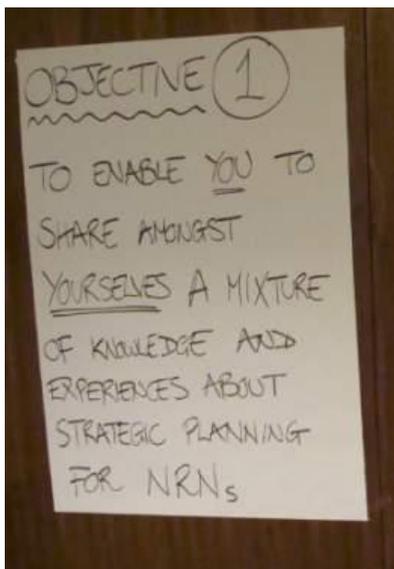
- **Introduction to the Pilot Training Programme – why peer-to-peer?**



Peer-to-peer learning and exchange is based upon acquiring knowledge, skills and experience through an active process of help and support within a group of equals from a similar social / professional context. There are no “trainers” - however the process is often led by a facilitator whose function is to help the group move through a variety of learning processes.

The advantage of this approach is that it is highly flexible and adaptable! It is ideal for working on current, real life challenges and exchanging feedback with others working in similar situations – and very importantly, it can also support the generation of new knowledge, as well as the sharing of existing knowledge.

The specific objectives of module 1 of this pilot peer-to-peer training module are presented below.



- **Some simple principles for working together during the peer-to-peer training** – before starting the first training topic we agreed that to make the most full and efficient use of the opportunity to be together in Budapest we would:

1. **Contribute** our knowledge, experience and thinking
2. Always speak with **intention**
3. Always listen with **attention**
4. **Search** for insights, patterns, deeper questions and new knowledge

Group Exercise: Designing our Own Feedback Form / Method

In order to kick-off the peer-to-peer learning and exchange process, we started with a group exercise focused upon designing a feedback form / method for evaluating the first pilot training module – and possibly all subsequent pilot modules.

The participatory technique used was a form of **Appreciative Enquiry** – this is an interesting technique which aims to build upon what works, rather than trying to fix what does not work. For more information take a look at: <http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu/>

We used a very simple version of Appreciative Enquiry involving 4 phases that are commonly used by practitioners:

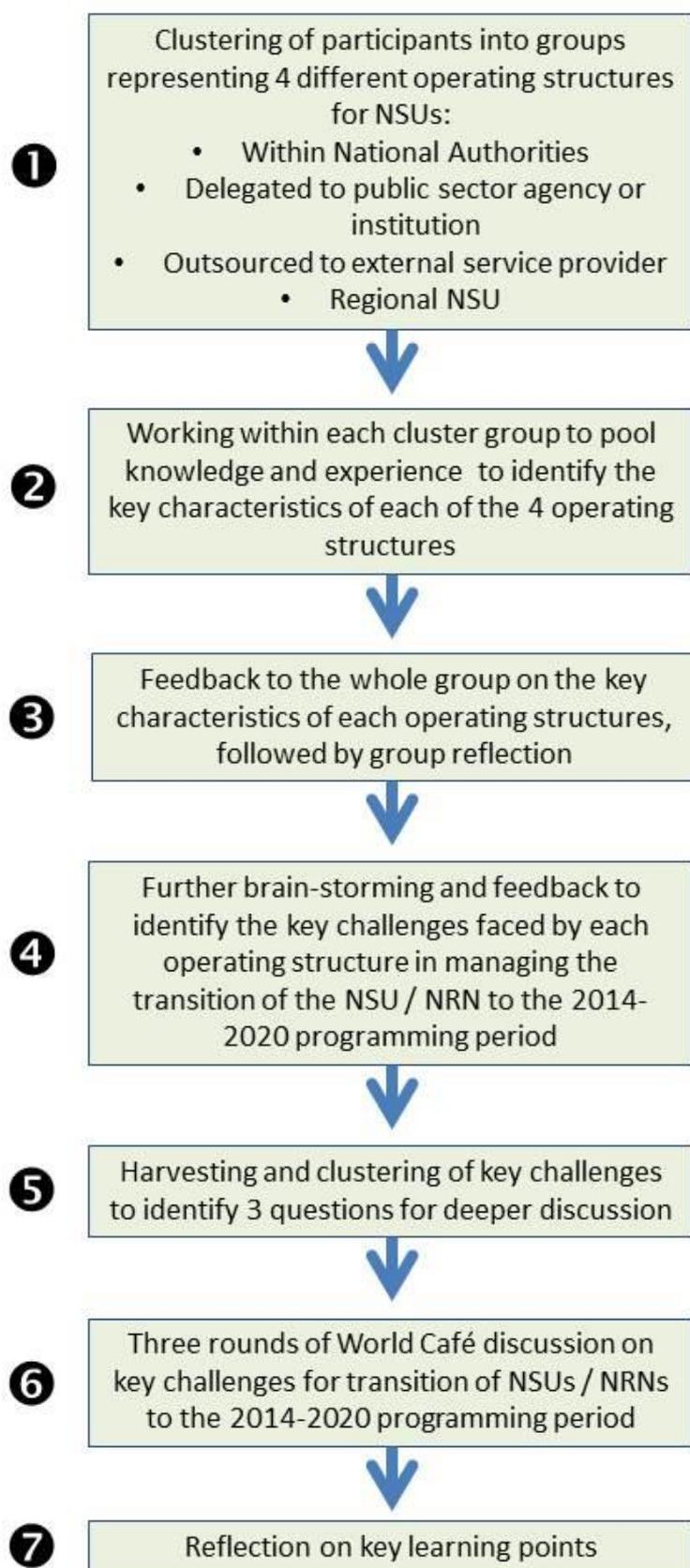
1. **DISCOVERY** – all participants were requested to bring examples of event feedback forms / methods from their own NSUs. At the start of the Appreciative Enquiry, all participants were asked to find someone that they did NOT know and to work in pairs (for 10 minutes) to discuss and assess the strengths of the forms / methods they had brought.
2. **DREAM** - coming back together as a group, we reflected upon the strengths identified in the Dream phase and collected our thoughts together to create the 'Top 10 Tips' for an effective event / activity feedback form
3. **DESIGN** – dividing into smaller groups we spent 30 minutes applying our 'Top 10 Tips' to the design of some simple feedback forms for the pilot module. These forms were collected and synthesised overnight to create a final feedback form – see Annex 2.
4. **DELIVERY** – the feedback form created during the Design phase was distributed at the end of day 2 and used to gather feedback from the participants.

'Top 10 Tips' for Designing Feedback Forms / Methods

1. For best response, keep the form anonymous – or at least with name optional if you want to make some follow-up
2. Keep the form short and concise – a maximum of ONE page was recommended
3. Use a mixture of 'closed' and 'open' questions – typical 'open' questions include:
 - Suggestions for next event?
 - Actions you will take after leaving this event?
 - What will make future events better?
4. Include all elements of the event in the feedback form – preparation, programme / content, next steps etc.
5. Link questions to the objectives of the event
6. When organising a series of events consider using a common feedback form, or at least some common questions
7. Be aware of quality versus quantity of feedback. Consider: a) giving more time for deeper feedback and follow-up by participants after the event and / or b) putting more emphasis upon informal feedback e.g. an on-line discussion group / community of practice / e-mail list etc.
8. Consider using alternative methods / media for getting feedback from participants e.g. 'live' feedback during the event (various techniques), mailing a postcard after the event, on-line evaluation tools, phone-based apps etc.
9. Plan to make effective / strategic use of feedback. Don't leave preparation of the feedback form until the last minute – build it into the planning of the event
10. Always "feedback the feedback" to participants

Training Topic: Key Strategic Issues – Structure, Representation & Mandate

This part of the training programme progressed through a series of steps that developed progressively deeper discussion and the generation of new insights and ideas about key strategic planning issues for NRNs – notably structure, representation and mandate. The steps (1 – 7) followed were:



World Café is a very effective way of enhancing interaction and dialogue within both large and small groups. It was used in this exercise for information sharing, personal / group reflection and the development of deeper discussion.

The general flow of the World Café we used was as follows:

- 5-6 people were sat at tables and one person at each table was invited to volunteer as “table host”
- We set-up three progressive rounds of conversation based upon 3 questions (see below) – each conversation lasted 20 minutes
- After each conversation, the table hosts stayed with their tables whilst the other table members moved to another table to contribute their ideas and insights to the next conversation
- The table host initiated each new conversation and invited the table members to share their key insights, questions and ideas with each other
- On this occasion we harvested the outcomes of discussions at the tables after each round of conversation

For more info, see: www.theworldcafe.com

Summary of group discussions about the key characteristics / issues of the 4 NSU operating structures:

NSU within National Authorities

- NSU is clearly linked to the MA
- Some NSUs have regional units / co-ordinators
- All NSUs have Thematic Working Groups / Committees
- All NSUs have annual work plans / action plans
- Membership of networks varies – both open and fixed / restricted membership
- All NSUs have budgets which are in proportion to the country size
- NSU staff tend to be working part-time on network issues
- All final management decisions are taken by the MA

NSU delegated to public sector agency or institution

Common characteristics of delegated NSUs:

- Delegated responsibilities for network management
- Similar objectives for network management
- Certain degree of independence
- Non-profit making

Differences between delegated NSUs:

- Different levels of regionalisation
- Formal and informal membership
- Separated vs. general budgets
- Annual vs. multi-annual budgets
- Differing perspectives on transition to the new programming period – more centralisation of NSU towards NA vs. more decentralisation



NSU outsourced to external service provider

Contract based - with potential issues related to:

- duration / periodicity of contracts (annual vs. longer-term contracts) – short-term contracts do not provide security for staff
- procurement – must be accountable and transparent
- start-up - risks of delay and time-lag between programming periods
- lack of flexibility – rigid contracts and restricted mandate of contractor leave no space for adaptation and flexibility in implementation of annual work plans

Profit-based – in some cases the NSU may be run by very commercialised operations – is this desirable / value for money?

Project-based - output orientated rather than a focus on impact – monitoring and coordination of contracts can be challenging and there may be heavy auditing of targets

Capacity can be a problem – there is a limited market for the necessary competence and therefore challenges linked to procurement

Neutrality - impartiality

Resources – better planning / resource allocation may be an opportunity to engage the right expertise

Communication – it is more challenging for contractors to build trust / cooperation - perception of contractor only as a service provider and not a true partner

Regional NSU

Context – regional NSUs arise for different reasons, but are mainly linked to regional RDPs. Not all regional NSUs are linked to a higher level national rural network

Diversity of implementation – all of the three main operating structures are found in regional NSUs

Decision-making – again, a diversity of approaches to decision-making are found in regional NSUs ranging from formal (MA-driven) to less formal (consultative and committee-driven)

Different funding sources – EAFRD (Technical Assistance and NRN Programme) and national funds – at least one regional NSU (Northern Ireland) financed 100% by national funds

Varying capacity – range of budgets and staff resources

Lack of EU context – regional NSUs can be distant / detached from EU issues

Focus – varies from working across all axes to specific focus on axes 3 and 4. But the use of Thematic Working Groups and a commitment to working directly with LAGs are consistent priorities



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding the role of networks • Understanding and managing the multi-fund perspective • How will future networks be linked? • Need to consider / discuss training needs for new period – especially for EIP 	<p>How to build links between future “networks” – NRNs, Evaluation, EIP and LEADER / CLLD in 2014-2020?</p>
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World Café Responses to Question No. 2

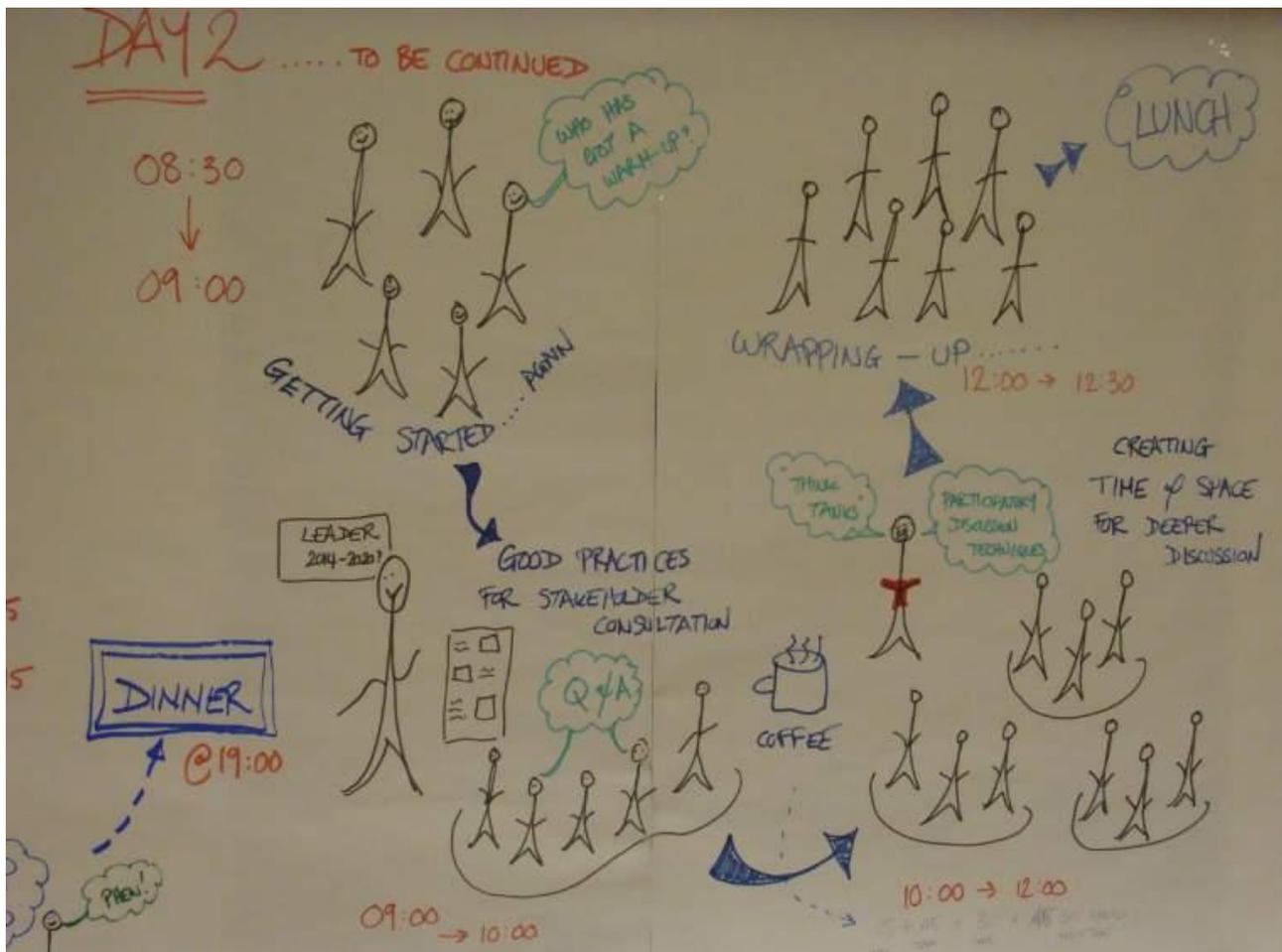
- Improve communication between national actors
- Use thematic groups for planning activities
- Use of a public-private partnership connecting practitioners, academia, evaluators, businesses etc.
- Actors need to understand the principle that “networking is working, if you are working!”
- Need piloting of LEADER / CLLD approach to develop appropriate networks and links to other areas
- Encourage local networking closer to the point of delivery
- Should be one network (NRN) linking Evaluation, EIP and LEADER
- More resources are needed – skills, expertise and funds
- Common communication strategy for all ESI funds
- Provide CLEAR definition of the roles and functions of each network
- Should develop a framework approach for how we are meant to work together – Member States can elaborate the details
- Creation of an innovation brokerage facility
- Bring academics / specialists into the networks to improve their functionality
- Allow for – and plan for – an increase in the amount and type of partnership activity
- A single LEADER / FLAG / CLLD network is needed to make the most of available opportunities
- Do not forget to continue encouraging cooperation between LAGs – make more use of available tools!
- Look for the complementarity between funds and networks that are dealing with “common issues”
- Identify and involve CSF actors to facilitate an increase in multi-funding



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gap between programme periods is a big issue! • Transition rules needed from one period to another • Budget allocation for 2014-2020 needs to be agreed in a timely manner • Possible reduction in budgets will lead to pressure on networking activities – do alternative models of delivery provide greater efficiency? • Networks must be more than just a communication tool – they must realise their potential 	<p>What are the critical success factors for ensuring NSUs effectively contribute to programme development and delivery in 2014-2020?</p>
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World Café Responses to Question No. 3

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Define the specific role of the NSU in preparation of the next programming period • Clearly divide network resources between activities for “preparation” and “delivery” of new programmes • More evaluation and guidance is needed on how to change network structures to improve their functionality for programme development and delivery • Connect with all interests across the programme and use the transition period to evaluate network performance in all areas – develop proposals for how networking can further enhance programme implementation • Need responsive and flexible approach (“agile” NRNs) to support programme development and delivery • Increase linkage between the Monitoring Committee and the NRNs • Good and efficient communication with all programme actors and stakeholders – encourage feedback and participation • Early set-up of the NRNs at least one year before RDP implementation • Try to ensure continuity of NSUs between programmes e.g. same structure and team • Preserve the institutional capacity / memory of NSUs • NSU skills should not be lost during the transition period • Invest time and resources in developing NSU skills and capacity • NRN / NSU action plans need adaptation to fit available budget and the on-going development of the network, including the new and different activities for different stages of network development • Reform TA rules to allow MAs more discretion regarding the planning and financing of NRNs • More and better pre-planning – evaluate existing activities, choose your future ‘model’, set your budget, plan your future activities • Develop and use a clear intervention logic • Agree / negotiate a clear mandate • Use stakeholder mapping to develop the ‘reach’ of the network • Choose right target groups for network activities • Stakeholder consultation for partnership agreement, ex ante evaluation, programme objectives and programme design / elaboration • Focus on stakeholder engagement and empowerment – seek a measurable increase in participation in decision-making at all levels • Organise more trainings and workshops for stakeholders
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Wednesday, 20 February 2013

Getting Started.....again

We played a simple game called **Names and Adjectives** to warm-up on Day 2.

Whilst standing in a circle everyone was asked to take turns to step forward and say their first name whilst thinking of an adjective to describe how they are feeling or how they are. The adjective had to start with the same letter as their name - for instance, "I'm Helene and I'm happy" or "I'm Angelo and I'm angelic".

You could also (and some did!) mime an action that describes the adjective – for example, "I'm David and I'm disco-dancing"which he was!

Training Topic: Good Practices for Stakeholder Consultation

The first training session on day 2 used a more classical approach for peer-to-peer exchange and learning – namely, two presentations from the Hungarian NSU on the theme of "Providing support for the preparation of next programming period". Many thanks to Csilla Páliné Keller and Ágota Hódi for their presentations which may be downloaded from [here](#).

Presentations are a valid and effective tool for peer-to-peer learning, although they are clearly not as interactive and participatory as other techniques we practiced during this training module. However, the learning experience associated with presentations can be enhanced. We used two specific approaches to enhance the learning value of the presentations:

1. **Topic 'lead-in'** - this consisted of a short talk by Marina Brakalova (ENRD CP) to introduce the training topic. Working with a flipchart Marina drew a simple diagram to place "stakeholder consultation" in the overall framework of the relationship between different stakeholders, their interest in rural development policy and their level of engagement in the associated processes.



A 'lead-in' such as this can play a number of functions during a training session – it can:

- help to generate interest in the training topic;
 - activate participants' existing knowledge of the training topic;
 - encourage the sharing of information and resources, and;
 - where necessary, help to reverse any resistance to discussion or learning.
2. **Reflective Q&A** - questions and answers are the typical follow-up to a presentation and are a comfortable approach for most people. However, the questioning can be deepened by taking time after the presentation to sit in groups of 2-3 and to reflect together upon the presentation before then formulating questions to ask.

Group Exercise: Creating Time and Space for Deeper Discussion

One of the objectives of this training module was "...to practice together some participatory techniques for animating meetings and facilitating effective and meaningful discussions". We practiced a group 'check-in', Appreciative Enquiry and World Café – and to complete the training module Hans-Olof Stålgren (Swedish NSU) introduced us to the Virtual Think Tank method that is regularly used by the Swedish NSU to bring network members together – usually by telephone – who are living a very long distance apart.

After a brief introduction, we practiced this method with the "simulation" of a Think Tank on the theme of "How to involve and activate stakeholder groups in rural networking?" The slides from Hans-Olof's short presentation are included on the next page and additional information on the Think Tank method can be found [here](#).

The Think Tank method

Short introduction
Hans-Olof Stålgren
Swedish NRN




A Swedish Network challenge

- Travelling costs and time consumption



- Web based registration
- Predefined chairman and secretary
- Maximum eight participants in each telephone meeting
- Structured time schedule, reserved time for all participants
- Immediate distribution of minutes
- Participants feedback within 48 hours

Mostly used for telephone meetings



You will only experience a small part of the concept.

- It is not just another meeting or discussing technique
- It is to bring together network members, living at a distance.
- Not having to spend hours in travel.
- Connecting and creating a network of colleagues even in between meetings.
- Gathering ideas from a whole network
- Getting almost instant notes and feedback
- Forming a joint report within a week




How to involve and activate the stakeholder groups in rural networking?

- You have chosen a theme, i.e. a Think Tank.
- You have got the questions and thought of your answers
- Chairmen are already appointed as well as secretaries
- Now it is time to get into business and talk.



Themes/target groups and questions

- Young people
- The business sector
- NGOs and volunteer groups
- The public sector
- The university sector
- Immigrants and ethnic minorities

- How do you get in touch with "your" stakeholder group?
- Where and when do you meet?
- Name some successful activities and themes that gathered and involved them?



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Wrapping-up

We wrapped-up the training module by returning to the circle for a group ‘check-out’ – again by using a talking piece to slow down the final group discussion and allow reflection upon the closing question of *“How was it and what will we take home?”*

Finally, before leaving the circle all participants took time to complete the Feedback Form designed on Day 1. A summary of the feedback is included in Annex 3.



And finally – we hope you had some fun.....we did!



ANNEX 1: List of Participants

ORGANIZATION	NAME	EMAIL
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Walloon Rural Network	Lorrain Guillaume	l.guillaume@reseau-pwdr.be

ANNEX 2: Feedback form designed and used during Training Module 1

Thank you for participating in this training! We hope you found it both valuable and enjoyable.

To help us with planning of future activities of this kind, please complete the following feedback questionnaire by rating the following issues with an X your answers using the grading system from Poor to Excellent:

How would you rate the organization of the event	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent
Pre-event organization and preparation				
Format, content and structure promoted participation and discussion				
Suitability of the venue				
Opportunities for networking and making new contacts				

Comments and suggestions:

How would you rate the training in terms of achieving the following objectives?	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent
Sharing knowledge and experiences amongst yourselves				
Facilitating development of deeper insights and group learning				
Practicing together some participatory techniques				

Comments and suggestions:

What are the most important lessons that you have learnt from this training?

Please indicate how can we improve future training modules:

Since we are still developing this pilot training programme, please share your thoughts about the general concept / outline:

ANNEX 3: Results of feedback on Training Module 1

1. How would you rate the organization of the event

	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent	Total
Pre-event organization and preparation	-	-	6 (28%)	15 (72%)	21
Format, content and structure promoted participation and discussion	-	-	6 (27%)	16 (73%)	22
Suitability of the venue	-	1 (4%)	5 (24%)	15 (72%)	21
Opportunities for networking and making new contacts	-	2 (9%)	6 (27%)	14 (64%)	22

Observations:

- Dinner outside the hotel in group to discover the country
- Useful to have the email address contacts to follow-up with some participants
- Venues in cities are easier accessible

2. How would you rate the training in terms of achieving the following objectives?

	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent	Total
Sharing knowledge and experiences amongst yourselves	-	1 (4%)	12 (55%)	9 (41%)	22
Facilitating development of deeper insights and group learning	-	1 (5%)	8 (36%)	13 (59%)	22
Practicing together some participatory techniques	-	-	3 (14%)	19 (86%)	22

Observations:

- Allow for deeper insights and deeper knowledge exchange per methodology
- There is still room and need for more theoretical sessions

What are the most important lessons that you have learnt from this training?

- Diversity between NRNs (most repeated answer)
- Challenges for next Programming Period and the role Networks play on transition period
- Participatory techniques
- How to involve stakeholders
- Sense of solidarity and common purpose thank to the group discussions; importance of sharing experience, knowledge and methods
- Think-tank method
- To obtain feedback from activities

How can we improve future training modules?

- More time for discussion/workshops
- Extent length of the meeting and reduce length of the day (energy and attention decreases after some hours)
- Go further in some topics; not get only good proposals, but also create new tools/methods together
- Trainings should take place in rooms with natural light
- Include presentations of NRNs through posters
- Keep the breaks

Thoughts about the general concept / outline of the training:

- Choose carefully the subjects of the trainings to keep them efficient and useful
- Connect the trainings with the NRN toolkit
- Continue to consult to NRNs what they find useful as topics of training
- Keep trainings associated to each NRN meeting to reduce travelling
- Keep in mind that participatory methods make the training interesting and involving
- Encourage the same trainees to attend to all trainings
- A possible focus topic could be cooperation