

**SUMMARY REPORT OF THE OUTCOMES
NATIONAL RURAL NETWORKS 7TH MEETING**

Brussels, 10th December 2010



Report prepared by ENRD Contact Point

Revised version (1st February 2010)

Brussels NRN Meeting Summary Report

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Executive Summary

This report summarises the main issues and outcomes from the 7th NRN Meeting, held in Brussels on 10th December 2009. The main focus of the meeting was on thematic workshops in three specific areas, namely Relevant Experience, Social Farming and Forestry. The issues that emerged from each workshop were many and varied but in all areas constructive proposals were made and agreed to guide follow-up actions. A summary of some of the main issues are provided below, presented by topic:

(i) Summary of the main discussion points (by session/topic):

(a) General NRN Forum / Coordination:

- The General forum provided an opportunity to update participants on other ENRD activities and progress, including an overview of the current ENRD Thematic Working Groups and their initial findings.*
- It was confirmed that there will be a fourth ENRD Thematic Working Group launched in January 2010 on "Delivery Mechanisms of Rural Development Policy". The potential role which could be played by the NRNs in providing input to improve RD policy delivery mechanisms was highlighted. More details will be provided in the New Year to ensure NRN involvement and support.*
- It was noted that three Focus Groups are planned to be launched in the New Year that will report to the LEADER Sub-Committee. These groups include: (i) Implementation of the bottom-up approach; (ii) Preserving the innovative/experimental character of LEADER; (iii) Implementation of the measure "Cooperation". Active participation of NRN representatives is anticipated.*
- A wide range of thematic initiatives planned or actively being supported by many NRNs were highlighted by various representatives during the follow up open discussion. It was agreed that the CP will develop a detailed record of these and distribute the information to all NRNs.*

(b) NRN Relevant Experience workshop summary of main issues:

- The workshop recognised that the collection, collation and dissemination of rural development practices as one of the most important tasks of the ENRD, thereby ensuring the effective transfer of relevant and useful RD practices/ideas and raising awareness of the use of EAFRD/EAGGF funds to a broader public. Any system developed at ENRD level would build upon and complement existing/future systems developed at Member State level.*
- To contribute to these goals an outline proposal was developed and presented by the ENRD Contact Point for a Pilot Project Information and Knowledge Sharing Exchange (Pilot PIKSE), an initiative designed for piloting collection and collation of relevant experience examples, in partnership with a number of National Rural Networks.*
- It was proposed to present relevant experience examples in two ways, namely: (i) Detailed case studies, primarily targeted at practitioners; and (ii) Short summary/fiche information, primarily targeted at a wider public.*
- It was further proposed that the Pilot PIKSE initiative would be developed in two phases, namely: Phase 1: Collection and collation of an initial twenty case studies by March 2010; Phase 2: Collection and collation of a further 30 case studies by June 2010 (the type of approaches and division of case studies to be collected will be decided by a Coordination Team – see below)*
- The thematic areas for the pilot PIKSE were proposed to focus upon: (i) Renewable energy and (ii) investment in agro-processing.*
- It was agreed that final decisions on the definition of a common framework for the proposed pilot PIKSE approach should be one of the first tasks of the Pilot PIKSE Coordination Team, a team that would be established to coordinate all actions on the Pilot and to include a number of NRN representatives with specific technical expertise in this area.*

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- *Two alternative approaches were identified for collection and collation of case studies, namely the concept of a more 'open, descriptive story approach' vs. a more 'structured, template approach'. Whilst both approaches were found to have merit, the participants had difficulty in establishing a clear consensus on the preferred approach. It was agreed that the pilot will try to test both approaches.*

(c) Social Farming workshop summary of main issues:

- *An introductory presentation was made by the Contact Point which provided a brief overview and description of social farming and its possible links with agriculture and RDPs measures; an outline description of the proposed objectives of the Thematic Initiative; possible results and indicative activities.*
- *It was highlighted that NRNs can only bring added value to Social Farming if they make farmers the main focus of the initiative. In addition it was recognised that it was importance to identify which social farming related activities can be financed within the framework of the current RD Programmes and which areas offer areas for improvement.*
- *It was acknowledged that there is a need to raise the profile and visibility of SF at National and European level to ensure that the needs of service users are recognised.*
- *Most NRNs agreed that inputs to the current and future policy discussions in this area will be important. To guide such discussions it was proposed that initial actions should concentrate on identifying positive examples and facilitating the exchange of information, experience and knowledge.*
- *It was proposed to identify a common approach of work focused upon RD Programme implementation to identify how the RDPs can better support Social Farming both now and in the future.*

(d) Forestry workshop summary of main issues:

- *A presentation was made by the CP, proposing to the participants an outline framework including the proposed wider and specific objectives of the initiative, possible activities and achievable results. One of the main objectives of the workshop was to gain feedback from the participants about the proposed working methods and identify possible common areas of interest that could be considered for NRN joint action.*
- *It was understood that the underlying objective of the forestry initiative will be to ensure the improvement of the implementation of the 2007-2013 RDP forestry related measures through the provision of concrete exchange of knowledge and experiences with key beneficiaries (and also where potential transnational partnerships can be developed).*
- *It was recognised that the range of stakeholders possibly involved by the activity of the group is potentially very broad including policy and programme decision makers, practitioners and direct beneficiaries, all of whom may benefit from the exchange of knowledge and experiences that could be promoted by the group.*
- *It was recognised that links with other existing working groups or advisory committees at EU and national level (e.g. DG AGRI Standing forestry committee) should be explored further to avoid overlap and ensure complementarity with the NRN Forestry Thematic Initiative.*
- *Given the specificity of the topic and the necessity to address the real needs of forestry stakeholders (at all levels) it was recognised that it will be important to identify the right expertise needed to support the thematic initiative. Key organisations/experts of the forestry sector should be involved at the national level by each partner NRN in order to ensure a relevant contribution to the definition of the work plan and the activities.*
- *The areas where the most common interest was identified amongst participants included: (i) The use of biomass from forests in small-scale operations; (ii) The multifunctional role of forests (Public*

Goods and services provided by forests); and (iii) Support to private forestry management (forestry associations). It was agreed that these will be followed up in greater detail in subsequent meetings.

(e) Rural entrepreneurship/ RD responses to economic change:

- *A presentation from the Contact Point highlighted the fact that rural entrepreneurship and development of effective responses to economic change were one of the most dominant themes identified by all NRN's in previous screening exercises; and also a leading theme of most current LEADER and LAG forums (based on some CP country visits and other NRN documents).*
- *It was noted that there is clear evidence that many rural stakeholders need support and guidance in building a response to economic change and that no clear road maps currently exist.*
- *It was proposed to consider establishment of an NRN Thematic Initiative that would contribute to the broader analysis of the impact of the economic change (from a rural perspective).*
- *The proposal was further supported and complemented by an Irish NRN presentation which outlined some of the challenges facing Ireland today and the ways in which the NRN is seeking to build a response. Offering the chance to build upon this and link with other NRNs / regions where innovative rural / RDP responses are being developed.*
- *Important responses may include introducing greater flexibility to Rural Development Programmes & Delivery Mechanisms to better respond to economic changes; Building effective partnerships with the private sector; Enhancing LEADER role in RD programmes; Promoting more TNC initiatives etc.*
- *The main focus of such an initiative was proposed to be 'To highlight bottlenecks, identify solutions and provide case studies to respond to economic change in rural areas.*
- *Possible results from such an initiative were proposed to include Policy analysis results and recommendations; Case studies and relevant examples and disseminated between networks; Key success factors/processes in implementing alternative/diversified ways of valuable activities e.g. TNC, Leader approach, PPP, etc.; and Events to promote new initiatives and disseminate findings.*

(ii) Main follow-up actions proposed:

(a) NRN forums and other coordination actions:

- *It was agreed that the Contact Point would coordinate the collection of information (with the support of all NRN representatives) on current and planned thematic initiatives being undertaken by NRNs (and planned events) and provide a report to all NRNs in the New Year, possibly to include suggested new clusters of NRNs on specific Themes. Suitable topics may include: Monitoring and evaluating the results and impact of networks; LAG self-assessment; Supporting LAGs / LAG management / LAG project generation; TNC project support methods.*
- *It was agreed that DG Agri and the Contact Point will aim to ensure pro-active coordination and flow of information between NRNs and the various Thematic initiatives at European level, where appropriate and relevant, to maximise synergies and prevent unnecessary overlaps between the various thematic activities supported at member state and between NRNs. This is anticipated to include the organising of more detailed sessions on thematic working group findings, linked to future NRN forums*
- *It was agreed to support the three emerging NRN thematic initiatives (Relevant experience, Social Farming and Forestry) in the next six months to ensure the development of tangible activities and outcomes. Using these groups as pilots to test and refine approaches for the support of other technical/ thematic issues. It is envisaged that each initiative will use a combination of e-meetings and face-to-face meetings, starting in January. Some follow-up meetings will be combined with general NRN meetings. It was noted that work with clusters involves development (of knowledge jointly by the participating NRNs) over a period of time and will require on-going technical support from the Contact Point and relevant NRNs to ensure successful progress is made.*

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- *The next NRN general meeting is anticipated to follow a similar format as the Brussels meeting. Given the commitment to follow up actions lead by the Italian NRN for Social Farming and Forestry the Contact Point will explore the option of a joint meeting in Rome towards the end of March (provisionally 25th/26th March 2010 – to be confirmed separately following further consultation with the Italian NRN and DG Agri). Topics to be covered could include entrepreneurship and other topics on which the NRN confirms a strong common interest.*

(b) Launching of an NRN Relevant Experience Pilot Initiative:

- *It was agreed to launch an NRN Pilot PIKSE Initiative in the New Year that would allow testing of two approaches, namely focused on collection of case studies materials using:*
 - *An open case study approach, whereby case study materials will be collected on projects that describe, in a more free structure, a project experience or story; and*
 - *A more closed case study approach, whereby case study materials will be collected on projects, presented within a more clearly defined template structure, with specific information.*

These approaches were agreed to be presented both as detailed case studies, primarily targeted at practitioners; and as short summary/fiche information, primarily targeted at a wider public.
- *It was proposed to utilise resources of the Contact Point's permanent and non-permanent team to support the completion of the pilot PIKSE summary fiches and case study templates (subject to final agreement with DG Agri), working closely with a number of NRNs who have relevant case study materials available.*
- *It was agreed to explore, as part of the pilot exercise, innovative dissemination channels for the relevant experience case study dissemination, include piloting of more interactive on-line tools, where possible.*
- *It was proposed to appoint a core group of NRNs to be part of the initial Pilot PIKSE Coordination Team, which would also comprise Contact Point coordination staff and a representative of DG AGRI. This was proposed to include representatives from Austria, Spain, Italy, Ireland, Estonia, Sweden and Scotland. The CP agreed to follow up directly with each of these countries before the end of the year to agree on participation and specific follow-up steps.*
- *It was underlined that the proposed core team would remain open to inclusion of other NRNs that may wish to join in order to contribute to the piloting exercise, as the initiative develops.*
- *It was also agreed that all relevant information about the progress and results of the piloting exercise will be disseminated to all NRNs, primarily through the provision of progress reports at next NRN meetings (and linked to other MS meetings where relevant).*

(c) Launching of an NRN Social Farming Thematic Initiative:

- *It was agreed to launch an NRN Social Farming Thematic Initiative in the New Year. It was also agreed that the Italian NRN would be the leaders of the initiative.*
- *All interested NRNs agreed to prepare basic research documents on social farming activities and the general environment for social farming in their countries. Each NRN agreed to prepare summary, evidence based reports and to provide these to the Italian NRN by 15th February 2010.*
- *It was subsequently agreed that the CP would support the Italian NRN in preparing a summary report which would collate the country information, in preparation for the next Social Farming Thematic Initiative meeting.*
- *It was agreed that there would be a follow-up meeting of the SF Thematic Initiative group during the 8th NRN meeting, possibly to be combined with a field visit in Italy during March 2010.*
- *It was agreed that a 2nd follow up meeting could be undertaken in Belgium in the framework of a Belgian Flanders NRN event on "Social issues on the country side" in September 2010.*

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- *It was agreed that there would be initial collection of case study materials between April – August 2010, specifically related to the implementation of social farming activities supported through the RDP measures. The materials will be reviewed in the next meeting of the group in Belgium in September 2010.*
 - *A tentative timetable was agreed for all actions.*

(d) Launching of an NRN Forestry Thematic Initiative:

- *The main goal for the first quarter of 2010 will be to define a more detailed and common work plan which specifies planned activities and topics for the Thematic Initiative.*
- *A "technical" meeting among the involved NRNs is proposed to take place for this purpose in the first quarter of 2010. Specific issues related to the implementation of group activities (including cost coverage) would be addressed as well.*
- *As a general action to be undertaken, the creation of a common basis of knowledge through the collection and dissemination of relevant technical works and other publications was agreed to be facilitated in order to provide solid background for the initiative. The involvement of the CP for this purpose will be further reviewed and coordinated.*
- *It was also agreed that there was a need for development of a communication strategy to promote wider dissemination between NRNs and other involved stakeholders to ensure the creation of a "permanent" exchange platform on forestry issues between official NRN meetings.*
- *It was agreed to initially focus on the three most common interest areas initially, namely: (i) The use of biomass from forests in small-scale operations; (ii) The multifunctional role of forests (Public Goods and services provided by forests); and (iii) Support to private forestry management (forestry associations). It was agreed that these will be followed up in greater detail in subsequent meetings (subject to future verification/adaptation by the group)*
- *An initial timetable of follow-up actions over the next three months was proposed and agreed to guide next steps.*

(e) Launching of a Rural Entrepreneurship and rural responses to economic change Thematic Initiative:

- *It was proposed to identify a core group of NRNs wishing to participate in such an initiative and to develop a more detailed framework, including specific objectives & results; an initial work plan and resource plan. Planning will also take into direct account and link with other relevant initiatives, wherever possible (i.e. Dutch, Belgian and Irish NRN initiatives).*
- *It was proposed that there could be a possible follow-up initiative during the Austrian LINC (LEADER Inspired Network Community) event on 15th-17th March 2010 and/or this could be followed up as one of the subjects of the next NRN forum.*
- *A proposal was made by the Irish NRN, in partnership with the ENRD Contact Point to develop such a proposal and introduce it to the NRNs by March 2010, prior to the next NRN meeting.*

PLEASE NOTE: All dates listed above are provisional, subject to confirmation by separate correspondence to specific workshop members. More detailed findings and recommendations in each technical area can be found in the main body of the report and in the supporting annexes.

Brussels NRN Meeting Summary Report

1. Introduction and acknowledgements

This report provides a summary of the issues and outcomes from the 7th NRN Meeting, held in Brussels on 10th December 2009. The meeting was designed to provide an update to all NRNs on ENRD and Contact Point activities, to allow the opportunity for all NRNs to update each other of progress and planned activities and to launch three specific thematic initiatives.

The ENRD Contact Point would also like to take this opportunity to particularly thank the Italian, Austrian and Irish NRNs for their invaluable support in preparing for this meeting and for the hospitality they have provided to Contact Point staff during recent visits, all of which contributed to the outcomes achieved during the NRN forum.

2. Overview of ENRD CP Activities

A general introduction was provided by *Haris Martinos*, Team Leader of the ENRD Contact Point. This allowed introduction of a number of new faces who were participating for the first time in the NRN forum, either as observers from other institutions or as active participants in the various thematic initiatives. This was followed by an overview of ENRD activities by *Gaëlle Lhermitte* from DG AGRI/G3. This included a brief summary of discussions at the previous day's ENRD Coordination Committee meeting, stressing the importance the Commission gave to the feedback and complementarity provided by NRN Thematic activities. This was followed by a Contact Point presentation by *Pascale Van Doren*, providing an overview of ENRD Activities related to NRNs, which included a summary of recent networking activities and Fact Finding Missions. This was followed by a further Contact Point presentation from *Adrian Neal*, providing a summary of some of the recent analytical activities supported by the ENRD CP. Important information highlighted during the introductory section of the forum included the following:

- The three on-going ENRD Thematic Working Groups have produced initial results. Some of the findings were presented to the forum to provide some insights into the work being undertaken. As more detailed documents become available these will be forwarded to the NRNs for information and feedback.
- It was confirmed that there will be a fourth ENRD Thematic Working Group launched in January 2010 on "Delivery Mechanisms of Rural Development Policy". The areas of interest intended to be considered by the Group include the programming process of the RDPs, their implementation and the role played by monitoring and evaluation. In addition consideration will also be given to the issue of demarcation and complementarity between EAFRD and EU structural funds; the role which could be played by the NRNs themselves to improve RD policy delivery mechanisms; and possible links with the work of the European Evaluation Network. More details on this group will be provided in the New Year to ensure NRN involvement and support.
- It was agreed that DG Agri and the Contact Point will aim to ensure pro-active coordination and flow of information between NRNs and the various Thematic Groups, where appropriate and relevant. This will include the organising of more detailed sessions on findings linked to future NRN forums.
- Three Focus Groups are planned to be launched in the New Year that will report to the LEADER Sub-Committee. These groups are as follows: (i) Implementation of the bottom-up approach; (ii) Preserving the innovative/experimental character of LEADER; (iii) Implementation of the measure "Cooperation". Nominations for leadership and participation in the groups have now been made and final agreement on the make up and schedule of meetings of the groups will be defined in January. Active participation of NRN representatives is anticipated and to be encouraged.

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- Round table contributions revealed a wide range of thematic initiatives planned or actively being supported by many NRNs on topics as varied as Rural entrepreneurship; Gender; Youth; Monitoring and evaluating the results and impact of networks; LAG self-assessment; LAG management and project generation; TNC project support methods. It was subsequently agreed that the Contact Point would coordinate the collection of information on all such initiatives (and events) from all NRNs and issue a short summary table and report on these initiatives early in the New Year.

3. NRN Thematic Workshops:

Following the general forum session, participants were organised in three separate workshops, namely for Relevant Experience; Social Farming; and Forestry. This was followed by a plenary session in which each group reported back to the main forum, followed by a fourth workshop on rural entrepreneurship and rural responses to economic change. The background/ rationale, main issues, outcomes and planned follow-up actions for each of these workshops are summarised below:

3.1 NRN Relevant Experiences/Relevant experience initiative

3.1.1 Background/rationale for the NRN Relevant Experience Initiative

The Relevant Experience workshop participants recognised that the collection, collation and dissemination of rural development practices is one of the most important tasks of the ENRD to ensure effective transfer of relevant and useful RD practices/ideas and raising awareness of the use of EAFRD/EAGGF funds to a broader public. To contribute to these goals an outline proposal was developed and presented by the ENRD Contact Point for a Project Information and Knowledge Sharing Exchange (hereinafter referred to as the Pilot PIKSE), an initiative designed for piloting, in partnership with a number of National Rural Networks.

A Contact Point Working Paper was introduced to workshop participants using a power point presentation, outlining the proposed approach and methodology of the pilot. The proposals were based on previous work undertaken by the Contact Point which has included the preparation of two background research documents (copies of which were provided to workshop participants), namely:

- A document summarising the current state of play of Relevant Experience and relevant experience systems developed to date by all NRNs, including a summary of main trends and lessons learnt (this was an updated version of a previously circulated document, prepared after the Budapest 6th NRN meeting).
- A document summarising the main approaches and methods being used by other regional, national and global programmes, including a summary of the main findings and recommendations for development of future RD relevant experience systems at National and European level.

The main elements of the Pilot PIKSE presented were as follows:

The Pilot would collect relevant experience examples and present them in two ways, namely (i) Detailed case studies, primarily targeted at practitioners; and (ii) Short summary/fiche information, primarily targeted at a wider public. It was proposed that the Pilot initiative would have two phases, namely: *Phase 1*: Collection and collation of an initial twenty case studies; *Phase 2*: Collection and collation of a further 30 case studies (the type of approaches and division of case studies to be collected will be decided by the Pilot PIKSE Coordination Team)

With the background research and the proposed pilot PIKSE information in hand, the workshop offered the first opportunity for direct comparison with and combination of the experience of the participating NRNs. Workshop participants were invited to discuss and agree the next steps to be undertaken in order to finalise the design of the pilot initiative and to launch certain practical actions in the New Year.

3.1.2 Main discussion points on Relevant Experience

(i) General approach and methods for the Pilot initiative:

- The discussion clarified that *relevant experience* gained during the *current programming period* would be the main focus of the collection and dissemination pilot exercise.
- For the *thematic focus* of the pilot PIKSE the areas of (i) renewable energy and (ii) investment in agro-processing were proposed and agreed. Both of the themes were recognised as important areas in most Member State Rural Development Programmes, linking well with issues identified in the CAP health check. Work in both areas is expected to provide the Pilot PIKSE Coordination Team with the possibility to further refine these themes into sub-themes.
- Participants exchanged their views on how to best *combine the collection of relevant rural practices between European and National levels*. It was agreed that final decisions on the definition of a common framework for the proposed pilot PIKSE approach should be one of the first tasks of the Pilot PIKSE Coordination Team, a team that would be established to coordinate all actions on the Pilot and to include a number of NRN representatives with specific technical expertise in this area.
- *Two main approaches* for the collation and dissemination of relevant experience materialised from the discussion, namely:
 - An open approach – where project experience is described in a more free structure or story format;
 - A more closed approach – where projects are presented within a clearly defined template structure comprising specific information.
- Practical examples were provided by the Swedish National Rural Network (and a publication was circulated, as an example of the open approach) and by the Italian National Rural Network (which included a presentation describing the currently developed analytical approach towards the establishment of examples of interesting and relevant rural practices).

(ii) Possible template(s) structure and content / case study materials

- Two alternative approaches were identified for collection and collation of case studies, namely the concept of a more '*open, descriptive story approach*' vs. a more '*structured, template approach*'. Whilst both approaches were found to have merit, the participants had difficulty in establishing a clear consensus on the preferred approach.
- Discussions revealed a clear link between the preferred approaches and the possible target audiences. For some participants the 'story' approach was considered too descriptive. Whilst others considered the use of more detailed analytical templates as too cumbersome and difficult to communicate. In this regard, it was clarified that the distinction between the proposed summary fiche (basic information) and case study (specific information) templates was designed to address such concerns.
- As a compromise and in the spirit of 'piloting', it was agreed that the PIKSE pilot would be modified to allow testing of both processes, namely allowing some case studies materials to use:
 - An open case study approach, whereby case study materials will be collected on projects that describe in a more free structure a project experience or story;
 - A more closed case study approach, whereby case study materials will be collected on projects, presented within a more clearly defined template structure, with specific information.

These approaches will be presented in two ways, as follows:

- Detailed case studies, primarily targeted at practitioners

- Short summary/fiche information, primarily targeted at a wider public
- Taking into account NRN comments regarding language and capacity requirements, it was proposed to utilise resources of the Contact Point's permanent and non-permanent team to support the completion of the pilot PIKSE summary fiches and case study templates (subject to final agreement with DG Agri).
- It was also agreed that the NRN Pilot PIKSE Coordination Team members (see below for more details on this) will undertake the sourcing and provision of background materials required for the establishment of summary fiches and case studies. It was noted that some NRNs involve external expertise to establish case studies and that these resources could also be used to support the initiative.
- A further recommendation made by participants to the future Pilot PIKSE Coordination Team was to consider, as part of the pilot exercise, *innovative dissemination channels* for the resulting relevant rural practices. This may include piloting of a number of innovative and interactive tools, offering e.g. the possibility to comment and source information on-line. The aim being to extend the dissemination process beyond traditional practitioners and policy-makers.

(iii) Establishment of a Pilot PIKSE Coordination Team to guide pilot initiative

- Following on from previous screening work undertaken by the ENRD CP, in particular in the context of the background document summarising the current state of play of Relevant Experience and relevant experience systems developed to date, by all NRNs, the Contact Point suggested a group of NRNs to consider joining the Pilot PIKSE Coordination Team, which will also comprise Contact Point coordination staff and a representative of DG AGRI.
- The NRNs invited to appoint a Pilot PIKSE Coordination Team member are understood to have reached a more advanced stage of development with Relevant Experience systems and services including Austria, Spain, Italy, Ireland, Estonia, Sweden and Scotland.
- It was underlined that the proposed core team would remain open to inclusion of other NRNs that may wish to join in order to contribute to the piloting exercise as the initiative develops.
- It was agreed that all relevant information about the progress and results of the piloting exercise will be disseminated to all NRNs, primarily through the provision of progress reports at the next NRN meetings (and linked to other MS meetings where relevant).

3.1.3 Proposed follow-up actions on Relevant Experience

The tentative agreement on the timetable for proposed follow-up actions is summarised in the table below:

Action/Results	Proposed completion date
Communication of revised PIKSE working paper, updated with NRN workshop results	<i>Direct follow-up to 7th NRN meeting, asap.</i>
Pilot PIKSE Coordination Team established and meeting	<i>Members agreed by 31st December 2009 First meetings held in early January 2010</i>
Agreement on case study specific structures for open and closed approach	<i>By 29th January 2010</i>
Phase 1: Collection and collation of 20 case studies/summaries (10 each: renewable energy; investment in agro-processing).	<i>Completed by 28th February 2010</i>
Phase 2: Collection and collation of an	<i>Completed by 7th May 2010</i>

additional 30 case studies/summaries	
Database for Pilot designed and operational	<i>By 28th February 2010</i> <i>Updated by 7th May 2010</i>
Dissemination programme and specific promotional events completed	<i>30th June 2010</i>
PIKSE roll-out plan for following year completed and agreed	<i>30th June 2010</i>

3.2 NRN Social Farming Thematic Initiative

3.2.1 Background and rationale for the Social Farming Initiative

Social farming activities are gaining attention from an increasing range of stakeholders in recent times. On the one hand this is the result of a different perception of the role and the possible positive effects of agricultural and rural resources on social, physical and mental well-being of people. On the other hand social farming represents a new chance for farmers to carry out alternative services to broaden and diversify the scope of their activity and their role in society. The integration between agriculture and social activities can also provide farmers with new sources of income and enhance the image of agriculture in the public opinion. During the 5th NRN meeting in Sevilla, in June 2009, the Italian NRN presented its outline ideas on establishment of a Social Farming Thematic Initiative and invited the other NRNs to express their interest to cooperate in this field. From the Italian idea, preliminary information has been collected from the NRNs on the expectations they have toward the thematic initiative and possible inputs they could provide. Nine NRNs expressed an interest in participating and six of these countries provided information on their preferences. The original intention of the IT NRN was to set up a system of relations including and sharing experience with a wider range of stakeholders, involving farmers, universities, research institutions, public administration and beneficiaries in order to identify best practices and exchange of experience and know how on social farming activities related to the implementation of the RDPs.

To provide a common platform to guide discussions during the workshop a summary presentation was made by the Contact Point which provided a brief overview and description of social farming and its possible links with agriculture and RDPs measures; a description of the proposed wider objectives of which the Thematic Initiative may contribute, mainly related to improving the formulation of future social farming policy at national and European level, the role of rural development as a social inclusion policy and its integration with other policy, the coordination of cooperation instruments and to enhance the efficiency of the efficiency of RDPs measures. A proposal was also made for the core purpose, possible results and initial activities. This provided the basis for follow up discussions.

3.2.2 Main issues raised during the workshop discussions on Social farming

- Participants acknowledged the need to clearly define the role and added value of an NRN thematic initiative on Social Farming (SF). It was agreed that NRNs can only bring an added value to SF if they put farmers in the focus of the initiative and for this reason the needs of farmers should be well identified and recognised. In addition it was agreed the importance of finding out which social farming related activities can be financed within the framework of the current RD Programmes and which are the areas of possible improvement.
- It was underlined the need to raise the profile and visibility of SF at national level, as well as at European level and to ensure that the needs of service users are well recognised also at EU level.

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- It was noted that numerous reports have been produced on local, regional, national and international level, but these findings were not well distributed and recognised, in many case both at regional and European level and this was one area where the group could possibly focus its work.
 - It was suggested the possibility that NRNs work as a national animation unit able to build up links with other networks as well as to discuss with other national stakeholders to find out how SF sector can make use of the RDPs, especially as in the present programming period SF is not well supported through some RD Funds in some MS.
 - However, it was noted that in some MSs the link between RD and SF is well exploited (mainly within Axis 3 and linked to Leader initiatives). Building upon and learning from these types of initiative may prove the best approach for the group.
 - A discussion of using the NRN group as a form of lobby group was explored. The aim being to influence discussions at European level in relation to the future programming period and ways to better accommodate SF in future measures/RD programmes. Most NRNs agreed that the influence on the policy and programming discussions can be a future outcome of group activities as an input to the policy process and that this should be concentrated, in the initial phase, on identifying good examples and facilitating the exchange of information, experience and knowledge (i.e. evidence based case studies to demonstrate policy and programming options).
 - Some participants pointed out that in the future the social aspect of farming should get a greater interest especially since the CAP already supplements farm income linked to compliance with broader objectives in the area of preservation of environment (protection of traditional rural landscapes, bird and wildlife conservation etc.). Farmers involved in social activities are providing the society with important services and for this reason the possibility to support their incomes could be taken into consideration. A SF system of relations set up by the NRNs could possibly prove the usefulness and efficiency of SF to policy makers and influence the future RD Policy or at least could give a feedback and important input to guide the European Commission in this area.
 - It was noted that since the ENRD Thematic Working Group 3 is working on public goods, that it would be useful if greater consideration could be given to social aspects of the RDPs when considering their research and analytical findings, especially since their results and findings could be a good mechanism to influence future programming. Linkages between the TWG3 and the Social farming initiative were recognised as being mutually beneficial in this regard.
 - It was proposed to identify a common approach of work. The thematic initiative has to focus on RD Programmes and show how RDP can better support SF. NRNs agreed that they have to put agriculture and farmers in the centre of their approach and to better identify what agriculture can contribute to social issues. NRNs should support farmers in finding alternative ways of how their farming activities could be diversified.
 - It was noted that there appears to be a great interest amongst many farmers in SF, but other stakeholders such as municipalities, health or education sectors do not show much interest on these issues and the communication between these two groups is very low.
 - It was emphasised that there is a strong need/demand from the society for these kinds of activities but, like other products or services, SF needs to be better promoted and farmers need to be better informed of what possibilities there are. For this reason the NRNs need to be able to collect, use and share information with their stakeholders to facilitate the wider promotion and implementation of these services.
 - It was pointed out that the organisation of study trips can be on one hand extremely useful for exchanging knowledge and experiences, especially for farmers, but on the other hand their financing can be an issue, both for NRNs and farmers. As a possible solution some participants proposed to make an analysis on national level and to clarify if SF is a priority and which funds could provide support. In case SF is considered to be a priority, funds could be made available for different kind of activity more easily.

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- Some of the NRNs underlined their main expectation on participating to this initiatives, in particular:
 - AT: Share experience on social farming and raise visibility.
 - BE-FL: Framework for promoting social farming in RD policy 2014-2020.
 - DE: Improve exchange of information between local actors and European level.
 - FI: Actions to assist in developing social farming activities.
 - IE: Raise visibility of social farming on European and international level.
 - NL: Strengthening farmers position & improve interaction with health sector.
 - IT: Exchange knowledge and experience on how other networks deal with practical issues and problems, such as child care services, agri-nurseries, social inclusion and therapeutic activities for people with disadvantages; social health care.
 - SI: Improve the promotion of social farming and encourage farmer uptake
 - UK-ENG: Demonstrate how RDPs can better support social farming.
 - In consequence, it was agreed that the main objective of the initiative could be defined as follows: *'To improve the implementation of RDPs in support of social farming and to provide input to the development of future programming at national and European level'.*
 - Following up on this seven NRNs agreed to participate in the initiative, namely UK-ENG, IE, SE, AT, BE-FL, IT, FI. It was also agreed that DE and NL may join the initiative at a later stage.

3.2.3 Proposed follow-up actions

- The Italian NRN were elected as leaders of the group. And as a first step the Italian NRN agreed to prepare a project proposal and send it to the interested NRNs by the end of January 2010.
- All interested NRNs agreed to prepare basic research documents on social farming activities and the general environment for social farming in their countries. This would be based on existing materials and research documents, wherever possible. This would include:
 - The situation with social farming activities linked to the implementation of RDPs;
 - The institutional and policy environment for implementation of social farming initiatives;
 - The possible opportunities and bottlenecks linked to the implementation of RDP measures in relation to social farming activities/initiatives;
 - The service provider needs and opportunities;
 - The user needs and opportunities.

Each NRN agreed to prepare summary, evidence based reports and to provide these to the Italian NRN by 15th February 2010.

- It was agreed that there would be a follow-up meeting of the SF Thematic Initiative group during the 8th NRN meeting, possibly to be combined with a field visit in Italy during March 2010. During the field visit projects financed with EAFRD funds and other projects financed from other sources would be considered.
- It was agreed that a 2nd follow up meeting could be undertaken in Belgium in the framework of a Belgian Flanders NRN event on "Social issues on the country side" in September 2010.
- It was agreed that other possible study trips may be planned at follow up meetings in Italy and Belgium subject to funds and overall support.
- It was agreed that there would be initial collection of case study materials, specifically related to the implementation of social farming activities supported through the RDP measures. For the collection of case study materials and the dissemination of information, it is proposed that the

group will be guided by the framework to be developed by the NRN Initiative on Relevant Experiences (to be followed up separately – see section above).

- It was agreed that the group would consider methods for the dissemination of the main results/findings from the group, with the aim to inform future social farming policy initiatives and improving RDP implementation.
- A tentative timetable was agreed and is outlined in the table below:

Results		Proposed completion date
A	Summary country reports prepared	15 th February 2010
B	Analysis of the reports and preparation of summary findings	February / March 2010
C	1st meeting of the NRN Social Farming Thematic Group	March 2010
D	First study visit	March 2010 (or June 2010 – to be defined)
E	Commencing social farming case studies collection process	April – August 2010
F	2nd meeting	September – Belgium

3.3 NRN Forestry Thematic Initiative

3.3.1 Background and rationale

During the 3rd NRN meeting held in Brussels on the 1st of April 2009, the Italian NRN proposed the establishment of a specific Thematic Network on Forestry and invited other NRNs to express their interest in cooperation. Preliminary information has since been collected by the Italian NRN from seven other interested NRNs, outlining their interests and experience. This core group includes Austria, Belgium (Wallonia), Germany, Spain, Finland, Italy and Sweden and now forms the basis to establish the forestry thematic initiative, which remains open to other NRNs willing to participate in future.

The forestry sector represents an important contribution to the rural economies of many Member states and a significant number of supporting actions to the forestry sector have been included in many RDPs. There are significant differences between Member states in terms of forest coverage, type of ownership (public vs. private), holding size and structure, production and diversification of activities. Participants in the thematic initiative aim to share knowledge and experiences in order to enhance the implementation of RDP forestry-related measures and contribute to improvements in national and European forestry programmes, policies and strategies.

3.3.2 Main discussion points during the NRN forestry workshop

- The workshop was opened by a presentation delivered by the CP proposing to the participants an outline framework (see revised version in Annex 5) which aimed to set out the basis for further discussion on the main objectives of the work, possible activities and achievable results. One of the main objectives of the workshop was to gain feedback from the participants about the proposed working methods and identify possible common areas of interest that could be considered for NRN joint initiatives.
- Participants noted that the range of stakeholders potentially involved in the activities of the group is wide. The type of stakeholders involved is principally related to the thematic area of interest and the activity that will be put in place. As suggested by the wider objectives identified for the forestry initiative (see Annex 5), decision makers, practitioners and beneficiaries are all possible beneficiaries from the exchange of knowledge and experiences that will be promoted by the initiative.

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- It was agreed that a more effective involvement of relevant stakeholder can eventually take into consideration the creation of links with other existing working groups or advisory committees at EU and national level (e.g. DG AGRI Standing forestry committee). These possible links however would be limited to ensure an improvement in the circulation of information and to a better targeting of the actions/partnerships realised at the operational level.
 - The main objective of the forestry initiative was discussed and agreed as *'The improvement of the implementation of the 2007-2013 RDP measures through the provision of concrete moments of exchange of knowledge and experiences with key beneficiaries, where some partnership can be developed'*.
 - The findings and the outcomes of the activities realised during the lifetime of the initiative could play a role in contributing to and informing the policy debate on forestry, also in the view of the next programming period.
 - In this context, it was recognised by participants that the forestry initiative is not to be considered as an isolated exercise but can develop synergies and find complementarities with other NRN initiatives or the wider EN RD thematic activities.
 - Given the specificity of the topic and the necessity to address the real needs of forestry stakeholders (at all levels) it was agreed that it will be necessary to identify the right expertise needed to support the thematic initiative.
 - It was further agreed that key organisations/experts of the forestry sector should be involved at the national level by each partner NRN in order to ensure a relevant contribution to the definition of the work plan and the activities.
 - On the basis of the results of the NRN survey proposed by the Italian network, the participants were asked to comment on the specific needs/expertises expressed and eventually provide further detail in order to prompt the interest and the participation of other partners.
 - During the workshop different possible areas of interest were identified and discussed, the following representing the ones which gained the most of interest and response from the participants¹:
 - (i) *Use of biomass from forests at small scale (short energy chains) – to include ES, DE, SE, BE, IT, FI*: These NRNs expressed an interest in cooperating in order to exchange specific knowledge and concrete experiences on the development and improvement of integrated renewable energy supply at local level, based on forest biomasses. On going experiences/projects already available in different countries can be usefully shared within the group. Some of the main issues as the scale of intervention and the valorisation of forest resources at local level seemed to represent common concerns for the involved countries.
 - (ii) *Multifunctional role of forests (Public Goods and services provided by forests) – to include IT, ES, DE, BE, SE*: The relationship between agriculture and the provision of PG and services is a horizontal and relevant issue. The specific contribution of forestry and the improvement of delivery mechanisms in this sector play a relevant role in this context. Regional experiences and relevant examples in some countries are already available to be eventually disseminated but will benefit from additional inputs/experiences coming from different contexts.
 - (iii) *Support to private forestry management (forestry association) – to include BE, IT, SE, FI*: Exchange of experiences and relevant practices in supporting private forest managers has been considered relevant at least in 4 different countries, either due to a lack of specific support instruments or for the structural situation of private forests in the interested countries. Forest associations have been pointed out as a relevant topic to be further investigated in this context. The involvement of forestry owners and managers in defining the possible activities to implement within this area of interest would be an undoubted asset.

¹ Since no representatives from the Austrian and German NRNs participated to the workshop, the interest of these networks in the identified themes has been deduced from the information provided in the survey.

3.3.3 Proposed follow-up actions on Forestry Thematic Initiative

- Following the conclusions of the first NRN workshop on forestry, the involved NRNs agreed to undertake further discussion with national stakeholders in order to test the initiative and their potential interest and involvement.
- On the basis of the information provided during the workshop and the tentative definition of initial common areas of interest in which joint activities could take place, it was agreed that NRNs should refine their needs and better define their possible contributions in order to achieve an agreement on the possible topics and specific actions that could be implemented.
- The main goal for the first semester of 2010 will be to define a detailed and shared work plan which specifies planned activities and involved subjects for 2010. A "technical" meeting among the involved NRNs has been proposed to take place for this purpose in the first quarter of 2010. Specific issues related to the implementation of these activities (including cost coverage) would be addressed as well.
- As a general action to be undertaken, the creation of a common basis of knowledge through the collection and dissemination of relevant technical works and other publications was agreed to be facilitated in order to provide solid background for the initiative. The involvement of the CP for this purpose will be further reviewed and coordinated.
- It was agreed that there should be the definition of a communication strategy on forestry for the the NRNs and other involved stakeholders, to ensure the creation of a "permanent" exchange platform between official NRN meetings.
- The proposed time frame for follow-up actions was agreed as follows:

Dates	Possible actions
January 2010	Further discussion within and among NRNs and stakeholders.
February 2010	Definition of needs/interest and possible areas of action
March 2010	Definition of a detailed work plan for 2010 (possible venue: Rome)

3.4. Rural entrepreneurship/ RD responses to economic change workshop:

3.4.1 Background and rationale for rural entrepreneurship thematic initiative proposal:

- A presentation from the Contact Point highlighted the fact that rural entrepreneurship and development of effective responses to economic change were one of the most dominant themes identified by all NRN's in previous screening exercises; and also a leading theme of most current LEADER and LAG forums (based on some CP country visits and other NRN documents).
- It was noted that there is clear evidence that many rural stakeholders need support and guidance in building a response to economic change and that no clear road maps currently exist.
- It was proposed to consider establishment of an NRN Thematic Initiative that would contribute to the broader analysis of the impact of the economic change (from a rural perspective)..
- A presentation by the Irish NRN outlined the challenges facing rural Ireland and the consequences of the severe economic slowdown and its knock-on effects.
- A research initiative has been launched which is looking in more detail at the impact on rural areas and the opportunities for rural areas to respond and to become more robust in dealing with such economic changes in the future. It was believed that this initiative could provide some important findings to guide and support a broader European response/initiative, either by linking a small

number of countries around a broad set of issues or by linking a larger number of countries around a specific well defined theme or themes.

3.4.2 Main issues raised on rural entrepreneurship /Rural responses to economic change:

- It was suggested that it will be important to identify the main barriers to the emergence of a sustainable and diversified rural economy; To understand how current and future RDPs can better address these challenges; and how RD policies can better facilitate the emergence of a new and more robust rural economy.
- It was suggested that important responses may include introducing greater flexibility to Rural Development Programmes & Delivery Mechanisms to better respond to economic changes; Building effective partnerships with the private sector; Enhancing LEADER role in RD programmes; Promoting more TNC initiatives etc.
- The main focus of such an initiative was proposed to be *'To highlight bottlenecks, identify solutions and provide case studies to respond to economic change in rural areas.'* The initiative/working group would be encouraged to think beyond the provision of short term relief, by preparing rural areas for a more sustainable recovery path; To promote and enhance diversified rural economic base; and to identify main areas of opportunity to create 'new economy' environment and climate friendly opportunities; to increase leverage of public investment by working more effectively in partnership with the private sector.
- Possible results from such an initiative were proposed to include:
 - Policy analysis results and recommendations based on RDP screening and other relevant analysis;
 - Case studies and relevant examples of implementation of rural economy-related RDP measures (rural entrepreneurship, environmentally oriented activities, etc) and disseminated between networks;
 - Key success factors/processes in implementing alternative/diversified ways of valuable activities e.g. TNC, Leader approach, PPP, etc.; and
 - Events to promote new initiatives and disseminate findings.

3.4.3 Proposed follow-up actions on Rural Entrepreneurship /responses to economic change

- Proposed next steps included the need to identify a core group of NRNs wishing to participate; to develop a framework including specific objectives & results; to develop an initial work plan and resource plan and to ensure that the initiative was linked to and would build upon existing initiatives, wherever possible (i.e. Dutch, Belgian and Irish NRN initiatives).
- It was proposed that there could be a possible follow-up initiative during the Austrian LINC (LEADER Inspired Network Community) event on 15th-17th March 2010 and/or it could be followed up as one of the subjects of the next NRN forum.
- A proposal was made by the Irish NRN, in partnership with the ENRD Contact Point to develop such a proposal and introduce it to the NRNs by March 2010, prior to the next NRN meeting.

4. Summary conclusions and proposed follow-up actions

- The most important overall conclusion from the forum is that more technically focused workshops provide a more appropriate forum for exchange of views and development of tangible follow up actions and results. The smaller workshop format led to meaningful next steps being defined in each of the three main thematic areas. This approach will guide the planning and preparation of all future NRN forums, wherever possible.
- To prepare for future thematic initiatives, it was agreed that the Contact Point would coordinate the collection of information (with the support of all NRN representatives) on current and planned thematic initiatives being undertaken by NRNs (and planned events) and provide a report to all

NRNs in the New Year, possibly to include suggested new clusters of NRNs on specific Themes. Suitable topics may include: Monitoring and evaluating the results and impact of networks; LAG self-assessment; Supporting LAGs / LAG management / LAG project generation; TNC project support methods. Other topics of common interest were also raised and may be considered as possible collaborative clusters, including gender and rural development; and Youth.

- It was agreed that DG Agri and the Contact Point will aim to ensure pro-active coordination and flow of information between NRNs and the various Thematic initiatives at European level, where appropriate and relevant, to maximise synergies and prevent unnecessary overlaps between the various thematic activities supported at member state and between NRNs. This is anticipated to include the organising of more detailed sessions on thematic working group findings, linked to future NRN forums in 2010.
- It was agreed to support the three emerging NRN thematic initiatives (Relevant experience, Social Farming and Forestry) in the next six months to ensure the development of tangible activities and outcomes. Using these groups as pilots to test and refine approaches for the support of other technical/ thematic issues. It is envisaged that each initiative will use a combination of e-meetings and face-to-face meetings, starting in January. Some follow-up meetings will be combined with general NRN meetings. It was noted that work with clusters involves development (of knowledge jointly by the participating NRNs) over a period of time and will require on-going technical support from the Contact Point and relevant NRNs to ensure successful progress is made.
- The next NRN general meeting is anticipated to follow a similar format as the Brussels meeting. Given the commitment to follow up actions lead by the Italian NRN for Social Farming and Forestry the Contact Point will explore the option of a joint meeting in Rome towards the end of March (provisionally 25th/26th March 2010 – to be confirmed separately following further consultation with the Italian NRN and DG Agri). Topics to be covered could include entrepreneurship and other topics on which the NRNs confirm a strong common interest.

REPORT ANNEXES

All annexes listed below can be found at the following link:

http://static.enrd.eu/7th_NRN_meeting.zip

- Annex 1:** Agenda for the NRN meeting
- Annex 2:** Overall Participants list
- Annex 3:** Workshop participants lists
- Annex 4:** Relevant Experience Pilot Initiative outline
- Annex 5:** Social Farming Thematic Initiative outline
- Annex 6:** Forestry Thematic Initiative outline

The two planned annexes below will be provided separately to all NRNs following their completion in January (based on all information to be provided by individual NRNs):

- Annex 7:** Summary report on NRN meeting evaluation results and feedback
- Annex 8:** NRN Thematic initiatives updated table (December 2009)