

# Thematic Group

## Improving RDP Implementation

3<sup>rd</sup> Meeting  
*Brussels, 23 June 2015*

### REPORT



V1 – July 2015

## INTRODUCTION TO THE DAY

**About the meeting** The third meeting of the TG held in Brussels on the 23 June 2015 counted on the participation of some 20 delegates from across the EU. These included representatives from national Managing Authorities, Paying Agencies, Network Support Units, EU and national-level organisations, advisors and EC desk-officers. A number of participants had not taken part to the TG previous meetings.

The CP Team Leader, Paul Soto explained that this meeting would conclude the TG's work in its current form. Findings from the TG's previous meetings and related events that were organised during this work package will now be collated and converted into recommendations for future ENRD actions over the next year.

Emphasis was placed on the value of ensuring that the TG's work and its **conclusions feed down into practical improvements** for national and regional level RDPs. Managing Authorities and National Rural Networks were noted as providing useful options for this knowledge transfer process.

### Presentation

#### [Introduction and purposes of the meeting](#)

by F. Cossu  
(ENRD CP)

The introductory presentation from the ENRD Contact Point summarised the work undertaken so far by the TG highlighting areas of work and key outcomes.

#### ***Key messages from the presentation and purpose of the meeting:***

- The work of the TG has nearly completed and participants were reminded of the main outcomes from the work package to date. These included the ENRD Seminar, a series of workshops addressed to RDP managers, and the forthcoming EU Rural Review and TG's final report.
- Aims for the meeting were explained and these centred mainly on consolidating the TG's work to date with a proposal for a set of recommendations to Member States about how RDP implementation can be improved. Suggestions for future ENRD work in the same area would also stem from the findings of the TG.
- Concluding the round of reflections about priority topics for 2015 started in previous meetings, participants discussed issues and possible RDP interventions in the areas of Green Economy and Climate Action.

## PRIORITY THEMES: CONCRETE OPPORTUNITIES FOR RDPs AND NETWORKS

### Presentations:

[Facts & figures on 2014-2020 RDPs](#)

by F. Cossu  
(ENRD CP)

[Green economy for jobs and growth](#)

by K. Hart  
(ENRD CP)

[Climate change: issues and opportunities](#)

by K. Hart  
(ENRD CP)

Participants took note that the topics of **Green Economy** and **Climate Action** had been identified by the Rural Networks' Assembly and Steering Group as priority themes for the ENRD to work on in 2015.

The TG would therefore discuss issues and opportunities associated with these themes. Contextual data was presented from 45 approved RDPs, which showed that up to 47% of the total EAFRD commitment for these RDPs is expected to be spent on ecosystem support activity through Priority 4. Some 6% of total funding was allocated in the RDP sample for resource efficiency and climate actions through Priority 5.

Variations exist between Member States with some RDPs allocating large amounts to environmental budgets, whilst other RDPs indicate less interest in using the EAFRD for such purposes.

### Group discussion

See [ANNEX I: summary fiches on Green economy and Climate change](#)

### *Outcomes of discussions - Summary*

TG members agreed that **many RDP priorities and measures (e.g. investments and cooperation and LEADER)** also funded actions that can contribute to the Green Economy and Climate Action. It may however be more **difficult to define these contributions** unless conditions are attached to RDP funding that require beneficiaries to report on their environmental results.

Difficulties were noted in gaining **meaningful and consistent measurements** from such RDP monitoring. Baseline data would be required and specialised monitoring systems could introduce risks of gold-plating if these were overly complex.

Nevertheless, the importance of demonstrating RDPs' real value as tools for supporting the Green Economy and Climate Action was stressed. **Improving the visibility of RDP results in these areas** remains essential because the EAFRD can offer so many opportunities here.

Optional tools and techniques highlighted included use of: **selection criteria** to target funds towards projects with measurable environmental indicators (including **proxy indicators**); integrated **territorial approaches** which linked up businesses and other rural development stakeholders in environmental initiatives (such as eco-tourism); RDP **guidance** about how to develop projects with low and/or measurable environmental impacts; plus **knowledge sharing** between RDPs and other EU funds about all of the above.

**Jobs created** and **jobs maintained** by the green economy or climate action provide relevant result indicators. Data about RDP effects on

**business productivity** in environmental sectors are also possible indicators. **Aggregated data** can show trends and confirm net (i.e. not gross) successes from RDP support.

So-called 'smart RDP implementation tools' like **simplified cost options**, **results-based payments**, and **financial instruments** also provide opportunities for targeted RDP funding on specific types of environmental outcomes (which are measurable and defined in advance).

DG CLIMATE's guidance material<sup>1</sup> about how to use RDP measures for climate mitigation and adaptation could be promoted wider.

It was agreed that useful lessons could be learned from exchanging good practice experiences about success factors for these sorts of tools and techniques. TG members underlined the need to **review and compare different types of rural development support in differing parts of the EU**.

**Capacity building** was noted as being beneficial for farm advisors, LAGs, RDP decision-makers, and funding applicants. An important point was underlined about the use of **terminology**. Farmers for example were thought not perhaps to understand (and thus possibly not support) 'green economy' or 'climate change' actions.

**Layperson language** was encouraged as a success factor for achieving RDP results in these fields. Environmental references should not be rejected but explanations about practical reasons for green economic growth and climate action could be more useful for improving uptake of associated RDP funds.

**Cost savings** for businesses, new **market opportunities**, as well as access to **natural assets**, and **improved competitiveness** were among the messages for beneficiaries that TG members felt would be most useful to encourage RDP results in these fields.

Scope was mentioned for these two themes to be further dealt with in the future by the ENRD under a broader **umbrella theme**. On-going work to improve the effectiveness of RDP environmental funding is expected to continue and revised global priorities after the [Paris 2015 conference on climate change](#) in December may influence Member States' interests in RDP contributions towards green growth and climate agendas.

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<sup>1</sup> See for example the final report of the project: "Mainstreaming climate change into rural development policy post 2013": <http://bookshop.europa.eu/en/mainstreaming-climate-change-into-rural-development-policy-post-2013-pbML0614002/>

## PROGRESSING THE ENRD THEMATIC WORK: LINKS TO RDP IMPLEMENTATION

### Group discussion

This session of the meeting focused on two main discussion questions:

- *How can the ENRD thematic work effectively improve RDP implementation?*
- *How can it be rolled out at national level? What support is needed?*

It was noted that, prior to launching any new thematic work, the ENRD should first agree how they intend to **measure the success** of future thematic work. Indicators should be chosen that can demonstrate the ENRD's ability to make clear differences in the way that RDPs are implemented. Initial screening of RDPs during 2015 may provide baseline material to measure progress against and longer-term impact indicators could be put in place (that extend beyond 2020).

TG members considered the two discussion questions using contextual examples - such as how to improve synergies between CAP Pillars.

Consensus emerged that **any progression of any ENRD thematic work needs to take account of gaps in knowhow that exist**. Such gaps can create inertia and fuel 'reluctance to change' by RDP stakeholders. In worse case scenarios, knowledge gaps can lead to misleading or inaccurate information that may trigger or deepen conflicting perspectives.

*"We don't want people to run away from things that they don't understand"* was a salient comment from the TG.

TG members therefore agreed that identifying and filling such knowledge gaps was an important priority for future ENRD thematic work.

Special attention could be paid to **improve understanding about some of the newer RDP opportunities and measures** (e.g. climate action, cooperation, risk management etc.). These may not yet be enjoying as much uptake on the ground as was intended by the policy - and the ENRD's mandate covers this type of capacity building.

**Techniques involved in addressing such challenges should always be inclusive** and bring together all the key players. RDP auditors and controllers, RDP beneficiaries, RDP administrators, RDP Monitoring Committees and RDP policy makers were highlighted as vital participants in joint efforts to improve RDP implementation.

TG member's promotion of inclusive methods involving multi-stakeholder dialogue would help to ensure a more consistent clarity about RDP implementation. Working from a common perspective can reduce potential (or pre-existing conflicts) and increase stakeholders' willingness to work collectively together on RDP improvements.

**Demand-led approaches** were encouraged and the thematic work will be rolled out based on confirmed interest from sufficient RDPs. This guarantees that the ENRD's future work will provide benefits for many RDPs and achieve EU-level added value. **Clusters** of demand for thematic work may also be progressed in order to safeguard efficiency

Mainstreaming thematic findings was discussed in detail. Conclusions underlined the value of **peer-learning, knowledge exchange**, and the growth of '**community-of-practices**' across the EU. Developing and networking case studies of **good practices** and **lessons learned** were also noted as being particularly useful to provide RDP decision-makers with confidence in different options for RDP improvements.

Analysis of experiences from the cases studies and communities of practice can be useful for identifying a variety of individual success factors from different experiences. These success factors can then be collated and packaged to produce good practice guidance (or even 'templates') for specific topics e.g. a good practice model for a NSU communication plan, or a step-by-step handbook on running RDP Financial Instruments.

TG members also recommended that future thematic work should seek ways of **using 'multipliers' to disseminate and extend the reach of the findings**. Rural advisory services, LAGs, local authority networks, Monitoring Committee members, and other EU funding programmes were all noted as providing useful outreach tools. Hence, relationships with these stakeholders should be built as part of any future ENRD thematic work.

Increasing the amount of joined up work with ESIF counterparts was considered to be very useful. TG members suggested that **pilot schemes** could be set up by Member States to coordinate the implementation and steering of funds within RDP territories.

Preparations of the Partnership Agreements will already have provided a foundation for ESIF counterparts to build on during the implementation stages of ESIF programmes. Networking the experiences from these types of ESIF pilots would be a useful task for the ENRD.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVING RDP IMPLEMENTATION

Presentations:  
[Preliminary findings and recommendations for 'improving RDP implementation'](#)  
by F. Cossu  
(ENRD CP)

This final part of the TG meeting was separated into

- I. Consideration of preliminary findings from the TG; and
- II. Discussion about the TG's final report in terms of its format, use and channels for dissemination.

The CP emphasised that **only preliminary findings** have been established at this stage and the final report may contain other material.

The preliminary findings feature options for 'horizontal' and methodological aspects of future thematic work. The TG's remit does not involve suggesting the actual topics.

'Horizontal' aspects that can help improving RDPs' effectiveness include ensuring that RDPs continually:

- *Address stakeholders' real needs.*
- *Use rules that are understood and there is clarity of intent for everyone involved.*
- *Stay focused on results and delivering them avoiding unnecessary complications.*
- *Improve the quality of management systems and capacity.*

**Highlights from the presentation:**

**Customer-oriented RDPs** can provide many of these benefits, which can be achieved through effective **RDP coordination and communication**.

Coordination needs to occur between **formal and informal exchange platforms** in order for RDPs to operate in more streamlined and efficient manners. Countries with regional programmes experience more complex coordination challenges and lack of coordination in these countries can have significant negative impacts on RDPs' potential.

**Communication for RDP stakeholders** needs to aim for easy-to-understand messages and use accessible tools. Communications helps to increase everyone's understanding about how to use RDP support effectively. It also can be used to promote new ways of improving the use of RDP support, as well other development policies that operate in rural Europe.

Communication messages should be consistent and coordinated throughout the delivery chain. Clear distinctions in communication roles can be set to ease efficiency and avoid duplication or confusion.

Information generated at EU levels (e.g. by ENRD TGs) should use effective communication channels to transfer such knowledge to regional level - where it can be used on the ground to **engage more stakeholders** in RDPs and increase uptake of the RDP opportunities.

TG members highlighted the effectiveness of **using short video** films for this purpose that can be subtitled into different EU languages.

One-way information channels can be complemented by encouraging two-way dialogue with stakeholders. Feedback mechanisms are valuable and **active engagement of Monitoring Committees** in this process should be encouraged.

The effectiveness of RDP communication is enhanced when it is timely and targeted. Planning and coordination throughout the delivery chain is a success factor here.

Using communication as a **pedagogic tool** (rather than simply a basic informative process) can prove productive and lead to long-term capacity building legacies. A coordinated programme of communication products can therefore be used to (among other things) raise awareness about RDP opportunities in under-subscribed measures or geographic regions or target groups.

Proper planning is essential to ensure that all communication is delivered at the right time, in the right place, for the right target groups, and using the right techniques. **Testing and piloting** communication actions is good practice to check their relevance, accessibility, and productivity.

Stakeholder involvement is a further crucial aspect of customer-oriented RDPs. Formal mechanism like Monitoring Committees can be strengthened by introducing new participative arrangements that encourage more engagement and dialogue, whilst discourage tokenism. **Empowered Monitoring Committees** will improve the effectiveness of RDPs and experience from Member States exists to show how to make the best use of Monitoring Committee knowhow.

Stakeholder coordination is highly important for **countries with multiple RDPs**. These involve a multiplicity of actors, implementing bodies and layers of rules. Consolidated, consistent, and transparent solutions are required to ensure RDP effectiveness in these countries.



**Recommendations:** Preliminary recommendations for actions to encourage improvements in coordinated communication and customer-oriented RDPs were suggested. These also note the actors who can take forward the proposed actions.

- ➔ Develop a sound **publicity and information strategy** (early identification of needs and audience) 
- ➔ Early sharing of good practices 
- ➔ Farm trips and study visits 
- ➔ Staff exchange / secondment 
- ➔ Collect good practices on **MC** 
- ➔ More informal /flexible platforms for exchange (including at the local level) 
- ➔ Sharing information about procedures and practices, develop contact lists. 
- ➔ Public online discussion fora 

**Discussion:**

A number of questions were discussed in relation to these ideas. TG members considered:

- *What role and added value for the RDP information and publicity strategy? What synergies with the NRN communication plan?*
- *What occasion is there for the Monitoring Committees? How to move them forward?*

Debate focused on what points are most **urgent**, and which remain important in the next few months.

The **ENRD's LinkedIn** sub group on communication<sup>2</sup> has already started to exchange ideas about how to coordinate RDP information strategies and NRN communication plans. Defining clear distinctions in roles and the development of common templates has been proposed as a possible solution for improving coordination.

Monitoring Committees were seen to have a useful coordination role in designing, implementing and evaluating both the RDP and NRN communication activities.

Increased Monitoring Committee inputs in RDP implementation matters was promoted by the TG – although it was recognised that this may require a **transition period** that could be facilitated by exchanges of experience between RDPs.

Reinforcing relationships between RDP Monitoring Committees and NRNs was spotlighted as offering many potential opportunities for improving RDP effectiveness.

Another success factor noted by the TG's preliminary findings points to the value of implementing **results-oriented RDPs**.

**Highlights from the presentation:**

Simplified administration systems and **'smart' delivery tools** like results-based payments, electronic application and claim forms, simplified cost options or financial instruments can all help keep RDPs focused on their intended outputs (and avoid the funds being used for unintended purposes).

**Human factors** will influence the success of RDPs in this goal towards results approaches. A shift in both attitude and behaviour may be required by RDP stakeholders to produce the required changes. Improved **technical knowledge** and **peer-learning** can aid the process.

Results approaches need to avoid risk of gold-plating and RDP simplification needs to be prioritised by all work involved in improving the programmes' effectiveness.

Advice and guidance that has been collated on these topics by the TG will be included in a **new edition of the EU Rural Review**. TG members also encouraged the collation, analysis and dissemination of more **methodological good practices** from around the EU and these should be made available through the ENRD's communication channels.

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.linkedin.com/grp/home?gid=8234444&trk=my\\_groups-tile-grp](https://www.linkedin.com/grp/home?gid=8234444&trk=my_groups-tile-grp)

**Recommendations:** Preliminary recommendations for actions and the actors here include:

→ Analysis of existing procedures and follow-up

→ 'Common readings' of rules

→ Contribute to design admin processes & tools

→ Promote the flow of technical knowledge:  
establish contacts in administrations

→ Promote the adoption of simplification practices (e.g. SCOs)



Collect needs --> put forward questions --> retrieve expertise, examples and information  
--> identify key steps and actors --> share 'methodological' practices - FAQs - trainings  
and workshops

**Discussion:** Debate again focused on what points are most urgent, which remain important in the next few months.

Caution was encouraged to ensure the TG recommendations remained **realistic** and did not over-burden the actors who will need to implement them.

**Targeting** and **piloting** new approaches was promoted, as was encouraging dialogue to help improve the quality of subsequent mainstreaming actions.

**Technical Assistance** funds could be used to support capacity building in areas that offered potential for improving RDP effectiveness.

DG AGRI stressed that no proposals would be imposed on Member States and the TG report would suggest good practices to consider.

**Final considerations:** Closing points from the final TG meeting concentrated on the format and content of the TG's Final Report. Examples and practical advice will be included in the report. All material will be published on the **ENRD website** pages for the TG<sup>3</sup> and a '**citizen summary**' version of the report was suggested to ease understanding about its main messages and recommendations.

<sup>3</sup> <https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/en/thematic-group-improving-rdp-implementation#keydoc>

## Annex 1: Summary fiches of the thematic priorities addressed during the meeting

### Climate change

**Summary:** Rural Development Programmes can be used to support actions for both climate mitigation and climate adaptation. *Greater awareness is needed about which climate actions to prioritise and where they should be targeted* to achieve maximum benefit for climate mitigation and adaptation. This includes *better understanding of the impacts* of the actions on production and other environmental priorities. *Improved methodologies* are also needed to ensure that emissions savings can be reflected in the National Inventory Reports. Significant awareness raising activities are required to improve the capacity and understanding of government agencies, advisory services, land managers and other rural stakeholders about the importance of taking action to adapt to climate change and reduce emissions.

#### Summary of key issues and possible actions (not exhaustive)

Programming stage	Key issues & needs	RDP implementation aspects	Networks' actions
Horizontal	Improved information on innovative/new/emerging actions for climate adaptation /mitigation that have not been commonly used in the past	EIP OGs can play a role	Encourage sharing of information and experiences from countries/regions where innovative actions are being implemented.
	Better understanding of the indirect production and environmental impacts of climate actions to inform decisions		Establish contacts within climate departments to encourage greater understanding of the role RDPs can play in combatting climate change
	Improved liaison between agriculture, forestry, climate and environment departments		
Measure design	Information needed on which climate actions are most beneficial in particular biogeographic circumstances to improve targeting of measures to areas where they can generate most benefit  Improved awareness of the link between the climate actions supported and the ability to account for the GHG emission reductions and removals in National Inventory Reports (NIRs)	Cooperation measure – M16  Knowledge transfer and information actions – M1  Advisory services, farm management and farm relief services – M2	Be familiar with the contents of the national LULUCF Strategy and Action Plan  Facilitate the sharing of information and expertise on the most effective climate actions – in conjunction with the EIP Operational Groups.

	<p>Ensure safeguards are in place to avoid non-climate measures having detrimental climate impacts</p> <p>Pilot networks of areas for testing adaptation and mitigation measures.</p>		
<b>Rolling out measures</b>	<p>Improve understanding of land managers and other rural actors of the importance of taking actions that make rural areas more resilient to climate change and reduce /increase removals of GHG emissions</p> <p>Improve information available on economic impacts of climate measures on farm/forestry/rural businesses</p>	<p>Knowledge transfer and information actions – M1</p> <p>Advisory services, farm management and farm relief services – M2</p> <p>EIP OGs</p>	<p>Facilitate information sharing and dissemination activities</p>
<b>Measure implementation</b>	<p>Greater exchange of information and experience on the impacts of climate change and how to address them – learning from research and practice</p> <p>Ensure appropriate guidance and adviser input is available for scheme beneficiaries (potential and actual)</p> <p>Greater sharing of good practice between regions/Member States</p>	<p>Knowledge transfer and information actions – M1</p> <p>Advisory services, farm management and farm relief services – M2</p>	<p>Facilitate exchange of information between researchers and practitioners/relevant stakeholders to build capacity</p> <p>Gather information on how implementation has worked or not worked to inform RDP revisions</p> <p>Profile good practice information on climate action at events</p>

#### Relevant work on the topic:

VV.AA. (2014). [“Mainstreaming climate change into rural development policy post 2013.” Final report. Ecologic Institute, Berlin](#)

16/04/2013 - SWD (2013) 139 - [Principles and recommendations for integrating climate change adaptation considerations under the 2014-2020 rural development programmes.](#)

VV.AA. (forthcoming), [Methodologies for Climate Proofing Investments and Measures under Cohesion and Regional Policy and the Common Agricultural Policy, A report for DG Climate, August 2012.](#)

ENRD Rural Review Issue 16 - Knowledge Transfer and Innovation in Rural Development Policy - May 2013

ENRD Rural Review Issue 4 - Rural Development and Climate Change - May 2010

## Green economy for jobs and growth

**Summary:** Businesses in rural areas have the potential to contribute to developing the green economy, by championing sustainable approaches to business development, integrating environmental considerations into economic and social decisions. Many such initiatives have already been funded through RDPs in the 2007-2013 period and are planned for 2014-2020, although they are not necessarily branded as contributing to the green economy. There are *opportunities to consider the contribution RDP support makes to the green economy more systematically in the design and implementation of RDP measures* which would enable RDPs to reach their full potential in terms of their contribution to jobs and growth for the sector. *Indicators need to be put in place* that allow this contribution to be measured, assessed and communicated more widely.

### Summary of key issues and possible actions (not exhaustive)

Programming stage	Key issues & needs	RDP implementation aspects	Networks' actions
<b>Horizontal</b>	Information needed on how rural development can contribute to the green economy via different rural sectors (farming, forestry, tourism etc.)	Technical Assistance – M20	Gather, synthesise and disseminate existing knowledge
	Improve communication on contribution of RDPs to green economy		Encourage the sharing of experiences from MS
<b>Measure design</b>	Review project selection criteria – to include assessment of the contribution of the proposed project to the green economy  Develop indicators that allow the contribution of RDP measures to the green economy to be measured		
<b>Rolling-out measures</b>	Make potential beneficiaries aware of the economic benefits of adopting 'green' business practices and the way in which the environment can be used as an economic driver	Knowledge transfer and information actions – M1  Advisory services, farm management	Collect and disseminate good practices from different MS

		and farm relief services – M2	Provide guidance and disseminate information via publications, events
<b>Measure implementation</b>	Ensure green economy benefits of projects/actions are captured.	Knowledge transfer and information actions – M1	Publicise good practices
	Improved communication between projects within particular locations – to provide opportunities for sharing experiences, exploring synergies between businesses and new green economy initiatives to develop – e.g. between agri-environment and tourism initiatives.	Advisory services, farm management and farm relief services – M2	Encourage beneficiaries to share advice with others
	Better consideration of green economy within Local Development Strategies	Cooperation – M16	Facilitate the development of ‘place-based’ networks to encourage information sharing and innovative ideas to flourish.
		Support for LEADER local development – M19	Capacity building actions

**Relevant work on the topic:**

EEA (2014), Resource-efficient green economy and EU policies, EEA Report No 2/2014.

<http://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/resourceefficient-green-economy-and-eu>

OECD (2013), *Policy Instruments to Support Green Growth in Agriculture*, OECD Green Growth Studies, OECD Publishing, Paris. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264203525-en>

OECD (2011), *Towards Green Growth*, OECD Green Growth Studies, OECD Publishing, Paris. DOI: <http://www.oecd.org/greengrowth/48224574.pdf>