

Success factors for the new Rural Development Programmes



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Member States' Rural Development Programmes (RDPs) for the 2014-2020 period should be: demand-led, results-oriented, error-free and fully integrated with other development support for rural areas. These key requirements emerged as conclusions from a high profile ENRD seminar in December 2012 exploring the factors involved in successful programming for the next generation of RDPs. 'Innovation brokerage', 'greening', 'shared management' and 'good governance' were also noted at the ENRD seminar as essential goals regarding successful RDP programming.

Proposals for EU rural development policy during the 2014-2020 period build on the experiences of previous programming periods, and strengthen rural development's position as an essential component of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).

Important issues such as the globalisation trends, fiscal austerity, and environmental sustainability provide a challenging context for the roll out of the new RDPs.

These issues were highlighted at the ENRD seminar as essential considerations for RDP programmers.



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“We need to make RDPs that can easily report on verifiable results, be better targeted towards rural territories’ real development needs, and properly integrated with all other funding. RDP programmers should also place a very high priority on reducing errors.”

Commissioner Dacian Cioloș

Building the new RDPs

‘Start early’ was the first message for all stakeholders involved in RDP programming. By stressing this success factor, DG AGRI is already working with Member States to organise in-country workshops for RDP programmers. Agenda items at the meetings will include explanations about the proposed financial management tools and new administrative systems for the 2014-2020 period.

Discussions around the EC Country Position Papers¹ during Commission visits to Member States will also be used for clarifying RDP programming issues. Crucial priorities for everyone involved include avoiding common problems experienced by previous RDPs, and finding workable solutions that successfully address the mix of different programming tasks.

Simplified RDPs

Simplification of the RDP systems continues to remain an important task for programmers. Member States are urged to work closely with the European Commission throughout the coming months on simplification systems concerning RDP programming and implementation processes.

Regular communication and collaboration between national and EU levels is particularly appreciated for facilitating RDPs’ alignment with the Common Strategic Framework (CSF). Simplification actions influenced by the CSF should

Speakers and delegates at the seminar (which brought together several hundred delegates including officials from managing authorities, paying agencies, Commissioner Cioloș and senior European Commission officers) acknowledged the challenges faced by RDP programmers. In doing so they recognised that the success of their work depends on them designing RDPs that are capable of making major contributions to Europe 2020 targets concerning smart, sustainable and inclusive growth.

Commissioner Cioloș reiterated such points and encouraged delegates to produce RDPs that could clearly demonstrate rural development policy’s added value in these fields. He noted that increasing the visibility of results, combined with reducing rates of errors, would help to further reinforce the complementarity between the two CAP Pillars, and protect the broad range of benefits that RDP operations offer for all Member States’ citizens.

Weaknesses in previous RDP programming exercises include:

- Inadequate quantification of programme outcomes (indicators).
- Insufficient targeting to achieve quantified goals and select best practice projects.
- Weak linkages between strategy and operations selected (poor intervention logic).
- Lack of clear identification of development needs in RDP territories.

¹ The European Commission carries out inter-service consultation processes to agree ‘position papers’ for discussing particular points about the specificities of rural development options in each Member State.

assist the introduction of more user-friendly rules that make the new RDPs more accessible and understandable for beneficiaries.

Stakeholder involvement throughout the RDP programming phases was highlighted by participants at the ENRD seminar as a significant success factor for achieving simplification objectives. Successful rural development programming depends on solid partnership and good governance procedures need to be put in place to safeguard seamless communication between the numerous partners involved in preparing RDPs.

Coordinating the cooperation and good communication that is needed between RDP authorities and their counterparts from other development programmes is important for taking advantage of synergies, and for ensuring the preparation of fully integrated programmes that are tailored to national and regional needs.

Considerable benefits accrue from cooperation and joint working arrangements. Such tools help to build and optimise the critical mass of multi-discipline expertise that is needed for successful RDP programming. A dialogue with stakeholders is essential to increase the transparency and ensure a better understanding of a policy which has the reputation to be complex. These partnership approaches represent good governance principles for successful programming, which are promoted by DG AGRI and the ENRD.

Early involvement of stakeholders in designing transparent decision-making processes is a proven method for minimising risks of errors occurring later on. Partners' can also provide valuable suggestions and perspectives for solving programming challenges concerning balancing simplification tasks with those linked to reducing error rates. Achiev-

ing such a balance should help to ensure, for example, the programming of simple eligibility conditions that are understood by beneficiaries. Complex conditions should be avoided. Simplified systems can ensure a better compliance with eligibility conditions and reduce the error rate.

Error-free RDPs

RDP error rates have increased to unacceptable levels in the 2007-2013 period. Thus programmers for the new RDPs need to think more carefully than in the past about the causes of potential errors and the procedures that can be put in place to mitigate audit problems.

Reducing RDP error rates is essential for safeguarding the integrity of rural development policy and its programmes. Protecting public funds and maintaining the credibility of RDP activity among Member State citizens is underlined as a vital priority for successful programming. An important starting point here is to ensure that all proposals for RDP operations and RDP support are based on accurate and validated demand.

Financial ceilings in new RDPs will be agreed by Measure (i.e. not like in the past by Axis). This introduces even more necessity for careful and realistic assessment of the actual demand that can be expected to exist for each Measure's proposed activities. Work on determining content for the SWOT analysis is crucial for informing and determining true levels of demand.

Getting the demand analysis right cuts the chances that pressures might emerge to use under-subscribed RDP funds for non-eligible activities.





RDP control

Another aim for programmers who are tasked with reducing possibilities for error, is to establish robust procedures for tracking the implementation of RDP operations. This applies to controlling expenditure and checking that the money is being spent on what it is intended for. Effective controls must be programmed for both:

- Guaranteeing the selection of eligible projects that demonstrate strong demand, while also possessing potential for making clear contributions to the RDP targets; and
- Monitoring the execution of approved projects to verify that they remain error-free.

In addition to programming robust and transparent procedures for these controls, successful RDPs also need to ensure that sufficient skills and capacity are in place at the right time in the right place to administer the controls effectively.

The relevance of strong skill sets and systems for targeting and tracking RDP support was repeatedly noted during the ENRD seminar as being cornerstones for successful RDP programming.

Monitoring and evaluation

Efforts have been made to improve monitoring and evaluation methods. Enhanced emphasis on reporting of rural development policy will help to achieve more results-oriented and accountable RDP actions. A prerequisite for this driving principle is the use of reliable and up-to-date baseline data to measure progress against. The quality of baseline data collection approaches used in previous RDP programming was considered to be weak and needing improved.

Demand-led approaches to successful RDP programming should hence to go further than using conventional demand indicators like unemployment levels, GDP data, priority species etc. Quality approaches to demand analysis should also consider a territory's absorption capacity for each RDP action proposed at Measure level.

Ex-ante evaluation of absorption capacity can take account of factors such as: forecasts for the availability of potential co-finance from different target groups; motivation of target groups to participate in RDP support schemes; and other issues, like skills or infrastructure, which may influence (positively or negatively) absorption capacity and associated demand for RDP funds within a territory.

Paying agencies are required to certify that the choice and design of RDP measures do not give rise to risks of errors. Shared management of the programming process between managing authorities, paying agencies, and other appropriate stakeholders is therefore promoted as a prudent and pragmatic success factor for RDP programming.



Baseline data collection needs to form an integral part of the SWOT analysis process. New considerations for programmers here include collating sufficient information about the current state-of-play concerning RDP cross-cutting priorities, namely climate action, environment, and innovation.

These cross-cutting themes reflect high level objectives of the *EU 2020* strategy for growth and prosperity in all Member States. RDPs need to be able to regularly report their contributions to climate, environment, and innovation agendas. A thorough analysis of each RDP territory's needs in terms of environmental management, innovation support, and climate action (adaptation and mitigation), is an essential starting point for successful RDP programming.

RDP programmers also need to ensure that user-friendly procedures are in place to control the ability of all Measures to target funding towards projects that complement the cross-cutting themes. Participants at the ENRD seminar drew attention to new policy flexibility for promoting the

packaging of support from more than one Measure. This generates opportunities for adding value and multiplier effects vis-à-vis cross-cutting themes, as well as all other Measure targets.

RDP planning

Starting early on programming all of these crucial RDP considerations therefore makes a lot of sense. Planning tools can help to map and manage the various phases of programming processes. Such preparations can also be useful for Member States' coordination of parallel work involved in producing content for the higher-level Partnership Agreements.

Efficiencies and other benefits can be gained by contracting ex-ante evaluators to be involved early on, and regularly throughout, the RDP programming process.

Reports from the seminar workshops

In addition to the aforementioned generic considerations concerning RDP design, participants at the ENRD seminar also looked in detail at a number of specific aspects of successful RDP programming.

Workshop formats were used to pinpoint what RDP programmers need to know in terms of:

- Promoting cross-cutting themes concerning innovation, climate action and environment.
- Ensuring good governance of programming processes, including the role of networking and effective shared management of programming tasks.
- Modifications to the RDP monitoring and evaluation framework.
- Facilitating links between different territorial stakeholders using LEADER methodologies.

Workshop results: How to promote knowledge transfer and innovation in the new RDPs?

Innovation and its associated transfer of knowledge are vital development tools for rural Europe. This fact is reflected in the proposed introduction of innovation support as a cross-cutting theme for the Member States' 2014-2020 RDPs.

Hence innovation in rural development is not to be considered in any way as an elitist concept. New approaches to the development of business operations, the management of environment resources, and/or the operations of local communities are relevant and realisable for everyone with an interest in Europe's countryside. In addition, innovations in the processes and procedures used for RDP implementation remain similarly pertinent considerations for RDP programmers.



RDP programmers are tasked to establish support systems that are capable of efficiently brokering innovation in all its forms, as well as promoting associated transfers of knowledge. Whilst all RDP Measures need to be designed to prioritise and track innovation contributions, RDP Measures funding cooperation, advisory and animation services, as well as technical assistance are anticipated to be prevalent sources of innovation support.

Demand analysis, selection criteria, and monitoring procedures for these Measures must therefore pay special attention to a number of factors. Firstly, care needs to be taken to programme complementary innovation support for rural areas and avoid duplication of efforts. This requires awareness of, and cooperation with, other innovation funding (including support from, European Structural and Investment (ESI) Funds, Horizon 2020 – the European Framework Programme for Research and Innovation, and/or other aid sources).

RDP programmers should ensure that tested procedures are in place to target RDP funds dealing with innovation towards added value projects. Selection and targeting processes need to be able to focus RDP support on fulfilling RDP strategic objectives. They also need to be able to act as a filter for syphoning out ‘wheels that have already been invented’ in a given RDP territory.

An equally important consideration for programming innovation is the management of risk. Risk is an inherent aspect of all innovation support schemes. Good process design can help to handle risk and delegates at the ENRD seminar spotlighted the role of provisions for setting performance milestones. These promote ‘stepwise’ approaches to the delivery of innovation project funding, and can be used to control releases of co-finance for projects that offer potential, but indicate higher risks.

Other advice offered by the participants at the seminar’s innovation workshop noted Member State’s ability to use a Guarantee Fund as a tool for helping to manage risk. There was widespread agreement that monitoring and evaluation of innovation projects should be conscious that ‘failure’ can provide useful lessons for informing future development action. Consensus also emerged at the workshop about avoiding programming of counter-productive procedures (e.g. requiring ‘failed’ innovation projects to repay RDP aid) that could discourage innovation and RDP demand.

RDP programmers can learn a great deal from experiences gained throughout the current programming period. Drawing on such experiences, the ENRD Focus Group on Knowledge Transfer and Innovation (KT&I) has drawn lessons on how future support for KT&I in the new RDPs could work more effectively².

RDP programming reminders concerning knowledge transfer and innovation support:

- Understand the real scope of demand for innovation support across a RDP territory.
- Encourage networking’s productive role in innovation brokerage.
- Promote bottom-up channels for exploring and proposing innovation possibilities.
- Avoid defining innovation but focus on designing innovation processes.
- Include flexibility for combining different types of support (funding and/or other) using a mix of competences.
- Support the use of local animators as catalysts. These advisors and innovation brokers should be well trained.
- Recognise risk and embed systems for handling failure.

2 Find out more about the ENRD’s work in promoting knowledge transfer and innovation at:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/themes/research-and-innovation-gateway-development/kt-innovation/en/kt-innovation_en.cfm

Workshop results: How to integrate environmental and climate concerns in the new RDPs

Rural Europe hosts the vast majority of EU environmental resources and the countryside also has a vital part to play in helping Europe to fulfil its global commitments concerning climate action. A wide range of different development opportunities is available for rural areas from sustainable approaches to environmental management, and climate action associated with both mitigation and adaptation. For these reasons, all of the new RDPs will proactively promote and prioritise support for projects that contribute positively to Member States' environment and climate objectives.

As cross-cutting themes for the 2014-2020 RDPs, environment and climate should be properly addressed by all Measures. Delegates at the ENRD seminar stressed this point observing that, "There should be no 'green or climate corners' in the new RDPs – these topics should be cross-cutting and horizontal issues." This means that *all* RDP Measures should be programmed accordingly. Programming thus must carefully consider the potential for each Measure action to produce environment and climate-related outcomes.

The high importance of these cross-cutting themes is also reflected in the availability of dedicated RDP Measures dealing specifically with ecosystems (Priority 4) and resource efficiency/climate (Priority 5). Whilst these Measures are expected to provide significant sources of 'green' funding, RDP Programmers are tasked to ensure that 'greening' options form part of all other Measures' support toolkits as well. Proposals in the new legal framework for rural development policy provide RDP programmers with a lot of flexibility to be creative in the way that they guarantee this over-riding principle.

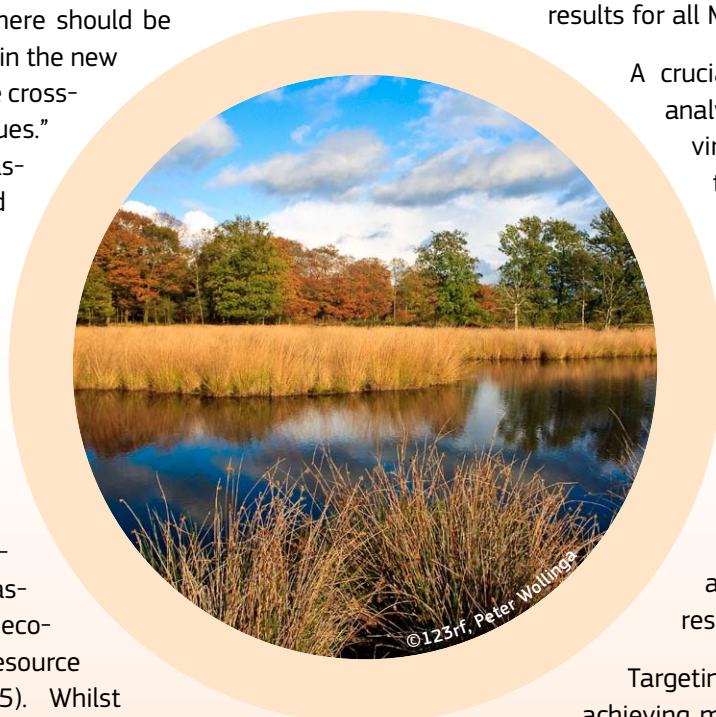
Since environmental and climate concerns are such high priorities for RDP programmers, ex-ante evaluations should pay special attention to the level of 'environmental proofing' that has been, and can be, achieved by every Measure proposed in each RDP.

Successful programming of environment and climate support should also contribute to core generic aims regarding achieving demand-led, results-oriented, error-free and fully integrated RDPs. This can be achieved by planning for consistency throughout a RDP lifecycle.

Green goals should firstly be taken account of during the SWOT. Greening processes also should target Measure support at confirmed environmental and/or climate needs, using selection criteria and other implementation tools. In addition, the reporting of these cross-cutting themes should be strengthened to provide proof of delivery of green results for all Measures.

A crucial starting point is a robust analysis of the RDP territory's environmental context. This helps to clarify informed decisions about the areas that are in most need of different types of environmental management and climate action support. Findings from the needs analysis provide baseline data sets from which RDP progress can be measured against. They also clarify demand for the funds available and help to establish results targets.

Targeting tools are encouraged for achieving more efficient approaches than 'broad-brush' and 'scatter-gun' techniques. Selection criteria should be properly used in meaningful ways to focus RDP funding towards meeting established needs, and achieving accompanying result targets.



Guidance and case study examples exploring how to do this in practice has been prepared by the ENRD's Focus Group on Environmental Services³. Participants in the workshop heard a review of the Focus Group's main messages that was complemented by other practical advice about methodologies for targeting RDP funds towards climate 'hot-spots' (using programming tools developed by the Oscar project - <http://sitem.herts.ac.uk/aeru/oscar/index.htm>).

Workshop and seminar delegates discussed the merits for targeting cross-cutting themes using combinations of Measure-level support. Synergetic packages, designed to generate added value environmental results from RDP actions, were favoured and seen as being feasible if programmed suitably early enough. Combining 'soft' support (i.e. animation, training, capacity building, cooperation, etc.) in packages containing 'hard' support for capital works and/or environmental management are promoted as means for securing better sustainable legacies from RDP support.

For example, the role played by investment Measures in climate action and the delivery of environmental services should not be underestimated, even though this link was undervalued in the past. Investment Measures can be combined with agri-environmental Measures in order to increase competitiveness at the farm level and achieve 'win-win' solutions.

The emphasis on programming more results-oriented RDPs means that all RDPs should prepare appropriate systems for measuring and explaining their contributions to environmental and climate objectives. This involves establishing accurate baseline data, and may also require programming the strengthening of environmental monitoring capacities by beneficiaries and administrators for all RDP Measures.



Consistency remains a common success factor for programming the greening of support throughout each phase of RDP life cycle. RDP greening actions also need to be consistent and integrated with other funding support available in a RDP territory.

All ESI Funds need to address environmental and climate concerns. RDP programming will require successful coordination with these other EU supporting instruments. RDP programming should ensure that RDP Measures maximise their potential for targeting gaps that other funding may not fully cover. Similarly, other funds can be used to add value to RDP operations in environmental fields. Risks concerning duplication of funding should be avoided. Areas noted at the ENRD seminar as being especially pertinent for integrated CSF programming include: transport and energy use in rural areas as well as, urban-rural collaborative actions.

RDP Programming reminders concerning environmental management and climate:

- Ensure the SWOT provides a thorough analysis of environmental management needs and associated support opportunities in a RDP territory.
- Use selection criteria in all Measures to prioritise projects that make positive contributions to the cross-cutting themes.
- Target RDP support towards projects that address recognised demand.
- Combine Measure support in packages that maximise RDP potential.
- Adopt result-oriented approaches for programming green support into all Measures.
- The needs of RDP monitoring should be matched by the monitoring capacities of all RDP stakeholders.
- Integrate RDP support with other corresponding territorial support.

³ Find out more about the ENRD's work in promoting environmental services at: http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/themes/environment/environmental-services/en/environmental-services_en.cfm

Workshop results: Effective shared management

A prerequisite for successful programming is effective coordination and cooperation between managing authorities, paying agencies, certifying bodies, and other organisations with formal responsibilities for the implementation of a RDP.

Many benefits are possible for many stakeholders from fully functional shared management systems. Delegates at the ENRD seminar agreed that everyone involved in RDP administration can gain from the efficiencies that are possible via collaborative working styles. There was also general recognition that these benefits from shared processes were worth the initial work involved in testing and fine-tuning successful collaborative management methods.

Consistency is again a key success factor for the successful programming of shared RDP management procedures. This extends to consistency in financial administration, IT systems, audits and controls. Consistency will be assisted by a change to the system for 2014-2020 that will see only one paying agency per Member State or region dealing with both CAP pillars.

Putting procedures in place to ensure consistent shared financial management of RDPs is intended to help all administrations concerned remain focused on the same set of development priorities. RDPs are development tools and all stakeholders in the management system should apply consistent thinking about their fundamental *raison d'être*: namely their role in helping the RDP to achieve its strategic objectives.

Shared management of RDPs offers useful opportunities to improve the efficiency of RDP actions. Joined-up working methods should balance the importance of a RDP's intervention logic with the importance of preventing errors. This approach underscores the ability of the RDP stakeholders to ensure that the money is being spent on what it is meant for.

Concentrating shared RDP administration systems on the intervention logic of the 2014-2020 RDPs will need to occur at different levels. This will include Measure level, because financial planning and execution in the forthcoming programming period will need to be explicitly based on a clear and common understanding of the RDP priorities, and the set of common indicators for each Measure.

Getting the shared administration right at Measure level will then facilitate smooth shared management for all higher levels in a RDP administration system. Attention should be paid to any new administrative rules at Measure level, such as those concerning the shared management of new financial instruments⁴, or packages of Measure support, or RDP sub-programmes.

Successful programming can thus be helped by establishing joint working procedures at an early stage for managing authorities, paying agencies, intermediary and certifying bodies. Starting early will be especially useful in allowing shared management and ownership of RDP processes involved in preparing Partnership Agreements, setting priorities and indicators.

RDP Programming reminders concerning shared management:

- Start early and test shared management systems that are inclusive and effective.
- Ensure that everyone involved understands their roles in helping the RDP achieve its purpose.
- Ensure that everyone involved understands what the money is meant to be spent on (and why).
- Managing authorities and paying agencies need to jointly carry out an ex-ante assessment of all proposed RDPs measures in order to check and demonstrate the verifiability and controllability of Measures and Measure outputs.



4 See issue 13 of the EU Rural Review for advice and guidance about RDP Financial Instruments.
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/publications-and-media/eu-rural-review/en-eu-rural-review_en.cfm

Workshop results: Good governance in preparation of the RDPs

Partnership working will continue to grow in relevance and potential as an effective tool for successful RDP programming. Consequently, it is important for all RDP partners to understand the rules and regulations that will be agreed by Member States for governing EU rural development policy. This is important with regard the procedures for preparing the RDPs, as well as the Partnership Agreements.



Good governance approaches to RDP partnership working therefore needs to be planned, agreed, and programmed during 2013. The aim of programming good governance procedures is to focus on, and profit from, the added value that can be gained from working in partnership to promote multi-level ownership and endorsement of RDP operations.

Outcomes from the programming of genuine partnership principles can help the SWOT analysis process to facilitate better thematic and territorial targeting of RDP actions. Partnership working also generates useful benefits in terms of the design of optimal and efficient RDP delivery systems.

Knowledge benefits can be gained from involving all stakeholders in the full life cycle of a RDP. Good governance preparations should hence seek to establish partnership working structures that are capable of delivering effective results not just during the preparation stage, but also throughout RDP implementation and evaluation phases.

Programming good governance principles throughout the life cycle of a RDP will help to ensure stakeholder involvement in implementation phases (during project selection as well as collection and analysis of monitoring data). It will also add value during the evaluation processes that can influence the strategic direction and operational procedures of a programme.

Active involvement of all stakeholders is a condition of success for rural development policy.

Selecting the most advantageous set of partners is a success factor for achieving good governance goals. It remains important to have a balanced approach to involving public, private and civil society sector partners. Transparent procedures should be put in place to prevent risks of possible in-balances occurring.

Article 5 of the proposal for a Common Provisions Regulation lists the main categories of partners to involve in Partnership Agreements and programme preparation: Competent regional, local, urban and other public authorities; Economic and social partners; Bodies representing civil society, including environmental partners, non-governmental organisations, and bodies responsible for promoting equality and non-discrimination.

Good governance approaches involve formalising working procedures between partners. Formalised partnership arrangements are anticipated as a new legal requirement for the 2014-2020 RDPs, and a common code of conduct is being prepared by the European Commission to specify how the principles laid down in Article 5 of the Common Provisions Regulation can be implemented by the Member States⁵.

Delegates at the ENRD seminar were advised about the code of conduct and the prominence it places on both consultation and communications tools for achieving good governance approaches. Discussions during the ENRD seminar drew attention to the fact that RDP programmers should aim to organise consultation and communication operations in ways that avoid focusing solely on topics concerning allocations of funding to different types of RDP actions or beneficiaries.

Good governance approaches require consultation and communication with/between partners to focus firstly on clarifying the main rural development challenges and opportunities that exist in a territory. Dialogue concerning decisions about funding allocations can then be made to target actions addressing defined needs and demand in an informed manner.

5 Other useful information about the code of conduct content is explained in a European Commission Staff Working Paper available at: <http://ec.europa.eu/esf/main.jsp?catId=67&langId=en&newsId=7956>

Technical assistance from the current 2007-2013 RDP budgets is available to help Member States make use of 'Consultation Platforms' during the programming of the new RDPs. Technical assistance funding from the 2014-2020 period is also expected to be available to help strengthen partnership approaches during each RDPs' full life cycle.

Notable Consultation Platforms for the RDPs will be the Monitoring committee and Rural Network, at national or regional level. ENRD seminar participants heard how Consultation Platforms with open membership arrangements may possess possibilities to be more inclusive than rigid formal partnership models. Flexibility was considered useful for encouraging a larger critical mass of expertise within the RDP governance apparatus.

Continuous exchange of good practices between partners was also highlighted at the seminar as being a beneficial

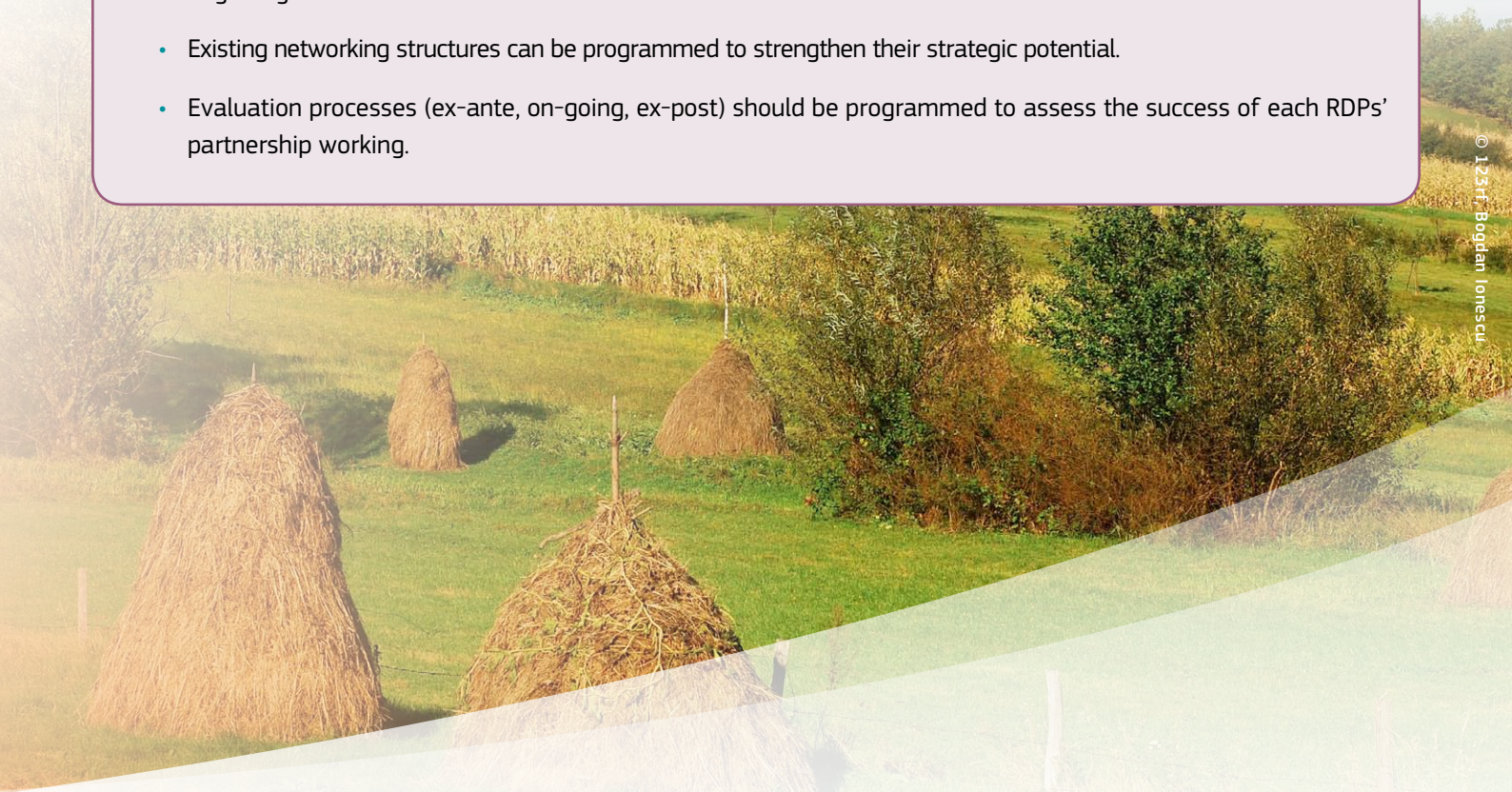
component of good governance approaches. RDP programmers are advised to objectively analyse the potential of the existing networking structures for carrying out these knowledge transfer tasks. RDP programming can seek to ensure that appropriate networking structures are in place for the start of the 2014-2020 period.

Social media and other communication tools offer opportunities for promoting dialogue and involving stakeholders in RDP programming processes.

National Rural Networks (NRNs) can represent important Consultative Platforms for reaching broad spectrums of RDP stakeholders⁶. One role of the NRNs is to help to interpret potentially complex concepts and language into more user-friendly explanations and terminology that different stakeholders can easily relate to, and understand

RDP Programming reminders concerning good governance approaches:

- Partnership approaches add value to RDP operations.
- RDPs need to formalise partnership arrangements using a code of conduct.
- Early investments in consultation and communication can generate cost-effective programming benefits.
- Identifying and exchanging good practice examples (of RDP projects and RDP management) is good practice in good governance.
- Existing networking structures can be programmed to strengthen their strategic potential.
- Evaluation processes (ex-ante, on-going, ex-post) should be programmed to assess the success of each RDPs' partnership working.



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6 See Issue 14 of the EU Rural Review for a detailed analysis on the added value of networking and the role of the NRNs: http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/publications-and-media/eu-rural-review/en/eu-rural-review_en.cfm

Workshop results: Monitoring and evaluation of the new RDPs

Programming successful monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems will make major contributions to the overall success of RDP operations. Programming should thus reflect the point that M&E is not just about reporting results, and should reinforce the reality that M&E is essential for providing vital data that is needed for steering the direction and performance of RDPs.

EU rural development policy proposals for 2014-2020 underscore such principles. The placement of more emphasis on M&E in rural development policy aims to help Member States to achieve more results-oriented and accountable RDP actions. RDP programming thus needs to establish procedures and conditions for:

- Ensuring the quality of M&E approaches; and
- Making effective use of the M&E findings.

A new M&E system is being prepared for the 2014-2020 RDPs which applies to RDP Measures and Focus Areas. It will improve the ability of RDPs to be more results-oriented and programmers should take account of the new system at an early stage.

Useful information about ex-ante evaluation processes for the 2014-2020 RDPs is available from the European Evaluation Network for Rural Development in a document titled: *Getting the most from your RDP*⁷.

The current Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (CMEF) remains the primary reference tool for RDP programmers. For 2014-2020, the M&E system has been modernised to cover both pillars of the CAP. This will further aid the visibility of Member States' development support for rural areas.

Other new M&E elements for 2014-2020 RDPs include the use of 'Evaluation Plans'. Programming processes will need to include preparations for, and agreement of, these Evaluation Plans. Content of the Evaluation Plans shall clarify and formalise M&E details such as (among other things) M&E timelines, data collection systems, and procedures determining how evaluation outcomes will be used.

No midterm evaluation will be required for new RDPs but in 2017 and 2019 the RDP annual implementation reports will be enhanced. In 2017, RDP annual implementation reports will highlight any changes that might be needed in the RDPs. In 2019, RDP annual implementation reports will highlight a summary of interim RDP performance.



7 Multi-lingual versions of the publication can be found at:

http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/evaluation/library/evaluation-helpdesk-publications/en/evaluation-helpdesk-publications_en.cfm

Decisions about the release of performance reserve funds will be made in 2019, based on a specified set of milestones which are to be aligned with the RDP's main indicator set. Participants in the ENRD seminar's M&E workshop highlighted that programming care is required in the choice of performance reserve indicators. These should reflect the overall intervention logic that has been agreed by the RDP stakeholders and should not risk introducing any unintended bias.

The number of performance indicators in the new programming period will be reduced in order to help simplify and strengthen RDP management.

Another important consideration for RDP programmers relates to the comparability of data-sources (e.g. for context indicators). These should be ensured at EU level. Attention is also needed during the programming of results-oriented systems, at Measure (and other) levels, to promote visibility of progress towards the RDP cross-cutting themes (innovation, environment and climate action).⁸

RDP Programming reminders concerning monitoring and evaluation:

- Getting M&E programming right will make a major difference to getting RDP operations right.
- More emphasis on results-oriented approaches will improve the visibility of RDP actions.
- Evaluation Plans will provide valuable M&E management tools.
- M&E procedures and indicators for RDP sub-programmes, performance reserve, and cross-cutting themes need to be designed to align with the overall RDP.



8 A working document has been produced advising on Indicator Plans for the new RDPs. This is available on the ENRD website page featuring the documentation from the Successful Programming seminar. A draft list of target indicators and results indicators for the new RDPs is also on this page under 'WS6' on the 'Documentation' tab at: http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/en-rd-events-and-meetings/seminars-and-conferences/successful-programming_en/en/successful-programming_en_home.cfm

Workshop results: Community-Led Local Development (CLLD)/LEADER and the new RDPs

The potential development synergies that could be achieved in the period 2014-2020 by programming viable linkages between different territorial stakeholders using LEADER methodologies were welcomed. These stakeholders include RDP Local Action Groups (LAGs), Fisheries Local Action Groups (FLAGs), and other groups involved in using ESI Funds for purposes of Community Led Local Development (CLLD).

An important consideration for RDP programming is to ensure that LEADER Groups address the weaknesses in Local Development Strategies that were identified by the European Court of Auditors⁹. For example, RDP procedures should be programmed for LEADER groups to ensure that all projects funded, and actions carried out, by the LEADER group are clearly connected to the Local Development Strategy's overall objectives. This involves using selection criteria and

monitoring systems as tools for checking that projects support the Local Development Strategy's intervention logic, and to ensure that LEADER funds are being spent on what they are meant for.

As a matter of simplification, core LEADER funds from the 2014-2020 RDPs will be entirely programmed under Focus Area 6B, namely: 'Fostering local development in rural areas' but the horizontal characteristics of LEADER make it relevant for all other RDP Focus Areas.

Employment is expected to be a top priority and performance indicator for LEADER funded RDP outcomes. Consistent approaches for measuring and monitoring LEADER's job creation performance will also be important for RDP programmers.

The reintroduction of opportunities for LEADER groups to access multi-funding budgets provides options for these local development stakeholders to take on a much stronger driving role in progressing the growth and prosperity of their own areas, on a wide variety of fronts



⁹ <http://eca.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/pressroom/Presspacks/Previouspresspacks/2010/PresskitSpecialReportNo52010>

But RDP programming preparations should also note that needs could still exist to build the capacity of LEADER groups to operate in new multi-funding arenas. Options for strengthening skills and competencies may therefore need to be programmed to help LEADER groups effectively coordinate the consolidation of funding that will be available for territorial approaches to local development¹⁰.

Testing pilot approaches and exploring success factors from existing good practice in multi-fund/policy coordination (e.g. combination of EAFRD with EFF) can help RDP authorities to programme their own road maps for furthering the mainstreaming of LEADER methodologies during 2014-2020

Delegates at the ENRD seminar heard how the roll out of multi-fund Local Development Strategies is not something that can be forced. Guidance was proposed to allow the process to happen 'organically' and at its own pace, reflecting demand and capacity levels in local territories.

Hence, it may still be the case that mono-funded Local Development Strategies are prevalent at the start of the 2014-2020 period.

Tools for aiding and enabling this change process include programming of:

- Legal national frameworks that provides harmonised rules between fund delivery systems;
- Capacity building support for stakeholders to help everyone involved understand the various perspectives and operational realities that exist.
- Regular cooperation meetings between institutions involved in different funding systems. Such cooperation should occur between counterparts at national, regional and local levels and communication tools can be programmed to foster dialogue aimed at identifying challenges, overcoming bottlenecks, and assisting the flow of accessible multi-funding opportunities.

If the multi-fund approach is adopted it is advised that selection of LAGs is made in a coordinated process. This could involve joint calls for proposals, or a selection committee at national or regional level with representatives across funds.



10 Find out more about the ENRD's work in providing guidance about the LEADER methodology at: http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/leader/en/leader_en.cfm

Options for involving Intermediary bodies in the administration of LEADER are also possible for the 2014-2020 period. These options can be programmed with dual aims to:

- Provide a 'one-stop-shop' for LEADER groups to liaise with regarding their funding (be it from multi or mono-fund sources); and equally important,
- Reduce risks of managing authorities becoming overburdened by administration processing. The latter would help managing authorities to maintain their strategic supervisory role in overseeing the coordination and quality of LEADER's implementation.

Intermediary bodies are also better placed to implement calls made by the ENRD seminar participants for effort to be made to programme easier procedures for smaller projects. Cooperation between Member States can help to identify/transfer good practice in such procedures.

RDP Programming reminders concerning achieving viable linkages between different territorial stakeholders using LEADER methodologies:

- Sufficient capacity needs to be in place to guarantee that all LEADER funds are spent on what they are meant for.
- Job creation will be an important target for LEADER.
- LEADER groups should be helped to move towards multi-funding at their own pace.
- Intermediary bodies can provide beneficial technical assistance support to LEADER groups and RDP authorities.



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Further information:

All of the Successful Programming documentation presented at the seminar can be found online at:

http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/en-rd-events-and-meetings/seminars-and-conferences/successful-programming_en/en/successful-programming_en_home.cfm