



Notes from

Virtual Think Tank Session –

*Communication and coordination with regard to planning
and implementing the CLLD delivery system*

CLLD Cluster

06.06.2014

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1. Background of the event

Invitation note

What?	Virtual Think Tank (VTT) session for CLLD cluster members
Topic?	Information flow, communication and coordination among key national stakeholders (Managing authorities of EU Funds supporting CLLD, Paying Agencies, National Rural Networks) in relation to planning and setting up CLLD delivery system
When?	14:00 – 16:00 (Brussels time), 27 May 2014
Who?	Up to 10 people: representatives of MAs, PA and NRN actively involved in the ENRD CLLD Cluster and responsible for implementation of and support to LEADER and CLLD 2014-2020
Objective	Exchange information and ideas on communication and coordination mechanisms related to CLLD programming, implementation and support which can be further enhanced and disseminated among interested CLLD cluster members.

Background

A thematic cluster on CLLD was formed and launched in 2013 under the guidance of the Hungarian NRN (More information: http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/themes/clld/en/clld_en.cfm). As part of Working Group 1 of the CLLD cluster (more information: http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/themes/clld/nrn-thematic-initiative-on-clld/en/clld-working-group-one_en.cfm) an exchange forum on MyENRD was set up. This VTT is conducted with the aim to support discussion among CLLD cluster members and their continuous efforts to assist preparation for CLLD in their respective Member States (MSs).

Why this topic?

The system and methodology of CLLD is new and will be implemented in several MSs as planned in their Partnership Agreements. There are various strategic decisions that each administration is making in relation to defining criteria for eligible areas for support, for selection of integrated LDSs which will receive funding from more than one funds, etc., intensified dialogue and exchange of information seems to be needed as a viable basis to make all those decisions. Mechanisms which allow for exchange of information, for consultation and for learning to help not to continuously “re-invent the wheel” seem to be an important basis for CLLD implementation in each MS.

Discussion questions

- What is the information that stakeholders need to exchange?
- What coordination is needed?
- What are the possible mechanisms to do this?
- Could a central forum/platform/group between MAs, PAs and NRNs be helpful and do they have the interest/time/capacity to continue information sharing?
- Does this need professional knowledge-management or should it be only informal exchange?
- What is the expected output/outcome of such a mechanism? Or what other mechanisms can be proposed?

2. Summary of the main outcomes of the Virtual Think Tank:

- Virtual Think Tank (VTT) is a method that allows focused and structured discussion around a specific (pre-defined) topic. The method was used in order to generate discussion among interested stakeholders (including the CLLD cluster members) on the topic of ‘Communication and coordination with regard to planning and implementing the CLLD delivery system’.
- The approaches adopted by Member States (MSs) with regard **to multi-funded CLLD varies** and MSs are at different stages of their development. Among the VTT participant Member States, Hungary and Estonia will follow a single-funded approach, in Austria the decision about multi-funding will be taken at the regional level, while in Scotland a combination of EAFRD and EMFF will be used (with planned links to ESF and ERDF programmes/projects). Some of the MS are already at an advanced stage in the **selection of LAGs and development of LDSs** (e.g. Scotland), while others are still awaiting decision about the LAG selection (e.g. Hungary).
- Some participants (with a single-funded approach) expressed **disappointment** with regard to the support received from national (and to some extent European) level. At the same time, others emphasised that the focus now should be on the policy content and possible **cooperation with other funds, which is possible** even in single-funded programme.
- At this stage, Member States and various stakeholders should look forward, and the challenge ahead is to **establish good communication, and spread good practices** from those Member States that are implementing multi-funded CLLD. The focus should be on the content and priorities of LDSs and national programmes, e.g. the different levels of expertise of local stakeholders would need to be considered.
- **Further issues that need particular attention** include the coordination and exchange between MAs and PAs within a Member State as well as between different DGs at the European level; support and guidance provided at the national and European levels; the establishment of a strong monitoring system; and ensuring the development of high-quality LDSs using multi-funding.
- **Communication and sharing/exchange of information among key stakeholders about CLLD** remains an important task. In particular, ways of communicating the added-value of LEADER would need continued emphasis. Good practices (such as the coordination committee in Sweden) should be built on.
- **Coordination** among key stakeholders should be organised both **horizontally and vertically**. Exchange and coordination at all levels is important: at the local level **LAG networks** play an important role in exchange; at national level sharing of expertise among MS is important (especially with regard to CLLD implementation); at the same time exchange, coordination and (common) guidelines from the European level are also essential.

3. Notes from the meeting

Facilitator:

Thomas Mueller, LAG Manager, Austria

Participants:

Alistair Prior, LEADER Managing Authority, Head of Rural Communities Team
Szabo Matyas, Hungarian Ministry of Rural Development
Ave Bremse, Estonian NRN
Marina Brakalova, LEADER expert, ENRD CP

Observers:

Giuseppe Gargano, Italian NRN
Maria Capecchi, Italian LAG
Elena Maccioni, ENRD CP

Discussion:

1. At which stage the preparation for CLLD/LEADER for the 2014-2020 programming period is in your MS?

Ave Bremse:

At the beginning of the year 2013 Estonia started the discussions about the next programming period, and more in specific about its preparatory support for LAGs with regular information days. The LDSs drafts will soon be submitted to the Managing Authority. The NRN will participate to the reviewing of the LDSs. LAGs will be allowed to use the 'preparation measure' to finalize their strategies. 26 LAGs are expected to be put in place. The 99% of the rural territory will be covered by LEADER. Almost 9% of the programme budget could be assigned to LEADER (but this final decision is taken yet). Estonia will not use the multi-funding option but there may be some possibilities for LAGs to apply from the ESF and ERDF. It is expected that for the end of 2015 LDS will be selected.

Matyas Szabo:

Hungary in the recent period changed drastically the way it was going to organize the support to the rural areas. Initially it was planned that 12% of the programme budget would be allocated to LEADER; currently it is foreseen that the minimum threshold of 5% will be used. There will be a reduction in the number of LAGs and also the themes suggested for LEADER will be reduced. Hungary will not have multi-funded LDSs. ITI, ERDF and ESF will operate in the cities but there will be no connection with the LAGs.

Since November 2013 LAGs are preparing for the next programming period. Unfortunately, while a reduction in the number of LAGs is expected, decisions concerning the LAGs are not taken yet and therefore, LAGs still don't know if they would continue to operate. The decision will be taken during summer of 2014.

Hungary will not have a 'preparation measure', so no money will be available for the preparatory stage. Overall, the expected budget per LAG is expected to be sufficient to support development in the selected rural areas.

The sad news is that in the coming programming period not all the rural areas that were covered by LEADER in the past programming period will be covered in the next one. The MA is now planning information workshops and guidance documents for LAGs.

Thomas Mueller:

In March the National Programme was almost ready and LAGs are preparing their LDS right now. Recently the Austrian government decided to change the co-financing rate from the 50% planned to the 20%, influencing in this way the preparation of the LAGs that now see a reduction of budget available. Austria also will have to reduce the number of LAGs, therefore, some LAGs will have to merge fusing their LDSs. Luckily the process is well facilitated because there is a good communication and connection between LAGs and MAs. October 2014 is the deadline for submission of LDSs and selection will happen in May 2015.

Alistair Prior:

Scotland is now at an advanced status of the LDSs preparations. 13 LDSs will be multi-funded by the EMFF and EAFRD. LAGs, having looked at policy priorities over the past 4/5 months, are now focusing on their business planning. Concerning the budget allocation the 5% of the RDP budget will go to LEADER and additional funds will contribute to the development of small businesses. LDS should link with ESF/ERDF work through creating interaction between delivery partners.

2. Reflection on the MSs acceptance of multi-funded CLLD to date:

Ave Bremse:

It would now be useful to reflect on **why only a minority of the MSs is programming multi-funding of the LDSs**. In my opinion the flow of information top to down failed: there is a big need of guidance both from the EU to the MSs and also from the National Government to the local level. It is important to understand that multi-funded CLLD is not just a 'one period action', we do need it. The message should be widespread that "*multi-funding has come to stay*".

Matyas Szabo:

One of the reasons why most of the MSs are not considering multi-funding might have been the **lack of information**. Further than this however, another big reason has been the **lack of experience on multi-funded CLLD**. Hungary had some problems in explaining to the EU how the actions of different funds were expected to work in a synergic way contributing all together to the development of the same rural areas. Furthermore Hungary did not succeed in explaining how it was going to ensure a sufficient demarcation between the different funds avoiding double funding: DG REGIO found that Hungary's planned programme was too ambitious.

In Hungary the LAGs were ready for multi-funded LDSs and were prepared to coordinate the actions of different funds in their areas; however, this was not fully supported at the national level.

Alistair Prior:

I don't think that the use of multiple funds are necessarily new and it might be that in several MSs vested interests at all levels dictates to what extent multi-funding is applied. It is possible to feel that there are some **tensions between EU and national drivers** when discussing/agreeing on the use of multi-funding. Furthermore there is the tendency within EU funds debate to focus too much on the process rather than policy.

Giuseppe Gargano:

I remember, for example, that during LEADER II (1994-1999) in EU **we already had some experience with multi-funding.**

3. Was the lack of uptake of the opportunity of multi-funding CLLD due to a deficits in information exchange? What kind of information stakeholders need to exchange?

Ave Bremse:

In Estonia local stakeholders and managers were well informed through several tools: specialists from different ministries provided support and, among others, several workshops, meetings and study-tours were organised. In Estonia all stakeholders worked intensively in support of multi-funded CLLD, and there was a very good flow of information and strong efforts on behalf of government organisations. Despite all these efforts, multi-funded CLLD was not included in the Partnership Agreement. However, what is needed now is a **good communication and dissemination of good examples from those countries that are implementing multi-funded CLLD.**

Another important issue that should be addressed is the **coordination between different MAs and PAs**; and this can be supported through exchange. There is the **need for communication about all those details that will allow a good management of the delivery system**, including important information concerning how to simplify the procedures. Information should come in particular from the different DGs, and DG REGIO in particular, concerning the most useful procedures and the acceptance of the LEADER method.

Alistair Prior:

I agree that we need to learn the lessons from the past (good and bad) and we should look at best practices on existing approaches to CLLD at programme/project level. I also think that a discussion about stakeholders (and their skills/level of expertise) is merited: different groups are at different stages in terms of their skills, expertise and understanding both of the LEADER approach in general and on how it can contribute to rural development. The debate, however, should be **about identifying priorities rather than getting stuck in debates about the process.**

Matyas Szabo:

It would be very interesting to spread good and bad examples; more specifically we should spread information about successful and non-successful projects that use multi-funding. In Hungary for example in the past programming period we had cases of multi-funded projects (but not strategies). These experiences should be shared.

Another aspect that represents an important challenge, and where efficient communication will be particularly important, is the **establishment of a monitoring system for CLLD and (multi-funded) LDSs**. A further important task is to guarantee a high quality LDSs. It is important to **create and disseminate experiences and guidance documents on how to produce a high-quality LDS by using multi-funds** and to increase the understanding of CLLD. The European Commission and the DGs should help MS through clear guidance explaining administrative details, on 'what we can do and we cannot'. The **guidelines should be a unified top-down message.**

4. Do you see any gaps in the communication from the EU level?

Marina Brakalova:

From the ENRD point of view we see that the role of the national stakeholders is very important. The EU approach is to provide the overall framework but it is left to the MS to make strategic decisions on how technically and concretely those principles will be put in practice. More information could be requested based on the needs coming **from the national and local stakeholders**. Communication and information on national level should aim at informing and preparing those stakeholders that will be in a key position to take decisions on the use of a multi-funding approach for the coming programming periods. About the necessary communication, it is important to remind us that before thinking about the 'how' it is important to decide on the 'what' to communicate.

Stakeholders from different funds should start sharing ideas in order to achieve a common **understanding about the purpose of** specific information-sharing and information needs. Furthermore, the funding authorities focusing on territorial approaches and development could form a common mechanism **together** to discuss and exchange on individual priorities and discover possible areas for integration in the implementation of the programmes. On this basis, joint decision and actions could follow for shared tools, decisions, etc.

The timing is important for the activation of exchange among bodies and teams involved in multi-funded LDSs: exchange and sharing of information should happen already in the **programming stage**, when programmes main implementation mechanisms and implementation rules are decided. Exchange of information and mechanisms for this is important especially when LDSs are funded from more funds (where the different funds may be funding/intervening in the same/overlapping territories). LAGs and NRNs should/could be the drivers and interlocutors for such exchange.

Some valuable information about how Sweden is organising its CLLD coordination mechanisms could be already shared. **Sweden set up a coordination committee including a diversity of stakeholders and funds representatives**. These stakeholders will be meeting at all key stages to agree on the criteria and procedures for selection, on criteria on LAGs and selection of territories. This will serve as a permanent body for monitoring and advising. Coordination committees can serve as a place for **information exchange**; alternatively other **consultative mechanisms**, or even a **decision making mechanism can be set up**.

Ave Bremse:

I agree with Marina but we should keep in mind that LAGs normally have limited human resources and that we should not expect too much from the LAG employees. **Activities such as disseminating more information should be expected from other organisations at higher level** – such as the MA, NRNs, etc.

Thomas Mueller:

In my opinion communication could also contribute to explaining better the CLLD and the multi-funding approaches: CLLD, **LEADER and bottom-up are still not well understood by those who were not involved in it** and therefore don't really know it. In the future when information-sharing is coordinated, we could better communicate LEADER values.

Matyas Szabo:

Communication activities should focus on showing the added value of CLLD and how to use the bottom-up approach, on the importance to leave the decision to the LAGs, explaining that delegation will not deny the chance to exercise control and monitoring. Many stakeholders that were not involved in LEADER know LEADER and understand it, but they don't see how it can actually work.

Alistair Prior:

I agree on the need to explain bottom-up importance and I agree that the Structural Funds are suspicious of interventions that have low cost - which they perceive to have low/no impact. It is therefore important to stress the outcomes of the LEADER intervention: what makes it work and how can we best demonstrate to others that LEADER is not a 'small club concerning of knitting circles'. I deeply agree also on the fact that communication could help overcoming risk aversion from PA/MA and could demonstrate that delegating decision-making is entirely appropriate.

5. What coordination among CLLD stakeholders is needed?

Ave Bremse:

Coordination should be organised both 'vertically and horizontally'. One solution could be to create the opportunity to use specific events to invite representatives from all funds. Representatives from all funds, for example, should be invited to participate to the LEADER Subcommittee meetings.

Matyas Szabo:

Coordination could be established also at a LAG level: LAGs networks could have the strength for communicating to the national administrations that they are ready to use multi-funding.

Marina Brakalova:

From the ENRD point of view we see the need for a greater integration at EU level: different MAs from different funds could meet at EU level and discuss/exchange how to ensure integration mechanisms between different funds. The need for coordination and integration mechanisms should be recognised.

Giuseppe Gargano:

Interact received many **questions from the MAs of regional funds on how to implement CLLD**. Further than communication activities, trainings on how CLLD works and its added value could be organised. There are major doubts for example about the eligible expenditures and there is a **strong need of guidelines that are approved by the European Commission**.

Alistair Prior:

Although MSs are already at an advanced programming stage scope for representatives from different MS to speak to each other is certainly still very useful. Also it is important that MS speak to each other and exchange approaches, already thinking ahead on CLLD multi-funded LDS implementation.

6. Final main messages by participants:

Ave Bremse:

- Try to involve the other funds;
- Important to know why countries didn't use the CLLD;
- Seminars and trainings would be very useful;
- There is the need for a commitment also from all DGs - not only DG AGRI - about the use of multi-funding.

Szabo Matyas:

- Seminars can be very useful;
- The guidance of DG AGRI was welcome but we don't see the commitment of other funds;

Alistair Prior:

- It is important to have more exchanges with each other
- We need to be positive and pragmatic in our approach and look at how we can begin to work better together to support outcomes
- Understanding the place of CLLD in broader agenda is important.
- Key thing for me is not pointing out weaknesses but rather looking for opportunities and how we can all evolve our approaches over the next six years.