

European Network for Rural Development

Minutes of the third Coordination Committee meeting

9th December 2009, Borschette Centre, Brussels

Chairing the meeting

Morning: Loretta Dormal-Marino, Deputy Director General in charge of Rural Development, DG AGRI

Afternoon: Jose Manuel Sousa Uva, Director of Horizontal aspects of rural development, DG AGRI

1 Opening and Introduction

Presentation delivered

"*EN RD Annual work Programme*" by Gaëlle Lhermitte, DG AGRI.

Summary of key points in the opening session

- To achieve the overall EN RD objective of improving policy implementation, it is vital to reinforce a dialogue with all rural actors.
- The EN RD work plan for the second year has been shaped on the basis of the suggestions received from the Coordination committee (CC) members, including the proposal to launch a new TWG related to policy delivery mechanisms.
- It is important to develop a more complete understanding of what is working well and what does not in the present programmes, and to identify 'lessons learned' in order to inform both the present and future programming periods.

2 Session 1 – Progress review of the thematic working groups (TWG).

Presentations delivered

- *TWG1: "Targeting territorial specificities and needs in rural development programmes"* by Peggy Dieryckxvisschers, DG AGRI.
- *TWG2: "Links between agriculture and the wider rural economy"* by Pierre Bascou, DG AGRI.
- *TWG3: "Public goods and public interventions"* by Martin Scheele, DG AGRI.
- *"Next TWG Steps"* by J.M. Sousa Uva, Director of Horizontal aspects of rural development, DG AGRI.

Summary of key points in the discussion of session 1

General

Each TWG chairman presented the state of play of their work. The TWGs have either completed or are about to complete the first major step of their work with further work programmed up to the second quarter of 2010.

- Appreciation for the work undertaken within the TWGs and the results so far was broadly expressed by the CC members. The opportunity to be involved in the work of the groups and to share information on their initial outcomes was welcomed. Further effort to include the members in the working process of all the three groups will be undertaken at the next CC meeting by proposing a specific workshop on the TWGs. This initiative will follow a TWGs joint meeting, provisionally planned for late March 2010, which will aim to put together and compare the results obtained in the three groups.
- A dynamic platform on the EN RD website will be developed to ensure connections among the TWGs, the members of the CC and the Commission in order to enhance the exchange of information and to make the documents produced available.
- The overall mandate of each working group is fixed, but within this, new strands of work may be undertaken to address identified needs.
- The roles of the EN RD CC and the RD advisory group respectively are clearly defined, the first aims for efficiency in the implementation of the RD policy through involvement of stakeholders, while the latter maintains the role of policy advisor.

TWG1

- As a first result of TWG1, a heterogeneous approach in the use of the OECD definition for rural areas in the RDPs emerged. The analysis also highlighted differences occurring in the identification of rural areas whenever a more articulated definition is applied. For the future a possible further refinement for the territorial targeting of public intervention might seem appropriate. TWG 1 will continue its work by undertaking case studies and finally making recommendations.

TWG2

- TWG2 work has been focusing on assessing quantified (backward and forward) and qualitative linkages between agriculture and other economic sectors in 18 regions throughout the EU.
- The work could possibly be enhanced by the inclusion in the analysis of specific aspects such as: i) the role that direct payments play in the development of the regions examined; ii) the way in which direct payments are considered for the classification of the regions (according to the methodology used in the group) and; iii) the contribution of agriculture to the provision of social benefits (creation of social goods and services). The first aspect will be taken into consideration in the next steps of the work of the TWG which will focus on policy instruments and institutional frameworks in MS. How to further address the issue of the provision of 'social public goods' could be discussed at the planned joint meeting of the TWGs.

TWG3

- The TWG Chairman noted that one of the first steps of the work of the group is to build a solid conceptual framework and definition of PG, providing a rational basis for further discussion.
- Besides the social dimension of farming, some additional issues could be taken in consideration in the work of the TWG3, specifically: i) potential conflict between PG and related public interest versus private interest; ii) the provision of PG in intensive agriculture areas.

3 Session 2: Launch of a new thematic working group on "Delivery mechanisms of rural development policy"

Presentation delivered

- *"Thematic Work Group 4: Delivery mechanisms of rural development policy"*, Josefine Loriz-Hoffman, DG AGRI

Summary of key points in the discussion of session 2

- The launch of a fourth TWG dealing with delivery mechanisms of RD policy has been discussed by the members of the CC. The possible areas of interest of the TWG4 will include the programming process of the RDPs, their implementation and the role played by monitoring and evaluation.
- Additional areas of interest for the group, the specific work plan and the working process are being developed and inputs are required from members in order to identify specific issues to be taken in account in the work.
- Initial suggestions of possible issues to be addressed by TWG4 concerned both the content and organisational aspects of the group, in particular: i) the issue of demarcation and complementarity between EAFRD and EU structural funds; ii) the role which NRNs could play to improve RD policy delivery mechanisms (in this regard, the work undertaken so far in collaboration with the CP could be taken into account); iii) possible links with the work of the European Evaluation Network; iv) advantages and disadvantages of establishing sub-groups in order to address specific sub-themes; v) ensuring links with the work carried out by the focus group on Leader implementation established as an initiative of the Leader subcommittee.

4 Session 3: Prospective work on "Access to modern ICT in rural areas"

Presentations delivered

- *"Forthcoming EU digital Agenda and EU Broadband strategy: issues at stake EN RD and ICT in rural areas"* by Guido Acchioni, DG INSFO.
- *"EU Broadband strategy co-ordination and synergy with Cohesion Policy"* by Luisa Sanches, DG REGIO.
- *"ICT priorities for rural development"* by Nivelin Noev, DG AGRI.

Summary of key points in the discussion of session 3

- ICT policy has an important impact on rural development and policy implementation decisions should meet the needs of the future not just today. Some concern was expressed that, while technology moves very fast, there is a danger that RD policy implementation structures and decision making do not. Thus, technology choices may be out of date by the time they are implemented. In programming, coordination between different authorities is important as is the need to increase ICT management capabilities among RD planners.
- It is principally the MAs responsibility (one of the principles of 'shared management') to liaise with other organisations and define what is most appropriate. In cohesion policy the territorial approach (involving all governance levels in decision making) is recognised as important.
- The need for broadband is universally accepted, as a 'must'; but provision of broadband does not automatically mean that rural areas can exploit the opportunities of broadband. A 'parallel' programme is critical to ensure that broadband can be exploited, including giving a priority to skills training. It was noted that the 2009 revisions of RDPs do not generally include 'soft' ICT initiatives).

- The importance of broadband performance (speed) as well as coverage was raised. It is recognised that there is a lack of data on the quality of broadband and broadband penetration. Information is provided by national authorities and there is currently very little data and information available on regional and rural areas. Proper indicators need to be put in place to address this issue and DG INSFO is addressing this.
- DG AGRI's position was sought regarding the possible health implications of electro-magnetic radiation. The Chair indicated that other relevant DGs (e.g. DG SANCO) would be consulted on this issue.
- Some difficulties in the implementation of ICT projects arise from EU competition rules. The importance of coordination between the various competent authorities at MS level was highlighted and also coordination between different DGs at the EU level.
- The Chair requested members to provide examples of ICT good practice in MS and comments relevant to the implementation of ICTs in the context of RD up until mid-Feb. The session concluded with the Chair confirming the intention to return to this subject at the next CC meeting.

Information point: A major ICT event is being planned for end of 2010 or early 2011. The focus will include the identification of rural stakeholders needs and include contributions from the EN RD.

5 Session 4: Review of EN RD activities: focus on key activities

Presentations delivered

- *"Leader subcommittee 25 November 2009"* by Ave Bremse, Representative of the Leader subcommittee / Estonian NRN.
- *"Focus on Activities with National Rural Networks, NRN activity plan"* by Haris Martinos, Contact Point of the EN RD.
- *"Analytical work on the RDs: Overview and proposed dissemination"* by Gaëlle Lhermitte, DG AGRI.
- *"Peak Performance: New insights into Mountain Farming in the European Union"* by Antonella Zona, DG AGRI.

Summary of key points in the discussion of session 4

- The need to ensure that the communications tools of the EN RD (especially the website) are effective, that visibility is raised and that discussions at the European level are both communicated to, and allow participation of the networks. Specific website functions (for example tailored email alerts) will facilitate this, but it must not be forgotten that currently the main issue is development of content, which also needs to be done together (i.e. by all active players of the EN RD).
- EN RD european-level work on good practices should build on the work done by NRNs, who do not want to be presented with *fait accompli* and, for example, additional 'form filling' tasks. It was explained that the NRN meetings coordinated by the CP provide for joint development and all MS are encouraged to participate in them. It is already programmed that a workshop on good practices will form part of the next NRN meeting.
- The need to ensure interactivity and coordination between different parts of the EN RD was raised as an issue. The current way information is presented and shared by the EN RD was

explained and the Chair acknowledged that this was an important issue which would be reviewed.

Information Point: The next EN RD seminar: "Semi-subsistence farming in the EU" will be held in Sibiu, Romania on 21-23 April 2010 for up to 200 participants. Topics covered will include: current situation of semi-subsistence farms (SSF) in the EU; how the MS are using EU support to meet the needs of SSF; what policy mechanisms are well adapted to meeting the needs of SSF.

6 Closing remarks

Currently the focus of the EN RD is to look at and increase the efficiency of the RD policy through a higher involvement of stakeholders. 2010 will see the mid-term review of the rural development programmes, which will be an opportunity to optimize the current implementation of the policy (in practice for the period up to 2015). Important topics with implications for CAP after 2013 are also being examined.