



Report of the Outcomes of 6th Leader subcommittee meeting

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Connecting Rural Europe

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Agenda Item	Welcome and introduction <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The meeting was opened by Jose-Manuel Sousa Uva (DG AGRI). It was confirmed that the meeting would focus upon the lessons from the implementation of Leader as well as on future developments, namely the programme of work for the 4th year of the ENRD; the launch of a new Focus Group on Local Development Strategies, and; early considerations regarding Leader and Rural Development Policy post 2013.• Participants were also reminded that the meeting would nominate the new two representatives to the Coordination Committee.
Agenda Item	Results, lessons learned from the Leader approach: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Leader+ ex-post evaluation report: Summary of main outcomes and lessons• Follow-up of the special report of Court of Auditors including the revised Guide on the Leader axis• Update on the implementation of Axis 4
Presentations	<p><u>Ex-post evaluation of Leader+</u> by Zélie Pepiette, DG AGRI</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The presentation covered the main points of the evaluation methodology and associated analysis. This was structured around 8 themes: (i) Relevance and Community Added Value; (ii) The actions of Leader+; (iii) The implementation of the Leader method; (iv) Impacts; (v) Governance and rural citizenship; (vi) Management, control and finance systems; (vii) Monitoring and evaluation, and; (viii) Rural activity/excellence clusters.• Highlights from the conclusions and recommendations included:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Leader+ addressed many rural needs, particularly those considered "unreachable" by more conventional channels• Leader should maintain its innovative nature with an emphasis on inclusive partnerships;• Leader should concentrate on increasing adaptive capacity and resilience, rather than short-term economic effects;• Territorial cooperation should be supported both for experienced and new LAGs;• Networking should be further developed, both within and between countries;• Higher LAG autonomy was linked to more effective implementation and high autonomy should be the explicit objective;• It is necessary to find a good equilibrium between the economic and environmental dimensions;• Clear definition of roles, continuity of systems, organisations and individual actors are all important for good governance;• It is also important to ensure seamless transitions from one programming period to another;• Monitoring and evaluation should be strengthened.• Some other Leader specificities arising during the previous programme were also highlighted, including "trigger character" of the approach and its long-term impact upon social capital. <p><u>Follow-up of the special report of Court of Auditors including the revised Guide on the Leader axis</u> by Pedro Brosei, DG AGRI</p> <p>The presentation had three components: (i) key recommendations of the Court of Auditors (CoA) Report (http://eca.europa.eu/portal/pls/portal/docs/1/6090724.PDF) and Commission follow-up; (ii) main elements of the DG AGRI update of the Guide on the application of the Leader axis, and (iii) specific amendments proposed to implementation</p>

rules (Commission Regulation (EC) n°1974/2006).

- The main topics of the CoA report were presented regarding the responsibility of LAGs to implement the Leader features, the soundness of LAG's financial management, as well on the Commission and Member States' management of Leader programmes. The conclusions of the Council were also repeated; the need to improve the management of local development strategies and; the request that the European Commission continues its permanent dialogue with Member States to improve the implementation of the Leader approach.
- The updated DG AGRI Guide on implementation of Leader Axis has integrated inputs from the Focus Groups (1, 2, 3) and the special report of CoA. In addition to the introduction of a new Chapter V "Implementation of the local development strategy", the main issues covered by the update are related to innovation; demarcation with other funds; LAGs' administrative and animation capacity; minimum tasks of the LAGs and possibilities offered through the regulatory framework, and; monitoring and evaluation. The English version is available on the ENRD website:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/rural-developmentpolicy/leader/en/leader_home_en.cfm.

[Update on the implementation of Axis 4](#) by Jean-Michel Courades, DG AGRI

- Statistics were presented relating to the current state of play of Leader in the EU Member States, noting that there are currently 2,192 selected LAGs in the EU with both Romania and Bulgaria still in the process of LAG selection. Expenditure under EAFRD Leader axis has so-far reached 10.7%, similar rate to the same period in the previous programming. Although much higher rates of expenditure are observed in the Austria and The Netherlands.
- Regarding the approval of TNC projects, the MAs were encouraged to send their notifications to the Commission SFC 2007 information exchange tool. Currently only 11 Member States are using this tool.

Discussion Points

The main issues discussed were:

- The lack of sufficient administration resources (e.g. to support the verification of the quality of the LDS) or the absence of continuity of staff and experts in the transition period before the next programming period may constitute obstacles to implement some of the recommendations from the Leader+ ex-post evaluation and the CoA report (e.g. evaluation of local development strategy).
- The importance of defining quantitative, but also qualitative indicators such as the measurement of social capital is very important and was highlighted in discussion.

Action Points

- The report on the ex-post evaluation of Leader+ will be shortly published on the ENRD website. Participants were invited to consult the report and in particular the relevant material on case studies.

The revised version of DG AGRI Guide addressed to Managing Authorities as regards the implementation of the Leader Axis is available on ENRD website. Other language versions of the special report of CoA will be available by the end of May 2011.

Agenda Item

Consultation on the work programme for year 4

- **Year 4 proposals related to Leader**

Presentation

[Year 4 consultation process & initial proposals related to Leader](#) by Adrian Neal, ENRD CP

- The presentation started with a general overview of the current consultation on Year 4 programme of work and the wider consultation on ENRD publications and website. The Year 4 programme will have two important underlying themes "collecting and telling more rural stories (including from Leader)" and "demonstrating and measuring the added value of networking".

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The major activities proposed for the 4th year of the ENRD related to Leader are: a new Focus Group (FG) on local development strategies; improvement of the TNC tools; support to several TNC events in EU organised by NRNs or groups of LAGs; increased emphasis on cooperation in the thematic initiatives; enhanced partnerships with NRNs to promote exchange of practices; the design of a Leader Gateway (a one-stop shop for information and exchange of experiences) for the ENRD website.
<p>Discussion Points</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> During discussion, the following points were raised: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> More publications and information should be focused towards specific groups of interest and grass-roots (MAs, LAGs, final beneficiaries, etc); "ENRD stories" should tell more about people and not only about projects; The development and the use of audio-visual tools in particular for people who do not know about Leader should be enhanced; There is a need for more information about ENRD website users; Existing material should also be valorized such as short films from Leader+ which can be instructive for the implementation of Leader approach and several brochures and postcards on projects; One key question is how to get a better involvement of LAGs in the communication process. Specific comments were made on the importance of animation to catalyse the necessary networking between rural development stakeholders and for structuring a good Local Development Strategy. TNC has to be considered within a broad sense and consider all kinds of TNC projects and funding sources of LAGs.
<p>Action Points</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Design of an ENRD Leader Guide to be available on ENRD website beginning of Year 4. LsC members to provide feedback on the approach and structure presented. Leader projects brochure in preparation to be available before the end of Year 3. LsC members to provide feedback on the RDP Project Data Base. CP to provide a website statistics report including an overview of visits and trends, pages most visited, origin of visitors, etc.
<p>Agenda Item</p>	<p>Consultation on the work programme for year 4 (Con't)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Examples of local development strategies by LAG managers Scope of a future focus group
<p>Presentations</p>	<p>Building the Local Development Strategy by Anastasios M. Perimenis (Lesvos Local Development Company)</p> <p>The characteristics of the Lesvos island (geographic, economic, infrastructure, demographic changes, employment, culture etc) were briefly introduced as well as the history of the Local Action Group of the area that was first established in 1992 under the Leader I. programme. Both a LAG and FLAG are operating in close partnership in the territory. The presentation was focused on how the LAG's local development strategy (LDS) was prepared and formulated, and explained its objectives and priorities. The strategy was prepared with a 3 stage process: 1) consultation with the authorities, agencies and sectorial representatives; 2) consultation with the inhabitants for building trust, and; 3) the use of different communication tools in order to disseminate information. The methodology used to quantify results and impact of the strategy is based on various quantitative and qualitative indicators, although the difficulty measuring impact was stressed – especially within the life cycle of programme since impacts are long-term e.g. social capital. Finally, the Local Development Strategy was presented as a living document that can evolve according to the needs of the territory.</p>

[The Regional Development Strategy of the Oberallgäu](#), Bavaria, Germany, by Sabine Weizenegger, LAG Regionalentwicklung Oberallgäu

The development strategy 2007-2013 of the LAG was prepared based on a regional forum discussion. As a first step in the strategy formulation, a mission statement was created ("Creating value together for the future of our region") as a key building block for the strategy and important reference for the formulation of ideas and decisions. LAG management was mentioned as critically important and in addition to the usual LAG managers, a further nine Leader managers are appointed at regional level to act as a contact point providing information, coordination, networking and advisory support for LAGs.

Project selection is based on 11 selection criteria. Assessment indicators are defined by project owner. Evaluation of the local development strategy covers both projects and processes, tangible but also intangible effects described only in a qualitative way; This includes the satisfaction with the activities of LAG and the communication action plan (effect on image).

[Year 4 consultation process & Proposal for a new focus group](#) by Jean-Michel Courades, DG AGRI

Leader Sub-committee members already proposed the launch of a new Focus Group (FG) at the last meeting. Based on the recent report of the European Court of Auditors and the Leader+ ex-post evaluation, the EC stressed the need to improve the quality of Local Development Strategies. The mandate of this new FG is to:

- identify the critical points in the design of local development strategies and;
- collect tools and good practices used at LAG level ensuring an efficient implementation of local development strategies.

An overview of the possible scope of the group, its format and set-up was given by DG AGRI.

It was also announced that the Focus Group would be co-chaired by the Portuguese and Finnish National Rural Networks, alongside the European Leader Association for Rural Development (ELARD).

Discussion Points

Two discussion topics developed:

- Several points were made about the fact that the Leader method provides a good tool for making better use of integrated local development. Firstly, questions were asked about the possibility to combine funds for Leader with other EU funds. It was pointed out that Local Development Strategies do not need to remain solely within the Leader framework.
- It was highlighted by both presentations that the drafting and formulation of the LDS should be based mainly on local resources with a possible assistance of external experts.

Action Points

- MS were invited to nominate volunteers who would support the work of the FG by the end of May 2011.
- Following the formulation of the group, the work plan of the FG should be developed by May/ July 2011.

Agenda Item

Leader and Rural Development Policy post 2013 preparation

Presentation

[Leader and rural development policy post 2013 preparation - state of play](#) by Rob Peters (DG AGRI)

The presentation was structured around three parts:

- The general context of EU's growth strategy which includes the possibility to create a Common Strategic Framework (CSF) in order to strengthen the coordination and integration of EU policies for the delivery of the Europe 2020 strategy. The CSF may also include provisions for the coordination of the different sub regional/local development initiatives.
- Reinforcing multi-level governance by improving strategic choices at Member State level regarding local development e.g. Member States to define the part of their territory which would be eligible for LDS, identification of a "lead" Fund (EAFRD, ERDF, ESF or EFF) for each LAG/LDS.
- Improvements in the implementation of Leader with the particular goal to make Leader better serve innovation and local governance e.g. strengthening the role of the local development strategies (LDS), clearer distribution of tasks between the authorities and the LAGs, greater focus on animation and capacity building, strengthening the participation of the private sector, streamlining transnational cooperation.

The elements presented are still part of a working framework. Commission's proposal is expected for next autumn.

Discussion Points

- Issues of integrating multiple funding sources require a focus on several key aspects: further harmonisation between funds as there are considerable differences between eligibility rules, increasing networking capabilities including links to other funds, insurance that real resources are available from all funding sources, co-operation to exist between different authorities, applicability at LAG level, etc.
- Transition issues between the two programming periods was raised as the situation might arise of interruption of LAG functioning and the resulting loss of local capacity, etc.
- It was underlined that anxieties of the LsC have been taken seriously referring to the letter from the four Commissioners. Moving towards integrated territorial approach has been quoted as a good development although the reality would be a compromise with Member states to keep as many elements of Leader as possible.
- Suggestion was made to open an ENRD forum on future of Leader inviting LAGs to contribute their thoughts and ideas.
- DG AGRI insisted on the fact that all proposals are subject to a lengthy elaboration and adoption procedure as no decisions have yet been taken. There is still scope for brainstorming on how make best use of Leader.
- The main conclusions from DG AGRI were:
 - It was stressed that Europe 2020 will require integration of various policy threads – local development being a reflection of this policy context.
 - Pressure for co-ordination at national level will increase in the next programming period which will require specific actions at MS level.
 - EAFRD is the only fund that includes minimum requirement for spending on local development strategies to be considered as a progressive position in comparison.

Action Points

- ENRD Contact Point to open an ENRD forum on future of Leader.

Agenda Item

Selection of two representatives to the Coordination Committee

Action Points

- The two new representatives of the Leader Sub Committee to the Coordination Committee were elected: Petri Rinne (ELARD) and Mr Stig Hansson (PREPARE).