



**Outcomes: 7<sup>th</sup> Coordination Committee  
meeting**

**Minutes**

9 June 2011



*Connecting Rural Europe*

**Coordination Committee Meeting, Brussels, 9 June 2011**

**Context of the meeting**

The extra-CC meeting of 9th February 2011 included a first exchange on how networking can be further developed as a policy tool. The morning session built on this. Specifically, as the third year of ENRD operations draws to a close, it was considered an appropriate time to take stock of the network's progress in terms of bringing different stakeholders together, to review other networking experiences and to develop ideas for future enhancements.

The conclusions on ways to improve ENRD networking were intended notably to inform discussion and agreement on the ENRD's 4th year planned activities, which was the focus of the afternoon session.

**Agenda Item**

Presentation Link:

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**Improving current and future EAFRD networking**

*Introduction: Networking: a luxury or a necessity?* By J.M. Sousa-Uva, DG AGRI

The participants were welcomed and it was confirmed that the meeting would focus upon: the analysis of the first results of the networks' experience drawn from the formal Mid-term Evaluation exercise and from the CC survey launched in April; illustration of the main activities implemented during the last year, and; the main activities envisaged for the 4<sup>th</sup> year of activity of the network.

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*State of play of ENRD and NRN networking: main findings and synthesis*, by A. Neal and M. Redman, ENRD Contact Point. The presentation gave an overview of: the results of the Mid-term Evaluation; the progress in the design of the self-assessment tool-kit for the networks; the results and lessons learnt, drawn from the CC survey launched in April 2011.

Discussion points

During the discussion it was noted that:

- Not all Members States evaluated the performance and contribution of their National Rural Networks in the mid-term evaluation of the rural development programmes for 2007-2013. Insufficient guidelines, absence of common indicators and evaluation questions for evaluating the four NRN programmes and the other networks was indicated as a significant constraint, which could be addressed through the work carried out by ENRD and the European Evaluation Network.
- In a significant number of cases networks start-up was subject to delays and it was considered in many countries an important challenge. The previous Leader networks were the only examples available, and they had a less ambitious scope compared to the present NRNs. Notwithstanding these initial difficulties, the role of the networks is considered crucial for ensuring the RDPs' efficient implementation and

for improving the performance of the RD policy.

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### **Discussion session – Improving Rural Development Networking from “grass-roots” to the EU level**

Presentation: *URBACT II – The Urban Development Network Programme 2007-2013*, by A. Ferstl DG Regional Policy

The presentation gave an overview of the URBACT II programme, how it works, its main actions and the functioning of the networks set-up in its framework.

Two NRNs, namely Portugal and Latvia, and two organisations, COPA and Euromontana, briefly introduced their networking experiences and their views for the future improvement of networking activity at national and European level, with particular reference to ENRD. The following main points were made by the panellists:

- Networks must be based on stakeholders' demand and needs; beneficiaries should have more visibility in the network, both at national and European level.
- When networks are managed directly by public administrations, the networking activities should be conducted distinctively from the usual authorities' business.
- Contacts and cooperation between national networks and organisation active in the field of rural development need to be improved.
- ENRD is considered a powerful instrument to disseminate information and knowledge and the availability of relevant information in more languages than the six currently available would help to consolidate its role and improve its efficiency.
- More interactivity should be encouraged for the development of the website.
- European NGOs should be further involved in the ENRD work.

Discussion points

The following points were made during the discussion:

- Coordination: The promotion of a “real” coordination among different policies and programmes was strongly argued for, starting from the position that rural development policy cannot be pursued only through the instruments available through EAFRD. In many regions several different strategies are active, financed at European, national and regional level. The general lack of coordination among them creates confusion, potential overlapping between goals and actions pursued, as well as inefficient use of the available funds.

The need to have better links between RD and regional policy, particularly in relation to the Europe 2020 strategy, was highlighted. In addition, relations between urban and rural areas should not be underestimated, and the experience of networks – at national and European level - such as URBACT II, should be better linked to the

ENRD activities.

- *Role of the networks:* The creation of the networks was an innovative experience and the start-up phase was for many of them a difficult period during which several problems were faced. The development of networking activities takes time, and so does building credibility and legitimacy of the networks among different actors, particularly when the network has been instigated according to a regulation and not upon the needs of the stakeholders. Nevertheless, after up to three years of activity, the networks are now functioning and their usefulness is recognised by numerous stakeholders. More confidence should be put on their capacity and a heavy institutional control should be avoided, ensuring them a certain degree of flexibility.

Concern was expressed regarding the role of the networks during the transition to the next programming period. It is important to ensure continuity of the networks so they can be in place to support the first phases of implementation of the new programmes, to make the best use of the experience and knowledge already developed and avoid potential difficulties arising from this transition.

In addition it was noted that networks, both at national and European level, should have an important role in informing the preparation of the future RD policy, providing important links with rural stakeholders/communities' needs and access to relevant past experiences.

- *Role of national authorities:* It was pointed out that a strong influence of the governments in the networks' activities is not necessarily negative, because the involvement of the national authorities can contribute to stimulating debate and encouraging participation and, consequently, the contribution of other ministries/authorities, increasing dissemination of information and coordination between different policies.
- *Focus on axes 3 and 4:* It was underlined that NRNs' activities are often primarily connected with axes 3 and 4 actions and stakeholders. The main reason for this was identified as the nature of axes 1 and 2 interventions. They are seen as more similar to direct support given to single farmers, while the implementation of projects under axes 3 and 4 involve a cooperation effort from the beneficiaries with other stakeholders – cooperation is often the best way to have the projects approved - that requires more assistance from the network. Attempt to stimulate cooperation among farmers in the implementation of investments and agri-environmental measures was suggested, as for some measures/actions a coordinated actions of several farmers/beneficiaries could ensure better achievement of the objectives, in particular for some environmental goals. Some national networks have already developed several initiatives in relation to the first two axes, with particular focus on agri-environmental themes, but

it was recognised that more effort is needed to better integrate these topics into the networks' activities.

- *Communication:* Better communication to the broader public in relation to the use of funding and the results achieved was suggested, to demonstrate that the RD funds are not simple subsidies to farmers and other beneficiaries but a necessity for the preservation and efficient and integrated development of rural areas.

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#### Activity report (July 2010 – June 2011)

- *RDP project database*, by A. Strano ENRD CP. The presentation gave an overview of the RDP project database launched in May 2011, which currently includes 70 projects.
- *State of play of the Rural entrepreneurship initiative*, by P. Van Doren ENRD CP. The presentation illustrated the activities implemented under this thematic initiatives and the main actions to be realised in the near future.
- *Preliminary findings of TWG4 on "Delivery mechanisms of EU rural policy"*, by J. Loriz-Hoffmann ENRD CP. The presentation gave an overview of the preliminary findings of the TWG4, with a specific focus upon the criticisms identified in the RDP delivery mechanisms requiring improvements.

#### Discussion Points

The Director General Mr J.M. Silva Rodríguez participated in this part of meeting, and the main following points were raised during the discussion:

- The role of ENRD and national networks was indicated as crucial for improving the performance of the RD policy, in particular because they can facilitate the dissemination of information and knowledge. The future programming period will be based on a more result-oriented approach, with the aim of improving coordination with other funds and capitalising on the synergies developed by different strategies and programmes. In particular the links between urban and rural areas are considered important to support territorial development.
- The first proposal of the regulation for the new programming period is expected to be published in October 2011 (the final version should be ready by spring 2013). This will give the MS the possibility to engage in the reform, internally and at European level, on the definition of strategies and programmes, with the help of ENRD and the national networks, giving them an extended period for preparation of the programmes before the new period starts.

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#### Activity programme (July 2011 – June 2012)

- *State of play of the preparation of the post 2013 policy framework*, by R. Peters DG AGRI. The presentation illustrated the general architecture of the future RD policy, highlighting the main priorities,

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namely fostering innovation, facilitating restructuring and renewal, improving food chain development, supporting development of rural areas and creation of jobs, preserving and enhancing ecosystems dependent on agriculture and forestry.

- *Overview of the Year 4 Programme*, by A. Neal ENRD CP. The presentation described the activities proposed for the fourth year of ENRD based on four main priorities: consolidating and disseminating the thematic work done so far; supporting the delivery of RDP; preparing the ground for the new programmes; supporting communication activities, networking and cooperation.

#### Discussion Points

The following main points were raised during the discussion:

- The continued emphasis upon promoting innovation and knowledge transfer was appreciated by NRN representatives, but it was stressed that it must be encouraged across all sectors of rural activity not just those related to agriculture. Rural areas are changing and agriculture is re-structuring – new ways of rural living and new forms of rural business are emerging - all of which must be addressed in forthcoming discussions about post-2013 RD policy and reflected in the work of the ENRD.
- It was strongly suggested to integrate the results of TWG3 on public goods in the discussion for the future programming period, considering its relevance for achieving agri-environmental goals and fostering innovation. It was pointed out that issues related to innovation and knowledge transfer will be addressed by the NRN thematic initiative on rural entrepreneurship, while the environmental issues will be addressed by the proposed Coordination committee Focus Group on the “delivery of environmental services”, envisaged to be launched in December 2011.
- It was pointed out that newly-established Leader subcommittee Focus Group on local development strategies provides a discussion platform on Leader. It will feed discussions on the post-2013 future of Leader and the role of “multi-level governance” in RD policy.

#### Action Points

All Co-ordination Committee members were invited to send further comments on the proposed Year 4 Annual Work Programme by 20 June 2011, either by email or through My ENRD.

*Preliminary results of the evaluation questionnaire of the CC meeting, sent out on 11<sup>th</sup> of June, based on 29 responses, can be summarized as follow:*

- *The content of the meeting was considered good and useful. Appreciation was shown for the moderated session. Suggestions included to organize workshops in order to improve discussions among the members and between them and DG AGRI; and; to focus more on practical issues that NRNs face in their daily activities, giving also more opportunities to the NRNs to present their experiences.*