

Better LEADER practices for Local Development Strategies across the EU

This infosheet is part of a series of relevant practice examples that Managing Authorities and Local Action Groups have used while implementing the LEADER approach in the 2007-2013 period. The series aims to extend the reach of rural development policy by highlighting what works well in the design and delivery phase of Local Development Strategies (LDS).

Enhancing LEADER's regional flavour

N.08



Country, Region: France

Organisation: Managing Authority

AT A GLANCE



Objectives

The French Managing Authority (MA) wanted to make Local Action Group (LAG) selection practices more reflective of regional specificities and to improve the capacity of the regional authorities in the process.



Key elements of the approach

In contrary to the approach used in previous programming periods, the MA put in place a decentralised LAG selection procedure. To ensure transparency, the MA published a practical LEADER guide detailing the selection procedure objectives and method. The regional authorities launched the call for LEADER projects and had flexibility in how the process was managed.



Lessons learnt

The decentralised procedure has been a success and should be applied again in the next programming period. The national regulatory and procedural framework has been respected and a better geographical coverage of LAGs has been achieved.



Objectives and background

The Ministry of Agriculture, Food, Fisheries, Rural Affairs and Spatial Planning has overall responsibility for rural development policy in France.

The rural development policy for France and its overseas departments is defined in a National Strategy Plan (NSP) which reflects EU priorities according to the France's specific context.

There is a comprehensive Rural Development Programme (RDP) for mainland France and five other separate programmes, one for the Island of Corsica and separate programmes for the four French Departments of Guadeloupe, Guyana, Martinique and Reunion.

In the 2007-2013 programming period the RDP for mainland France, which includes 21 administrative regions, is managed by a single Managing Authority (the Ministry), but with measures under axis 4 (LEADER) delegated to the regional administrative authorities (operating at NUTS II level¹).

The approach below describes the responsibilities allotted to each level of the system within the national framework which aims to promote competitiveness and transparency in the LAG selection procedure.

The regional LAG selection procedure draws heavily on the experience gained under the 2000-2006 period, during which a national level selection procedure was implemented that emphasised that the selection criteria needed to cover all innovative principles of the LEADER approach (partnership, LDS quality, innovation, linking with the mainstream RD policies, etc.).

¹ The NUTS classification (Nomenclature of territorial units for statistics) is a hierarchical system for dividing up the economic territory of the EU. More information is available at: http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/nuts_nomenclature/introduction



Key elements of the approach

To ensure full transparency of the methodology, the MA with the support of the Paying Agency published a national LEADER Practical Guide and then issued a notice to the 21 regional bodies. By establishing the methodological framework, the aim was to standardise the procedure. The notice covered:

1. Objectives guiding the regional selection of projects;
2. Preparation requirements prior to the call for projects and for the selection process;
3. A timetable with annexed appendices, including:
 - a call for project template (to be adapted regionally) including key evaluation criteria
 - suggested application content
 - an eligibility grid for application analysis (to be adapted regionally)
 - a selection planning tool (with information about selection committee composition, timing of the process, communication needs, etc.)

Communication aspects

The LEADER Practical Guide distributed to the regions covers the main elements (LAG territory, strategy and when and how to establish a LAG). The call for projects, launched regionally, included information about the general principles of LEADER

The regional authorities then launched the call for projects (in one or two phases) which included the following elements:

1. The general principles, key strategic orientation and main management provisions of LEADER.
2. Regional LAG selection principles.
3. LAG application eligibility criteria (e.g. territories covered; targeted priorities; public-private partnerships; budget and desired application contents; etc.).
4. LAG application assessment criteria (e.g. document presentation and clarity; stakeholder involvement; pertinence of the strategy; cooperation; added value of the LEADER project; quality of the development and financial planning; quality of the LAG organisation; etc.).
5. The link between LEADER and the regional strategy for rural development.
6. The financial allocations available and number of LAGs to be selected.
7. Calendar of the LAG selection process.
8. Support systems to be made available to selected LAG applicants.

LAG selection, application eligibility and assessment criteria, Local Development Strategy links, financial allocations, deadlines and details about support systems available to the selected LAGs.



Lessons learnt

Benefits

In comparison with the centralised LAG selection procedure, the decentralised approach means:

- selection criteria which are better aligned to regional specificities;
- regional flexibility (e.g. selection procedures launched in one or two stages);
- better regional partnership involvement;
- better public awareness;
- improved LAG strategy quality;
- use of regional experts, familiar with the territory, allows for better analysis of the LAG applications.
- better geographical coverage, in particular in the north of France, where very few LAGs existed under LEADER+;
- The total number of LAGs in France increased from 140 LAGs in the 2000-2006 to 221 LAGs in 2007-2013.

Barriers

The principal drawback experienced concerned a minority of regions where the procedures were not selective enough. This was caused by fewer LAG applications than expected, and/or political pressure induced by the close proximity of the selection committees to the territories.

The decentralised approach required that the MA had to support the regions - who had little LEADER experience - with national experts to ensure compliance with eligibility criteria and for the overall consistency of selection procedures.

Lessons learnt

The decentralisation procedure adopted in France has overall been a success and should be applied in the next programming period. Going forward, care has to be put into the training of decentralised services and the tools (applications, templates, specifications for computer applications) offered to the LAGs require simplification. The absence of performance indicators defined in advance rendered monitoring difficult.

The information included in this Infosheet is primarily coming from case studies carried out within the ENRD Focus Group 4 on Better Local Development Strategies. It has been compiled by the Contact Point on the basis of the information collected in the EU Member States and regions and takes into account views expressed by the Focus Group. This notwithstanding, the content does not necessarily reflect the official position of the EU institutions and national authorities.