

Summary of the Danish public debate on the rural development policy after 2013

The Danish Network Unit for Rural Development opened, with a press release from the Minister of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries on the 10th of May 2010, a public debate in Denmark on the European Rural Development Policy after 2013. The deadline for submission of contributions to the debate was the 26th of May 2010.

The debate was organized as a public debate via the homepage of the Danish Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries. Stakeholders in the rural development field were via an e-mail with the press release directly invited to participate in the debate (the stakeholders are defined as the receivers of the regular newsletters from Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries). Furthermore, the members of the Monitoring Committee (the “Committee for a Living Countryside”) and all Local Action Groups received a direct invitation via e-mail. The Network Unit has received 20 written contributions in all from various stakeholders i.e. authorities, social and economic partners, Local Action Groups, consulting firms and private citizens from different parts of the country.

The members of the Monitoring Committee also discussed the subject at the committee meeting on the 1st of June 2010. The Committee counts nearly 30 members, representing the main interests regarding rural development in Denmark.

There have been several indications that the deadline for contributing to the debate has been too short. The short period has made it difficult for organizations to discuss contributions with their political and democratically elected boards. Several have therefore requested a longer debate period in future.

The written and oral contributions have been divided under the three questions of discussion set out by the EU-Commission. The summary is not an expression of a comprehensive Danish position, but merely a collection of various views among the Rural Network stakeholders, that have emerged in the debate.

1. What should be the objectives of the future rural development policy?

- According to some of the stakeholders the main objective must be to ensure *attractive living conditions* in rural areas. Others believe that efforts *regarding management of the natural environment and landscaping* must be the main objective and that these efforts should be strengthened to at least 75% of the rural development policy budget. Others again believe that the objectives must be formulated in close relation to pillar 1 of the Common Agricultural Policy, and thereby be more focused on *business development*.
- The objectives of rural development policy should be more clearly articulated. There must also be established more clear and concrete goals, some believe. This is in contrast to others, who believe that there is a need for a broad range of options and flexibility giving the member states the possibility to adapt goals and measures to local conditions and desires. The conclusion has been a wish for clear objectives in the national implementation and flexibility in the EU regulation.
- Rural Development Policy (pillar 2 of the CAP) should play a very significant role - also in relation to the whole CAP, and many more resources than previously used should go towards promoting the aims of pillar 2 instead of pillar 1.
- It must be clearer articulated, that pillar 1 is a contribution to business development in agriculture, and that pillar 2 relates to other purposes, such as management of the natural environment and landscaping. It should be clear, what support for business development is and what management of nature is.
- Rural Development Policy must support the implementation of the Water Frame Directive and Natura 2000 in a better way. At the same time the support should be less fixed on land areas (hectares) and take into greater account the contents of the activities and the investments made.

- Some believe that rural development policy must remain part of the CAP. Others believe that the proportion of rural policies relating to Axis 3 and 4 (general development in the countryside and attractive living conditions) must be kept separate from nature management and the common agricultural policy.
- Public goods should be valued more in general.
- Purposes as stabilization, settlement, better living conditions, jobs, business development, and development of an economy based on knowledge and innovation are important. So is sustainable growth and inclusive growth, ensuring social and territorial cohesion.
- Supporting farmers must be less important, and there must be more focus on nature and biodiversity.

2. How can the policy instruments be made more effective?

- It is important to ensure that different rules and objectives in the CAP do not go against each other. For example, there is inconsistency between the requirements of good agricultural and environmental conditions in pillar 1 and objectives of nature management and conservation at the same sites in the pillar 2. There is also a conflict between the rules on plant cover (in pillar 1) and nature management (in pillar 2).
- There should be a better coherence between the Rural Development Policy and the structural funds.
- There should be a clearer link between the regional / local strategies and the projects under the rural development programme, and generally a more coherent national action on rural development.
- The requirement of additionality should be maintained to secure support to projects that add value and not just replace tasks that would otherwise be provided by public authorities.
- More information in and visibility of the rural policy.
- The central national management of subsidies and support must physically be replaced to the countryside ("satellite offices"). This will create jobs in the rural areas.
- There is a need for support to higher overall and coherent plans and initiatives.
- There is a need for support to pilot projects, demonstration projects, analyses, innovation and development.
- There is a need for more integrated support schemes.
- There is a need for support regarding knowledge dissemination and skills.
- The forestry sector should be a focus area in the Danish rural development – including in the first axis of the RDP.
- Rural Development Policy must increasingly be targeted towards other stakeholders in rural areas than those in the primary sector.
- Projects with broad local ownership should be prioritized and safeguarded.
- The LEADER approach should play a major role and should be implemented broader in the Rural Development Programme (it should be more than 10% of the budget - as it now is in Denmark).
- *Specifically for axis 1:*
 - Support to small power producers, for example produced from biogas plants
 - The large industry in the processing sector should also be eligible.
 - Risks should be rewarded.
- *Specifically for axis 2:*
 - Caring for or managing the landscape and nature should be recognized as a farming operation, thereby areas where the primary purpose is protecting the nature or landscape can obtain support.
 - All actions on the Water Frame Directive and Natura 2000 should be paid via the Rural Development Programme. It is important though, that there still are voluntary measures - without requiring spatial location or designation - including support which relates to areas outside Natura 2000 areas.
 - Support rates (compensation) should actually cover the whole costs associated with the activity or investment, and incentive subsidy rates should be introduced in selected schemes.
 - There is a need for different funding models, including:

- a) One-off compensation payment or a skewed model where compensation is high in the beginning of the period and low at the end – rather than current compensation distributed evenly throughout the period.
 - b) Sale of land to the government that imposes restrictions on the area, and then sells it again.
 - c) Expropriation.
 - d) There must be offered long-term continuous nature management agreements.
- The concept for Less Favored Areas should be reviewed. There are other disadvantages for agricultural production than those included in LFA definition (such as areas restricted to natural and environmental requirements).
- Local authorities should have a greater administrative coordination role. They should also be able to get and use support.
- *Specifically for Axis 3 and 4:*
 - Support to people from cities who want to live in the countryside.
 - Support to maintain small village schools.
 - Efforts regarding attractive living conditions should be focused on villages with fewer than 3,000 residents.
 - To ensure overall solutions it should be possible to support partial compensation for the employment of rural coordinators, who create partnerships and disseminate knowledge on collaboration, processes and solutions to the challenges in the rural areas.
 - Closer linkage between municipal efforts and the local development strategies (LEADER) to ensure coherence.
 - The requirement for broad representation in the LAG boards should be maintained.
 - Important to secure a budget for the running costs of the LAGs.
 - Need for training of LAG members and LAG-coordinators.
 - Need for a broad range of support opportunities under the LEADER schemes.
 - Need for an increased budget for LEADER initiatives and for provision of national public financing.
 - LAGs should operate independently.
 - The administration of LEADER projects should be organized with more flexibility and less administration.
 - Option for grants of more than 50% in the LEADER projects.
 - “Soft values” as democracy, shared ownership and processes in relation to the LEADER must be assessed by means of other measurement methods than quantitative.
 - There should be a special budget for commercial projects in the LEADER schemes.

3. How can the management of the policy be improved?

- Need for a more unified state management of the entire rural development effort - and with consistency to municipalities and LEADER development strategies.
- Several stakeholders have indicated that the Monitoring Committee should play a more decisive role and be more actively involved.
- Advisory committees should select projects for funding. It would ensure a higher degree of democracy and that the funds come out wider.
- Need for faster and smoother management of the applications - and acceptance of major budget variations
- Digitalized application material.
- Need to reconsider whether the indicator system and measurement of effects can affect the positive effects.
- Project holders are teammates, not opponents - there is a need for informal dialogue between project holders and authorities.
- Need for clear objectives and clear rules.
- Local resource people and initiatives should have a major role to play in the implementation of rural development policy.
- Training of LAG members and LAG-coordinators.