**European Network for Rural Development**

**Coordination Committee Workshop on the Future of Networking**

**Summary of the Discussions**

17<sup>th</sup> September 2012

| Coordination Committee workshop on the Future of Networking, Brussels, 17 September 2012 |
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| **Context of the meeting** | The aim of this ENRD workshop was to exchange information and develop a better understanding amongst key stakeholders of the future of European networking for rural development and of the new legal proposal. |
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| | During the meeting exchange of ideas and views on the expected scope of networking in relation to the future rural development policy scenario was discussed, with a particular focus on the role and function of the European Network for Rural Development (ENRD), the European Innovation Partnership (EIP) network, the European Evaluation Network for Rural Development (EENRD) and the National Rural Networks (NRNs). |
| | The workshop helped to identify some of the challenges for the future, practical solutions as well as implications of the proposed regulatory framework for all stakeholders, as well as the needs for further clarification on implementing rules and guidance. |

| **Agenda Item** | **Networking landscape for the 2014-2020 programming period** |
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| ***Presentation on the role and function of ENRD, EENRD, agricultural-EIP network and NRNs as outlined in the proposed regulatory framework,*** *by Rob Peters, Head of Unit for European network and monitoring of rural development policy, DG AGRI (hyperlinked to presentation)* | The presentation focused on the strategic role of networking as a tool for the delivery of rural development policy. Networking is considered to play a very important function with the development of the CAP and the enhanced coordination of EU policies towards the Europe 2020 goals of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. |
| | In order to achieve these objectives it is important to involve all stakeholders at EU, national, regional and local level and to build on lessons learnt from the current programming period. This will lead to a more participative governance and legitimacy of the public policy. |
| | The network structures for the next programming period will involve the ENRD as the main policy network flanked by two more specialized networks, the European Innovation Partnership Network for agriculture (EIP) and the European Evaluation Network for Rural Development (EENRD). |
| | These European networks have distinct roles and functions but their activities all contribute to improving the quality of the rural development policy implementation through the involvement of different stakeholders and actors in the policy. |
| | In addition the National Rural Networks (NRNs) will have a reinforced role |

|  | in the activities of the European networks. A list of activities is currently set out in the draft regulation. It is important to have a set of minimum common actions in order to build and develop the networks and networking. The regulation is flexible in the type of structures and organisational set-up required to deliver these activities and this will be up to the Member States to define. The list of activities for NRNs in the draft rural development regulation is still subject to discussion in the Council and in the European Parliament. |
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| **Discussion points** | **Comments /reactions from participants:**<br><br>Discussion with participants was based on three questions:<br><br>1. *What do you expect from EU level networks and/or national networks?*<br><br>2. *How do you see yourself contributing to the network activities?*<br><br>3. *How do you network with other actors who are your partners?*<br><br>The questions raised prompt reaction from the audience particularly on organisational aspects at national level, and anticipating some discussion on the envisaged tasks of the NRNs.<br><br>The legitimacy of having three different networks at the EU level (i.e. ENRD, EIP, Evaluation network) instead of one single networking structure for rural development was raised in different ways by a number of interventions. Several interventions dealt with the effectiveness of several networks working simultaneously at the EU level and the need or otherwise of replicating this structure at national level and its potential inefficiencies.<br><br>The view of the European Commission was that a certain division of tasks/functions at EU level is deemed appropriate considering that for many aspects of the network activities different target groups will be addressed by the different networks and there is a degree of specialisation required. However, such division at Member State level was not necessarily needed or appropriate and would depend on the specific situation in individual Member States.<br><br>In relation to the activities that the networks would need to commit to, concern was expressed on the capacity of future networks to undertake a wide range of tasks, particularly considering financial constraints and limited resources.<br><br>A number of interventions, especially from EU organisations, highlighted the achievements of networking at EU level, such as the increasing engagement of and collaboration with stakeholders and partner organisations at EU level, the sharing of relevant experiences and the contribution to improve policy implementation and build more integrated actions.<br><br>Clarification was sought, particularly by national authorities, with respect to the EIP network and the nature of the Operational Groups that this network would bring together. In certain contexts these new structures are likely to |

add to existing ones, potentially generating issues of coordination, potential duplication and competition for "participation" with the network(s).

More guidance and a more prescriptive framework was called for by many participants to clarify and guide Member States in this process. In the Commission's view, both "formal" (i.e. getting support from the EAFRD) and "informal" (i.e. existing structures not supported by EAFRD) operational groups will be considered part of the network, with the aim of sharing experience. It was highlighted that the EIP is intended to help bring into the networking process various players currently excluded from the picture, thereby creating enhanced synergies with NRNs on the "innovation" topic and other areas.

| Agenda Item | Lessons learnt from the current period |
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**Presentation on "What has worked well and less well at EU level rural networking?"** *by Michael Gregory and Adrian Neal, ENRD Contact Point* **([hyperlinked to presentation](#))**

The presentation was based on the experience of the four years of ENRD:

- The nature of the analytical work of the ENRD has evolved as the programming period has progressed. At the same time different models of engagement with stakeholders have been tested and the more successful ones built on.
- For the best results; stakeholder/practitioner ownership – not just involvement - is required. Thus the objectives of the activities should be relevant to MS and region level actors as well as having an EU-wide perspective.
- Many specific topics and subject areas are dealt with by the ENRD. Real value is maximized when the linkages and feeds between the different areas are recognized and built into plans and actions.
- Subject matter expertise is necessary but not sufficient. Over the evolution of the ENRD, the main improvements have come through testing and building-on different ways of engaging stakeholders.
- Within the ENRD there is now recognition that the network represents a diversity of voices.
- Communications products have improved over time and are now more flexible, people focused and targeted at specific audiences. Language remains a constraint for EU-wide networking.
- The ENRD's formal structures can limit the engagement of some stakeholders. More direct outreach to regional/local stakeholders is also needed for effective ENRD work.
- Effective and mature networking is a function of evidence based research, flexibility of resource usage, stakeholder's ownership, finally resulting in longer term partnerships.

**Presentation on "What has worked well and less well" at EU level from the perspective of the EENRD** *by* Hannes Wimmer, Team Leader,

The presentation highlighted the main lessons learnt in the current period performing the main tasks of the EENRD which are to improve methods and tools for evaluation, to increase capacity and to share knowledge:

- Collaboration: the CMEF needs to be "translated" and stakeholders participation and collaboration is important in determining where

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| EENRD Evaluation Help Desk<br>(*hyperlinked to presentation*) | guidance is needed.<br><br>• Training: awareness on training objective and importance with stakeholders, learning by doing and a focus on specific not generic training.<br><br>• Direct exchange of good practices: focus on joint working on specific products. |
| **Discussion points** | **Comments /reactions from participants:**<br><br>The main discussion points regarding what has worked well and less well from the perspective of the ENRD and the EENRD included the following:<br><br>Target groups of the EENRD should not only include evaluators and programme administrators, but also people who can utilize the results in their work (e.g. Leader/LAGs). The work of the EENRD has focused more on methodologies for evaluation and not on evaluation results. It may be interesting for the next programming period to consider how to disseminate more broadly among RD policy stakeholders the outcomes and synthesis of evaluation.<br><br>A concern was raised regarding the time mismatch between planning and evaluation results becoming available. There is the need to ensure the results of assessment provide feed-back at the right time on specific issues.<br><br>A question for reflection was raised on the outreach of disseminated information as one of the most important objectives of the ENRD.<br><br>There was a consensus that the effectiveness of dissemination is related to good networking through the NRNs. The language barrier for information coming from EU level is still an issue. Progress has been made in terms of increasing linguistic coverage, but nevertheless it remains extremely resource intensive. |
| **"NRN Critical Issues"**<br><br>**Poster session** | Presentation of the current networking challenges on key operational issues in relation to the network structure, mandate, budget, membership, capacity and management and monitoring and evaluation were addressed by various representatives through presentation of posters, followed by direct dialogue on the topics raised. These included the following:<br><br>• **"The Austrian Model - structure, mandate and budget"** by Christian Jochum (Austrian NRN)<br><br>• **"Outsourcing NRN Netherlands"** by Henk Kieft (Netherlands NRN)<br><br>• **"The French NRN: Synergies between regional and national levels"** by Nathalie Prouheze/Francis Morin (French NRN)<br><br>• **"A Swedish Network Challenge"** by Maria Gustafsson/Hans-Olof Stalgren (Swedish NRN ) |

- **"Challenges of Estonian NRN to build linkages with stakeholders"** by Meeri Klooren (Estonian NRN)

- **"NRN monitoring and evaluation activities"** by Riccardo Passero (Italian NRN)

- **"Capacity building: What do we know?"** by Rita Munk (Danish NRN)

- **"Cyprus National Rural Network"** by Efi Charalambous (Cypriot NRN)

- **"ENRD evolution: Some facts and figures"** by  Donald Aquilina (ENRD Contact Point)

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| **Agenda Item** | **Preparing for the future** |
| **Presentation on "Which organisational structure at EU level?"** by Gaëlle Marion, Unit for European network and monitoring of rural development policy, DG AGRI  (**hyperlinked to presentation**) | The presentation focused on proposals for the role, structure and functions of the bodies which could guide the work of the ENRD, EENRD and EIP. It was proposed that two main formal structures could be established to oversee the work of the three networks as part of an integrated framework. It was recognized that although each network will have its own specific requirements, it will be important to promote synergies between the networks to ensure a coherent, inclusive and flexible approach at EU level.  The two main bodies outlined are:  1. A **European Rural Networks' Assembly**, which would possibly meet once a year to give orientation for the various networks, discuss key results and provide strategic guidance/input. This body should be as inclusive as possible. Flexibility and efficiency would be ensured by the fact that the assembly would delegate work on specific topics to smaller sub-groups (e.g. Evaluation, LEADER, Innovation, etc., as permanent sub-groups and/or for thematic issues under ad hoc sub-groups). These groups would be mandated by the Assembly. Their specific work plans would be managed by the Networks Steering group.  2. A **Networks Steering Group**, composed of the members of the Assembly, would deal with operational and organizational issues such as detailed working programmes, reporting, general coordination and management of the three networks.  The Commission specified that the provisions on the EU level networking structures will need to be set out in implementing rules. |
| **Discussion points** | **Comments /reactions from participants:**  Some participants positively welcomed the proposed approach, recognizing |

that having the three networks represented within the same Assembly will promote greater synergies and potential efficiencies, especially given the possibility of focusing on specific network interests and concerns in sub-groups.

Others raised concerns on the necessity to create an additional body (i.e. the Steering Group). The Commission clarified that the proposed structure was based on extending the network governance models that exists today for the ENRD which has proved to be increasingly effective over time. Namely that the current Coordination Committee of the ENRD represents the institutional stakeholders of the network, whilst the more policy related content is addressed through ad hoc focus groups initiated by the Coordination Committee.

The manner the Commission will interact with all different bodies was questioned and it was recognised that this should be further elaborated in the implementing rules.

The need to include and/or coordinate with other EU funds such as the ESF, ERDF or EMFF was also highlighted as a need which if addressed effectively, could help to facilitate better coordination and support to meet the new requirements of the future Common Strategic Framework (CSF). The Commission recognized that there will be a need to work more closely with other funds in the future, ensuring some further strengthening of mechanisms to enhance coordination at EU level.  But it was also noted that each policy has its own specificities which will also need to be addressed through separate structures during the next programming period.  It was also pointed out that other DG's of the Commission such as DG REGIO or RDT are be associated to the work on rural development matters.

Concern was raised over the challenges that existed for the EIP to create an effective network given the different levels of planned intervention required to ensure the successful engagement and participation of the various stakeholders.   Based on SCAR's (Standing Committee on Agricultural Research) experience over the last period, particularly given the increasing demands created by Horizon 2020, some participants could not see how the network was going to make this workable in practice.

Regarding the proposal that membership of the Steering Group might be limited to 11 EU organisations, with a possible rotation of membership every two years, concerns were raised as to how this might work and the impact such an approach may have on continuity, on motivation and on levels of active participation by these organisations.  It was recognized that certain flexibility would need to be found.

The extensive representation of RD Advisory Group organisations in the future Assembly was seen as a guarantee of the fact that the development of rural territories will remain central in the future RDP.

Participants agreed that the transition from the current to future

|  | programming period should be carefully planned and actions taken where possible to ensure that existing network relationships, capacity, experience and institutional continuity are not lost both at EU and national levels. |
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| **Discussion on "Which organisation at National level and which coordination mechanisms between EU and National levels?"** by Gaëlle Marion, Unit for European network and monitoring of rural development policy, DG AGRI<br><br>**([hyperlinked to presentation](), see page 5)** | The fact that although no organisational model can or should be imposed on Member States, it would be highly beneficial if some minimum and common list of tasks and responsibilities are agreed upon for all networks, to promote collaboration at EU level, share knowledge and experiences and promote partnerships between networks. This list of common tasks still needs to be clarified. Nevertheless, the scope for different organisational national network models, as is the case today, was envisaged to continue in the next period.<br><br>The Commission proposed that Member-States consider allocating some dedicated human and financial means to provide more direct support for network actions at EU level and not only at national or regional level.<br><br>Furthermore, it was highlighted that the needs at EU level for effective action and coordination within the CSF should also be reflected at national level with support from the networks, where possible.<br><br>It was requested that Member-States should be provided in advance with more details about what the EU is expecting from them with respect to networks and their support, in order to allow them to better plan and allocate resources, where needed within the new programmes.<br><br>Concerns were also raised regarding the transitional period for the setting-up of networks at national level. The Commission acknowledged that the build-up of networking experience should not be lost in the transition period between programmes (whilst acknowledging the need to respect competition rules and other regulatory constraints). |
| **Presentation on "What are the areas for which common guidance is valuable? "** by Donald Aquilina (ENRD CP)<br><br>**([hyperlinked to presentation]())** | The presentation outlined the main areas where previous discussions had focused in consultation with Member State NRNs and NSUs (Network Support Unit), namely clustered around the challenges for NRN Structure, Mandate, Representation, Budget, Capacity and Management. A short overview of existing support available or planned on Networking best practice and/or relevant experience was also outlined. This was followed by the launch of a participatory exercise to promote exchange of ideas on priority areas potentially benefiting from the development of common guidance and/or mechanisms to promote shared experience. |
| Discussion Points | **Comments /feedback from participants:**<br><br>Various participants highlighted the need for common guidance on networking practices that could ensure lessons learnt could be used to guide support for network structures during the next period.<br><br>The need to more directly engage with the Managing Authorities in Member States to promote the value of networking and its benefits and needs was highlighted. |

**Presentation on "Next Steps"** by Riin Saluveer
*Unit for European network and monitoring of rural development policy, DG AGRI*
**([hyperlinked to presentation](#))**

The common development and/or coordination in the development of ITC tools and services was highlighted as an area for further collaboration which would be highly beneficial in promoting practical exchange, sharing and flow of information and experience between and within the networks and ensure more effective use of limited resources.

The need to listen and learn more about specific stakeholder groups and their needs and to become better at responding to those needs through the development of more concrete and common products/services for specific target groups was highlighted.

The growing importance of on-line forums and exchange platforms was emphasized and acknowledged as an area that will become increasingly important to develop common approaches in support of future networking.

In conclusion a road map of the planned ENRD actions was presented. As a follow up to this workshop a forum on "myENRD" will be launched with the aim to encourage further discussion and exchange of information between the key stakeholders on what are their needs for further information and support in relation to (future) networking.

The outcomes of this meeting will be also incorporated into the edition number 14 of the EU Rural Review that will focus on "Networks and Networking in Rural Development Policy" that will be finalized around the end of 2012.

Further discussion will take place during the 16<sup>th</sup> NRN meeting that will take place on 18 October 2012 in Cyprus.

All outcomes will feed into the "Successful Programming" event that will take place on 6-7 December in Brussels.