

ENRD Seminar

Seizing the opportunities for 'Improving RDP implementation'

11 June 2015, Brussels



Final Report

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I. Introduction

Background

In its first year of activities under the 2014-2020 programming period, the European Network for Rural Development (ENRD) Contact Point developed a work stream dedicated to *improving the implementation of Rural Development Programmes (RDPs)*. 'Improving the quality of the implementation of RDPs' is in fact one of the common objectives of the National Rural Networks (NRNs) and the ENRD. The scope of the work stream is to offer the knowledge and tools to improve programmes' performance to those directly and indirectly involved in their management and implementation.

Under the EU rural development regulation¹ for 2014-2020, a number of opportunities and tools are offered to RDP managers to improve the focus of the programmes and their capacity to deliver the agreed outcomes, and to make efficient use of public money. Rural Development Programmes can also rely on a renewed set of measures whose capacity to deliver is determined by a thorough understanding of their potential and a certain amount of ambition for their use. RDP administrators, therefore, require knowledge and confidence that can be gained through the sharing of experiences and practices across the EU.

In this view, a number of activities were put in place by the ENRD in order to identify the preconditions for a successful implementation of the programmes and enhance the knowledge about opportunities and practical solutions that can be put in place. Such activities included the work of a Thematic Group, a series of trainings and workshop sessions for Managing Authorities (MAs) and Paying Agencies (PAs), a dedicated publication (Rural Review N.20) and a Seminar.

Objectives

The ENRD Seminar on 'Improving RDP implementation' (held on 11 June, 2015 in Brussels) is an integral part of the dedicated work stream on the topic. It was mainly addressed to those directly involved in the management and implementation of RDPs with the aim of **sharing practices on methods and approaches for improving RDP implementation** and **raising awareness of possible challenges for the successful start of the RDPs**, highlighting the need for future action at the EU and national levels.

The event built on the work undertaken by the dedicated Thematic Group (TG), bringing issues and opportunities forward for discussion with a wider audience. The results of the Seminar informed the conclusions of the TG, as well as possible future work of the ENRD on improving RDP implementation.

Participants and format

The Seminar brought together some 100 participants from **22 Member States**. Participants included national and regional Managing Authorities, Paying Agencies, Network Support Units, agricultural advisors, members of national organisations actively involved in the implementation of RDPs, DG AGRI officers and other rural development stakeholders.

The event focused on encouraging exchanges among participants about practical strategies and solutions to be put in place for improving RDP management and implementation from the outset of the programming period. After an introductory session outlining the state of play of 2014-2020 RDPs and the

¹ Regulation (EU) N°1305/2013 : <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1436946987049&uri=CELEX:32013R1305>

challenges and opportunities ahead, **two sets of workshops** focused on:

- **Horizontal aspects of implementation** and preconditions to be realised for the efficient and effective implementation of RDPs (morning workshops)
- Specific **implementation aspects linked to RDP measures**, novelties and opportunities offered by the 2014-2020 RDPs (afternoon workshops).

A number of presentations from RDP authorities and other stakeholders on methods applied in Member States (MS) and plans for rolling out specific measures at national or regional levels provided input to the workshop discussions. Participants were in turn encouraged to share their own approaches and views, to discuss about possible difficulties and put forward recommendations for overcoming them.

All presentations (including plenary & workshops) delivered during the seminar are available on the relevant [ENRD website page](#)².

Content of the report

The main body of the report provides a summary of the discussions that took place during the event. It highlights key recommendations and lessons based on the experiences of MS in view of identifying and seizing the opportunities for improving the quality of RDP implementation.

As far as possible, references to the examples presented and to other concrete experiences emerging from the discussions, are made throughout the text to support findings, recommendations and to encourage the exchange of practices at the EU level.

Despite the difficulty in providing an exhaustive summary of the discussions, detailed reports on each workshop are provided in [Annex I](#) (morning) and [Annex II](#) (afternoon) where the additional examples referred to in the main summary can be found.

² <http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/en/enrd.ec.europa.eu/en/en-rd-events-and-meetings/enrd-RDP-implementation-seminar-20150611>

II. Opening remarks and introductory session

In his [introductory remarks](#), *Paul Soto (ENRD Contact Point)* stressed the relevance and the timely organisation of the Seminar considering the current stage of Rural Development programming. At a time when the majority of RDPs are adopted or next to be, the Seminar focuses on those steps that RDP authorities need to put in place to ensure the best preconditions for success in managing the programmes and rolling out measures.

He also reminded the audience about the role of the Seminar in the wider frame of ENRD activities that during the first year focused on working together with rural development stakeholders to identify those areas in which the work of rural networks is most needed and most likely to achieve results.

Participants were invited to exchange experiences and share methods and tools that work in practice, strengthen the working relations among all stakeholders involved along the different steps of RDP implementation and indicate what support is needed from rural networks.

Mihail Dumitru (Deputy Director General, DG AGRI) then provided a comprehensive overview of the [state of play of 2014-2020 RDPs](#), outlining the envisaged timing for the approval of the single programmes and providing preliminary data on the RDP budget allocations. The intervention included summary information about MS plans on the use of specific and new instruments of the rural development policy such as financial instruments, support to business start-ups and risk management measures, among others. A strong emphasis was put on the need to **focus on results** and key figures coming from the RDPs were provided on expected targets for 2014-2020. In this respect a number of sensitive areas were highlighted for consideration and further joint work of the EU and MS to ensure a performant and correct implementation of programmes.

Highlights on 2014-2020 RDPs

For the period 2014-2020, **118 Rural Development Programmes** will be approved by the EC covering national and regional territories. By the end of May 2015, 51 programmes were adopted accounting for 43% of the total number of RDPs and 62% of the total allocated EAFRD budget, which for the EU as a whole amounts to some EUR 99.6 billion.

According to the available data submitted by MS on *21 May 2015*, a total public expenditure of EUR 161 billion is expected to be invested by the RDPs. This budget is mainly allocated to Priority 4 – Ecosystem management (43%) followed by Priority 2 – Competitiveness (20%), Priority 6 – Social inclusion (15%), Priority 3 – Food chain organisation (10%), Priority 5 – Resource efficiency and climate (9%), with technical assistance budget covering the 3% of the total. Actions programmed under Priority 1 – Knowledge transfer and innovation will support all other priorities.

Regarding measures, investments in physical assets (23.5%), agri-environment-climate measure (16.8%) and payments for Area with Natural Constraints (16.1%) are the three measures in pole-position.

Following on implementation aspects, *Martin Scheele (Head of Unit, DG AGRI)* provided a comprehensive overview of available options and opportunities for a [simpler and better implementation of Rural Development policy](#). The key messages of the intervention were that simplification of the policy is a task to be addressed jointly by the EU and the MS. Possible options identified in this respect - in consultation with MS - concern practical implementation aspects that can be pursued by MS under the current set of rules. Control rules were also mentioned as an area for possible improvement under scrutiny.

Actions are being taken at the EU level to understand how national and regional authorities have applied these rules in their programmes in view of identifying and sharing promising approaches and ‘best practices’. The ongoing provision of EU guidance for better implementation of programmes is also envisaged, and the work will be undertaken both in close coordination with the national authorities and the ENRD.

Member States were invited to consider giving more attention to the adoption of simplification options in their programmes, and prepare any future programme modification in advance through timely consultation with the European Commission and the Partnership.

Main areas for consideration for better and simpler RDP implementation

- ✓ Public procurement rules, reasonableness of costs and eligibility issues for the control of error rate (particularly for investment measures)
- ✓ Adoption of Simplified Cost Options
- ✓ Avoiding ‘gold-plating’ and over complication of rules
- ✓ Verifiability and controllability of measures
- ✓ Special attention to new policy elements (including ANC delimitation)
- ✓ Increased focus on results
- ✓ Make effective use of the new M&E system
- ✓ Considering strategic and effective programme modifications

Questions & Answers

Following the keynote presentations a ‘questions & answers’ session with the audience highlighted that:

- The **correct application of the partnership principle** in both policy design and delivery was raised by RDP stakeholders as an element of high concern. In their view, despite the existence of a Code of Conduct, in some MS the principle is not applied correctly and stakeholders are left out. The issue has been formally raised by civil society organisations with the EC and the latter, where appropriate, has intervened to enquire whether rules were followed and how partners were involved in consultations. However, it has been recognised that this situation varies across MS.

Beneficiaries are equally responsible for good implementation of the programmes and to respect the partnership principle and transparency, they are expected to raise such issues and ask more actively to be considered. Issues of underrepresentation of certain categories of stakeholders (e.g. small farmers) were also raised in the discussion.

- In the view of stakeholders, issues also exist in terms of **quantification of support rates** for certain measures, especially those for which payments are made on hectares. More robust scientific methods for calculation and involvement of experts is desired along with a more prominent role of the EC in checking the correctness of the calculations. Although the EC can have a view on whether the rates are proportionate according to the context, it has to rely on calculations undertaken at the national or regional level while verifying the correctness of procedures. In this respect, the rural development

Regulation requires for an independent body to check and confirm the adequacy and accuracy of calculations.

- The **inclusion of expert advice** was also raised in relation to the assessment of impacts of area-based measures. Here, according to the stakeholders' representatives, the focus should shift from area-coverage to a more qualitative assessment of the interventions' outcome. In this context, the EC is very supportive of active NGO and expert involvement to clarify what is actually happening on the ground. Such collaboration produced good results in the past and results-based approaches constitute a good opportunity.
- A specific comment was raised in respect to **eligibility issues of permanent pastures** under Pillar 1 of the CAP and particularly the lack of coordination with rural development support considerably affecting extensive farming systems. On this latter aspect, the EC felt that because of the introduction of greening under Pillar 1, MS may end up giving less emphasis to agri-environment measures. The outcomes of the application of greening will be assessed, leading as appropriate to revisions of delivery mechanisms and, most crucially, of its own rationale.

III - Morning workshops

Topics

In the introduction to the morning workshops *Fabio Cossu (ENRD Contact Point)* reminded how the choice and definition of the discussion topics were informed by priority issues raised by the Rural Networks' Steering Group and further articulated by the ENRD Thematic Group on 'Improving RDP implementation'. Several of the examples presented were also derived from the work of the TG as well other ENRD activities - such as the workshops on RDP implementing aspects - organised in the first half of 2015.

The three workshops taking place in the morning dealt with 'horizontal' aspects of RDP implementation. These related to programme management, communication and coordination aspects that are key to ensure that:

- **RDPs are customer-oriented** or, in other words, that programmes address stakeholders' real needs and there is clarity of intent for everyone involved in their delivery (Workshop 1)
- **RDPs are results-oriented** and deliver the agreed outcomes while avoiding unnecessary complications (Workshop 2)
- **Coordination and capacity building** challenges are adequately addressed in Member States with regionalised countries for a consistent implementation of RDPs (Workshop 3)

Method and key outcomes

Following the presentation of concrete MS practices, participants engaged in group discussions and in turn, were invited to exchange their experience and approaches in dealing with the issues considered by each workshop.

The scope of the exercise was to learn and get inspiration from each other's practices while recognising possible practical constraints. In the last stage of discussions, each group was asked to put forward recommendations for improvements that were shared and prioritised through voting.

Around 8 different examples of practices were presented during the morning workshops, which stimulated rich discussions about specific issues and possible practices (based on concrete experiences) to overcome them.

Detailed outcomes of the group discussions are summarised in [Annex I](#) of this report. A summary of **key recommendations** per topic is provided below.

Workshop 1: Customer-oriented RDPs

The topic tabled for discussion in the workshop was mainly drawn from the work of the ENRD Thematic Group on 'Improving RDP implementation'. The focus was on identifying and discussing approaches that bring potential beneficiaries' needs (i.e. the 'customers') to the centre of RDP implementing considerations. As pointed out in the [workshop's introductory presentation](#), the main challenge in this respect is to find a balance between ensuring compliance with the rules, on one hand, and recognising stakeholders' needs through effective consultation, on the other hand.

A number of implementing aspects fall under this consideration such as:

- effective consultation and involvement of stakeholders in the roll-out of programmes, primarily through functioning formal mechanisms as in the example of the [RDP monitoring committee](#) presented by *Veronika Madner (RDP managing authority, AT)*;
- ensuring vertical coordination and the same level of understanding of rules between institutional levels, often through simple solutions such as the ones applied in Finland through [joint 'reading sessions'](#) with national, regional and local stakeholders presented by *Erja Loppi (Agency for Rural Affairs, FI)*;
- improving the take-up of measures by beneficiaries by providing targeted information, which in the example from the Czech Republic presented by *Zuzana Dvořáková (RDP managing authority, CZ)* was realised through a [campaign for the launch of the RDPs](#) in close collaboration between the managing authority and national organisations.

Key findings and recommendations from the workshop:

- The **RDP Monitoring Committee (MC)** was identified as a key instrument to ensure a better customer-oriented RDP. However, its effectiveness depends on a **balanced representation** of all stakeholder groups involved in the implementation of RDPs and **higher degree of participation**.
- **National Rural Networks (NRNs)** have a role in ensuring stakeholder groups are reached and flows of information established with institutional stakeholders. A general recommendation for the MC is to avoid working in isolation and create more agile structures and mechanisms to consult more effectively and transparently on specific themes (e.g. through ad-hoc working groups) or coordinate with other policy fields (e.g. joint MC for all ESI funds). More **structured organisation of the work of the MC and better planning** could also help to address other main issues such as the lack of time for effective preparation and consultation.
- Stakeholders would need assistance and support to engage more effectively in consultation. Therefore, RDP authorities should encourage **capacity building especially for certain categories of stakeholders** (e.g. NGOs, small farmers). This could be provided through advisory services or other forms of support such as guidelines or FAQs.
- Provided that all concerned stakeholders take responsibility in contributing to consultation, administrations' attitude towards inclusive consultation should change. Based on positive examples around EU, a recommendation was made to **consider more informal means of consultation** - and link these to formal mechanisms - in order to ensure a broader involvement of stakeholders.

Workshop 2: Results-oriented RDPs

The workshop (see [introductory presentation](#)) focused on tools and strategies to keep programmes focused on achieving the envisaged results, ensure sound financial management and keep administrative procedures relatively simple. The topic was identified as one of the priority areas for EU Networks' work

in 2015-2016 by the Rural Networks' Steering Group³, responding to both a political call for a more performing policy and a demand for simplification from all rural development stakeholders. In this context, the ENRD organised a series of workshops⁴ in the first half of 2015 that, to a certain extent, informed the content of the discussion.

The two practical cases presented put emphasis on:

- Adopting simplified administrative procedures for the implementation of RDP measures through [simplified cost options](#) that, in the experience of the RDP of Canary Islands presented by *Carla Álvarez de Vera (RDP Managing Authority, ES)*, allowed for paying for results and ensuring the traceability of expenditures for investment measures.
- Learning from ongoing monitoring of implementation and auditing, and transforming lessons into concrete opportunities for capacity building, for example through national-level [mentoring programmes for local development stakeholders](#) as explained by *Denis McGowan (RDP authority, IE)* and the [adoption of improved control and management systems by LAGs](#) like in the case of West Cork Development Partnership, presented by its director *Ian Dempsey (IE)*.

Key findings and recommendations from the workshop:

- **Avoiding 'gold plating'** or, in other words, keeping the cost of policy interventions under control was recognised as a priority in RDP implementation. In this respect, the solution provided by **Simplified Cost Options (SCOs)** appeals to RDP managers and potential beneficiaries alike. The information provided in the presentations were considered particularly useful in helping others think about possible solutions to similar issues. A strong need was expressed for **good practical examples to be shared between Member States** both on Simplified Cost Options and, generally, on simplification of management processes (including LEADER).
- A raising interest in such practices, however, needs to be accompanied by **the development of better knowledge and stronger skills** for their application. In this respect, **delivering more trainings that are practical in nature** was considered to be amongst the most effective ways to raise the capacity of those concerned.
- With particular reference to SCOs, a strong recommendation was put forward to **involve concerned stakeholders in understanding and designing the methodology**. Crucially – to address possible risks of non-compliance and irregularities - **auditors should be involved in the early stage and possibly be trained** themselves to ensure common understanding of rules and possibilities. Stakeholder groups and experts should equally be involved by the administration.
- From the operational point of view, it was recognised that **it is important to prepare sufficiently early to implement SCOs in the programmes**. This mainly relates to collecting and developing adequate data. Investing sufficient time and resources in preparing for the adoption of SCOs is necessary for the administration, but the effort will eventually pay off in terms of budget savings

³ See outcomes of the first meeting of the Rural Network Steering group (Brussels, 25 February 2015): <http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/en/en-rd-events-and-meetings/rural-networks%E2%80%99-steering-group-%E2%80%93-25-february-2015-%E2%80%93-brussels-be>

⁴ Trainings on simplified cost options (Brussels, 26 February and 29 May 2015): <http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/en/en-rd-events-and-meetings/SCO-training-20150226>; Training on reasonableness of costs and public procurement (Brussels, 17 March 2015): <http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/en/en-rd-events-and-meetings/procurement-training-20150317>; Workshop on results-based agri-environment payments (Brussels 14 April 2015): <http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/en/en-rd-events-and-meetings/RBAPS-workshop-20150414>.

and lighter procedures. Timely preparation was also recognised as necessary to carry out thorough risk assessments and develop quality management systems, as in the Irish case relating to LAG management.

Workshop 3: Coordination and capacity building in regionalised MS

Issues of horizontal and vertical coordination for the coherent implementation of Rural Development Programmes as well as the need for improved administrative capacity for the many actors involved are particularly felt in countries with regional programmes⁵ (see [introductory presentation](#)). Decentralisation of competences in both planning and implementation and the existence of a multiplicity of actors at different governance levels require increased efforts in these countries for which the workshop intended to provide an exchange platform for possible strategies.

As identified by the work of the Thematic Group on 'Improving RDP implementation' a number of possible solutions and approaches are adopted by MS, examples of which were introduced by two practical cases, in particular:

- In the example from Italy, *Andrea Evangelista (INEA/National Rural Network, IT)* illustrated plans at national level for the design and [introduction of quality management systems for regional MAs](#) based on a thorough analysis of administrative processes, to respond to the objective of improving the quality of RDP implementation.
- [Training and capacity transfer to regional authorities](#) was also the focus of the example presented by *Laurent Vignaud (Agence de Service et Paiement, FR)* who introduced the main challenges of decentralisation in France and the tools put in place by the Paying Agency to increase the administrative capacity of regional administrations and a more coherent approach towards the implementation of RDP measures.

Key findings and recommendations from the workshop:

- Despite recognising the need to improve technical knowledge of RDP administrations - notably through trainings - or to put in place better management tools such as centralised IT systems, it was argued that such actions alone are not sufficient to improve the quality of RDP implementation. A first recommendation put forward in this respect was to **ensure that the entire administrative system is functioning properly**. **Risk assessment, analysis of existing procedures and rules** and, consequently, of **training needs** were suggested as prerequisites for introducing improvements in the programme's administration. A **possible role for NRNs** as promoter and coordinator of such initiatives was also suggested for consideration.
- On the other hand, actions aiming at increasing the quality of RDP management should not be seen as a competence of central administrations only. **Active participation and collaboration at the regional level** should be sought through encouraging the latter to take responsibility for

⁵ See also findings of the ENRD 2007-2013 thematic working group on 'delivery mechanisms of EU RDPs': http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/enrd-static/policy-in-action/improving-implementation/delivery-mechanisms/en/delivery-mechanisms_en.html

introducing changes and tailoring the available tools/methodologies to the specific context and needs.

- Arguably, this could be extended to the whole set of stakeholders directly or indirectly involved in the implementation of the programmes. This clearly aligns with considerations emerging from the first workshop in that capacity building actions should aim at ensuring **more effective participation in formal coordination mechanisms** (such as MCs), where feedback is directly provided to administrations on the way 'quality' is perceived and managed.
- Regarding practical tools and strategies, a recommendation was made to **look at instruments already available** (e.g. national frameworks, joint action plans for error rates, technical assistance funding) to understand the opportunities offered by them without unnecessarily investing in more complicated solutions.

IV - Afternoon workshops

The afternoon workshops were dedicated to discussing specific implementing aspects related to RDP measures. The aim of the workshops was to address specificities of three different categories of measures particularly focusing on new elements of the policy and showcasing MS plans for their implementation:

- **Workshop 4** dealt with **Investment support measures**
- **Workshop 5** dealt with **area-based measures** (i.e. measures for which support is provided on the basis of number of hectares or animals)
- **Workshop 6** dealt with a range of ‘**other**’ measures such as knowledge transfer, business development and co-operation

Note: the list of relevant measures included under each category is provided in [Annex III](#) for information.

Examples from five MS were presented by RDP authorities or other stakeholders highlighting priorities and challenges related to the implementation of specific measures, strategic choices and practical approaches adopted, and expected achievements.

Participants were invited to comment and discuss on the examples in groups and come forward with their own plans for the implementation of the same and other RDP measures for 2014-2020. The aim of each workshop was then to identify **concrete opportunities for better implementation** along with possible constraints and support needs.

The following section provides a summary of the main findings for each workshop. Detailed outcomes of the group discussion including examples referenced throughout the text are available in [Annex II](#) of the report.

Summary of main findings and lessons from MS in implementing RDP measures

Investments measures (Workshop 4)

Investment measures do not usually pose any particular challenge in terms of take-up or ‘understanding’ on the side of beneficiaries. On the contrary, demand for investment projects is likely to be higher than available funding in several MS (see examples in Annex II).

The main implementation challenges therefore relate to **effective management of the applications, targeting and keeping the costs of investments under control**.

Targeting of measures and ensuring that project calls match the programme’s key objectives should be the first preoccupation for programme managers. **Targeted calls** (e.g. [investments related to animal welfare in DE Lower Saxony](#); [family farms, larger farmers and mountain farms in RO](#)) and effective use of **selection criteria** ([environment-focused investments in IT Umbria](#)) are the main instrument available to ensure that support reaches potential beneficiaries and projects that serve the programmes’ priorities and deliver results.

In the context of effective administrative procedures, **Simplified Cost Options** are adopted or planned in a number of RDPs (e.g. [forestry investments in FR](#), [investments under M4.1 and M8 in RO](#)). The [plans for Denmark](#) – as presented by *Stefan Østergård Jensen (Danish AgriFish Agency)* - are to use this tool for

supporting productive and non-productive investments, placing emphasis on outcomes and reducing administrative burdens in the process. A specific recommendation for those MAs considering the use of SCOs was **to start from a limited number of measures / types of operations** in order to get familiar with the process, identify limitations and requirements before scaling up the method.

An additional challenge in implementing investment measure is **assessing and evaluating project applications** in order to keep the costs under control. A number of strategies were proposed such as:

- Encouraging joint applications e.g. via co-operatives to ensure cost-efficient delivery of outcomes (farmers are encouraged to do so [under M4 in FR](#))
- Defining reasonable costs /standard costs in advance using e.g. independent research institutes ([lists are established and made publically available for all investment measures in RO](#)) or other means ([through tendering procedures in DE – Lower Saxony](#); [pre-defined lists of available technologies in the NL for investments for young farmers](#)) to facilitate assessment of planned costs and reduce errors
- Undertaking pre-assessment of projects to ensure that the applicant has the capacity to comply with the project requirements ([UK – Scotland](#))

Area based measures (Workshop 5)

Provided that good implementation of area-based measures starts with their good design, the major issues related to the implementation of area-based measures were linked with **targeting, advice and monitoring**.

The inspiring example of [England’s new Countryside Stewardship scheme](#) presented by *Kaley Hart (IEEP)* highlights the evolution of England’s agri-environment schemes towards a progressive improvement of the **scoring and targeting system** that is expected to raise the quality of applications and interventions (and eventually, of outcomes).

An example of effective targeting strategy was also provided by the [Green Low-carbon Agri-environment Scheme](#) (GLAS) in Ireland presented by *Anja Murray (Environmental Pillar, IE)*. The scheme aims at delivering better results tackling key environmental challenges by giving priority for support to farmers showing ‘priority environmental assets’ or undertaking actions for threatened farmland birds in specific areas.

Inspired by the lessons offered by the two examples, participants stressed **the importance of tailored-made advice** to farmers in order to ensure the highest effectiveness of such schemes, especially when these are more sophisticated (i.e. prescribing practices with higher ecological value). This was taken into account, for example by the higher tier of England’s new scheme’s support. However, the lack of advisory capacity is an issue for a number of MS (in SK for examples, the lack of independent advice is lamented). Sharing **practical examples** and setting up **demonstration projects** ([both supported by the RDP in BE – Flanders](#)) were mentioned as powerful instruments to accompany and reinforce advice at the farm level.

The necessity to rely on good monitoring systems and data was stressed as the third success factor for improving the implementation of area-based measures. **Collection of adequate data** and their **interpretation by independent experts** are the foundations for effective evaluation of outcomes and improvement in scheme design following the well-known programming cycle.

In terms of focusing on outcomes, opportunities were highlighted around the shift towards **results-based schemes** - where payments are based on achieved results⁶ - thus allowing more flexibility to farmers to achieve environmental objectives. The presentation from IE contains examples (not funded by the EAFRD) which can inspire RDP-supported actions.

Knowledge transfer, business development, cooperation and other measures (Workshop 6)

The workshop covered a wider and more diverse set of measures, for which it is only possible to provide a summary of some of the issues that were the subject of focused exchanges. These touched upon the **integrated use of funding** and aspects related to the **implementation of new measures**.

Most of the discussion focused on the **synergic use of measures and funds** (including multi-fund LEADER/CLLD). In this sense, participants encouraged the adoption of approaches that facilitate access to different funding sources and the use of **'package of measures'**. The [Scottish example illustrating the way in which RDP supports public procurement in the food sector](#) supports this argument and was considered an inspiring example by participants.

The ways in which the access to and the use of different funding sources can be simplified imply improved coordination at the administrative level. This could be achieved through simple improvements such as the **harmonisation of calls** or the creation of a 'Funds Menu'. Such approaches (like the [creation of a list of calls in SK](#)) allow focusing on the project idea first and then on the available funding opportunities. However, they require a minimum coordination effort at the level of the administrations (especially when different funds are involved).

Sharing **good practices** on the implementation of the RDP measures covered by the workshop (e.g. knowledge transfer, CLLD/multi-funding, co-operation and business development⁷), and providing tailored **guidance** and **training** on specific technical aspects such public procurement rules and Simplified Cost Options were among the most common recommendations raised. It was suggested, particularly for future EC guidance, to take into account the differences in RDPs and to tailor it to specific MS conditions.

Concerning support for innovation and EIP operational groups (OGs), a recommendation was to put in place **simple conditions for the setting up of OGs**. The role of both NRNs and advisory services is important in facilitating this process.

⁶ See also DG ENV project on results-based agri-environment schemes (http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/rbaps/index_en.htm), and the ENRD workshop on the same topic (<http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/en/en-rd-events-and-meetings/RBAPS-workshop-20150414>)

⁷ See for example, the presentation of the [strategy put in place by BE – Flanders](#), presented by Ariane Van Den Steen (Flemish Rural Network)

IV – Next steps and final considerations

As reminded in the introduction to the Seminar, the event is part of a wider set of activities addressing one of ENRD and NRNs' main objectives: 'Improving the quality of RDP implementation'.

The outcomes of the Seminar are meant to be taken up and further articulated by the work of the ENRD Thematic Group 'Improving RDP implementation', directly contributing to the discussions at the third meeting (23 June 2015) and subsequently to the final TG report.

The latter will provide practical recommendations to RDP delivery stakeholders – with a focus on sharing good practices - while outlining possible areas for future activities for the ENRD and national-level networks.

One of the main messages emerging from the day is the **strong need to identify good (methodological) practices** that can inform recommendations and feed other parts of the work, such as trainings, workshops and seminars. At the EU level, there is a strong request for MS and stakeholders to come forward and share their practices which do not necessary need to be 'good': questions and attempts to solve problems can also be very useful and inspiring.

Some tentative topics of interest for a collection of 'good practices' emerged during the discussions and include, among others: monitoring committees and their functioning, implementation of new measures – with specific attention to those that act as catalysts, such as the co-operation measure – and, mechanisms and approaches for vertical and horizontal coordination.

Annex I: Detailed summary of morning workshops

Workshop 1: Customer-oriented RDPs

Effective functioning of Monitoring Committees	
<i>Issues & needs discussed</i>	<i>Examples of practices and approaches adopted</i>
<p>Lack of time to generate proper discussions and cover all implementing aspects in MC meetings. It is important to hold meetings to prepare the ground and do the in-depth work with those concerned / interested.</p> <p>Some MCs work in a rather ‘top-down’ approach presenting decisions to the MC. There is very limited involvement of stakeholders in the process.</p> <p>Engage stakeholders also outside formal consultation platforms.</p>	<p>Working outside the MC: establishing sub-working groups, committees, etc. that carry out work on specific issues and whose outcomes inform the work of the MC. In this way the MC works as platform where concrete recommendations emerging from informal groups are discussed and brought forward more effectively (also time-wise).</p> <p>This is common practice in AT, but also in England, Scotland, RO and the NL with some differences, e.g.:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In AT (see presentation) the MC members decide on themes for working groups - In RO sub-groups are decided by the MA <p>Co-operation platforms are established between stakeholders such as MAs and LAGs in Scotland, and facilitated by the NSU.</p>
<p>It is important that stakeholders have the ownership of the outcomes of MC meetings. Decisions and comments provided by different members of the MC would need to be made available and shared with other members, leaving them sufficient time to react.</p>	
<p>It is important to have active MC members and a real representation within the MC. Balance between public authority and civil society organisations must be sought.</p>	

<p>An increasing number of civil dialogue groups has been emerging e.g. small farmers in ES. Such groups can play a role in the implementation of the policy subject to be recognised and included in the formal consultation structures.</p> <p>Capacity building of civil society is a crucial issue since less organised groups struggle to get their voices heard even though they are key stakeholders in rural development.</p>	<p>In SK, the Cohesion Fund was used to support and provide capacity building to NGO representatives in MC (including preparation of meetings)</p>
<p>Clarify the role of the MC: technical body responding to a process vs. political entity driving the policy.</p>	
<p>MC as instrument to monitor and coordinate all ESI funds. Joint MCs provide for complementarity between Funds in the delivery of strategic objectives.</p> <p>However, in order to undertake this function effectively this coordination body should be representative.</p> <p>The risk is felt particularly that rural development stakeholders might be marginalised in bodies covering a wide range of areas and bringing together multiple interest groups. Regulations should ensure that rural development stakeholders find their representatives in such bodies.</p>	<p>Joint MCs for all ESI funds in Wales meets four times per year. Operational Committees meet on each specific program and make recommendations to the MC</p> <p>A single MC for all ESI funds is also established in Mayotte (FR). This approach works very well also thanks to the fact that the RDP covers a small area with simpler administrative structure.</p> <p>In LV there is a MC for each of the programme/fund but a Steering Group (made up only of public authority representatives) oversees the work of the different MCs.</p>

Ensuring common understanding and coordination	
<i>Issues & needs discussed</i>	<i>Examples of practices and approaches adopted</i>
<p>Connecting stakeholders in regionalised MS and / or stakeholders located far away from each other</p>	<p>Alternative communication channels as teleconferencing in FI</p>
<p>Share common concerns and questions among those involved in policy implementation. Work out shared solutions to common problems.</p>	<p>Frequently Asked Questions in FI (need to be collected, validated and shared)</p>

Reaching out potential beneficiaries through ad-hoc information	
<i>Issues & needs discussed</i>	<i>Examples of practices and approaches adopted</i>
Absence of adequate support from advisory services to small farmers in certain countries (e.g. EE). Small farmers are not recipients of the support from the AS, the AS are either focused on administrative issues or they have not been trained / informed to provide tailored advice to small farming needs or to exploit available funding opportunities.	
Time pressure on MA and PA prevents the possibility to provide adequate information to beneficiaries. Often there is very little time available between the preparation of the measure, the launch and the closing of calls for applications.	In EE , the PA provides detailed information about the measures and the calls through its website so that beneficiaries can be well informed in advance about opportunities and requirements through dedicated fiches (time pressure however can hamper the timely publication of the fiches)

Workshop 2: Results-oriented RDPs

Adoption of Simplified Cost Options and other simplification measures	
Issues & needs discussed	Examples of practices and approaches adopted
<p>Discussion around the example provided by the Canary Islands' RDP highlighted the need for early planning and beneficiary focus in implementing SCOs.</p> <p>It is important to be clear to what elements of the supported activities the approach is applied to justify its use.</p> <p>Lack of knowledge and capacity can hamper the further take-up of the approach, therefore, specific training / mentoring was suggested. It is crucial to involve auditors in the process as they were perceived as a possible obstacles to adopting such approaches.</p> <p>The adoption of a coherent approach in regionalised countries was raised as desirable but possibly difficult to achieve.</p> <p>Also the issue of regional variation in costs was thought to make Simplified Cost Options tricky and questions raised about whether SCOs could be established regionally. In this vein, about it was questioned whether or not SCOs might disadvantage the use of local products or distort competition, and how this interacts with procurement rules.</p> <p>Issues of availability and comparability of data were raised and how to strike the right balance between different investment options with varying prices (the examples of fences were suggested (in case there is a huge range of different types of fence available that could be funded, all with different associated prices, how to define a simplified cost?))</p>	<p>See presentation from ES - Canary Island</p> <p>Also in SE Simplified Cost Options are used across the all ESI funds. Previous experience exists in using standard unit costs for trainings.</p> <p>In IE SCOs will be put in place for knowledge transfer actions. This approach is considered more transparent and should be easier to implement.</p> <p>In FR, the need to simplify and streamline implementation of forestry measures led to the definition of several models of forestry investments (each model included different species, planting densities and operations). Simplified costs were defined for each model. Experts and different stakeholders were involved in the development of the models. Reference costs were 'agreed' in meetings with stakeholders. Potential beneficiaries can choose from the pre-defined models which are differentiated at the regional level.</p> <p>In DK, the development of SCOs for investment measures is underway in response to the need for simplification (see presentation). Also in LV, the development of SCOs is currently being considered for as many measures as possible.</p> <p>SCOs for LEADER have been identified in BG (other measures are being considered).</p>

<p>Adoption of reference price lists as a way to control costs and reduce ‘gold plating’ (reducing the risk of over specification) in the implementation of investment measures and ensuring a more efficient use of resources.</p>	<p>During the 2007-13 period, BG created a reference database for investment measures. For machinery, this included both the machinery itself (e.g. tractor) as well as linked options (e.g. additional specifications, such as air conditioning etc.). Despite all this information, it is difficult to know how to assess these items – e.g. when additional options need to be funded and when not. The proposed solution is to include only basic costs in the database. Then farmers either have to pay themselves if they want to include more sophisticated options or need to justify why a more sophisticated option is required.</p>
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Reduction of errors and improving management (LAGs)	
<i>Issues & needs discussed</i>	<i>Examples of practices and approaches adopted</i>
<p>Introduction of monitoring and capacity building for LAGs for the development of Local Development Strategies, procurement and control systems.</p> <p>Understanding the potential offered by monitoring and reviewing procedures (e.g. through audit) for learning and further improvements.</p>	<p>In IE (see presentation), the MA reviewed experience of LEADER after a specific LAG became insolvent, highlighted difficulties in a number of LAGs and introduced a system of checks and audits. A strong need for more robust checks pre-decision making was identified.</p> <p>The Irish LAG example (see presentation) demonstrated robust and systematic process to address reduction of irregularities. However, the need of having sufficient staff resources was flagged as determinant of LAG’s viability.</p> <p>In Scotland too eligibility issues for LEADER projects arose – errors came mainly from domestic requirements, which are being simplified in the 2014-2020 period. Penalties for errors were imposed on the MA. The solution was to set up a Service Level Agreement with the LAG which means they are now liable for the penalty. Greater responsibility of the LAGs, along with simpler domestic procedures are hoped to lead to improved implementation and fewer errors.</p>
<p>The use of a risk management framework / system gives control with clear expectations for competence and controls.</p>	<p>In FI a total quality management system was introduced for LAGs, the NSU supported the process.</p>

Workshop 3: Coordination and capacity building in regionalised MS

Raising administrative capacity and quality	
<i>Issues & needs discussed</i>	<i>Examples of practices and approaches adopted</i>
<p>Involving stakeholders in the improvement of RDP management particularly through ensuring the space for providing feedback to the administration.</p> <p>Effective participation in Monitoring Committees seems crucial in this respect, raising questions about their effectiveness, timing and the added value of this participation.</p>	
<p>Role of intermediate bodies such national organisations or NRNs in linking institutional actors and ensuring capacity-building activities are tailored to real needs.</p>	<p>In FR the Association of regional councils (<i>Conseils Régionaux</i>, the regional MAs in charge of the RDPs) is an autonomous network that defends the interest of regional councils, including counselling on agriculture and RDP policy. The structure works closely with the national PA (trainings for administrations) and among others, organises events to discuss possible implementation improvements (e.g. on centralised payments).</p>
<p>It would be important to increase the administrative capacity of the MAs, not only through training, but also by ensuring the necessary instruments and resources are in place. Suggestion to carry out an analysis of rules and procedures in place to map-out where the bottlenecks are at both MS and EU levels.</p>	<p>Guidelines for the introduction of Quality Management Systems for regional authorities in IT (see presentation)</p>
<p>Establishing centralised IT systems (for management and /or monitoring of measures).</p> <p>Difficulty to work with all regions and different bodies in a coordinated way, ensuring the procedures are in place in the appropriate timeframe. NRNs could help in identifying MAs' needs in terms of improving administrative capacity.</p>	<p>French PA 'toolbox' for the coherent implementation and management of measures across regional RDPs (see presentation)</p> <p>In DE a national network for monitoring and evaluation was established, however, there were difficulties in the data collection at the central level because of different IT tools.</p>

Vertical coordination mechanisms	
<i>Issues & needs discussed</i>	<i>Examples of practices and approaches adopted</i>
<p>Role of available tools, such as National Framework in regionalised countries, as effective tools for ensuring coordination and coherent approaches to RDP implementation</p> <p>Improving flow of information to regional implementing bodies</p>	<p>In ES, the National Framework (envisaged by the Rural Development Regulation for regionalised MS) seeks a coordinated approach on certain implementation aspects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It sets up common provisions for the implementation of certain measures at the regional level, indicates which operations and measures can be implemented at national level to avoid overlap. - It also provides for the submission of a joint notification on state aid at the national level, thus releasing some administrative pressure for regional MAs. <p>In ES, a coordination body for the MAs is also in place, which is important not only for ensuring coherent implementation on the ground, but also for the dissemination of information from the EU to the regional-level authorities.</p>
<p>Role of available tools, such as the joint action plans for the reduction of error rates, as a national-level tool for ensuring coordination (and simultaneously increasing quality of implementation)</p>	<p>The production of a single action plan at national level allows each MA and PA to see what others are doing to overcome common challenges or which issues are arising; common actions are also designed, and MAs can adapt their plan based on the information made available (as a preventive approach).</p>

Annex II: Detailed summary of afternoon workshops

Workshop 4: Investment measures

<i>Examples of MS plans and approaches to measure implementation</i>	<i>Issues / expected improvements</i>
BULGARIA	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Call already launched for M 4.1, 3 500 applications were received, but available resources (€150m) only for 500. 	<p>Open calls without sufficient specification can lead to demand surprises.</p> <p>No clear view yet as to quality of applications (not yet processed).</p> <p>As a general point, the hiatus between RDPs is thought to have resulted in pent up demand.</p>
GERMANY : Lower-Saxony	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Investments aimed at promoting animal welfare rather than competitive agriculture (since competitiveness is considered to be largely achieved). Specific targeted calls for investment measures on animal welfare. - All investment measures: reasonable costs are assessed each time using three tenders procedure. 	<p>The tendering procedure is relatively resource intensive and can lead to a variety of costs claimed for the same or similar activities by different projects. Increased admin for all.</p>
ESTONIA	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Single call with 4 sectoral funding envelopes. 	<p>The demand varies per envelope depending on sectoral conditions.</p> <p>There are tensions around underspending envelopes for areas in need of funding, but with low ability to absorb because of sectoral difficulties and better performing sectors that could absorb the funding.</p>
SPAIN	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - M4 will be implemented at national level. The measure will mostly focus on producers groups / co-operatives. Beneficiaries will need to be registered in national level databases. 	<p>This allows to better control applicants and avoid double funding with regional level.</p>

FRANCE	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - M4 investments mostly target competitive agriculture and climate. Farms are encouraged to jointly apply for shared machinery as a co-operatives – to impact on the territorial level. - Use of SCOs not yet planned. A national-level database to register buildings is used by the PA for the implementation of the measure. Invoices will continue to be used for the implementation of M4. - SCOs will be used instead for certain types of investments in forestry for which obtaining invoices is difficult. 	<p>Decision following the findings of the SWOT analysis. It is expected that this will accelerate the absorption of the funds by not having to follow up on big investment projects.</p> <p>Different political decisions might change this approach.</p>
IT - Umbria	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The focus of the M4 is on competitiveness. The MA has decided to use the selection criteria as a tool to promote the environmental aspect of investment projects. This will be achieved by giving higher ranking to investments which place a stronger emphasis on agro-environmental issues. 	<p>There is a strong resistance from farmers on issues relating to targeting environmental objectives through M4.</p>
The NETHERLANDS	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - All investment measures: looking at a pre-defined list of eligible technologies for investment support available to young farmers. 	<p>Makes it easier for young farmers to understand what types of support is available and how much funding they can get.</p>
ROMANIA	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - For M4 investments will be focused on increasing agricultural competitiveness, reflecting profile of different farms. Specific calls for family farms, larger farms and farms in mountain areas. - For Measures 4.1 and M8: Standard costs defined per hectare for planting certain types of crop, trees etc. - All investment measures: predefine reasonable costs using research institutes and data from suppliers. Data are made publically available to applicants. 	<p>Ensure the selection criteria defined for the measure match the specificities set out in the individual calls.</p> <p>Simpler administration, easier for beneficiaries to understand the support available and reduce error rates.</p> <p>Making data publically available helps beneficiaries respect the eligible cost levels.</p>
SWEDEN	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Generally, RDP implemented through 21 county plans with regional budgets. 	<p>Issues of inconsistent implementation might arise for the different use of selection criteria.</p>

UK - Scotland	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - M4 and M6 will be mainly targeted at crofters and small farms. - The focus will be on targeting small projects aiming to provide support up to €25 000 to some 20 000 beneficiaries. - A type of pre-assessment of project applications is foreseen. This will allow to ensure that applicants have the capacity to comply with the requirements. On the spot visits or communication by telephone is foreseen for the cases where there are doubts by the PA on the beneficiary's capacity. 	Probably not applicable to all potential beneficiaries.

Workshop 5: Area-based measures

<i>Examples of MS plans and approaches to measure implementation</i>	<i>Issues / expected improvements</i>
<p>BE- Flanders</p> <p>Two type of agri-environment-climate measures envisaged:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Basic level, mostly targeted to arable land support, management practices compatible with food production Schemes with higher ecological focus entailing specific agreements and management practices 	<p>A significant issue is getting uptake of the ecological measure as farmers are concerned about losing their land for production forever – despite reassurances that this is not necessarily the case</p> <p>Advice and clearer, targeted communication to farmers is needed.</p>
<p>SPAIN</p> <p>For the 2014-2020 period, the National Framework sets out a series of common elements such as, among others: the eligibility criteria for AEC schemes, the baseline, ANC delimitation, double funding rules.</p>	<p>Harmonised approach for the regions to apply, amore simplified one than previously</p>
<p>IRELAND</p> <p>The Green, Low-carbon, Agri-environment Scheme (GLAS) provides differentiated support according to environmental objectives; farmers with 'priority environmental assets' get priority access (see presentation for further details).</p> <p>Further opportunities are offered by locally-led and output-based schemes to address local conservation challenges where payments are based on achieved results. Examples already exist outside RDP funding (see presentation for further details).</p>	<p>Scheme is well-targeted to key environmental challenges. However, from the point of view of implementation, capacity of advisers to provide specialist support to farmers participating in biodiversity-focused schemes is lacking.</p> <p>Specialist advice as well as monitoring (poor in the previous period) need to be improved</p>

SLOVAK REPUBLIC	
(Not stated)	For AE measures, there appears to be a lack of advice provision and independent monitoring and evaluation. The payment rates are not considered to be calculated in a way that reflects the requirements of the measure either (e.g. IPM gets a payment around 90% of the Organic payment, despite being able to use pesticides).

Workshop 6: Knowledge transfer, business development, cooperation and other measures

The workshop dealt with a range of measures each covering specific implementing aspects. The following summary focuses mainly on those issues with more horizontal relevance and that were subject of debate across the different discussion groups.

Synergies between measures and ‘multi-funding’ approaches (including LEADER /CLLD)	
<i>Issues & needs discussed</i>	<i>Examples of practices</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It is important to ensure access to different funding sources and measures (‘packaging’ of measures) to address RDP objectives and priorities. - Sharing good practices is encouraged (lessons can be learnt from the past, e.g. multi-funding was a reality under Objective 5b programmes and LEADER II). 	The Scottish example which illustrate how links are created between food procurement & RDP is very relevant (see presentation for more details)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The process of accessing several funding sources when dealing with integrated projects must be simplified. From the point of view of funding management, more discussion and exchanges between the relevant ministries are needed in order to create the preconditions for synergies and e.g. harmonising calls. 	In FI representatives of different ministries are physically located in the same building at the regional level. This facilitates good communication and regular exchanges among delivery stakeholders.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - From a more operational point of view, achieving synergies is possible through e.g. coordination of calls. 	In SK , creating a list of different calls (i.e. ‘Funds Menu’) allows focusing on the project idea and subsequently thinking about available funding opportunities.

Support provided for innovation and OG partnerships	
<i>Issues & needs discussed</i>	<i>Examples of practices</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Simple conditions are needed to set up OGs. The role of both NRNs and support (advisory) services is essential to facilitate this process. - Need to raise awareness among potential stakeholders to apply for the measure. - Role for Rural networks to support partner search, set-up of OGs. 	<p>M16.1 of the South Tyrol RDP (IT): Research Institutes can be from different regions and countries if the focus of the action is within the RDP region.</p>

Dealing with new measures and taking into account differences at regional level	
<i>Issues & needs discussed</i>	<i>Examples of practices</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strong need of guidance and training, in particular linked to public procurement rules and Simplified Cost Options. This needs to take into account the differences in RDPs - and EC guidance needs to be tailored to specific MS conditions (that often vary significantly). - Need to take into account the differences in the development of regions (in national RDPs) and reflect such differences e.g. in selection criteria or co-financing rates. 	<p>In FI, higher co-financing to compensate for regions lagging behind (bigger envelope for less developed regions)</p> <p>Specific legislation in CZ on less developed regions</p>

Annex III: List of RDP measures per category

The classification of RDP measures presented in this table had the sole purpose of clarifying the topic of the workshops (afternoon session). It should not be interpreted as restricting the scope of the intervention of the measures.

Measure	Investment Measures (Workshop 4)	Area-based Measures (Workshop 5)	Other Measures (Workshop 6)
M01 - Knowledge transfer & information actions			
M02 - Advisory services			
M03 - Quality schemes			
M04 - Investments in physical assets			
M05 – Damage restoration /prevention actions			
M06 – Farm & business development			
M07 – Basic services & village renewal			
M08 - Investments in forest areas			
M09 – Producers groups & organisations			
M10 - Agri-environment-climate			
M11 - Organic farming			
M12 – Natura 2000 & WFD			
M13 - Areas with constraints			
M14 – Animal welfare			
M15 – Forest-environmental-climate			
M16 - Cooperation			
M17 – Risk management			
M19 - LEADER/CLLD			