

# STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

## Strand highlights

The Stakeholder engagement strand of the networX event looked at three areas of activity – the work of the National Rural Networks (NRNs in Action), how to exchange differing perspectives between stakeholders (Speed Networking) and how to find solutions for improved engagement in future CAP networks (Stakeholder Engagement).

The NRNs in Action session concentrated on current rural network activities and their transferability. The ‘drop-in’ Speed Networking session provided a basis for participants to meet and exchange on rural topics. The Stakeholder Engagement session looked to the future and strengthening and widening network engagement.

### About the strand

**Title:** Stakeholder Engagement

**Dates:** 11-12 April 2019

**Participants:** 144, including representatives of local action groups, research institutes, Managing Authorities, European organisations and the European Commission.

**Speakers:** Anne-Kristen Lucbert (FR – MA), David Armellini (FR – NRN), Michael Fischer, Johanna Rohrofer (AT – NRN), Paweł Krzeczunowicz (PL – NRN), Meeri Maastik, Reve Lambur (EE – NRN), Nils Lagerroth, Ingrid Whitelock (SE – NRN), Oana Neagu (Copa-Cogeca)

**Facilitators:** David Lamb, Katarzyna Panfil, Laura Jalasjoki (ENRD CP), Kaley Hart (IEEP), Riccardo Passero (IT – NRN), Simona Radecka (SK – NRN), Kirsten Birke Lund (DE – LAG), Katerina Vrublova (Copa-Cogeca), Kim Smedslund (FI – PREPARE)

## NRNs IN ACTION

The session in the morning of day 1 looked at the work of the NRNs and aimed to promote and draw lessons from a range of current networking activities, and to assess their transferability for future activity. Working in groups – five led by network support units (Austria, Estonia, France, Poland and Sweden) and one led by Copa-Cogeca - participants were able to discuss any two of six topics which were based on current networking practice.

Two separate discussions looked into interregional project implementation and results transfer. The main message from the respective discussions was that thematic groups should be created to tell the story “before and after project implementation”. Events under such thematic groups need to take place two or three times a year, as this can particularly help to improve local linkages between MAs and stakeholders.

The discussion on the organisation of networking events concluded that events need to include sufficient time for free networking, not to overload the agenda and end with a key message emerging from the event. From this group’s activity and the discussion on engaging with different groups it was suggested that differing communication means, including increased use of short event videos, bloggers or podcasts are needed to reach younger people.

Participants suggested that stakeholders need to be asked what type of communication they prefer e.g. through a survey. The internet or social media can be less relevant for some people whereas traditional



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media and contact with journalists can be useful and vice versa. A combination of communication tools may be needed, and digital solutions can include celebrities, you-tubers and other influencers.

The group discussions on cooperation between all types of stakeholders identified that it can be a struggle to introduce very new actors or to link different projects to create new ideas, it is therefore extremely important to identify connecting points. The conclusions also highlighted the need for the support of agricultural stakeholders and cooperatives for networks and for their involvement in Local Development strategies. For small farmers and rural entrepreneurs, the incentive of being involved is the advice received (AKIS, wellbeing) and their feeling that they are part of the network.



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## SPEED NETWORKING

This short informal session presented an opportunity for networX participants to interact. These light-touch discussions were prompted by rural images, where each short discussion was based on participants describing each image from their own perspective. Discussions took place in pairs and then in groups, with the process ensuring that each participant engaged with every other participant in the room. The ‘surprising’ observation in summing up the session was how much participants had in common rather than what separates our perspectives of rural areas.

## STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT – LOOKING FORWARD

In the session on Stakeholder Engagement participants discussed possible constraints and enablers of effective stakeholder participation in the future CAP network. In considering how to engage with differing stakeholder types the discussion brought out different needs and ambitions of different groups.

Primary producers will form a key group within the CAP networks. Farmers need to feel that they are relevant members in their own right, instead of being the object of the networks’ actions. The types of communication about the networks have to change in order for farmers to truly feel it is ‘theirs’.

Local and territorial organisations need above all to understand the added value of networking beyond their immediate surroundings. Targeted messages about this added value, demonstrating the concrete benefits of networking, would help to reach out to them.

Operational Groups’ challenges relate to the continuity and upscaling of innovation. Closer collaboration with advisory services and rural opinion leaders can ensure additional support for adopting innovations.

Participants suggested that poor engagement of young people is often due to a mistrust of institutions. The first step to overcome this is to ensure that those institutions wanting to reach out to youth take steps themselves to integrate young people who can then be credible role models for others.

Whether and to what extent the CAP network should have a role in promoting local social integration was questioned. Marginalised and disadvantaged rural groups need engagement not only in the CAP network, but most importantly in their immediate rural communities.

For environmental stakeholders, the CAP network must serve the broader purpose of contributing to policy objectives. Mere participation is not a meaningful use of time for environmental advocacy organisations if no policy follow-up can be guaranteed.

All in all, demonstrating the relevance of networking and using appropriate and targeted communication channels are common for all stakeholder groups. In order to be effective, the future CAP networks will need to adopt an active role in brokering the interests of all their stakeholders concerning policy implementation.

“Engaging with people is more important than ever in our modern, fast-paced world. It is therefore critical to take the time to share experiences and knowledge and generate new ideas – across all objectives of the CAP. But engagement needs to be tailored appropriately: use all types of communication – new and old; be relevant; avoid silos and engage the unusual suspects.” – Kaley Hart, IEEP



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