



Report of the 8th meeting of the European Rural Networks' Steering Group

Brussels, 23 October 2017



Morning session

Welcome and Introduction	
<p>9.30 – 10.00 Welcome and Introduction Mario Milouchev, DG AGRI</p>	<p><i>Note: Presentations can be directly downloaded by clicking on the link provided</i></p> <p>Participants were welcomed to the 8th meeting of the Rural Networks' Steering Group. The agenda was presented by the chair of the meeting, Mario Milouchev, (DG AGRI).</p>
Agri-Innovation Summit	
<p>10.00 – 10.30 Feedback of the main points emerging from the Summit, Maria Custódia Correia, Portugal MA Alistair Prior, UK-Scotland NSU Teemu Hauhia, Finland NSU Antonella Zona, DG AGRI</p>	<p>Maria Custódia Correia from the Portuguese Managing Authority, one of the main organisers of the Lisbon AGRI Innovation Summit, thanked the EU Rural Networks and the Commission for their support. She noted that Portuguese farmers have already requested another AGRI Innovation Summit. She also provided the main points and key messages from the Summit, focusing in particular on the first day of the event. The key themes addressed during the first day included resource use, management of farming, food and forestry systems, valorisation of the territory, agriculture 4.0 and rural development.</p> <p>Two National Support Units (NSUs) who participated in the event intervened to give their feedback. For Alistair Prior (UK-Scotland), the key lesson was the importance of better communicating the work of each NSU with others as there are many overlaps, synergies and opportunities with activities in other countries. Teemu Hauhia (Finland) considered the event to be a success as it gave the opportunity for a large group of people to share their innovation experience and examples, such as HORIZON2020 projects, EIP-AGRI Operational Groups (OGs), etc.</p> <p>Antonella Zona (DG AGRI) presented the key messages which emerged from the second day of the Lisbon AGRI Innovation Summit, highlighting the need for multi-level digital planning and for setting up a healthy environment for all innovation players in agriculture and rural areas. The Summit provided valuable input for the EU Rural Networks as it underlined the importance of bottom-up, multi-actor approaches, networking, peer-to-peer and created an opportunity for the exchange of good practices.</p> <p>Steering Group (SG) members asked questions on whether there would be a conclusion paper with recommendations based on the four EU level digitisation events; the administrative burden for OGs (compared to Horizon 2020 projects) and whether environmental NGOs' representation in the Summit could have been increased.</p> <p>Antonella Zona responded that the work of the networks will integrate the findings from these meetings. She stressed that a large part of the Lisbon event was about the implementation of innovative projects and that the work to be done in terms of simplification and better links to H2020 has started and</p>

certainly will continue. All the EU NGOs in the Assembly were invited to the Summit. Maria Custódia Correia added that although 150 farmers or farmers' associations participated in the event, only three to five Portuguese environmental NGOs registered.

RN self-assessment

10.30 – 11.00
Report back from
the self-assessment
process of the
emerging findings
and conclusions,
Sari Rannanpää,
External Expert,
ENRD Contact Point

[Sari Rannanpää](#) presented the main findings of the first Rural Networks' (RNs) Self-assessment exercise. She indicated that the responses from the self-assessment survey gave a positive rating of the overall performance of the rural networks. The survey, which was undertaken during the summer, also achieved a good response rate.

There were no substantive comments on the draft report on the results of the self-assessment exercise. Questions focused on stakeholder participation in National Rural Networks. Antonella Zona stressed the fact that the RNs are not 'closed circles' but open networks where all rural players are free to express their views.

RN self-assessment exercise

11.30 – 12.45
Rural Networks'
Self-assessment
Exercise
ENRD Contact Point

Steering Group members formed three [working groups](#) to discuss the findings of the Rural Networks' self-assessment report, identifying the main recommendations for improvements that can be taken forward for debate in the forthcoming RN Assembly meeting. Recommendations for improving the delivery of each objective of the Strategic Framework were as follows:

Enhanced Participation

- Replicating EU level events at national or local level.
- Involving local practitioners to attract more practical knowledge.
- Need for input from different organisations that work with local stakeholders.
- Strengthening the role of NRNs in communicating and engaging stakeholders.
- NRNs to translate information into their local language to disseminate relevant information.
- Possibility of peer-to-peer or twinning between NRNs that are more advanced with those NRNs that are less advanced.

Improve policy quality

- Networking has contributed to the overall improvement in policy quality on the ground. It remains important to look at weaknesses in the system and address them.
- Need for a platform to share information and experiences with multi-funded Community-led local development (CLLD), allowing development of solutions to improve implementation. The platform should connect local and EU levels.
- Implementing a common template for good practices: what represents a good practice and how to present it.

- Need for more evaluation capacity-building for different stakeholders. Knowledge about evaluation has improved, now new tools are needed to put it into practice.

Increase awareness

- Maximising the multiplier effect within the networks by targeting information to those stakeholders who understand the EU RNs' role and how they work.
- Translation of information to disseminate from EU level to national/regional/local levels. Here the role of NRNs is crucial.
- Strategic approach to communication: information needs to be concise, clear, simple and easy to understand, targeted by types of audience and accompanied by good practice examples.
- Possibility of creating an EU network of Rural Development communicators, following the example of the NRN Innovation Camp held in Finland.

At the end of the morning session, participants were asked to outline one word they would take away from the RNs' self-assessment exercise. The results are shown in a 'word cloud' below.

One word to take away from the self-assessment exercise?



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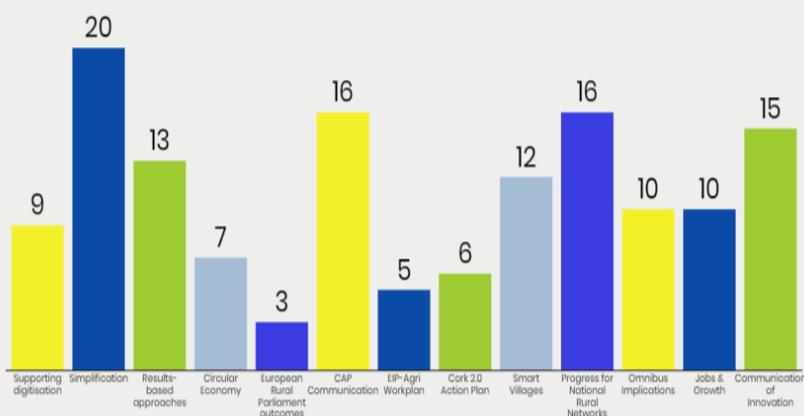
Afternoon session

Proposals for future ENRD activities	
<p>14.15 – 14.30 Planned Network Activities – Michael Gregory, ENRD Contact Point</p>	<p><i>Note: Presentations can be directly downloaded by clicking on the link provided</i></p> <p>Michael Gregory presented the planned activities of the ENRD Contact Point for the fourth year of implementation. Clarification was provided regarding the targeting of Managing Authority (MA) participation in ENRD Priority 1 ‘RDP implementation’ events. The increased involvement of MAs does not entail less involvement of other stakeholders in ENRD activities. Under Priority 1, the aim is to enable exchanges between MAs on technical aspects of RDP implementation.</p> <p>SG members also expressed interest in the work that would focus on Rural Development-related elements of the Omnibus regulation (e.g. simplified cost options). DG AGRI clarified there may be an option to have a workshop once this regulation is approved.</p>
<p>14.30 – 14.45 Planned Network Activities – Hannes Wimmer, ENRD Evaluation Helpdesk</p>	<p>Hannes Wimmer presented an update on the ENRD Evaluation Helpdesk activities, focusing on the published guidelines for the evaluation of LEADER/CLLD, the ongoing thematic work on the evaluation of innovation, the assessment of Annual Implementation Report (AIR) impacts in 2019 and upcoming good practice workshops and capacity building activities.</p> <p>Steering Group participants asked how NRNs are evaluated, including what is working and what is not. They also queried the delays in implementation and low uptake of certain measures. Hannes Wimmer explained how NRNs have in fact already been assessed as part of the RDP evaluation in 2017. The 2018 Helpdesk work programme includes further activities relating to the evaluation of NRNs.</p> <p>Mario Milouchev (DG AGRI) also responded on the issue of a low uptake of measures, stressing that the Commission is exchanging with RDP MAs to improve this situation for next year.</p> <p>A point was raised on the need for further simplification of the LEADER/CLLD evaluation guidelines to make them more user-friendly. It was noted that the LEADER/CLLD guidelines have been shortened and currently comprise 70 pages—one part for the RDPs, and one part for the LAGs. Furthermore, the Commission services are translating these Guidelines into all EU official languages and these translations will be made available in the ENRD Evaluation Helpdesk’s e-library as from December 2017. This forms a good basis for MAs and NSUs to provide capacity building activities and support with the evaluation of LEADER/CLLD.</p>
<p>14.45 - 15.00 Planned Network Activities –</p>	<p>The EIP-AGRI networking activities update was presented by Koen Desimpelaere who highlighted the EIP-AGRI networking priorities and process for 2018, resulting from discussions within the Subgroup on Innovation.</p>

<p>Koen Desimpelaere, EIP-AGRI Service Point</p>	<p>Following his presentation, SG members asked how certain areas would be reflected in the work plan – specifically forestry and digitisation, including digital infrastructure. A follow-up point was raised on the need for improved coordination between the two networks, particularly for networking activities in 2018.</p> <p>Mario Milouchev responded that there are other DGs which also deal with digitisation, and it is recognised as a cross-cutting topic. Forestry may not be very well represented in the 2018 networking programme, but this is an outcome of an ongoing process of discussion.</p> <p>Regarding the connection between ENRD and EIP activities, Koen recognised there are similar aspects e.g. soil and water quality themes running in both networks. DG AGRI will make sure that the activities are complementary and synergies are assured.</p>
<p>Group discussions</p>	
<p>15:30 – 16:00 CAP Consultation: - Ricard Ramon i Sumoy DG AGRI Unit C1 Overview of the main outcomes emerging from the CAP consultation process and conference</p>	<p><i>Note: Presentations can be directly downloaded by clicking on the link provided</i></p> <p>Ricard Ramon y Sumoy (DG AGRI) presented the main outcomes of the Public Consultation on the future of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). He assured the audience the results of the public consultation will feed into the Communication and the legislative proposal, along with other activities (technical seminars), but it will not pre-empt the development of the legislative proposal. All input and analysis will be considered and will contribute to the future legislation. Budgetary discussions will come at a later stage.</p> <p>The European Commission is expected to publish the CAP Communication on the Future of Food & Farming at the end of November 2017.</p>
<p>15:30 – 17:00 Preparing the Assembly, Michael Gregory ENRD Contact Point Interactive exercise and discussion in working groups</p>	<p>Michael Gregory outlined an interactive exercise to identify agenda items for the forthcoming Rural Networks’ Assembly (RN Assembly) based on topics identified by the 7th Rural Networks’ SG Meeting (Communication on the future of the CAP, results of the RNs’ self-assessment). Four additional topics were then suggested by SG participants: Progress of NRNs, Omnibus Implementation, Jobs & Growth and the Communication of Innovation.</p> <p>Following an online vote (as shown in the graph below), five topics were selected for further discussion in working groups tasked with developing a rationale for their inclusion in the RN Assembly agenda.</p> <p>Groups reported the following findings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - CAP communication – This topic is important for the RN Assembly, as the rural agenda needs to be promoted. The headline should be “rural areas are good for you”. - Results-based approach – If there is to be a move from approaches based on compliance to an approach focused on delivering results there is a

	<p>need to know how the approach will be implemented, including associated risks and opportunities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Role of NRNs - We are moving into the fifth year of the programming period, NRNs are at different levels. It is important that the NRNs provide and demonstrate added value, there is a need to see what can be learnt among the NRNs. - Communication of innovation - The knowledge available (for instance about digital opportunities for farmers and rural businesses) should be made more accessible to farmers and the other rural players. Rural networks have a key role to play, and there should be more synergies and less duplication (a single database for LEADER/EIP-AGRI OGs was suggested, including making project data and offers easily accessible). - Simplification –The CAP is still too complex. There is a fear of making mistakes and overall many layers of implementation (RDP vs greening). The RN could enable an EU level exchange of solutions implemented in different Member States/regions. "Simplification should be simplified."
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Which topics should we pitch to the Rural Networks' Assembly?



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Outlook

17.00 – 17.30

Outlook and Closing Remarks
Mario Milouchev, DG AGRI

[Nicolas Adamides](#) of the Permanent Representation of Cyprus to the EU informed the SG about the forthcoming 9th NRN Meeting taking place in Nicosia, Cyprus on November 15th.

In closing remarks, the Chair thanked the participants for their active participation. He reiterated the positive results of the RN's self-assessment, underlining the importance of networking. He also highlighted areas where further work might be needed, such as coordination of the two networks, better communication and cooperation and widening of the networking activities in thematic and in geographical scope (outside EU).

	<p>The Chair noted the topics the SG suggested to bring forward to the Assembly, stressing the need for careful consideration of all areas. The Assembly will be a good opportunity to elaborate further on key elements of importance for the rural networks, particularly in view of the CAP communication which is due to be adopted by the end of November.</p>
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