



6th Thematic Group meeting

The sixth meeting of the Thematic Group (TG) brought together around 45 stakeholders from 18 different countries and a wide range of organisations to explore the toolkit of policy instruments that can support the implementation of Smart Village Strategies/Plans.

The meeting concluded that LEADER/CLLD, cooperation and digital strategies can play an important role in supporting a set of actions that can enable the implementation of Smart Villages Strategies/Plans. Additionally, there are opportunities for leveraging in further investments through the EU Cohesion Policy and Financial Instruments, among others.

Event Information

Date: 5 December 2018

Location: Brussels, Belgium

Participants: 45 participants - including EU institutions, European organisations, Managing Authorities, National Rural Networks, Local Action Groups (LAGs) and researchers.

Outcomes: Preliminary orientations on how LEADER/CLLD, cooperation and future CAP digital strategies can support Smart Villages.

Website: [6th TG meeting on Smart Villages](#)

Overview of policy instruments supporting Smart Villages



Stefan Ostergard (DG AGRI) explained that Smart Villages Strategies can make a significant contribution to the specific objective of Vibrant Rural Areas, as well as other objectives in the future CAP regulation. Stefan highlighted the key features that make Cooperation interventions - including LEADER/CLLD - a particularly versatile and flexible tool.

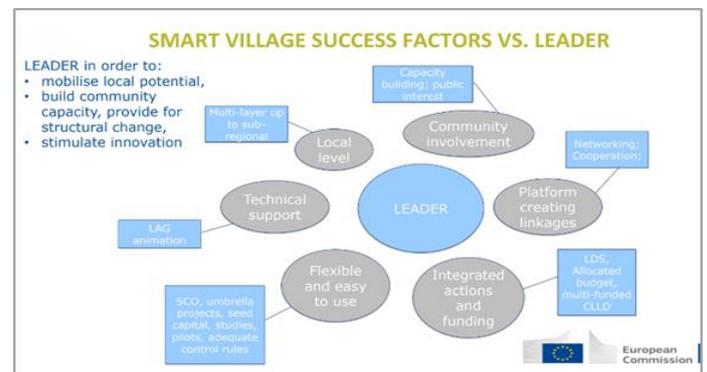
- Support may cover up to 100 % of eligible cooperation activities costs;
- Cooperation operations may include animation and investments in project implementation;
- Cooperation can be combined with other CAP Strategic Plan interventions (e.g. investments, advice, etc);
- Eligibility criteria should be defined by Member States.



Louis Mahy (DG AGRI) explained that digital strategies should be described in future CAP Plans. They have to cover a complex policy environment made up of many programmes and sources of funding. The support from the CAP should form part of these integrated strategies and target needs in agriculture and rural areas through support to research and innovation, digital take-up and building the capacities of local actors and SMEs. Digital Innovation Hubs can play an important role in bringing together these different components.



Karolina Jasinska (DG AGRI) indicated that LEADER/CLLD “has it all for being one the main vehicles for driving Smart Villages - as long as all the features (of the LEADER approach) are present. Yet, to play to its full potential, LEADER/CLLD needs to be complemented by an enabling environment (larger scale investments, regulatory environment, coordination)”. All the LEADER principles can and do support Smart Villages. But LEADER/CLLD has particular strengths in mobilising local potential; building community capacity; creating the conditions for structural change; and stimulating community-led innovation. Effective multi-funded CLLD can provide an important boost.



Toolkit of CAP policy instruments to support Smart Villages

This section presents some initial ideas about how certain CAP policy instruments can support Smart Villages now and in the future. It does not represent any official view or opinion, but simply serves as a starting point to develop future ENRD briefs for policy-makers.

LEADER/CLLD and Smart Villages

[Gabriel O'Connell](#) (LAG) illustrated how LEADER/CLLD is implemented in Ireland, through a one-stop shop, Irish LAGs already provide support in a variety of fields such as rural jobs, social inclusion, migration, social enterprise and health-wellbeing, drawing support from different EU and national policies. LEADER is described as the “*locomotive of the train*” that drives development in rural areas. Effective multi-funding could ensure that LEADER/CLLD has the agility and flexibility to support Smart Villages even more successfully.



Initial recommendations presented by [Eamon O'Hara](#) were enriched by many ideas from participants:

- > Increase and **simplify access to funding** for collective/small/risky projects.
- > Increase **resources for animation** and recognise LAGs' role in preparing the ground for wider initiatives.
- > Strengthen **LAGs' mandate to operate in new fields** and support links with new partners.
- > Strengthen leverage/alignment with **other funds/policies**.
- > **Avoid displacement**, the top-down imposition of priorities and/or the duplication of structures or programmes.
- > Establish effective **multi-funding** and a delivery system that strengthens LAGs' ability to support Smart Villages.
- > Ensure that **indicators** and metrics capture LAGs' strategic role in supporting structural change and transition.

Cooperation and Smart Villages

[Alistair Prior](#) (Scottish NRN) argued that Smart Villages Strategies/Plans need to be based on an understanding of the institutional and policy landscape in each place as well as local needs and opportunities. They must build on and complement what exists and not add an additional layer of complexity. In Scotland, many LAGs cover extremely large territories and many smaller scale community organisations have emerged – supported in part by an enabling national policy framework as well as by the LAGs themselves. Cooperation (M16) has mainly been used to support collaboration between farmers and research but it could be extended to scale up local Smart Villages initiatives and improve collaboration among stakeholders on common challenges.

Initial recommendations presented by [Mark Redman](#) were enriched by many ideas from participants:

- > **Broader cooperation interventions** can build on and complement the activities supported by LEADER/CLLD in a number of ways – by scaling up local initiatives, increasing collaboration and leveraging in expertise on common challenges; and by supporting local cooperation where LEADER is unable to intervene.
- > Access to **innovation brokers** and other forms of technical assistance and sources of knowledge can play an important role.
- > The EIP-AGRI model of Operational Groups has mainly been applied to build better links between farmers and research but there are lessons that could be applied to support **innovation on wider rural issues**.
- > Cooperation interventions should be seen as part of a coherent **toolkit which builds on the existing policy landscape** to complement support to local communities. It is important to build synergies with LEADER and avoid duplication.

Digital Strategies and Smart Villages

[Katharine Willis](#) (University of Plymouth, UK) provided a summary of the main lessons from 4 ENRD Case Studies of digital strategies in France, Germany, Spain and the UK. The cases show that major investments in infrastructure are taking place in all these countries but that there is still a need to match this with investments in skills and capacity building. Enabling frameworks for coordination between national, regional and local levels are required - as well as support for multisectoral partnerships and platforms. Participants added to Katherine's original recommendations for ensuring that digital strategies act as an effective tool for building Smart Villages:

- > Ensure that digital strategies are based on local needs and opportunities by encouraging participative processes of **co-design**;
- > Support **local rural digital hubs** adapted to local circumstances; involve **digital champions** in the community, the municipalities and the private sector; and build **network software platforms** that enable e-governance, coordination and upskilling that link village and regional level initiatives.

