



Report of the 9th meeting of the European Rural Networks' Steering Group

Brussels, 25 May 2018



Morning session

Welcome and Introduction	
<p>9.30 – 10.00 Welcome and Introduction Mario Milouchev, DG AGRI</p>	<p>The key objectives of the 9th Steering Group Meeting were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To discuss the planned and recent activities of the European Rural Networks - To discuss outcomes of the 11th OECD Rural Development Conference ‘Enhancing Rural Innovation’, Edinburgh - To exchange on the ideas for ENRD activities in the following year <p>In opening the meeting, the chair welcomed participants and made a short remark on the upcoming proposals for the new legal texts for the Future CAP, reassuring the Steering Group that, once published, there will be plenty of time to discuss them, including at the next Steering Group meeting. He also shared the ambition of the Commission to have an agreement on the new Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) by the end of the current European Parliament term – the EC proposal on the new MFF was published on May 2nd.</p>
Enhancing Rural Innovation	
<p>10.00 – 10.30 Feedback of the main points emerging from the Rural Development Conference, Edinburgh Alistair Prior, UK-Scotland NSU, Niclas Purfürst Swedish MA</p>	<p>The 11th OECD Rural Development Conference on Enhancing Rural Innovation held on 9-12 April in Edinburgh, Scotland was a highly successful event. It was hosted by the Scottish Government, the European Commission, and the UK Government and supported by the Scottish Rural Network and the ENRD Contact Point. Over 440 delegates from 27 countries gathered to discuss and share experiences on “Enhancing Rural Innovation”. The event highlighted the 10 key drivers of rural change and recommended the development of an integrated policy approach to capitalise on them. It concluded with the adoption of the Edinburgh Rural Policy Statement, which calls for making the most of rural innovation opportunities to drive job creation and economic growth.</p> <p>Alistair Prior (UK-Scotland NSU) showed a short video capturing thoughts during the event. He commented that organising the event had sometimes been challenging, but, by working together and thinking outside the box, the organisers had delivered a conference which showcased many rich examples of rural resilience. Niclas Purfürst (Niclas Purfürst Swedish MA) highlighted the need to engage with rural people and build trust and capacity between all rural inhabitants.</p>
Proposals for the future ENRD activities – ENRD Contact Point. Group discussions	
<p>11.00 - 11.15 Overview of proposals, Michael Gregory, ENRD CP</p>	<p>Following a presentation of ENRD Contact Point proposed activities for 2018-2019, participants discussed and fed back their comments in two rounds – the first on capacity building priorities, the second on thematic priorities.</p>

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<p>11:15 – 12:00</p> <p>Capacity Building: Interactive exercise and discussion</p>	<p>Round 1: Capacity Building Priorities</p> <p>Working Group 1: Supporting more effective and simpler programme implementation</p> <p>The discussion focused on four topics that are under consideration for the upcoming year – risk management; new entrants, farm exchanges and demonstration activities; farm restructuring and modernisation; and the future CAP delivery model.</p> <p>For risk management, the starting point for work in the coming year should be at the farm level and then scaled up to a more holistic approach. The implementation of the risk management toolkit available under the current framework should be encouraged in more MSs with a view to the future programming period.</p> <p>For new entrants, farm exchanges and farm restructuring and modernisation, an integrated approach should be taken through ENRD CP activity to bring in measures such as advisory services, investments and young farmers with a specific focus on small farms, also exploring synergies with specific support schemes available under Pillar 1 (particularly for young farmers and small farms). Good practices of innovation and cooperation by new entrants should be presented.</p> <p>Finally, for the event on the new delivery model, the focus should be more technical and directed towards MAs, PAs and NRNs, considering their possible future role.</p> <p>Working Group 2: Strengthening NRNs and NSUs</p> <p>There was strong interest in developing clusters of NRN-driven activity. Some geographical clusters are already being created, but consideration should also be given to the development of thematic clusters - for example, by launching an evaluation (or survey) of the interest in common new themes.</p> <p>Participants welcomed the idea of a major Rural Networking Conference which is provisionally suggested to take place in spring 2019. The conference would engage a broad range of networks and stakeholders to showcase and present the role and the importance of networking, including awards for networking activities that have produced clear added value. An event of this kind, marking the 10th anniversary of rural networking, should reflect on successes and on lessons learned but should also be forward-looking, and consider topics such as cooperation, innovation and digitisation.</p> <p>Working Group 3: Simpler and more effective rolling out of CLLD</p>
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	<p>One of the main recommendations was to overcome gaps in communication between stakeholders, and to engage with the full range of CLLD actors (LAGs, LAG cooperation networks (EU and national), NRNs, MAs, PAs).</p> <p>It was noted that the principles of CLLD and its essential networking elements still need to be better understood – particularly by MAs. Hence, the work on simplification and multi-funding should continue; at the same time, future work should also consider how CLLD can best respond to new challenges.</p> <p>The focus should be on practical examples of approaches with tangible outcomes, peer-to-peer exchanges between more “advanced” and less “advanced” MAs, aimed to build trust in the LEADER delivery chain.</p> <p>Regarding communication, the emphasis should be on “speaking the local language” – keeping the local stakeholders in mind when communicating about CLLD and networking; and in making better use of existing information by creating a gradually more customised ENRD website experience with tutorials and promotional materials.</p>
<p>12:00 – 13:00</p> <p>Thematic Priorities: Interactive exercise and discussion</p>	<p>Round 2: Thematic Priorities</p> <p>Working Group 4: Smart and Competitive Rural Areas</p> <p>The Smart Villages Thematic Group should continue, acting as a focal point or platform for the considerable momentum that is building up around this subject at all levels. The ENRD Smart Villages portal should be revamped to provide easily accessible information on the initiatives taking place at different levels, with different entry points (digital, energy, urban rural) and in different parts of Europe.</p> <p>The most urgent task for next year, however, is to clarify and provide orientation about how existing and future policy instruments and funds can be used and combined to create a more enabling environment for smart villages. This could take the form of fact sheets covering, for example, smart village strategies, the use of specific policy instruments (CLLD, Cooperation), and how best to combine different funds and sources of finance.</p> <p>There should be further work with EU stakeholders on more integrated approaches towards <u>digital</u> innovation (involvement in the EIP-AGRI seminar on multi-level digital strategies, BCO guidance on community broadband, INTERREG on Smart (Digital) Villages in the Alpine area, and other projects).</p> <p>Working Group 5: Supporting the transition to the Green Economy</p>

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	<p>The proposal is to continue the thematic work on greening the rural economy, resource efficiency and water and soils by focusing on ‘Mainstreaming the bio-economy’.</p> <p>Participants recommended narrowing the scope of the analysis, defining a clear focus and concentrating on the opportunities that the bio-economy can bring to the development of rural areas.</p> <p>Based on a preliminary scoping analysis, the TG should centre its work on the development of value chains. However, the focus should not be of a purely economic nature; it should also consider the impacts of bio-based business models on the environment, climate and biodiversity.</p> <p>The TG should ensure synergies with other networks and stakeholders in order to avoid replicating the work already done under other initiatives on this topic (for example, by EIP AGRI).</p> <p>Working Group 6: Responding to demographic change and promoting social inclusion in rural areas</p> <p>Participants discussed whether there is an EU-wide vision for generational renewal which can inspire all the work on this topic - and on social inclusion more generally. The umbrella concept could be that of enhancing rural attractiveness. Based on recent experience, activities in this field should be inspired by young people themselves, through a real bottom-up approach.</p> <p>As a preliminary step, there is a need to map what Member States are already doing in support of youth and generational renewal. This should consider different models of support and/or the use of different funds, rather than just carrying out case studies. The initial work could also explore whether there are already operational networks (formal or informal), such as urban-based networks, and link these to the activity of the rural networks.</p>
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Afternoon session

Advanced Gateway to EU Meetings	
<p>15:00 – 15:15</p> <p>AGM – Advanced Gateway to EU meetings – Athéné Neszmélyi, DG AGRI, Unit I.4</p>	<p>The Commission representative gave a presentation on Advanced Gateway to EU meetings (AGM), the new online system which will be used for meeting organisation and reimbursements of travel expenses. All key elements of the AGM were presented and described (i.e. advantages, usage, roles, main changes). In addition to the basic presentation, practical examples and guidance were also provided.</p>

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Planned Network Activities	
<p>15.45 - 16.15</p> <p>Planned Network Activities – Veronique Rébholz, EIP-AGRI Service Point</p>	<p>The EIP-AGRI Service Point presented its activities for this year. This was followed by a request to have an activity on how to overcome the obstacles encountered in the promotion of digitisation in agriculture. There was also a suggestion to provide information about the different models of innovation support services across the EU in order to provide inspiration and to promote cross-fertilisation among EU Member States.</p> <p>There was a further request to have an updated online version of the description of Operational Groups approved in the different regions and Member States. The Service Point explained that the OGs that are uploaded on the EIP website are those that are officially approved and communicated by the MS to the Commission through SFC.</p>
<p>16.15 – 16.45</p> <p>Planned Network Activities – Hannes Wimmer, Evaluation Help Desk</p>	<p>The ENRD Evaluation Helpdesk presented its activities for this year with a main focus on preparing the Member States for the upcoming evaluation activities to be carried in 2019. During the discussion, a question arose on whether there will be trainings for stakeholders concerning the future CAP indicators and monitoring systems. The EC representative informed that there will be an information point in this respect during the next meeting of the Expert Group on Monitoring and Evaluating the CAP on 19 September. The Good Practice Workshop on “Showing the added value of LEADER/CLLD through evaluation” was considered highly useful, and a need to provide even more practical examples on the topic was highlighted. The FAME/FARNET Evaluating CLLD - Handbook for LAGs and FLAGS was also welcomed.</p>
Outlook	
<p>16.45 – 17.15</p> <p>Report Back, Outlook and Closing Remarks Mario Milouchev, DG AGRI</p>	<p>At the end of the meeting, the Chair called for preliminary ideas for the Steering Group Meeting on 22nd October and agenda items for the EU Rural Networks' Assembly on 11th December. No particular suggestions (in addition to the inclusion of the discussion on the forthcoming legal texts on CAP post-2020) were made.</p> <p>As regards future preparations of the Governance meetings, an intervention from the floor was made stressing the need to make available the presentations and documents in advance.</p> <p>In closing the meeting, the Chair praised the collaboration seen in the organisation and delivery of the OECD event, stressing the value of the Edinburgh Declaration which he considered to be an inspiring document. Moreover, he welcomed SG members' satisfaction with the proposed activities of the EU Rural Networks and reassured them that their valuable suggestions made will be taken into account.</p>

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