

## Working Document

# Background briefing: Collective approaches

## 1.1 Introduction

The overall aim of this short briefing is to:

- provide a summary of experience to date with collective approaches in the field of rural development policy and its relationship to the sustainable management of water and soils; and
- identify knowledge gaps and areas where research for the TG could add value in the context of Rural Development Programmes (RDPs).

## 1.2 What are collective approaches?

Collective action, fostered through collective approaches, is typically defined as: *“the action taken by a group (either directly or on its behalf through an organisation) in pursuit of members’ perceived shared interests”* (Marshall, 1998).

The key point is that the action is taken towards ‘shared interests’ and involves multiple actors. Other terms may also be used, such as cooperation or collaboration, to describe the same types of actions. Indeed, this is precisely what the LEADER approach has epitomised through the development of projects through Local Action Groups over many years. However, the LEADER approach has not been used in a mainstream way for agricultural land management to date. The current cooperation measure (M16) under the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) was expanded in 2014 to promote these types of activities more widely (see below). The forms that collective approaches take can be many and varied, depending on the issue to be addressed and the situation locally. They can be instigated from the bottom up (the initiative coming from farmers or other local actors, community-led and bringing a variety of stakeholders together to generate action), top down (the initiative coming from public authorities) or a combination of both (where actions are coordinated between practitioners and authorities).

Collective approaches can be organised via:

- Collectives as formalised entities: Farmers / land managers coming together to jointly deliver agreed objectives via an organised and formalised ‘collective’ or ‘cooperative’ (e.g. the current Dutch approach to agri-environment-climate measure (AECM) delivery);
- Less formalised approaches: Activities taken by a group of farmers / land managers and potentially with the involvement of other local stakeholders to meet commonly agreed goals – more loosely facilitated through some form of key person in the local area and without establishing a formal collective entity;

It is important to note that collective approaches can be stimulated at the territorial scale (e.g. horizontally across a watershed, a landscape or an administrative region) or bring actors and activities together up and down a supply chain (e.g. vertically). In relation to RDPs, depending on the objective of the collective approach, these may make use of one single measure or, more commonly, multiple

measures in combination to achieve the desired outcomes. Collective approaches do not necessitate negotiating joint agreements with land managers (although this is also possible). For example, farmers could have individual agreements to undertake activities on their land, but the aim would be to have the majority of farmers taking action within an area and agreements would be agreed within the context of the overall agreed strategy and priorities for the area (such as a river basin management plan).

### **1.3 What are the benefits of collective action / cooperation?**

Collective or collaborative / cooperative approaches are increasingly seen as having merit, not just for achieving environmental objectives, but also for social and economic reasons too. The main added value of promoting collective action from an environmental perspective is as a means of achieving improved environmental outcomes across a wider area or throughout a supply chain. The importance of achieving action throughout a geographical area has been promoted for some time. For example, in 2011 the European Court of Auditors stated "In certain cases it might be necessary to have in a particular geographical area a minimum number of farmers signing a contract. Such cases can be to maintain (...) local landscape, to reduce pollution (...) or protect certain species (...). Expenditure for a few individual contracts may not be effective in such cases. One way to ensure that a sufficiently large group of farmers delivers the necessary environmental benefits is through collective approaches." (ECA, 2011<sup>1</sup>)

Because collective action involves dialogue between multiple actors, often with different perspectives, this allows the objectives for a particular area, for example, to be debated and agreed. In so doing it allows the synergies and trade-offs between different objectives to be identified and action agreed to maximise those synergies and minimise the trade-offs. Once these objectives have been agreed, this allows for more tailored tools to be designed to deliver these, which in turn should be more effective. Finally, the process of engagement and dialogue often leads to greater ownership and commitment to achieving the outcomes by all those involved in the process, including land managers and this commitment tends to be retained in the longer term and can lead to more sustained changes in behaviour.

Traditionally land management support has been provided via agreements between the state and individual farmers, often implemented in a very atomistic way, responding to the interest of the farmer. While individual contracts are not ruled out under collective approaches, what is required is more focussed attention on the need for action throughout a particular area or supply chain. This requires the buy-in of multiple actors and multiple farmers within a particular area. Key to the success of these types of initiatives tends to be the presence of a local 'champion' or 'facilitator', someone who can get the initiative off the ground and with the creativity and energy to bring people together to solve a challenge / problem and build trust to enable joint working. This person tends to act as the lynchpin around which activities and ideas evolve. This point is already well recognised through experience with the LEADER approach and the inclusion of the cooperation measure (M16) within the EAFRD.

### **1.4 Potential for collective and cooperative approaches within RDPs**

The 2014-2020 rural development policy puts far greater emphasis on the importance of collective and co-operative approaches for environmental purposes by making available a range of tools aimed at encouraging the spread of good practices in the management of natural resources. Measure 16 (Article 35) of the EAFRD regulation (the cooperation measure) is most commonly associated with funding

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<sup>1</sup> ECA, Special Report No 7/2011: Is agri-environment support well designed and managed?"

collective or cooperative approaches within RDPs. However, collective action as defined above can relate to any type of multi-actor type approach and therefore need not be restricted to the use of measure 16. For example, the agri-environment-climate measure (M10) and the organic farming measure (M11) allow for a higher proportion of transaction costs within the payment calculation where agreements involve groups of farmers. In addition, any other RDP measure could be used to provide support to advice, investments, processing, marketing etc. within the context of a collective approach either at the territorial scale or throughout the supply chain.

Nonetheless, M16 is important as it provides funding that focuses on the bringing together of stakeholders, supporting various forms of cooperation, including partnerships, clusters and networks for a range of different areas of activity, including water and soils. These partnerships can then develop funding ideas and identify the types of actions to be funded using other measures. The sub-measures that are could have some relevance to the TG's work on soils and water are:

- *M16.1 - support for the establishment and operation of operational groups of the EIP for agricultural productivity and sustainability*
- *M16.4 - support for horizontal and vertical cooperation among supply chain actors for the establishment and development of short supply chains and local markets and for promotion activities in a local context relating to the development of short supply chains and local markets (where these are linked to promoting products based on their resource efficiency credentials)*
- *M16.5 - support for joint action undertaken with a view to mitigating or adapting to climate change and for joint approaches to environmental projects and ongoing environmental practices*
- *M16.6 - support for cooperation among supply chain actors for sustainable provision of biomass for use in food and energy production and industrial processes*
- *M16.7 - support for non-CLLD strategies*
- *M16.8 - support for drawing up of forest management plans or equivalent instruments*
- *M16.9 - support for diversification of farming activities into activities concerning health care, social integration, community-supported agriculture and education about the environment and food.*

However, despite the potential benefits of collective/ cooperative approaches to land management are as yet not very widespread in the EU. Key barriers to collective action are commonly found to be:

- The absence of a local 'champion', 'facilitator' or 'animator' to kick start the process;
- The fact that collective action is often seen as more complicated to organise and facilitate and the legal status of the actors cooperating (and implications that this has for who can apply for payments under the RDP);
- Issues of building trust and historical connotations of 'collective' approaches – this is particularly the case in central and eastern European countries, where historical and cultural factors influence the degree to which individuals are happy to work collaboratively and where building trust between different actors is not straightforward;
- Issues of cost, especially concerns over higher transaction costs involved, what costs are permissible under RDP measures and the calculation of eligible costs;
- Issues of accountability and who is responsible if objectives are not achieved;
- How to balance individual group/territorial priorities vs. local, regional, national and wider EU priorities to ensure that objectives agreed locally help contribute to and do not undermine broader regional or national objectives;

- The timing with respect to the application windows in cases where the use of multiple RDP measures is required – for example first the partnership/ network may require setting up before applying for funding under the AECM.

### 1.5 Some examples of collective approaches to land management in the EU

Although not as common as individual approaches to land management, collective/ cooperative approaches for delivery of environmental benefits are growing in number in the EU. This is largely due to the recognition that to address many environmental issues, for example reversing habitat and species declines, improving water quality, more joined up action is required across areas greater than individual farms. Examples are also emerging, particularly in relation to water management and climate action, where common objectives and actions are required throughout the supply chain. Many of these are funded via RDPs.

In the field of environmental land management, in the past few years the most widely discussed ‘collective/ cooperative approach’ is that taken by the Dutch government to the delivery of their AECM from 2016 onwards (see box below). This is a very specific example where AECM agreements, focused on biodiversity conservation, are delivered via 40 certified collectives who have a legal identity and are accepted as the beneficiaries of the AECM support. They also submit payment claims and check that the relevant management is carried out by members of the collective and apply sanctions for non-compliance where necessary.

Other examples of collective / cooperative action being promoted on agricultural land and funded via RDPs include (for more information see boxes below):

- **Hungary:** the cooperation measure (M16) has been used to set up a ‘landscape farming’ initiative to facilitate cooperation and to help support the implementation of harmonised regional approaches to environmental management involving groups of farmers, focused on improving the resilience of the farmed landscape to climate change;
- **Italy (Marche region):** in the 2007-13 period a number of RDP measures have been used to develop an area-focussed agri-environment scheme centred around peach production in Valdaso, Italy. Both the AECM and advice measures are used to promote the uptake of advanced integrated pest management techniques for crop protection, instead of the intensive use of fertilisers and pesticides) to improve soil and water quality [NB: this example is being currently updated to show how this has evolved for the 2014-2020 period].
- **United Kingdom (England):** the Countryside Stewardship (AECM) facilitation fund<sup>2</sup> supports people and organisations that bring farmers, foresters and other land managers together to improve the local natural environment at a landscape scale.
- **United Kingdom (Scotland):** An Environmental Co-operation Action Fund (ECAAF) has been developed using sub-measure 16.5 to promote the delivery of landscape-scale environmental projects by groups of farmers, foresters and other land managers.

The ongoing PEGASUS H2020 project<sup>3</sup>, focussing on finding more effective and long-lasting approaches to delivering environmental and social benefits from agricultural and forest land alongside food, timber and fuel, carried out 34 case studies in 10 Member States, many of which could be classified as collective action. These range from a group of farmers coming together in Estonia to promote grass-fed beef (working collectively to add value to the product by promoting its taste and environmental

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guide-to-countryside-stewardship-facilitation-fund>

<sup>3</sup> <http://pegasus.ieep.eu/>

credentials to chefs in the capital Tallinn and into Sweden) to the private water companies (e.g. Volvic, Evian, Vittel) working collectively with local communities and farmers to influence the management of the areas of land to minimise pollution of the water sources on which they depend, thereby reducing their water clean-up costs. These collective initiatives are not as embedded in RDP implementation as those highlighted previously, although they all use RDP measures in some way to fund the environmental management identified as a priority via the collective initiative.

**RDP supported examples:**

**The Dutch cooperative approach to the agri-environment-climate scheme (NL)**

In 2016, the Dutch government introduced a new scheme within the RDP for the delivery of the agri-environment-climate measure (AECM), allowing for group applications only. This goes hand in hand with the long Dutch tradition of agri-environment cooperatives. The scheme was promoted for multiple reasons:

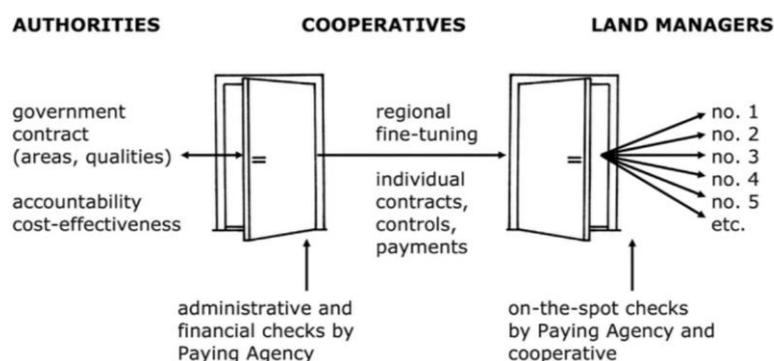
Its effectiveness. In the context of a debate on agri-environment schemes, it was felt that to address the decline in farmland biodiversity required a cross-farm approach and regional cooperation;

1. The need to increase flexibility in terms of the content of conservation activities, their exact location and their financial compensation. Making cooperatives the final beneficiaries of agri-environment support allows for a simpler scheme design, with room for local fine-tuning of activities and payments;
2. The previous individual, agri-environment-climate scheme had a relatively high error rate. The collective scheme is associated with simpler administrative processes and improved compliance.

This collective scheme is based on the so-called ‘front door – back door principle’ according to which the government signs a 6-year contract with regional cooperatives. It also sets agri-environment targets and describe the types of conservation activities that will be used to achieve the targets. The agreement establishes a results-based obligation for specific habitats over a specified area at a budget per habitat based on the average payments per hectare for the different activities. 40 certified cooperatives are accepted as beneficiaries of AECM support and are in charge of making the contracts with individual land users.

A landscape scale approach is taken, with conservation measures set at habitat level. Tailor-made controls operate according to a two-tier system. Separate checks are undertaken on the contracted area and on compliance with contract obligations, i.e. activities and commitments. Individual breaches concerning eligibility criteria lead to penalties corresponding only to the area of farmland involved.

There are some challenges associated with this collective scheme. There is a concern about the balance between



*The "front door – back door system" of the Dutch agri-environment scheme with a key role for agri-environment cooperatives as final beneficiaries*

regional self-regulation and a governmental straightjacket, as well as adequate participation from conservationists and other non-farmers.

More information on the scheme can be accessed here:

[https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/sites/enrd/files/w12\\_collective-approach\\_nl.pdf](https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/sites/enrd/files/w12_collective-approach_nl.pdf)

### **Landscape farming via the cooperation measure (HU)**

The landscape farming cooperation measure in Hungary has recently been launched to pilot a landscape wide results based approach to environmental management.

The aim of the measure is to facilitate, by encouraging cooperation between farmers and supporting implementation, the application of harmonised regional approaches to improve climate resilience in the countryside by:

1. improving water balance through the water retention rehabilitation of water systems ( the preservation and retention of water for periods of water scarcity so as to mitigate the damages caused by excess surface water and drought)
2. re-creating the close-to-natural spatial structure of the landscape, rehabilitation of ecological network features,
3. halting the fragmentation of habitats, thereby increasing biodiversity (creation, rehabilitation and enhancement of habitats)
4. improving the sustainability of natural resource management as a result of the use of renewable energy sources,
5. Reducing soil degradation,
6. facilitating efforts to increase C sequestration and the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions,

In the target areas for 'landscape farming' payments will be based on the environmental performance of farms, calculated by a green point assessment (points awarded for performance against different 'green' indicators).

### **The Valdaso Agri-environmental agreement (IT)**

In 2009, the RDP of the Marche region in Italy established an Agri-Environmental Agreement (AEA) focussed on specific environmental goals within the Valdaso area, centred around peach production. The initiative stemmed from the needs of a small group of farmers, part of the local farmers' association Nuova Agricoltura. In particular, these farmers were willing to adopt integrated management techniques at territorial level to reduce the detrimental impacts of local farming systems on soil and water. The AEA continues to be funded under the 2014 – 2020 RDP.

The AEA involves a set of commitments for farmers in a limited area, supported through a mix of RDP measures (advice and the AECM in the 2007-13 period), which can be activated to reach a number of specific goals. For instance, these include a 30% reduction in macronutrients (nitrogen, phosphorous and potassium) and the substitution of agri-chemical inputs. The adoption of advanced integrated pest management techniques for crop protection, instead of chemical products by a large number of local farmers, has already reduced the sources of pollution for both soils and water.

The implementation of the agreement was successful for two main reasons. On the one hand, effective institutional support for farmers' collective action; on the other, the integration of technical requirements in tailored policy tools, thanks to the support ensured by local institutions and by ASSAM (regional extension service). Collective action ensured positive effects on advisory, learning and networking, increasing the level of trust and reciprocity among farmers, creating both environmental and knowledge effects in the valley.

More information on the agreement can be accessed here: <http://pegasus.ieep.eu/case-studies/list-of-case-studies#italy>

### **The Countryside Stewardship facilitation fund (UK-England)**

As a means to support the implementation of agri-environment scheme included in the 2014-2020 England RDP, the Countryside Stewardship facilitation fund supports people and organisations that bring farmers, foresters and other land managers together to improve the local natural environment at a landscape scale. The principle is of partnerships working together to deliver environmental benefits, including farm clusters.

Facilitators have the aim to work with a group of new or existing land managers to, among other things, develop cooperation and agree on the group's priorities. To qualify for funding the group has to undertake activities, on at least 2000 ha, to deliver Countryside Stewardship priorities. The activities needs to be new to land managers as a result of cooperation, such as aligning land management activities across different parts of the holdings to deliver at a landscape scale.

Facilitation funding are awarded to successful applicants through a competitive process and varies depending on the number of holdings involved in the group and the type of work the facilitators has to undertake. Priority for funding is given to approaches which show partnership and a collective approach across holdings, going beyond individual holdings acting in isolation.

More information on the facilitation fund can be accessed here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guide-to-countryside-stewardship-facilitation-fund>

### **The Environmental Co-operation Action Fund (ECAF) (UK - Scotland)**

The cooperation measure (M16.5) has been used in Scotland to set up an Environmental Co-operation Action Fund (ECAF) to promote the delivery of landscape-scale environmental projects by groups of farmers, foresters and other land managers. It provides funding to support the costs of planning, facilitating and overseeing cooperative projects, principally by the funding the activities of a facilitator. It supports collaborative projects aimed at increasing biodiversity, improving water quality and managing flooding. Once the cooperative group has been established and the landscape scale action has been planned, applications can be made to the Agri-Environment Climate Scheme and/or Forestry Grant Scheme, or an alternative source of funding to support the costs of on-the-ground management to implement these environmental projects. The ECAF was open for applications until early 2016 and is currently closed to new applications.

More information can be found here:

<https://www.ruralnetwork.scot/news-and-events/news/environmental-cooperation-action-fund-opens-applications>

**Non-RDP specific examples** (although in all cases RDP measures are used to fund the management that is the focus of the collective action:

#### **Creation of public/private partnerships for the management of the Volvic water catchment (FR)**

In 2007, Danone – who owns the Volvic water company – developed a strategy in partnership with local public authorities and land managers (especially farmers) to maintain high and constant mineral content levels in this valuable watershed and to manage water contamination and shortage risks.

The growing interest about the management of the water catchment resulted in the emergence of new governance arrangements based on public-private and private-private partnerships. The former is based on the relationship between downstream local authorities and Danone, with the result of creating the Environment and protection committee of the Volvic Water Catchment area – an association including 4 municipalities and Danone. On the other hand, a private-private partnership was developed between LPO, a conservation NGO, and Danone for the protection of the red kite.

Although no significant issues have occurred in relation to groundwater management in the catchment area, both public and private partnerships act to prevent future risks and ensure a good public image for the Volvic water. Interventions mostly target agriculture and are aimed at reducing the use of chemical inputs in the area and improve the management of cattle effluents.

More information on the partnership can be accessed here: <http://pegasus.ieep.eu/case-studies/list-of-case-studies#france>

#### **Supply chain, collective approach to grass fed-beef (EE)**

Responding to low prices in conventional supply chains, in 2010 a group of Estonian organic beef farmers founded the NGO Liivimass Lihaveis. The organisation brings together 41 individual farmers and agricultural companies all over Estonia, managing organically about 14,000 ha of farmland (both permanent grassland and semi-natural habitats) and over 5000 beef cattle. Beef produced on grassland supports high levels of biodiversity, enhances landscape character and cultural heritage, and helps preserve rural viability and support climate change mitigation. The grassland management is supported via the RDP, using both the AECM and the organic farming measures.

Progressively, the project has grown to cover the whole grass-fed beef supply chain. A private limited company, Nordic Beef, was established in 2010, whose main function is to distribute grass-fed beef meat in different retail channels, beyond taking care of slaughtering and processing meat. Grass-fed beef of over 40 certified producers is marketed to restaurants/cafes and schools.

This is therefore an example of successful and innovative collective action, highlighting the value of farmers' cooperation, quality schemes, short food chain and local partnerships.

More information on the approach can be accessed here:

<http://pegasus.ieep.eu/case-studies/list-of-case-studies#estonia>

### **The Water and Integrated Local Delivery (WILD) project (UK)**

The Water and Integrated Local Delivery (WILD) project is a three-year project covering about 26,000 ha within the Cotswold Water Park, in England, UK. The area contains a wide variety of habitats and landscapes and provides high quality game and coarse angling in both rivers and still waters.

The central objective of WILD is to improve the water environment to meet the requirements of the Water Framework Directive (WFD) with regards to water quality and flow, biodiversity and flood protection. In particular, the project aims at finding solutions to minimise the impacts of potential floods in the area, achieve good ecological status of surface water as well as good chemical status of groundwater to counter the effects of long-term trends towards more intensive arable production in the area. RDP funding, alongside many other funding sources, are used to support some of the solutions with respect to land management and investments.

In order to do so, the project has built a lasting multi-stakeholder partnership, bringing farmers and local communities together to provide economic and social benefits. Coordinated by the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG), the partnership brings together farmers and landowners, 3 local NGOs, 4 regional wildlife groups, water trusts and partnerships, 18 local communities, local councils, the University of Gloucestershire and the Thames Water company. Critical to the success of the partnership is the presence of a specialist facilitator, provided by the FWAG, who has enabled the application of a similar process to each water body linked to WFD failures.

The partnership is developed through local meetings in which businesses and communities can reconnect and engage with national organisations, like Natural England, on common issues. Central to the involvement of local communities is the involvement of the Gloucestershire Rural Community Council, which help rural communities in developing and delivering cross cutting environmentally sustainable parish and local plans. The project connects up the landscape through contact with local authorities, those with statutory responsibilities and farmers and communities across the catchment.

More information on the project can be accessed here: <http://www.fwagsw.org.uk/projects/wild-project/>

#### **1.6 Collective approaches for water and soils – key challenges and opportunities.**

Joined up approaches for improving the quality of surface water in particular is very important since the source of the pollution may be from multiple sources in various locations in the watershed or river basin. Action is therefore required across a broad area, greater than an individual farm, and requires all land managers who may have an impact to play a role in delivering solutions. Since the introduction of the Water Framework Directive, Member States are required to develop River Basin Management Plans (RBMPs) to demonstrate how they will reach good ecological status of their water courses and these set out many of the actions required at the local level. Similarly, for soils, action at the landscape scale is important to counter degradation issues that can affect wider areas than the farm itself, such as soil erosion and soil carbon sequestration.

There would be many benefits, therefore from extending the use of collective / cooperative approaches to deliver soil and water objectives at the local scale in the EU, building on existing examples. To do so requires two types of activities:

1. To find ways of promoting the benefits of collective approaches for delivering soil and water objectives to Managing Authorities and other stakeholders involved in the design and delivery of RDPs;
2. To consider how to overcome the common barriers identified that hinder the promotion of collective approaches within RDPs.

In terms of promotion activities, the TG could:

- source further examples of collective approaches currently in place or planned in Member States using RDP measures that focus on water and soil issues and investigate in more depth the results achieved/intended and how these are considered to differ from results that could have been brought about through taking a more traditional atomistic approach.
- Produce a factsheet promoting the benefits of collective approaches for soils and water;
- Produce a brochure of examples of how RDP measures have been used to develop collective approaches and their results;
- Consider whether the practitioner guidance and toolkit, currently under development in the PEGASUS project (due to be finalised in January 2018), could be promoted as a useful tool for Managing Authorities to help promote collective action for soil and water objectives through RDPs. The key points from this toolkit could be distilled and communicated to Managing Authorities to try and promote this type of action more widely through RDPs.

In terms of overcoming barriers, the TG could:

- Look at the current implementation of the cooperation measure (M16) and its relevant sub-measures in conjunction with other RDP measures, examine issues faced in using these measures in practice and identify solutions to these barriers;
- Consider ways of mainstreaming collective action into the operation of RDPs so that it becomes the norm rather than the exception;
- Learn lessons from the operation of the LEADER approach, particularly looking at examples of where LEADER has been used to promote environmental action at the territorial scale via land management and consider whether any of these lessons could be applied to the promotion of collective action in RDPs more generally.

## References and further reading:

Cisilino F and Vanni F, 2017, The Agri-environmental Collective Actions in the Rural Development Policy 2014-2020: Exploring Italian Stakeholders' perspective, CREA, presentation to the Council for Agricultural Research and Economics Research Centre for Agricultural Policies and Bioeconomy First Joint Conference LIV SIDA - XXV SIEA "Cooperative strategies and value creation in sustainable food supply chain" 13th-16th September 2017

ENRD Contact Point workshop on Measure 16 'Cooperation' (2016) – see:

[https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/news-events/events/enrd-workshop-measure-16-cooperation\\_en](https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/news-events/events/enrd-workshop-measure-16-cooperation_en)

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