

## Co-operative and multi-actor approaches for soil and water management

### Factsheet

The ENRD Contact Point Thematic Group (TG) on the '[Sustainable Management of water and soils](#)' aims to promote better soil and water management through improved design and implementation of the 2014-2020 Rural Development Programmes (RDPs). The TG ran between September 2017 and July 2018 and is based on stakeholder engagement, including managing authorities, paying agencies, farm advisors, NGOs and farmer groups. The TG members selected three approaches to be examined in the context of soil and water management: result-based payments schemes (RBPS), co-operative and multi-actor approaches (MAA) and nutrient management plans (NMP).

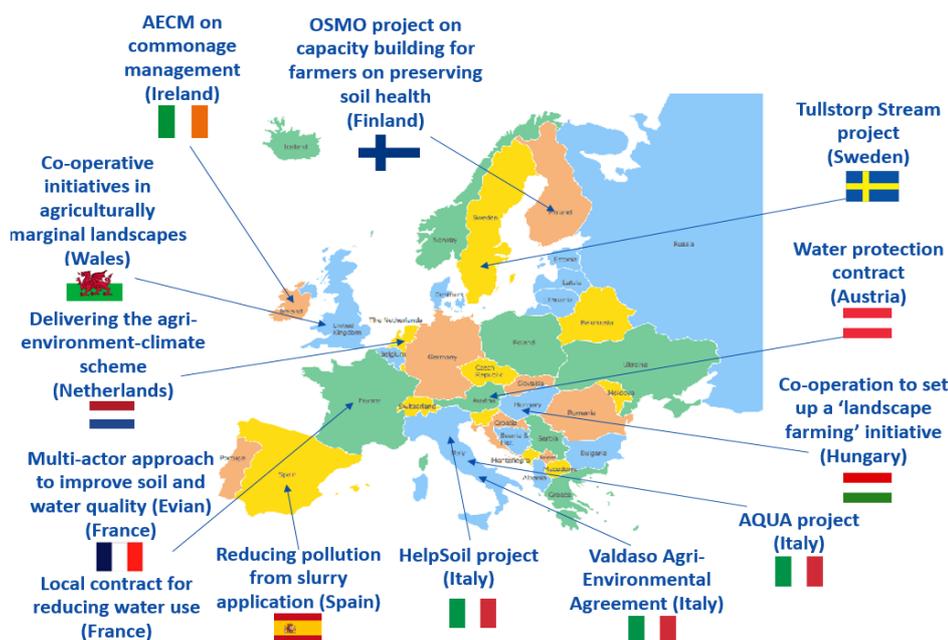
**Co-operative and multi-actor approaches (MAAs)** for soil and water management describe where action is undertaken by multiple actors (individuals or organisations) towards the delivery of common objectives within an area. Achieving **environmental improvements** often requires co-ordinated action at a scale greater than the individual farm level, such as at the catchment level for water. Working together in a co-operative way can help to achieve such actions at the right scale. The dialogue and co-learning, as a benefit of cooperation, can lead to the **improved understanding** of the effects of different actions on water and soil management and the importance of adapting management to local conditions. This can bring about

longer term **behavioural change** and strengthen connections between different rural actors.

Co-operative and multi-actor approaches can be stimulated at the territorial scale (e.g. horizontally, across a water catchment, a landscape or an administrative region) or can bring actors and activities together over a supply chain (e.g. vertically).

MAA schemes or pilots for soil and water management are well established across Europe, with support for their establishment and implementation provided by both public (including RDPs) and private funding.

RDPs are one of the main sources of financing to support the establishment and implementation of MAAs via the Measures for co-operation (Measure 16) and for agri-environment climate contracts (Measure 10), coupled with other Measures such as organic farming (Measure 11), knowledge transfer (Measure 1) and training (Measure 2).



# Recommendations of the TG to improve soil and water management through MAAs

## Supporting participation and leadership

1. In designing RDP Measures Member States should **set out selection criteria that are focused on results and outcomes**, require broad participation of farmers and rural actors in identifying local issues, and promote participation from multi-actor groups under the cooperation and agri-environment-climate Measures.
2. Greater **resources** should be made available **in order to fund focused extension services** as well as training and knowledge upgrading of facilitators and project managers, for each supported MAA project.
3. **Small, but flexible funding streams** should be made available at the local level to fund the hire of meeting rooms, the provision of refreshments and the participation of actors in the discussions in the start-up phases of projects, to stimulate engagement and help to build trust.

## Supporting good governance and innovation

4. **Innovation should be encouraged** and the fear of failure reduced by:
  - > Setting RDP controls and penalties that are appropriate to the scale and risk of the funding.
  - > The design of loans or other sources of finances should be investigated and build on examples already operating – e.g. loans only to be repaid if the project is successful.
  - > The rules for piloting new approaches should be accessible and simple.
5. Collection and exchange of best practices and **pilot projects on co-operative and multi-actor approaches should be further encouraged** at EU level, e.g. through the ENRD CP, or an appropriate European repository/hub.

## Ensuring appropriate financing

6. A **two-stage approach for funding** for specific RDP Measures should be designed:
  - > The first stage would provide support to fund the set-up of a partnership and/or setting out new objectives for an existing partnership, for example using the co-operation Measure.
  - > The second stage would support putting into action the initiatives identified by the partnership, through the RDP Measures most appropriate for the project.
7. Member States could encourage the use of co-operative and multi-actor approaches through checking that the **design of selection criteria is appropriate for multi-actor groups** under both the co-operation and agri-environment climate Measures.
8. Member States should also consider allocating a **higher proportion of transaction costs** within the payment calculation (up to 30%) for contracts involving groups of farmers/land managers.
9. Where funding is not sufficient to support actions in co-operative and multi-actor approaches under certain RDP Measures, **other sources of funding could be explored** (e.g. InvestEU).
10. Costs associated with **facilitation should be considered an eligible cost** and supported at least for the entire duration of the agri-environment scheme.
11. Where possible, **applications for funding under RDPs should be open to existing collectives** or groups in an area (e.g. local associations, NGOs, LAGs).

## Additional information

 Visit the ENRD thematic webpage on the [sustainable management of water and soils](#)