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# ENRD Thematic Group (TG) on sustainable management of water and soils

## Collaborative and multi-actor approaches to soil and water management in Europe

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Scope of the paper

This paper has been prepared on behalf of the [ENRD TG on the sustainable management of water and soils](#) to inform EU and MS level discussions on how collaborative and multi-actor approaches could and should be facilitated in relation to better soil and water conservation through Rural Development Programmes (RDPs).

The paper builds on the [working document on collective action](#) produced for the second TG meeting and the outcome of the [second](#), [third](#) and [fourth](#) TG meetings held, respectively, on 15 December 2017, 22 March 2018 and 15-16 May 2018. It also integrates the lessons learnt from the inventory of collaborative and multi-actor projects provided by TG members (please see the TG inventory of examples for more details).

The paper aims to:

- Identify where collaborative and multi-actor/collaborative approaches have been used to address soil and water management through RDPs and private funding;
- In relation to the examples collected, assess what the main enabling factors and barriers to the use of collaborative and multi-actor approaches have been;
- Provide recommendations on how collaborative and multi-actor approaches, where beneficial to soil and water management, could be more widely and more effectively designed and implemented through the 2014-2020 RDPs. Findings and recommendations were discussed and amended in light of the discussion at the fourth TG meeting held in Turku, Finland, on 15-16 May 2018. Although the primary purpose of this analysis is to support the implementation of the current RDPs, it is also relevant to discussions about the possible role of collaborative and multi-actor approaches within the CAP post-2020.

The analysis focuses on a select number of collaborative and multi-actor approaches relevant to soil and water management, collected through and beyond the TG. It also draws on the review of selected RDPs (IT Marche region, HU and IE), specialised articles and expert interviews. A total of four interviews were undertaken with national experts including Francesco Vanni and Barbara Forcina (Council for Agricultural Research and Economics Research, CREA – IT), Jukka Rajala (University of Helsinki, Ruralia Institute – FI) and James Moran (Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology – IE). The relevant collaborative and multi-actor approaches upon which this analysis is based are the following:

- The Dutch collective approach to the delivery of the agri-environment-climate scheme;
- The French multi-actor approach to improve soil and water quality in the Evian water basin;
- The French local contract for reducing water use for irrigation ('Coop de l'eau 79');
- The Finnish OSMO project that aims to improve farmers' capacity to preserve soil health;
- The Hungarian collaborative landscape farming approach (pilot);
- The Irish approach to deliver the agri-environment-climate measure (AECM) in relation to common land;
- The Italian collaborative agri-environmental agreement for water protection in the Aso Valley (Marche region);
- The support to the use of efficient irrigation systems through technology (Irriframe) in Italy;

- The Italian LIFE project AQUA that is aiming to achieve good water quality status in intensive animal production areas (pilot);
- The Italian LIFE project HelpSoil that is aiming to improve soil quality and strengthen adaptation to climate change through conservation agriculture;
- The Spanish LIFE project ES\_WAMAR that is aiming to reduce pollution from slurry application (pilot);
- The Swedish Tullstorp Stream project to improve water quality; and
- The Welsh (UK) collaborative initiatives in agriculturally marginal landscapes (Fferm Ifan Conwy area)

## 1.2 Background and context

Soil and water underpin complex ecosystems and are subject to different conditions and pressures across Europe. Pressure on these environmental resources is anticipated to increase into the future, as a consequence of several factors – modest expansion of European population, numbers of households, changes in the climate and associated increases in incidence of extreme weather events (i.e. droughts and flooding), and changing patterns of demand from the agriculture sector.

**The effects of these phenomena will be locally specific and responses will need to be determined on a case-by-case basis, depending on local conditions. Encouraging greater cooperation between the various stakeholders and land managers involved in managing rural areas to find solutions to the challenges faced at the local level is an important element of such responses.** Depending on the local context, cooperation may take multiple forms, such as: approaches designed and implemented collectively by cooperatives or multiple actors on the ground; or where the approach is developed through cooperative action at the design stage but implemented by one individual or organisation on behalf of the wider community.<sup>1</sup> Bringing multiple actors together to work collaboratively to manage rural land in a way that improves water and soil quality as well as minimising water use is increasingly recognised as more effective than focusing on disparate activities on individual parcels of land dotted across the landscape. This means that action can take place more systematically across a whole river basin or at an identified geographical scale. Collaborative, multi-actor approaches for improving the quality of surface water, for example, are particularly important since the source of pollution may be from multiple sources in various locations in the watershed or river basin. Similarly, managing soil at landscape scale is important to counter a series of degradation processes, which can affect wider areas than the farm itself, such as soil erosion or soil carbon depletion.

This idea is not new. Indeed, already in 2011, the European Court of Auditors encouraged collaborative approaches for environmental land management, stating that ‘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’ (European Court of Auditors, 2011). In response to this, the 2014-2020 European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) includes a ‘Cooperation’ measure (M16)

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<sup>1</sup> For example, the TG noted that in cases where it is necessary to raise the water table in a particular context, in certain Member States (e.g. the Netherlands in the context of a polder with peat soil) this can be engineered as cooperative action across rural actors and implemented by the water board managing the resource.

that can be used on a voluntary basis to introduce cooperative approaches, and the Agri-environment-climate measure (M10) permits payment rates to include a higher proportion of transaction costs for agreements covering multiple beneficiaries.

A variety of terms are used to describe action that is undertaken by multiple actors towards shared interests – including cooperation, collaboration or collective action. The terminology used to describe land management that involves multiple actors varies across countries and disciplines and has different connotations in different situations. For this reason, for the purpose of this paper, the terms multi-actor approaches, cooperation and collaboration were used fairly interchangeably, but tended not to use the term ‘collective’, unless this is used in a particular example, due to negative connotations of the term in some parts of the EU.

Data collection and analysis of collaborative and multi-actor approaches established or piloted by Member States in Europe aims primarily to understand the extent to which there has been collaboration in managing land for soil and water purposes using various RDP measures. This is based on the understanding that to date cooperative action for environmental purposes has been used to a limited extent in Europe. We therefore need to understand the underlying reasons for this and, where appropriate, promote the use of such approaches more widely.

## 2. Collaborative and multi-actor approaches in Europe

Across Europe, collaborative and multi-actor approaches for the delivery of environmental benefits have been established, using both public and private funding, and take a variety of forms and involve different types of actors in different Member States. They can be instigated from the bottom up (the initiative coming from farmers or other individual organisations and stakeholders), top-down (initiative coming from public authorities), or a combination of both.

Over the past years, the most widely discussed approach to cooperation for environmental purposes has been the **Dutch approach to the delivery of the RDP agri-environment-climate measure (M10)** (Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs, 2016). This approach, [presented at the second meeting of the TG](#), was established in 2016 and focuses on biodiversity conservation. It has devolved the delivery of AECM agreements to 40 certified collectives, which function as legal entities and are accepted as the beneficiaries of the support. However, many others, less formalised approaches to multi-actor cooperation exist. A number of these were covered in the [TG paper](#) presented at the second TG meeting.

For example, cooperation in the organic sector includes operators cooperating in the Netherlands and Belgium (Flanders) to coordinate research and knowledge transfer among stakeholders within the organic supply chain, and to farmer-to-farmer exchanges to promote conversion to organic farming in Spain (IFOAM EU, Undated). In Estonia farmers came together to promote grass-fed beef, working collaboratively to add value to their product by promoting its taste and environmental credentials to chefs in the capital Tallinn and onto Sweden (PEGASUS, 2016a). Following a different model, private water companies (such as Volvic, Evian and Vittel) work in cooperation with local authorities, communities and farmers to influence the management of the land affecting their aquifers to minimise pollution of the water sources on which they depend, thereby reducing their water clean-up costs (PEGASUS, 2016b).

Other types of environmental cooperation have been promoted via public money being set aside for this purpose. For instance, the English Countryside Stewardship (AECM) facilitation fund supports

people and organisation that bring farmers, foresters and other land managers together to improve the local natural environment at a landscape scale (Natural England, 2017). Similarly, in Scotland (UK), 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 (Scottish Rural Network, 2015).

In some Mediterranean countries the management of water resources is organised via the formation of collective organisations and has been done so for many years. This is the case of the well-established (Consorti di Bonifica in Italy or Comunedades de regantes in Spain and Portugal), which are in charge of managing water networks for irrigation and drainage from agricultural land and cities. Alongside farmers and householders, public bodies are often part of the consortia.

### 3. Using collaborative and multi-actor approaches for soil and water management in RDPs and other funding streams

This section sets out selected examples of where collaborative and multi-actor approaches to soil and water management that have been implemented or piloted with support from RDP, LIFE and other funding streams over the previous and current programming periods (2007 – 2013 and 2014 – 2020). The set of examples chosen to be analysed for this paper is not intended to be an exhaustive list of collaborative and multi-actors approaches currently in place in the EU.

RDPs are one of the main sources of financing for the establishment and implementation of collaborative approaches for soil and water management in rural areas, although the use of such funding for this purpose is still scattered across Europe. The most relevant measures that are currently used to support cooperation for soil and water management are **measure 16 on Cooperation** and **measure 10 on Agri-environment-climate schemes**, or a combination of the two with other RDP measures, including support to Organic farming (M11), knowledge transfer (M1) and training (M2).

#### 3.1 Cooperation through the EAFRD cooperation measure (M16)

Among the menu of RDP measures used to support collaborative and multi-stakeholder approaches, Measure 16 has been used to improve soil and water management in various forms across Europe. This includes a variety of approaches used by Member State to increase farmers' capacity and knowledge in relation to a number of environmental issues, including soil fertility and water management. One example of the former, supplied by the TG, is the **OSMO project** developed in Finland through the use of measure 16.5. (Box 1)<sup>2</sup> The same RDP measure was used in the UK (Wales) to explore the potential for landscape-scale farming to support production and better resource management, including improving water balance, reducing soil degradation and facilitating efforts to increase carbon sequestration in soil (Box 2).

#### **Box 1: Multi-actor approach aiming to improve farmers' capacity to preserve soil health (OSMO) (M16.5)**

##### **Finland, 2014-2020 RDP**

The OSMO project (2015-2018) aims to transfer knowledge on, *inter alia*, soil fertility management to farmers in four regions of Finland: South Ostrabothnia, Satakunta Region, Southwest Finland and

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<sup>2</sup> RDP measure 16.5 provides 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.

Uusimaa. With support from RDP measure 16.5 and private funding, the project offers a combination of 'blended learning sessions', including study groups, workshops and testing of different farming methods on eight farms. Overall the project aims to improve farmers' methods for testing soil quality and health, generate better know-how, develop practical tools and study material for planning practices for soil health management on-farm, and ensure dissemination of results to the general public.

The project team has a long history working alongside farmers and, in fact, includes a mix of farmers, scientists in agriculture, horticulture and soil management, and advisors. **One enabling factor creating the conditions for the project to take off is the presence of a project leader, primarily a farmer, who holds in-depth understanding of the surrounding rural context and is trusted by peers.**

To date, 28 different educational events (seminars, workshops, field days and study groups) have been held, highlighting to 810 participants the improvements in soil health management at farm level.

**Box 2: Collaborative initiatives in agriculturally marginal landscapes (Fferm Ifan Conwy area) (M16.5) UK (Wales), 2014-2020 RDP**

In Wales, the farmers' cooperative Fferm Ifan applied to the Sustainable Management Scheme (SMS), under RDP measure 16.5, to support knowledge exchange and collaborative learning opportunities on sustainable intensification (Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, 2017).

Fferm Ifan is a group of 11 farmers in the upper Conwy catchment of Wales, whose decision to apply for the SMS builds on a 10-year legacy of collaborative work within the partnership. Many of the farms involved are neighbouring and share access to an area of common land (as part of a grazing association) that is used for summer grazing.

Working together with Bangor University, the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, and other partners in 2016-17, a proposal for RDP funding was developed by farmers and submitted in the spring of 2017. In early summer 2017, success in the funding application was confirmed, although there have been delays in the receipt of funds, with the farmers proceeding with the activities at their own risk. **Match-funding from partners has been critical to the advancement of the project.**

The project is still at an early stage. However, in terms of planned output, model projections show that for the planned SMS interventions the benefits will include 54 tonnes of increased carbon storage in soils and vegetation, as well as a 94 ha increase in the area managed to mitigate rapid runoff and diffuse pollution, leading to a 40 ha reduction in areas with significant accumulation of overland flow.

Key findings from the collaboration to date are as follows:

- While the farmers see benefits in increasing their environmental outputs by working as a group, they have limited experience of considering environmental issues holistically and beyond the farm scale. This has required external expert input to which they have been receptive;
- Facilitation was required to help farmers use the output from the modelling tool used for targeting activities on the ground, which is designed primarily for use by scientists and advisers;
- Collaboration between farmers and scientists is necessary to design schemes to maximise benefits at landscape scales and account for the local environmental factors. Establishing such collaboration may be a barrier to entry for many groups without an external facilitator; and

- Evaluation of knowledge exchange processes demonstrates good potential for combining farmers' knowledge based on practice with expert insights, when farmers' understanding is acknowledged and used as a starting point.

### 3.2 Cooperation via the agri-environment-climate measure (M10)

Cooperation through an agri-environment scheme (AECM) can take the form of farmers jointly applying for an AECM agreement (establishing an entity with or without legal personality) (ENRD, 2017), but it can also involve multiple farmers within an area working together towards common objectives through individual agreements (usually with some form of coordination via a facilitator, adviser or public authority). Both these types of cooperation using the AECM are not new within RDPs but have become more prominent within the current (2014 – 2020) programming period as higher transaction costs are permitted to account for the time taken for collaboration to put together joint applications.

#### ***Box 3: Managing soil on common land through the agri-environment-climate measure (M1.1 and 10.1) Ireland, 2014-2020 RDP***

As well as the Dutch approach to AECM delivery highlighted above, with regards to soil conservation on common (peat and grass) land, **the 2015 Irish Green, Low-Carbon Agri-environment Scheme (GLAS) gives priority access to farmers managing common land.**<sup>3</sup>

Access to the GLAS is dependent on a five-year Commonage Management Plan setting a grazing agreement<sup>4</sup> to which, at least 50% of active shareholders (farmers) or a group of shareholders together owning more than 50% of the shares in the commonage, have signed. The agreement must be drawn up with support from a qualified advisor and applies only to the commonage, with no direct impact on how farmers farm their privately-owned land. The cost of drawing up the plan is factored into the per hectare rate proposed for commonages. Knowledge transfer by means of a training course is compulsory for all GLAS applicants and is funded under RDP M1.1.

Although no preliminary results are currently available on the effectiveness of this scheme, initially the scheme attracted limited interest among farmers due to the strict requirements from the RDP. Instead, there was a preference from farmers managing common land to self-organise cooperation to allow for more flexibility in the approach. At this stage, it is unclear whether actual collaborative management of common land has taken place.

### 3.3 Cooperation using a mix of RDP measures

In several contexts, cooperation to support soil and water protection is brought about through the use of a combination of RDP measures. This often includes the agri-environment-climate measure (M10) and the cooperation measure (M16), in combination with knowledge transfer to farmers (M1) and other measures as appropriate. Several examples are explored in the boxes below from Italy (Box 4 and 5), France (Box 6) and Sweden (Box 7).

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3 Commonage, in Ireland but also elsewhere in Europe, is considered land that is owned by more than one person.

4 The grazing agreement for managing commonage under the GLAS scheme in Ireland includes information on the herd numbers that have signed up to the plan, flock markings of participants, stock numbers to be held by individual participants, details of the measures to be undertaken (such as burning or removal of waste on land).

**Box 4: Collaborative agri-environmental agreement for water protection in the Aso Valley (M10; 11; 1; 16.2 and 16.5)**

**Italy (Marche region), 2014-2020 RDP**

The agri-environmental agreements (AEAs) put in place in the Marche region (Italy) is one example of a collaborative approach using a package of RDP measures. The Aso Valley is highly specialised in fruit production (peaches, plums, apples and pears), traditionally cultivated with a high use of chemical inputs and associated negative consequences on soil and water quality.

Launched in 2016, **the AEA for water protection in the valley supports coordinated action among more than 100 farmers in 19 municipalities. The purpose is to increase water protection and soil quality by establishing integrated/advanced agriculture and/or organic farming across 9 000 ha.**

The AEA is underpinned by a package of measures that include the agri-environment-climate scheme (M10) and organic farming (M11), supported by knowledge transfer, information and advice to farmers (M1) and cooperation (M16). The latter is used in the form of pilot projects to assess the economic and environmental sustainability of farming techniques required in the AEA (M16.2), and to support the role of a facilitator (M16.5).

Based on the project objectives, the AEA expects to achieve:

- Water protection and quality at river basin level;
- Proactive engagement and participation of the beneficiaries in the design of the activities;
- Stronger relationships between local stakeholders (farmers, local communities, associations and local government); and
- Joint production of knowledge and exchange of sustainable farming practices in the local area.

**Box 5: Support for the use of efficient irrigation systems through technology (Irriframe) (M10; M11)**

**Italy (Emilia-Romagna), 2014-2020 RDP**

In the Emilia-Romagna region farmers applying for support under the agri-environment-climate measure (M10) or organic farming (M11) are eligible for an additional support of €15 per hectare provided they use the 'Irrinet-Irriframe' tool.<sup>5</sup> The latter is a web-based platform that provides up-to-date information on the availability and balance of water resources across the region.<sup>6</sup> It is used to help farmers and agricultural operators plan their water use and its application to crops.

The developers of the tool – the Canale Emiliano Romagnolo (CER) – is currently exploring opportunities under the Cooperation measure (M16) to use RDP support to further encourage ongoing development and implementation of the tool.

<sup>5</sup> Irriframe is used in other Italian regions by the Agricultural Water Boards associated to ANBI (the National Association of Water Boards). The institutions managing Irriframe ('ConSORZI di Bonifica') are directly controlled by farmers and householders. Similar to the case presented in Emilia-Romagna, farmers operating in the Veneto region receive support to manage tobacco plantations through Irriframe and reduce water use.

<sup>6</sup> The 'Irrinet-Irriframe' model provides up-to-date information to farmers on: the necessary irrigation volume, the best timing for irrigation, and the estimated economic advantage of more effective irrigation. The information provided is tailored to different crops. More information on such a tool is available here: [www.irriframe.it](http://www.irriframe.it)

**Box 6: Collaborative local contract to decrease water usage for irrigation ('Coop de l'eau 79') (M4.3.1) France (Nouvelle-Aquitaine), 2014-2020 RDP**

In France, capital investments (M4.3) and the agri-environment-climate scheme (M10) have been used in combination to finance the setting up and implementation of a local contract (2012-2016) to decrease the use of water for irrigation within the region and increase water storage.

The rural area of Sèvre Niortaise and Marais Poitevin (Nouvelle Aquitaine) is characterised by hilly landscapes and mixed farming systems, mainly for cattle breeding and cultivation of cereal crops. Pressure on water resources is strong in the local area, due to competition linked to agricultural irrigation, aquaculture, consumption of drinking water, and leisure activities. Out of 300 farmers located in the catchment area, 75% are members of the local water cooperative ('Coop de l'eau 79') that manages the water reservoirs.

In order to achieve an overall reduction of water abstracted for irrigation of 2 million cubic meters (out of 9.3) by 2021, in compliance with the Water Framework Directive, **a local contract for quantitative water management was designed, following a consultation process involving all relevant stakeholders (farming community, environmental NGOs and citizens), and steered by a board including over 40 local organisations.** It involved a four-year study (2012-2016) for the identification of 19 reservoirs to be used for irrigation, a series of diversification activities for farmers (including young farmers' set-up and supply of feed for livestock), and an on-farm trial to measure the water savings. Alongside the contract, information exchange and awareness raising campaigns were organised among the farmers located around the catchment, with facilitation provided by the Chamber of Agriculture.

Since 2005, water savings of 24 million cubic meters have been achieved. Annual water abstraction for irrigation had reduced to 9.3 million cubic meters (in 2017).

(Within the 2007-2013 RDP, local authorities used a similar combination of measures including 125b and the agri-environment scheme).

**Box 7: Multi-actor approach to improve soil and water quality in the Evian water basin (Terragr'eau) (M10.1 and 4.14)**

**France (Rhone Alps), ERDF, 2014-2020 RDP, private funding**

The aim of the multi-actor approach led by Terragr'eau is to improve the quality of soil and water resources in the Evian water basin, France. The farmer grouping includes 50 holdings specialised in dairy farming, located around the Evian water basin. The area has longstanding environmental concerns linked to water pollution and abstraction for agriculture. In fact, the first trials were launched in 1993, with the aim of reconciling farming practices with water quality in the area.

The Terragr'eau is responsible for collecting livestock effluents and spreading digestate from biogas production over 1 700 plots using precision farming. This aims both to increase soil quality and decrease water pollution in the river basin. The project is supported by the combination of several French AEC measures under a single scheme. Within the AECM for Chablais, where the Terragr'eau project is located, different types of soil cover (grassland, rotational crops, etc.), activities (delayed mowing, suppression of nitrogen fertilising, etc.), and the premium per ha and per year are defined (usually 75% of costs are provided through EAFRD).

The agro-environmental contract includes the following obligations:

- All livestock manure is brought to the biogas plant;
- 100% of farming land is at the disposal of the spreading plant.

In exchange, the grouping provides a collective forecast for fertiliser inputs on an annual basis. Half of the spreading (around 15 000 t) must be carried out before mid-May on 1 200 ha. **The coordinator was in touch with every farm of the grouping in order to determine practical information such as access to the plot, loading places, etc.**

From an environmental perspective, the Terragr'eau project makes it possible to reduce winter spreading of digestate and limit mineral nitrogen inputs onto fields. The projects are expected to enhance water quality at river basin level and produce a 10% reduction of total CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from farming practices.

***Box 8: Collaborative agri-environmental project aiming to reduce the outflow of nutrients into the Baltic Sea (Tullstorp Stream project) (M216; M214; M421)***

**Sweden, 2007-2013 RDP**

Within the 2007-2013 programming period, the Tullstorp Stream project was developed as an example of a collaborative agri-environment project (Baltic Compact, 2014). It aimed to decrease the flow of nutrients into the Baltic Sea, reducing erosion by water and flooding, while creating wetlands and restoring the stream. The stream flows through one of the most intensive agricultural areas of Sweden and is located in a nitrate vulnerable zone.

The Tullstorp Stream Association was founded in 2009, consisting of 45 landowners located along the stream, with the aim of proposing and implementing actions beneficial to water quality. More specifically, all the landowners along the stream signed an agreement giving the TSA the right to make use of a stretch of adjacent land bordering the stream to pilot conservation initiatives. This **joint initiative benefited from the fact that the landowners already knew each other as well as the presence of a facilitator who knew the local actors and secured financial resources for running the project.** Upfront funding for the restoration project was provided by the municipality of Trelleborg, while funding for creating wetlands was provided by the national Marine Environment Grant and the RDP. In particular, non-productive investments were used to outsource planning and implementation of physical investments (such as wetland creation/restoration). This was coupled with support from the agri-environment scheme for the maintenance of the area, and from LEADER used for the installation of a permanent tourist/visitor path, and research studies to increase tourism in the area.

Since 2009, 35 wetlands have been created and restoration of 9 km of the riverine systems has taken place, while several inventories have been carried out, reports on possible actions have been produced and many other activities connected to the project have taken place. Key to the success of this project was the financing of a coordinator, who has a developed network within the area. With regard to the 2014-2020 programming period, the TSA has collectively applied to the current agri-environmental scheme to maintain the land along the Tullstorp watercourse.

### 3.4 Piloting cooperation

In certain cases, collaborative and multi-actor approaches for soil and water management have gone through a pilot phase. These are often funded through state-aid (which is not addressed in this paper) or other non-CAP European funds (for instance in the form of LIFE funds) or RDPs themselves. Below

are presented two examples of LIFE-funded projects for slurry management (Box 9 and 10) and soil conservation (Box 12) characterised by a strong multi-actor component and a pilot landscape approach supported by the Hungarian RDP (Box 9).

**Box 9: Collaborative landscape farming approach (M16.5)**

**Hungary, 2014-2020 RDP**

Cooperation between farmers in Hungary is encouraged through payments for 'landscape farming' (M16.5) practices in pilot areas defined by legislation. Their selection is centrally determined based on the environmental performance of farms against a green-point assessment. Beneficiaries include consortia of at least five members.

The measure is currently at a pilot phase, with the aim of integrating it into an agri-environment scheme in the next programming period. The funding aims to facilitate, by encouraging cooperation among farmers, the application of harmonised regional approaches for improving climate resilience in the countryside by *inter alia* improving water balance, reducing soil degradation, increasing carbon sequestration in soil and reducing GHG emissions. Mandatory actions include:

- Water retention for at least two weeks each year; and
- One of the following land uses after/outside the water retention period: wetland, grassland, cropland, plantation, forest and reeds.

Non-mandatory actions (depending on the type of land use) give rise to extra credit in the scoring system. Early assessments show that a call for cooperation is currently ongoing, but no decision has been made as to the project selected. Limitations may be due to a lack of administrative capacity.

**Box 10: Large-scale demonstration project to handle swine waste (ES-WAMAR)**

**Spain, LIFE programme, 2006-2011 ([www.life-eswamar.eu](http://www.life-eswamar.eu))**

The aim of the ES-WAMAR project was to pilot handling of swine waste in three areas within the Aragon region of Spain to respond to water pollution (eutrophication) and soil health problems caused by the large amount of pig waste from livestock farming (500 000 m<sup>3</sup>) in these areas. Within the framework of the Integrated Waste Management Plan of Aragon, the project sought to match the needs of arable farmers for fertilisers, with the need of pig farmers to dispose of their slurry through collective action.

**The collaborative element of the project lies in the creation of Swine Waste Management Enterprises (SWME) for the centralised management of swine waste.** These companies, one per project area, were responsible for the full-life cycle of manure management – from planning and collection of manure, to its treatment, distribution and field application. They comprised the environmental management company (SODEMASA), regional and local authorities, and representatives of livestock and arable farmers. In case of excess of pig slurry in one area, the SWME was both collecting and transporting it to the areas in need or purifying it *in situ* for use as a fertiliser.

The collective management approach was found to enable cost sharing, improved energy efficiency and higher control of field application of slurry, as well as ensuring farmers' support and engagement with the overall environmental aims of improved waste management. This was further supported by information and training events for technicians and farmers and the creation of 16 permanent jobs.

The project helped to demonstrate the value of using pig manure as organic fertiliser and was widely accepted by farmers. Key environmental benefits included reduced nitrogen overload into the soil surrounding pig farms (average phosphorous concentration decreased from 50.7 to 39.1 mg P/kg soil between 2008 and 2010) and into groundwater (average concentration of all samples was 102 and 83 mg nitrate/l in 2009 and 2010 respectively). Conclusive results on soil and water status would require longer monitoring periods.

***Box 11: Achieving good water quality status in intensive animal production areas (AQUA)***

Italy (Emilia-Romagna), LIFE programme, 2010-2014 (<http://aqua.crpa.it>)

The aim of the AQUA project was to help reduce water pollution from nutrients at the river-basin level by optimising the use of nitrogen and phosphorous from livestock farmers and reducing nutrient losses to water. In particular, the project aimed to:

- Reduce nitrogen concentration in manure by introducing feeding techniques based on low-protein diets;
- Improve the efficiency of the use of fertiliser inputs;
- Maximise the efficiency of nutrient use;
- Promote manure application for crop rotations characterised by a long growing season and high uptake;
- Reduce nutrient losses caused by agriculture through agri-environmental measures and practices.

A network of demonstration farms was set up in four Italian regions – Piemonte, Lombardia, Veneto and Emilia-Romagna – for a total of nine intensive livestock and arable farmers involved. **In order to reduce pressures and impacts on water from nutrient leaching and slurry application on land, a consortium of dairy and arable farms was established in an area of high livestock density in the Lombardy region.**

Among dairy farms, the solid-liquid separation of the slurry was undertaken using a mobile separator. The separated solid fraction of slurry was used by arable farms for fertilising land under cereals that normally did not receive organic input, and to produce energy through anaerobic digestion.

Results show that more than 1 300 tonnes of the solid fraction of manure was handled by the consortium, alongside the application of low-protein diets for livestock and more efficient nitrogen feeding techniques. This contributed to a reduction in water pollution by nitrates from agricultural sources and in the cost of treatment. The demonstration farms continue applying the techniques identified by the project on a voluntary basis, and those same practices were used to design the 2007-2013 and 2014-2020 RDP measures in the four Italian regions involved.

***Box 12: Improving soil quality and strengthening adaptation to climate change through conservation agriculture (HelpSoil)***

Italy (Lombardia, Veneto, Emilia-Romagna, Friulia-Venezia Giulia), LIFE Programme, 2013-2017 (<http://www.lifehelpsoil.eu/en/>)

The aim of HelpSoil was to demonstrate that conservation agriculture:

- Is possible and sustainable for demonstration farms in the Po plain and in the nearby Alpine and Apennine foot-hills;
- Supports soil functions, such as organic carbon sequestration, conservation of biodiversity and fertility, protection against erosion; and
- Improves the environmental performance of agriculture, reducing, for example, energy and water consumption.

**A network of 20 demonstration farms, including arable, mixed and livestock farms was set up across four Italian regions with the aim of testing conservation agriculture techniques.** Farmers, agronomists as well as local associations and companies were involved in the Coordination Committee for the development of the activities for the whole Po plain; contributed to the improvement of action plans in the demonstration farms and to the drafting of guidelines for the application of conservation agriculture, and exchanged practices through dissemination activities (e.g. website, open farm days, newsletters, seminars and conferences).

The project results identified the strengths and the weaknesses of conservation agriculture based on implementation at farm level. By involving farmers and land management, the project coordinators identified technical adjustments to overcome the limitations encountered in the implementation of conservation agriculture. These were targeted to the specific agricultural systems and soil and climate conditions of the Po plain.

#### 4. The benefits and factors enabling and limiting the use of collaborative and multi-actor approaches to soil and water management

Based on the cases described above and discussions within the TG, it is increasingly recognised that the approaches to soil and water protection which coordinate the action of multiple rural actors across a particular geographic area, have benefits compared to what could be achieved individually by farmers with agreements dotted throughout the area. In particular, interventions aiming to achieve soil and water management objectives at a broader territorial, landscape or river basin scale may be best achieved in the form of cooperation and coordination between farmers and other actors. This can be set up either formally or informally. This section sets out some of the benefits of collaborative and multi-actor approaches to soil and water management.

For natural resources that are diffuse in nature, such as soil and water, achieving **environmental improvements** often requires coordinated action at a wider scale compared to the individual farm level, as the source of pollution or the degradation process may come from different locations across the landscape. Examples include avoiding pollution into watercourses or unsustainable abstraction of water for irrigation. In France, the collective local contract for reducing water use for irrigation created the conditions for measuring water savings on a trial farm and reducing the use of water by farmers signed up to the local water cooperative following awareness raising campaigns. Piloting large-scale **Error! Reference source not found.** (Box 10) demonstrated the value of using slurry as an organic fertiliser in farming, leading to reductions in diffuse pollution into soil and water. It also illustrated the benefits of replacing energy-intensive chemical fertilisers with organic ones. Similarly, coordinating the **Error! Reference source not found.** (Box 11) showed promising results in terms of reduced water pollution from nitrates and reduced water treatment costs.

An important benefit of cooperation and multi-stakeholder action is the dialogue and co-learning that takes place, which in turn 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**. This means that there is a greater chance that the beneficial activities will be sustained in the longer term. For instance, as a result of the **Error! Reference source not found.** (Box 1), Finnish farmers understanding about the most pressing environmental challenges in the local area improved and they learnt how to produce soil health management plans on their farms, increasing understanding of both specific soil conditions and management requirements. As an indirect effect, conservation of soil health acquired higher priority among farmers' considerations when managing their land.

#### 4.1 Enabling factors for the delivery of cooperation and multi-actor approaches

A number of factors have been identified that have enabled multi-stakeholder approaches for soil and water management to be successful. These are set out below.

The specific **design of certain RDP (sub-) measures** in a way that encourages cooperation and group applications is a key factor in encouraging engagement in cooperation from a critical mass of farmers over a territory. As recognised in several of the examples above and reinforced by members of the TG, within the current RDP framework this may be done through targeting selection criteria to collectives or groups of farmers and land managers or allocating higher proportions of transaction costs within the payment calculation to agreements involving groups of farmers. Notably in 2016 the Dutch RDP introduced a scheme for the delivery of the agri-environment climate measure (M10) allowing for group applications only. This has required those wanting to receive funding for environmental land management via the AECM to engage with other farmers within the area covered by the 'collective'.

A common feature of all successful collaborative and multi-actor approaches described in the previous sections is the key role of **local leaders and facilitators**. As recognised by the TG, 'local champions' or trusted organisations are usually essential for creating trust among participants and support continued engagement in the long term. For instance, the OSMO project leader is primarily a farmer, with an in-depth understanding of the surrounding rural context and is trusted by peers. Critical to the success of the multi-stakeholder partnership **Error! Reference source not found.** (Box 8) was the presence of neutral facilitators with established contacts among the landowning community located around the riverside banks who could also provide advice. The facilitators managed to secure upfront and ongoing funding and enabled a process whereby solutions were found by the farmers themselves, rather than creating a strict set of rules to be imposed. This was also coupled with well-defined roles and responsibilities within the Tullstorp Stream Association (made of 45 landowners) that was in charge of developing and implementing proposals for action along the river.

Another element contributing to the success of collaborative and multi-actor approaches is the presence of appropriate **governance structures and experienced administrations** on various scales. A key role for administrations is to support the convening of bottom-up dialogues, roundtables, discussion groups as well as capacity building and training for rural stakeholders involved in soil and water management. In some Mediterranean Member States (Italy, Spain and Portugal), the agricultural water boards – respectively *Consorzio di Bonifica* and *Comunidad de regantes* – are already in charge of soil and land protection in relation to the hydrological aspects. In addition, the collective agri-environmental actions developed in the Aso Valley in Italy were launched as a grassroots

initiative by a group of farmers, gathered in the 'Nuova Agricoltura' association, which paired up with the local municipality of Altidona. As the local authority was the coordinator of the 'River contract', a planning instrument aimed at developing the area alongside the local river in cooperation with local stakeholders, it had already gained recognition as a trusted partner and convenor among farmers and the local community. In the Spanish **Error! Reference source not found.** (Box 10), central to the creation of the project was the involvement of local and regional authorities. This helped with setting up the Swine Waste Management Enterprises (SWME) and acted as a catalyst for upscaling local projects into larger scale initiatives. In addition, as highlighted in the Dutch agri-environment scheme delivered by collectives, multi-actor initiatives are facilitated by using a combination of top-down and bottom-up approaches. The managing authority sets the overarching objectives to be achieved by the cooperation, while the collectives are in charge of defining the means for achieving those aims.

The challenges encountered by a rural area in relation to soil and water management may be multiple and changing. Framing cooperation is a way that is sufficiently **flexible in scope** is important in order to be able to accommodate the evolution of local needs throughout the project. For instance, the objective of the **Error! Reference source not found.** in Finland was framed with a rather broad scope in mind, i.e. it aimed to transfer up-to-date knowledge on soil health management to farmers. The rather flexible tasks and methods, as set out in the terms of reference of the project, enhanced the opportunities for testing multiple learning tools for knowledge transfer and approaches for managing soils. All of these were based on the specific needs identified by the farmers. This helped to create a sense of empowerment among farmers, alongside increased trust in the usefulness of engaging in multi-actor approach to address specific soil needs on their farms. Indeed, the unpopularity of agri-environment scheme for common land management in Ireland is understood to be largely due to the rigid rules associated with it and highlights the importance of building sufficient flexibility into the scope of the collaborative approach for increasing the chances of higher interest from farmers.

Collaborative approaches, including those aimed at improving soil and water management, often require upfront costs for planning and establishment, as well as funding to develop initiatives throughout the whole period. These costs can be supported by both public (EAFRD and state aid-based funding) and private sources. In the specific case of collaborative and multi-actor approaches funded through RDPs, **securing appropriate upfront and ongoing funding** through measures supporting the setting up and running costs of cooperation between farmers and other actors is a key factor, as recognised through the examples analysed by the TG. In particular, the TG noted that to ensure the successful take-off of a multi-actor approach it is necessary to secure funding *before* such an initiative is set up. While several Member States (e.g. NL, DK and SE) have been using national funding to 'oil the wheels' of a multi-actor approach, very few have yet been able to do so through the use of RDP measures. In most cases, this is associated with inconsistencies raised in the context of audits (please see Section 1.4.2), which may act as a disincentive for the use of such measures by Member States. One successful example is the **Error! Reference source not found.** (Box 1). Here, the first call for proposals under measure 16 on cooperation was launched in 2015, giving the OSMO project team the possibility of applying and securing income to cover upfront costs as the project was being launched at the end of the same year. Securing up to 80% of the overall budget (€560 000) at the start of the project cycle ensured sufficient financial security and allowed the project team to start launching field trials and knowledge-sharing activities as needed. In addition, the Dutch Managing Authority is exploring opportunities to fund the design of multi-actor approaches through measure 16, while funding their actual set-up and implementation under other RDP measures.

Having a history and culture of **managing land through collectives or groups of farmers** makes the use of collaborative and multi-stakeholder approaches for the achievement of targeted environmental benefits easier. One notable example is Ireland, where a large expanse of peat and grassland is common land and traditionally managed by multiple farmers. The current GLAS agri-environment scheme, giving access priority to groups of farmers managing common land, builds on this legacy. Typically, each shareholder owns a defined fraction of the total land area, or farmers have rights to access common land to graze livestock. Farmers are used to working together and therefore coming together to discuss the management of the common area does not imply a significant change in behaviour for the shareholders. Similarly, in Finland and Italy the collaborative and multi-actor approaches build on a range of projects launched since 2009. On the one hand, OSMO builds on multiple projects aimed at improving farmers' knowledge of soil conditions and testing a range of farming tools, while the **Error! Reference source not found.** (Box 4) builds on similar cooperative experiences from the previous programming period (2007-2013). Finally, with a track record in developing collaborative approaches, the farmers, scientists and local authorities involved in the OSMO project had already developed an understanding on the way such multi-actor approaches operate on the ground and on the environmental and economic benefits that these can bring to both the wider area and individual holdings.

In planning to pilot a collaborative and multi-actor approach to soil and water protection in a specific area, an important underlying condition for empowering local actors is to involve not only farmers, but also land managers and other local actors and institutions involved in the management of the land or the resources in question at the start of the initiative. More specifically, **farmers** hold knowledge on the specific farming conditions in their local area and **play therefore a key role in identifying and defining specific needs and objectives**, both environmental ones and in relation to the economic performance of their farm. Therefore, a participatory process in the design of the multi-actor approach is crucial to its implementation and success. As recognised by the TG, clear and shared understanding of the local challenge to be tackled by the partnership is a prerequisite of long-lasting engagement by participants. TG members also recognised that portraying both the environmental and private benefits (e.g. economic knowledge and understanding) of engaging in collaborative and multi-actor approaches is a key element to encourage farmer participation. Farmers and other actors recognising the added value and common objectives of a joint initiative are felt to be more inclined to test innovative and locally-targeted approaches to soil and water management. In addition, supporting farmers' understanding of both local conditions and needs through the involvement of scientists and experts creates a favourable environment for cooperation. This is the case of OSMO project, which fostered good cooperation between the project lead, who is primarily a farmer, with scientists, who were involved to provide technical advice to farmers on soil testing and management. The interaction between land managers and scientists has proved helpful to make sure that more scientific messaging was communicated in a sufficiently clear and targeted manner to farmers.

As recognised by a number of farmers during the fourth TG meeting in Finland, another enabling factor to consider in the success of cooperative and multi-actor approaches is the existence and use by farmers and all local actors of **online discussion fora**. These discussion fora may range from online platforms or file sharing tools, to share documents or data, such as Google drive, to more informal groups set up spontaneously on social media, including WhatsApp and Facebook. All these elements are recognised as 'fast-and-ready' means for exchanging ideas between practitioners. Examples mentioned during the TG meeting included: farming techniques and results on the ground;

agreement on the set up of face-to-face meetings and other collective action; and maintenance and fostering of relationships among farmers and local actors on the ground.

Finally, and as recognised by the TG, there is a wide range of **external triggers** that act as enabling factors for the delivery of collaborative and multi-actor approaches to soil and water management. These include: legislative triggers, such as compliance with EU, national or regional legislation in relation to conservation of water and soil resources; economic elements, including securing a premium price for specific agricultural products; and changing environmental and climatic patterns linked to the specific local or weather conditions that may act as ‘wake up calls’ for action. For example, in Italy, the main objective of the AEA is to stimulate a large number of local farmers to adopt organic or advanced integrated pest management techniques for crop protection, in order to reduce the sources of pollution into water and soil and comply with the river basin management plan (RBMP) under the Water Framework Directive (WFD). Triggers linked to the **local environment** and **weather patterns** have been particularly relevant in harnessing commitment to the actions proposed via the collaborative approach in Finland. More specifically, between 2013 and 2014, the southwest of Finland experienced very wet seasons, resulting in lower yields compared with the average. This helped create the conditions for farmers involved in the OSMO project to be sufficiently motivated to join learning sessions and study groups and be willing to improve their knowledge of soil health management.

#### 4.2 Limiting factors / barriers to the use of collaborative and multi-actor approaches

Despite the benefits to soil and water management of collaborative and multi-actor approaches across a landscape or a catchment, their development also poses a number of challenges that must be overcome to unlock their potential. One of the historical challenges posed to collaborative action is linked to the fact that this way of working is often seen as more **complicated to organise and facilitate**, compared to the organisations of individual contracts with farmers. This may be due to the timing with respect to the application windows in cases where the use of multiple RDP measures is required. For instance, partnerships and/or a network may need to be set up before applying for funding under, for example the agri-environment-climate measure (M10). Several managing authorities within the TG reported challenges in using a combination of RDP measures (e.g. measure 16 with measures 4 and 10) to support collaborative and multi-actor approaches. This was mainly due to the fact that the different support schemes had been designed separately according to their respective objectives and criteria and were not necessarily easy to combine at a later stage. In addition, **audit requirements** may act as a disincentive for Member States to encourage the development of collaborative and multi-actor approaches for soil and water management. Based on the experience developed through LEADER, voluntary facilitators were used by Local Action Groups (LAGs) to gather interest and participation among local actors. However, in some cases this has turned into auditors raising inconsistencies in the way facilitators’ time was accounted and significant administrative issues for individual facilitators (as in the case of Finland).

Setting up the process leading to the establishment of an **Error! Reference source not found.** (Box 4) required the involvement of more than 100 local farmers, which was a long and complex process to manage, especially from the perspective of **limited administrative capacity** within the managing authority. In addition, due to the nature of the coordinator of the collaborative approach, which is a public authority, the AEA was subject to additional administrative requirements, such as the signature of a contract with a notary by all farmers involved. Similar elements in relation to the limited administrative capacity of the project team emerged from the OSMO project. In particular, one

limitation that emerged from OSMO was the inability of the project team to engage with the whole range of farmers involved in the project. Ultimately, the **absence of a local ‘champion’, ‘facilitator’ or ‘animator’** to kick start the collaborative process, bring together and keep engaged all relevant local stakeholders is a key factor impeding its successful delivery.

While involving a wide range of different stakeholders in collaborative and multi-actor approaches is considered added value, this may also raise complexities, with **‘a common language’** needing to be established for the partnership. For instance, clear communication between farmers and scientists needs to be ensured in order to transfer appropriate knowledge. For example, within the OSMO project the involvement of international speakers or experts that are used to communicate to scientific audiences was perceived as a barrier by the farmers involved. While at a more basic level, it entailed a language barrier that required appropriate translation from English to Finnish; in other contexts, it was challenging for scientists to translate technical messages into practical outcomes implementable by farmers and land managers on the ground.

Other limitations raised in relation to the approaches involving cooperative or collaborative action to soil and water management are attached to the **higher costs** of such action (especially in relation to time spent by the facilitator/coordinator to set the partnership) compared with those required by individual contracts with farmers. For instance, the TG mentioned that these may include costs linked to the timespan required to build a sense of ‘ownership’ within the multi-actor partnership, which are often reflected in **higher transaction and eligible costs**, as set out by the RDP. As in the case of the **Error! Reference source not found.** (Box 4), bringing together the AEA coordinator and local farmers involved higher costs (in the form of actual time spent by the facilitator(s) in setting up the partnership) linked to the administrative requirements set up in the RDP. In addition, administrative costs may be associated with the requirements to access RDP funding. For example, the **Error! Reference source not found.** the legal entity managing the collection and spreading of manure within the Evian water basin (Terragr’eau EEIG) was originally composed of both farmers and industry representatives. In order to access RDP funding to purchase a tractor for spreading manure, the farmers members of Terragr’eau EEIG had to create a new legal entity (in the form of a cooperative). Although this helped the grouping comply with RDP requirements (allowing only farmers as beneficiaries of support), to set it up involved additional administrative costs. More work is needed to investigate the nature of these additional costs and to compare these with the additional benefits that can accrue through these types of approaches.

Although action involving multiple actors is perhaps more straightforward in Member States where cooperation is well established (e.g. the cooperative approach taken by the Dutch government to deliver their AECM), this depends on country-specific circumstances and historical conditions. In contrast, in several Eastern European Member States, undertaking approaches that involve a ‘collective’ acting on behalf of a group of individuals poses challenges in terms of **trust building and accountability**, with a lack of trust that all will play their role and a concern about what happens when the objectives are not achieved. The perceived risk linked to the uncertainty of the outcomes of entrepreneurial actions can limit farmers’ willingness to carry out new types of management. This is likely to be the case also in relation to the use of RDP funding for the collective management of soil and water resources. Even in areas where collaborative and multi-actor approaches are already well established, such as the case of the Aso Valley in Italy, establishing partnerships and mutual trust among farmers required significant efforts over time due to the multiplicity of actors involved and the need to transfer understanding on the specific issues to be addressed.

In several circumstances, a further layer of complexity in the setting up and implementation of multi-stakeholder approaches comes from the need to **balance local needs and territorial priorities with those at regional, national or EU level**. The main challenge is to ensure that the objectives agreed locally help contribute to higher level priorities or, on the contrary, are not undermined by political shifts or changes at national level. For instance, in the context of the **Error! Reference source not found.**, the regional assembly of Nouvelle Aquitaine is currently reviewing its regional policy on water, based upon a 2017 appraisal and public consultations run in the same year. A new water strategy will be endorsed in 2018. This may provide water cooperatives, such as that in charge of the management of the river basin in the Poitou-Charentes, with a different set of priorities, which may lead to a reshuffle of both the local strategy for water management and any budgetary adjustments under the regional RDP in favour of further investments for agricultural irrigation. This would require a route change with regards to the objectives of decreasing water abstraction for irrigation from the local river basin.

### 4.3 Summary of enabling and limiting factors

Both findings from the analysis of the collaborative and multi-actor approaches currently in place to manage soil and water resources and input from TG members reveal that there are a wide number of **triggers and enabling factors that support successful delivery**. These range from regulatory and legislative elements to economic opportunities and environmental challenges. On the other hand, both the examples analysed and discussions emerged within the TG suggest that the current framework set out by the RDPs has not been sufficient to incentivise broader use of collaborative and multi-actor approaches in Europe. The main enabling factors and barriers associated with these types of approaches are summarised in the table below.

Enabling factors	Limiting factors / Barriers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding the attitudes of farmers and local actors and investing in adequate support for capacity building, training and on-farm advisory support;</li> <li>• Presence of local leaders or ‘champions’;</li> <li>• Trustworthy relationships between farmers and local actors by involving stakeholders at all stages of the collaborative and multi-actor approach;</li> <li>• Highlight environmental and private benefits (e.g. economic and knowledge and understanding) to farmers and other actors involved.</li> </ul>	<div style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold; margin-bottom: 10px;">Participation and leadership</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cooperative action is often considered more complicated to organise and facilitate;</li> <li>• Absence of a local leader or facilitator;</li> <li>• Challenges in relation to building trust and bringing local actors together.</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presence of local and managing authorities willing to trial innovative approaches to cooperation;</li> <li>• Design of flexible rules and requirements as to the scope and delivery of the collaborative and multi-actor approaches;</li> <li>• Track record of pilots and past experience in developing collaborative and multi-actor approaches.</li> </ul>	<b>Governance and innovation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Balancing local needs with EU, national or regional priorities and policy directions;</li> <li>• Limited administrative capacity within local and public administrations.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of upfront and ongoing funding to support setting up and development of the activities.</li> </ul>	<b>Appropriate financing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Higher transaction costs linked to the development of collaborative and multi-actor approaches.</li> </ul>

## 5. Proposed recommendations

Drawing on the enabling and limiting factors identified above, this section sets out proposed recommendations to support further mainstreaming of collaborative and multi-actor approaches for soil and water management into the 2014-2020 RDPs (section 1.5.1 to 1.5.3). Proposed reflections are suggested for policy developments beyond 2020 (section 1.5.4).

In the fourth meeting of the Thematic Group, draft recommendations and conclusions were discussed in the context of three ‘lenses’ to ensure they are fit for purpose in improving the environmental effectiveness of RDP implementation and the design of schemes to achieve local soil and water objectives. These were the transferability of policy tools to different contexts across the EU; the benefits to farmers of achieving soil or water objectives on the ground; and the support that managing authorities may need to implement the recommendations. The outcomes of this discussion have been taken into account in the conclusions and recommendations set out below.

As an overarching recommendation, European Commission guidance on the opportunities to support the setting up and running of collaborative and multi-actor approaches through the RDP measures currently available would be helpful. This should focus especially on the ways in which the measures can be used to enhance their set-up and running, on control requirements, and demonstrate how to achieve a phased approach to financing.

### 5.1 Supporting participation and leadership

The collaborative and multi-actor approaches to soil and water management examined have involved a diverse range of actors, including farmers, local authorities and scientists/experts. The benefits identified of working in collaboration included: defining common goals and objectives; and creating a stronger sense of ownership and involvement in the project and therefore long-term engagement. In addition, the selection of an appropriate facilitator and/or coordinator, able to bridge scientific and more practical knowledge, is crucial to deal with the RDP requirements (including, for example, ensuring sufficient funding for the setting up and running of a multi-actor approach) and enhance farmers and rural actors’ confidence in relation to the added value of undertaking cooperative projects for soil and water management. The creation of partnerships and networks that include a wide range of interested actors, as well as the selection of leaders requires time and resources. It is

often the case that supporting participation in and leadership of such approaches can be facilitated through loosening some of the specific requirements within RDP measures and providing flexible financial support, and in some cases increasing the incentives available. Therefore, it is suggested that:

1. When designing RDP measures (see recommendation 6), it is recommended that Member States set out selection criteria that require the broad participation of at least farmers and rural actors (including local industry operators and thematic experts) in identifying the local issues that require resolution, and promote participation from existing or newly established cooperation, for example under the Cooperation (M16) and the Agri-environment climate (M10) measures. In order to facilitate the creation of a partnership that achieves the agreed objectives on soil and water management and does not create additional burdens for farmers, the managing authorities should consider setting out selection criteria that are focused on results and outcomes, rather than on specific requirements for the partnership to fulfil.
2. Greater and more varied resources should be made available within RDPs in order to fund focused extension services, or training and knowledge upgrading for facilitators or initiators, universities and research centres and project managers supporting or participating in collaborative and multi-actor approaches. More specifically, earmarked resources for contracting and training facilitators, for examples through the knowledge transfer (M1) or training (M2) measures, should be made available for each collaborative and multi-actor application supported.
3. Small but flexible funding streams should be made available at the local level (perhaps via project facilitators) to fund a number of activities, including the hiring of meeting rooms, the provision of refreshments and the participation of actors in the discussions in the start-up phases of projects. This is likely to stimulate greater engagement and helps to set the environment for building trust and collaboration. This type of fund could also be extended to fund a selection of low-cost activities to get the group going. The disbursement of this funding should be at the discretion of the facilitator and there should be a lighter touch to the application for and reporting on these small funds.

## 5.2 Supporting good governance and innovation

Bringing stakeholders together at local level creates opportunities for brainstorming and developing solutions that are tailored to the specific needs linked to soil and water management and helps engage local actors to find common solutions. In some areas these types of activities are commonplace and arrangements and governance structures are already in place; in others this is a less familiar way of working. Framing a collaborative and multi-actor approach in a way that is sufficiently flexible in scope is important to be able to accommodate the reshaping of local priorities as the project develops. Balancing local needs with EU, national or regional priorities should be facilitated by fostering managing authorities' willingness to experiment, innovate and work with decentralised governance systems at the local level. Therefore, it is suggested that:

4. Innovation should be encouraged and the fear of failure reduced – this can be achieved in various ways, including:
  - a. Control requirements and associated penalties linked to RDP funding should be appropriate and proportionate to the nature, scale and risk associated with the funding received;

- b. The design of loans or other sources of finances should be investigated and should build on examples already operating – e.g. loans only to be repaid if the project is successful; and
    - c. The rules for piloting new approaches should be accessible and simple – learning from the rules that apply to LIFE funding may be beneficial.
  5. To ensure the transferability of soil and water collaborative and multi-actor approaches across Member States, the collection and exchange of best practices and pilots should be further encouraged at EU level, either through the role of existing bodies, such as the ENRD Contact Point, or through the creation of an appropriate European repository/hub.

### 5.3 Ensuring appropriate financing

Creating opportunities for mainstreaming collaborative and multi-actor approaches to soil and water management in Europe can be done with support for such type of approaches, where necessary. As mentioned in the section above, where collaborative and multi-actor approaches are already a reality, it may be appropriate to make use of the existing governance structures by adapting them to the emerging needs (e.g. broaden their remit or membership). Collaborative and multi-actor approaches require appropriate funding in order to support both upfront and running costs linked to the setting up of a partnership and the running of specific activities. As emerged from the discussions within the TG and the examples examined, the project leader/partnership needs to be able to secure funding *in advance* of launching collaborative initiatives in order to avoid risks of failure if funding applications turn out to be unsuccessful. Also, funding needs to be available for the entire duration of the project, whose lifespan may, in some cases, go beyond the duration stipulated under an RDP measure or the seven-year rural development programming period. Therefore, the following is suggested:

6. Time is required to set up a collaborative approach or partnership. Currently the funding for setting up the cooperation element and the funding for the actions to implement the approach are often dealt with separately and the timing of the application processes are often not joined up, leading to delays and frustration. In order to ensure that appropriate funding is available, a two-stage approach in the application for funding for specific RDP measures could be designed to make sure that the two elements work seamlessly together and bring longer-lasting results through cooperation:
    - o The first stage would provide funding to help setting up the partnership, and/or setting out/agreeing on new objectives for an existing partnership, before launching RDP measure calls (e.g. for agri-environment climate (M10)). The selection should be based on a set of criteria focused on results (see recommendation 1). The first tranche of costs could be supported through the cooperation measure (M16), where farmers and other rural actors could be paid for the time and travel costs associated with attending meetings and engagement in designing the objectives of the proposal;
    - o The second stage would provide financial support for putting into action the initiatives that are identified by the cooperation, supported through appropriate RDP measures depending on the nature and scope of the project.

The benefit to farmers is that the first stage of the application process would enhance cohesiveness and the expertise of the group by building on complementary skills to achieve longer term soil and water management objectives. These benefits are likely to be greater if the partnerships are strongly tied to local needs. However, for managing authorities to commit to such a system for funding applications, they will need to broaden the type of expenditure that is eligible for support under the RDP (see

- recommendation 3), and have access to a network of well-trained and locally-tied facilitators or project managers (see recommendations 2 and 9) who could be responsible for initiating a partnership and bringing forward the applications for funding;
7. Member States could encourage the use of collaborative and multi-actor approaches through checking that the design of selection criteria is also appropriate for collectives under both the cooperation (M16) or agri-environment-climate measures (M10). In addition, they should consider allocating a higher proportion of transaction costs within the payment calculation to agreements involving groups of farmers/land managers, as is currently permitted. For example, up to 30% of the premium paid to the beneficiaries under Measure 10 could be used to support running costs of collaborative action. This would help to reduce additional administrative costs for the managing authorities. From an auditing perspective, using transaction costs to support the running costs of a multi-actor approach would not require the need to prove (through receipts and reporting) the specific costs incurred;
  8. Where funding is not sufficient to support actions within the scope of collaborative and multi-actor approaches under certain RDP measures, other sources of funding could be explored, including InvestEU;
  9. To ensure the longevity of the project and delivery of its environmental objectives, costs associated with facilitation of the collaborative and multi-actor approach should be considered as an eligible cost within the RDP and supported at least for the entire duration of the agri-environment scheme (a minimum of five years, although some projects require longer periods, up to 20 to 30 years). This can benefit farmers by offering a longer term commitment and support for soil- and water-related management and offer them a greater chance of achieving positive results. However, for managing authorities to commit to longer contracts will require a negotiation of extended EU support, in order to avoid the risk that EU support priorities change in future and the Member State is left to honour the extended agreement through national funds.
  10. Where possible, applications for funding under RDPs should be open to existing collectives or groups in an area (e.g. local associations, NGOs, LAGs), which would not require funding for costs related to the facilitation and setting up of a group.<sup>3</sup>

#### 5.4 Looking at future rural development policy

Many of the points raised in this paper on collaborative and multi-actor approaches for soil and water management are reinforced by the [Cork 2.0 Declaration 2016](#) (5-6 September 2016) and the policy note on [Rural Policy 3.0](#) based on the pre-conference sessions at the [11<sup>th</sup> OECD Rural Development Conference](#) in Edinburgh (9-12 April 2018). For example, these both highlight the following:

- Cooperation and collaboration are essential and require mutual trust among participants. Therefore, enablers, champions and project leaders are essential to create that trust and such roles should be appropriately supported;
- Creating the space and infrastructures for community-level solutions to be created is equally important;
- Enhancing and upskilling people's soft skills enables better and longer lasting cooperation and creativity; and
- Public procurement and authorities have an important role to play in creating demand for and enabling collaboration.

In addition, the 2017 [European Commission's Communication on the Future of Food and Farming](#) (CAP post 2020) proposes a new delivery model that would give Member States more flexibility to

design the rules and eligibility criteria for the measures they introduce. Although at the time of writing the details are not yet known since legislative proposals are yet to be published, this approach could provide them with an opportunity to address some of the limiting factors that have been highlighted in this paper.

## 6. Annex – References and supporting material

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