"CONNECTING RURAL EUROPE – LEARNING FROM THE PAST, PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE"

2 June 2014, Brussels

EVENT REPORT

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Introduction

The June 2014 ENRD seminar was a unique occasion to recognize the work achieved by the EU rural development community during the 2007-2013 programming period. The event offered the opportunity for ENRD stakeholders – the 240 participants and the rural stakeholders following the live web-stream and Twitter feed of the event - to take part in appreciating and discussing the past 6 years of rural development networking and its achievements, and to exchange their views in relation to upcoming challenges during the 2014-2020 programming period.

The event was structured according to the main themes of improving RDP implementation, increasing stakeholder involvement, and the increased role of networking in cooperation and LEADER in three parallel workshops. The morning sessions looked at lessons learnt, while in the afternoon preparing for future challenges was the focus.

The opening plenary session

The opening plenary session comprised several key note presentations from EU and national level perspectives on the role of the EU rural networking in improving EU rural policy. The presentations were followed by a Q&A session with participants.

The opening address was given by **Jerzy Plewa, Director-General, DG AGRI**. The Director-General opened the conference with sharing his perspective on some lessons learned during the six years of ENRD, encouraging participants to use them to adopt further a strategic approach for the forthcoming programming period in relation to networking. In his contribution he stressed that the role of the European Network for Rural Development as an exchange platform is now widely recognized. He described the contributions networking has made to the implementation of the RDPs by developing a sense of ownership among rural development stakeholders, the facilitation of synergies across sectors, and the diffusion of successful ideas.

The opening address was followed by a **presentation on the role of EU networking in improving EU Rural Development Policy** by representatives of **the ENRD Contact Point, the Evaluation Network Helpdesk, and the EIP-AGRI Service Point.** The main points brought forward by the EU networks presentation included the specific objectives that each of them focused for their activities, as well as key facts and figures about their work.

A second set of presentations during the morning plenary focused on **the perspectives of stakeholders about EU rural networking**. The representative of the French NRN and the Finnish LEADER community and the NRN summarized and acknowledged the value of different forms of interactions with the ENRD.

They described how cooperation and exchanges have led to the transfer of the European tools at the national level, contributed to promoting specific national experiences on a European level as well as to using good examples from other countries and promoting cooperation in specific rural development themes and LEADER.

Evidence was shared of the added value and importance of networking at EU level: specific events have helped to stimulate transnational cooperation (TNC); simplification in delivery mechanisms was introduced based on the thematic analysis and work of focus groups.

Highlights from the opening plenary session in relation to ENRD 6 years of experience:

- **ENRD role** - The role of ENRD has become widely become recognized during the past six years. The fact that the legal framework for 2014-2020 reinforces networking both at the European and at the national level is evidence of this. Over the years the ENRD has become a strong platform for exchange. This has also demonstrated that networks are effective instruments for developing a **sense of ownership and strengthening the engagement of stakeholders** which in turn improves policy implementation on the national level. ENRD has become a powerful tool in informing and also assisting the improvement of policy programming and implementation.
- **Synergies among EU networks –** The strengthening of integration and synergies among the EU level networks has started and will become more important in the future. To further strengthen integration the Commission intends to set-up one common governance body for the two European rural networks (ENRD and EIP-AGRI), based on an inclusive European Rural Networks' Assembly that will agree on the work programme for the networks.
- **ENRD and national networks** – The role of the ENRD and National networks in facilitating **synergies** across sectors and the **diffusion of successful ideas** has been recognized and appreciated among key stakeholders. ENRD work is dependent on active interaction with national network stakeholders and can play its role only with their engagement and participation in thematic work, exchange, and the generation, collection and diffusion of knowledge and information.
- **Effectiveness of ENRD tools and methods** – Stakeholders appreciated the ENRD's 'leadership' in making the exchanges among them more interactive, making efficient use of very useful products, as well as conducting meetings and seminars with strong thematic focus.
- **Capitalisation** – Capitalisation has a pivotal role for making the most of ENRD achievements.

Suggestions for improvements from stakeholders

- **Visibility of EU and national networks** – Stakeholders expressed the need **to improve the visibility of the networks** both at the European and national levels in order to engage stakeholders active in implementation of the RDPs.
- **More effective dissemination and outreach** – the dissemination of knowledge and information gathered by the network to all interested parties needs to be strengthened by enhancing the multiplier functions and capacities.
- **Strengthen the tools for cooperation** – It was suggested that the ENRD should build a stronger platform for supporting cooperation, facilitating exchange and seminars on cooperation early in the programming period.

- **Generate and share benchmarking** between countries, including 'networking benchmarking'. This would assist EU MS in their planning, implementation and on-going monitoring.
- **Support to clusters of networks and macro-regional networking –** Networks can benefit from targeted support when they share common challenges and can develop an **integrated approaches and activities.**
- **Directory of contacts** – It would be useful for national stakeholders to be able to access integrated directory and contact lists for national and regional stakeholders (also including information about their practices).
- **A capitalisation plan for ENRD** early in the programming period will assist focusing the work and development of final products in view of their effective utilization and dissemination.

Workshop 1: Improving RDP implementation

Summary

What defines the "quality" of rural development programs (RDPs) and how can rural networks improve it? These are the overarching questions that, building on past experience and inspiring examples were debated by participants. The workshop highlighted that the right tools and methods are already in place and the challenge for networks will be to re-think them in terms of right priorities, inclusiveness and cost-effectiveness.

Objectives

- Highlight how networks and networking support RDPs implementation
- Identify strengths and weaknesses of consolidated methods and tools
- Understand how rural networks can improve the "quality" of future RDPs

Contributions and method

Over two consecutive sessions participants moved from the assessment of relevant networking activities and tools to re-thinking them in terms of future challenges and priorities. Each session was opened by two inspiring examples from privileged stakeholders followed by discussions in groups. Participants' views were finally shared and debated in the view to reply to the workshop's questions.

The examples presented:

- The relevance of the ENRD focus group on "Better local development strategies" from a stakeholder's perspective, by Judit Racz, manager of the Felsö-Homokhátság LAG
- Networking tools and activities to support regional RDPs implementation and policy coordination at national level, by Riccardo Passero, Italian rural network
- Representativeness and participation of farmers in the work of the Walloon rural network, by Isabelle Jaumotte, Féderation Wallone de l'Agriculture
- Experience and opportunities of good practices-sharing for the National Rural Network in England, by David Wilford, Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs, UK

Outcomes

Highlights from the discussion

The quality of rural development programmes. As expected "quality of RDPs" means different things to different people. It also differs according to the specific context. In the main, participants agreed that "high quality RDPs": are those targeted to the specific needs of a territory and address them in a holistic approach (economic, environmental and social dimensions); are coordinated with other policies and programs; allow people to have the space and tools to innovate; have long-term and sustainable impacts and consider LEADER as a key delivery tool; promote good quality projects; rely on the beneficiaries' involvement - from preparation to implementation - an on a qualified managing team.

So what can rural networks do? Maybe not everything can be addressed by rural networks, but as reflections on the past experience demonstrate the right tools are there waiting to be used wisely. Networks can provide answers to key features articulated above, for example by: informing beneficiaries and raise their involvement in planning and implementation; improving capacity of RDP managers; stimulating exchanges with other managers of other programs; pooling good-practices and make this information to "work harder" (i.e. promote their transferability through sharing platforms among networks). Crucially, "big budget doesn't necessarily mean big results": good management and creative ideas are the keys to success. This also means to recognize the limits and bring in specific expertise when needed.

> Networks should keep investing in thematic activities such as working groups, seminars etc. that allow for in depth knowledge development.
>
> The key for success is to put aside vested interests and work for a common goal.

The right tools are there! Participants widely recognized that NRNs had valuable functions and played an important supporting role during the implementation of the 2007-2013 RDPs. Thematic Working Groups and seminars at different levels, involving stakeholders and experts and focusing on specific subjects, were an effective method for networking. They contributed to a better understanding of programming issues, drawing lessons from concrete project examples, and formulating suggestions for further improvement. Project databases and communication tools such as newsletters were considered essential complementary tools to drive information to the relevant stakeholders. Exchange activities such as on-line forums or on-farm exchanges also worked well in support to rural development actors.

What were the most effective networking tools and activities? What was missing?

Strengths (most effective tools)	Weaknesses (what was missing or should be improved)
Thematic seminars and exchanges (e.g. Focus Groups)	Collaboration and coordination between MA and NRNs
Face-to-face meetings	Exchange of information at all levels
RDP projects database / Exchange of good practices	Diversification of online/offline tools
Newsletters	Peer-to-peer support
Online/web-based resources and forums	Activities for young farmers
	EC support for NRN set up and evaluation
	NRNs directory : database of useful contacts

Connecting real people first. Promoting real-life networking and establishing direct contacts among rural development actors were among the most discussed themes in the session.

Exchanges solely based on seminars or virtual communities are often not enough to involve local stakeholders. Good internet connection, for example, is not always available in all European rural areas, and the possibility to participate in European seminars and meetings may also be limited.

Rural networks need to develop a strategy which takes more in consideration the direct participation of local stakeholders' with goes hand-to hand with the use of web-based tools.

> Networks are the vehicle to involve local stakeholders, mobilise the collective intelligence of rural areas and reduce the gap with the decision makers.

Particular categories of stakeholders such as young farmers or LAGs need specific consideration and dedicated networking efforts. Facilitating the contact and cooperation between LAGs and farmers was pointed out as a specific field for action in order to improve farmers' participation to networking activities.

A strong European network is made of strong national/regional networks. And a strong network is the one where Managing Authorities are committed and involved in the networking activities. Better "institutional" networking can contribute to close the gap with the final beneficiaries and especially in countries with regional programming it allows better information to flow from the European to the regional level (and vice-versa). Participants encouraged NRNs to involve MAs already in the preparation of the annual action plan and to strengthen animation at the regional level.

Workshop 2: Increasing stakeholder involvement in RD implementation

Summary

The workshop focused on the experiences and methods relating to the challenge of increasing stakeholder involvement in RDP implementation drawing on the experiences and perspectives of various local and institutional stakeholders. Questions and issues identified by the participants – based on guiding questions and the presentations – were clustered and then used to identify recommendations for the next programming period focusing on stakeholders to be involved, the process of stakeholder involvement, the resources available for stakeholder involvement, and knowledge transfer. A key conclusion of the workshop is that stakeholder groups are not static, they undergo changes in varying pace and networks that aim to engage and involve them should be ready to apply a combination of face-to-face and online methods to engage and re-engage them while offering them a "clear deal" with realistic objectives.

Objectives

- To learn from the various stakeholders` experiences
- To identify the most effective methods and tools for stakeholder involvement in RDP implementation
- To identify key areas that need to be improved in providing network support for stakeholder involvement in RDP implementation

Contributions and method

The workshops attracted between 50-65 participants (both at morning and afternoon sessions), mostly from National Rural Networks and national administrations but also representing a significant number of representatives from Local Action Groups and other local stakeholders. EU organizations (Ceja, Copa-Cogeca, Prepare, and EIP-AGRI Service Point) were also present.

Participants were invited to consult the workshop factsheet presenting some key elements and figures as food for thought. In addition to the fact-sheet, the discussions during the workshop were framed by the following presentations:

- The thematic initiative of the Walloon Rural Network on the `rural economy` by Cécile Schalenbourg, Walloon Rural Network.
- A study on participation in Austrian LEADER regions in the 2007-2013 programming period presented by Michael Fischer, National Support Unit for the Austrian NRN.
- MA and NRN cooperation in developing EIP-AGRI in Estonia by Külli Kaare, Head of the Department of Research and Development, Ministry of Agriculture of Estonia.
- Networking and capacity building through E-platforms by Martina Bolli, researcher, the Italian National Institute for Agriculture Economics (INEA)

A panel composed of Jessica Morgan from PLANED (UK) – with experience of involving rural stakeholders in local development planning and implementation -, and James Elliott from the UK-EN

NRN - with particular experience in using social media for stakeholder involvement in RD – also contributed to the discussion.

The facilitation aimed to maximize participant involvement in the workshop by offering Q&A sessions and a combination of all-group and small working group discussions related to the key questions/issues identified in each group.

Outcomes

The presentations in the "Learning from the past" session prompted questions from various stakeholders ranging from local beneficiaries to National Rural Network representatives. The discussion evolving around these questions provided a framework for the mini-group discussions in the 2nd part of the session. The focus was on issues and questions based on lesson learnt from the past that are relevant for future rural development implementation. The groups within Workshop 2 identified the following questions or issues for further analysis in the afternoon:

Stakeholder focus[1]
- ✓ Stakeholders/stakeholder groups evolve & this requires follow-up and adaptation
- ✓ What happens if the relationship between the LAG manager and the beneficiary is `bad`?
- ✓ Customer focus in relation to beneficiaries in terms of service, support and motivation (not only funding!)
- ✓ Make the more external networks and stakeholders a real/structured part of the network
- ✓ It is crucial to maintain communication towards all stakeholders and create links between farmers, SMEs, NGOs, tourism.
- ✓ Find the right person/organization having the trust necessary to involve the farming sector stakeholders
- ✓ How to involve young farmers (and young people) in rural development?

Process focus
- ✓ We have to communicate exactly what the stakeholders need in order to get them successfully involved.
- ✓ How to share ideas between areas with different levels of development, with different frameworks?

- ✓ How to define what is a "good" level of participation?

- ✓ How to bridge the intervention logic at program level to LAG level. One possible way is to involve the LAG managers in the elaboration of the monitoring and evaluation instrument`
- ✓ Make the more external networks and stakeholders conscious of their role in the network
- ✓ Involvement of stakeholders in not only the implementation, but also in the design of rural development policy.
- ✓ How to find out which are the reasons for local stakeholders` lack of participation & how to ensure the `chain of engagement`?

Resources focus
- ✓ How to ensure sufficient resources for dealing with the time-consuming stakeholder involvement?
- ✓ How to raise public awareness of rural issues and rural development with small budget?
- ✓ The success of LAGs is not only the number of jobs or projects – it is also about creating a new culture for cooperation in the LAG.

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[1] Please note that the thematic classification presented here is slightly arbitrary as some questions and issues may be classified under more than one theme.

✓ EAFRD provides good stimulus for development, but in combination with national rules it can be too bureaucratic.

Knowledge transfer focus
✓ How to capitalize all the knowledge, experience from the past, seminars, meetings, documents from events, etc.?
✓ How can we share our stories? Our problems?

✓ Need for a database for EIP work. Criteria: easy to find, easy to use, include good examples that can be/are being implemented all around Europe
✓ How do we involve new stakeholders (not yet "involved in the system")?
✓ How do we build trust?
✓ A project should be initiated from the bottom-up.

The questions and issues identified by the groups have been used as the basis for forming `clusters` with a thematic focus (as above) to facilitate discussions in the "Preparing for the future" session:

- **Stakeholder focus** (awareness of roles in the process; customer focus; gaining trust, e.g. farming sector; linking different stakeholder groups; new and old stakeholders…)
- **Process focus** (reasons for engagement in different phases of implementation; clear intervention logic – a "clear deal"; engaging and re-engaging – different levels of involvement; creating a new culture of cooperation; initiate projects from bottom-up; excess bureaucracy)
- **Resource focus** (rural development with small budgets; sufficient level of resources?)
- **Knowledge transfer focus** (capitalization & summarizing the lessons learnt in the best way, communicating between stakeholders and areas with different levels of development; easy to use databases and IT tools, incl. for EIP; targeting)

Highlights from the discussion

A structured, step-by-step, and gradual approach with a focus on clear objectives and targeting of stakeholders was a point emphasized by both presentations and the benefits of such an approach to stakeholder involvement reinforced by the panellists as well as the participants of the workshop.

Reaching stakeholders through surveys can be good method, but the **results of surveys need to reach the decision-makers**. Otherwise unrealistic expectations can be raised and that is to be avoided.

Networks need to think in terms of constantly **engaging and re-engaging society** and its various stakeholder groups. The **minimum level of engagement is keeping people informed** – this is the absolute basis for more advanced, intense levels of engagement and involvement. **Recognition of differences of values and varying levels of interest** at different stages of the rural development process are also essential.

To develop and maintain the involvement of the different actors of a territory in a territorial development project, it is important **to promote and develop collective forms of economic interest enterprises consisting of a multi-stakeholders "board"** (producers, users, public communities,

partners) based on existing examples/models such as "Cooperative Companies of collective Interest in France, Social Cooperatives in Spain, Companies with a social purpose in Belgium.

In territorial development innovation is primarily social.

> Networks should consider that social innovation ("high-touch") always comes before technical innovation ("high-tech").

With regard to **the best possible utilization of limited resources for stakeholder involvement** the optimum use of existing events and groups, existing forms and sources of knowledge, enhancing the knowledge about the network`s "customers" , and the involvement of existing networks as partners in the stakeholder involvement activity are key points to note.

> Networks need to take into consideration the diversity of rural stakeholders, go towards them in a proactive way and use an appropriate language to create trust.

Communicating the same message to different stakeholders may require the **reformulation of the message to suit the target stakeholders` specific needs** if the purpose is to get the targeted stakeholder group involved in RD implementation.

Contrary to popular belief, **using social media to engage and involve stakeholders is not free.** The tools (including Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn) may be freely accessible, but a significant investment in time, human resources is required for the successful use of social media for stakeholder involvement. Social media activities do need to be planned and sufficient resources should be allocated to them if networks want to make the best use of this innovative tool-set.

The contribution that culture and cultural activities can make to effective stakeholder involvement has been underestimated. In rural areas, cultural events can provide effective venues and means for communicating about rural development and engaging local stakeholders.

Stakeholder involvement should start not only at the implementation phase, but already **as early as the planning phase of rural development programming.** Special working groups for farmers and other stakeholder groups can be a way forward to effect this.

Workshop 3: An enlarged role for networking in cooperation and LEADER

Summary

Workshop 3 addressed '*the enlarged role for networking in cooperation and LEADER'*. The morning presentations and discussion identified useful findings with regard to the 'past' challenges of cooperation within LEADER and the most useful forms of networking support to address these. The afternoon presentations and discussion brought together ideas from participants on the new challenges of CLLD and how the LEADER/CLLD approach can be best supported through networking during 2014-2020.

Objectives

- Contribute to a better understanding about the benefits rural networking brought for LEADER and cooperation;
- Identify and discuss the main challenges and the most useful forms of support provided to LAGs and cooperation through networking;
- Identify and discuss new challenges brought by CLLD and how they can be best addressed and supported through networking in 2014-2020.

Contributions and method

The morning session focused on the "past" achievements of networks and networking at EU and national/regional levels with the aim to identify what worked well and less well in support of LEADER and LAGs (with specific focus on cooperation). The afternoon session focused on the "future" of EU and national/regional networking, with specific focus on providing support for LEADER/CLLD during 2014-2020. In order to set the scene and generate ideas for discussion, the following presentations were delivered:

- The role of ENRD in providing support for LEADER and LAGs by Kirsten Birke Lund (ELARD)
- Networking support for Transnational Cooperation (TNC) by Steven Delahaye & Maurizio Reveruzzi ('Villages of Tradition' TNC project) & Séverine Bressaud (French NRN)
- Territorial perspectives in networking by Gérard Peltre (RED)
- The future of LEADER/ Networking support for CLLD approaches by Thomas Müller (LAG manager, Austria)
- Bottom-up networking initiatives for exchange by Charlotta Heimersson (LAG manager, Sweden)

Both the morning and the afternoon presentations were followed by a **questions and answers session (Q&A)**. Following the Q&A, a **discussion was organised in small groups** around specific questions with regard to networking support to LEADER/CLLD.

Outcomes

Key points from **the morning Q&A** can be summarized as follows:

- **Rules of TNC are different in different MS**, which makes cooperation challenging. As far as the cooperation of the 'Villages of tradition' with the Romanian partner is concerned, first those activities started that did not have budgetary implications, and the rest of the activities were carried out when the relevant legislation was adopted. Cooperation is most often a question of will, trust and adaptation.

> Good cross-border networking requires trust and knowledge of what is happening beyond the borders. Networks can help to make this information available and on time.

- Cooperation events are important. However, the timing also matters. In some EU Member States (such as Portugal) **the cooperation measure was closed** at the time of the 2012 LEADER event, and therefore the benefits were not as considerable as for French LAGs (see TNC presentation above).

- An important challenge is to **communicate efficiently the positive results of TNC through the media** (that is often more interested in 'scandals').

The **morning discussion groups** focused on the 'past' and addressed the question:

*'What were the **main challenges** of promoting joint activities and cooperation among LAGs, and what were the **most useful forms of networking support** provided in response to these?'.*

The main outcomes of the discussion are summarized in the table below.

Main challenges (with the main focus on TNC)	Most useful forms of networking support
"Harmonization" different Member State rules	
- Different regulations - Differences in the timeframe in different Member States - Differences in administration	- Explaining rules in different Member States - Rules of Lead Partner applied to all
Other barriers for TNC & useful networking support	
- Financing and need of advance payments (co-financing / pre-financing) - Administrative burden/bureaucracy - Language - Lack of information and knowledge on possibilities - Building cooperation & implementing projects requires time	- Profiles of LAGs - Providing updated information on TNC in other countries "Speed-dating" support by ENRD (such as the 2012 LEADER event) - Identification of opportunities for TNC across the EU - NRN support and information for LAGs - TNC conferences - Face-to-face contacts - Good translation systems - Best practice examples to be promoted

Main challenges (with the main focus on TNC)	Most useful forms of networking support
Better understanding of the added value of cooperation & improved communication	
- Need for a better understanding of cooperation by the communities - Understanding that some cooperation projects may fail (How cooperation is perceived by the non-LEADER world?) - Cooperation has to be considered as a useful tool on its own right (not just "nice to do if you have time") - Different concepts of cooperation/ development at the various levels - Cooperation between LAGs and NRN networks	- Promotional material from the NRN - Tools to reach local communities - TNC Focus Group (at EU level) - Best practice examples to be promoted
TNC as a strategic tool	
- TNC needs also support from the MAs - Should TNC be compulsory? - Need umbrella strategy for projects - Differences in strategies	- Profiles of LAGs - Cooperation of LAG associations and networks - Strategic action plans for NRNs - European-level evaluation of cooperation

Key points from the **afternoon Q&A** can be summarized as follows:

- **Networking and 'lobbying'** at regional and national levels, and convincing politicians about the added value of CLLD has been important for making sure that multi-funded CLLD is included in the Partnership Agreements. In some of the Member States such networking & lobbying has been successful (e.g. Sweden, where all four funds will be used to support CLLD), whereas in others, multi-funded CLLD did not become part of the Partnership Agreement, despite extensive awareness-raising and lobbying (e.g. Estonia). In other Member States (such as Austria), it was left to the regional level to decide whether to apply multi-funding (e.g. this will be the case in Tyrol that has considerable expertise in this respect).

- There is a need in rural areas to coordinate different funds, and **multi-funded CLLD is just one way** of doing this, but it can also be done in other ways (e.g. in some urban areas nationally funded programs are used to support community-led initiatives). **Rural areas need to be recognized as poles of development and innovation.** Networks play an important role to support the integration of various initiatives and programs.

- The **focus on the beneficiaries** is essential whether we talk about the delivery of programs or networking support. Early planning of projects (and networking support to identify projects that can attract funding) is very important.

> Be aware of what each other is doing and when are key to effectively implement CLLD while considering the diversity of stakeholders, rules, timetables, cultures and languages.

The **afternoon discussion groups** focused on the 'future' and addressed the question:

*'What are the **new challenges brought by CLLD** and how these could be best addressed through networking support?'*

The main outcomes of the discussion are summarized in the table below.

New challenges	Suggested networking support
Understanding the CLLD approach	
• Lack of understanding of the terminology at community-level • Lack of understanding on how to proceed • Lack of understanding on the new process and impact on existing practices at project level • Lack of common reference (what are we talking about?) • Lack of experience	• Capacity-building among stakeholders (e.g. how to use multi-funding approach from a 'legal perspective') • Training/ education – increase stakeholder's ability to implement multi-funding • Training for newcomers • Help stakeholders to understand new rules (LAG, MA, PA, the auditors) • Building a model (how CLLD works) – it would be easier to implement if there is an existing visual model
Coordination of funds	
• New rules and implementation of different funds are being taken forward by different government departments (at different times) • There is a danger of less money being allocated (more complicated process to have the same outcomes) • CLLD must be more than LEADER (need for integrated strategies) • Multi-funding needs to continue during the next programming period	• Networking to have integrated CLLD governance/management • Networking to support with legal simplification • Networking with other funds - keep the other funds informed • Networking at the level of ministries • Focus Group methodologies at different levels (local, regional, national) • Platforms for urban-rural development • Technical support from Europe
Communicating CLLD & the multi-fund approach	
• Communicating the method & approach • Multi-sectorial message/approach • Stimulate cooperation projects financed by multiple funds	• Integrated information material • Connect the decision of people (LAG) with the decision on the strategies at the overall policy level • To increase awareness of all stakeholders regarding the CLLD approach and its added value • Transnational strategies • More focused communication

Panel discussion on the importance of networking for supporting policy implementation

Based on almost 25 years of experience in INTERREG programmes and several centuries of Nordic cooperation experience, **Ieva Kalnina** from INTERACT (EU funded networking programme supporting all Interreg programmes) focused on two key pre-conditions for successful cooperation. Firstly, cooperation across borders is not natural. Unless continuously supported, it tends to fade away. It is only when border effects (legal, physical, cultural, financial etc.) have been minimized to the extent that they are not 'felt' and cooperation has become a natural habit, that support across borders can be gradually withdrawn. But, based on experience at this stage, no region in Europe seems ready for this step! Secondly, 'cooperation' requires a long-term relationship, commitment and willingness to make it work, together with long-term political support. It has to be continuously fuelled (through e.g. animation/facilitation) and this requires time and maturity to deliver strategic results.

Key factors for successful 'institutional policy networks' were highlighted by **Paul Soto** of FARNET (the EU network of fisheries areas). In Mr Soto's view, first of all it is critical to ensure that EU networks work closely with the real practitioners at all levels – from the Commission Services to rural development actors on the ground - in order to know what the real issues are. Secondly, it is necessary to prioritize actions over time, between countries and between themes (e.g. measures) because not everything that needs to be done can really be. Finally, networks need to create a "smart" division of labour and build task forces both 'in-house' and with other networks or similar organisations, drawing upon and using to the maximum extent possible each-others' strengths.

> *"Having Member States to talk about what worked well or not is a challenge and the ENRD has created an atmosphere where this is possible!"*

Based on the experience of the PREPARE partnership, **Stig Hansson's** view is that formal policy networks should help promote the creation of bottom-up, informal networks and that in turn this is what can make rural development more sustainable. Trust is another key ingredient for achieving sustainable development and ultimately, a well-assembled network can be an effective arena for trust-building. Finally it was reminded to always look to the bright side of life! All experiences are good, even the bad ones, and sharing them can help others for the future.

Future challenges for the ENRD and NRNs: the view of the panellists

Panellists in the closing plenary session articulated some of the future challenges for the ENRD and NRNs as follows:

	"It is the time to ask the "why?" question and reflect on what is the purpose for cooperating trans-nationally and for these purposes, to explore the different tools available."
Future challenges	"The focus of the networks is still too much on the procedures and the tools while there is the need to focus more on the stakeholder as a customer."
	"Multifunding is one way for achieving policy coordination. Outside the scope of multifunding cooperation is still possible… moreover it is important to see rural areas in the broader picture and move forward to the key challenges that they are now facing (such as the urban-rural connection)."

ENRD 'capitalisation' products

In support of the new programming period the ENRD has developed a range of new products as to capitalize the experience and knowledge accumulated over the past six years. Some of the ENRD `capitalisation` products were presented during the event. These include the EAFRD project examples brochure, the NRN Guidebook, ENRD Self-assessment report and the ENRD website ultra-light version. For more information please click here.

ENRD in retrospect – a witness' perspective

José Manual Sousa Uva, in his capacity as former DG AGRI Director in charge of horizontal aspects of rural development and the ENRD from its inception, reflected on the achievements of the Network in the last six years. He highlighted the "learning by doing" character of the Network and its capacity to "build trust". Moving forward to 2014-2020 his main message to all those involved in the network was to *"keep on keeping on…"*

Mr Sousa Uva placed particular emphasis on the idea of networks promoting a culture of proximity and interconnectivity in Europe, which has an impact not just limited to rural areas.

In the period 2014-2020, the support of national networks will be vital to promote the concept of legislation close to the citizen and help people taking informed political decisions. At the European level the ENRD and the EIP-AGRI will work together in close coordination, defining priorities, targets and the tools that will allow setting up the driving forces for rural development. Stronger links between national networks, European networks and those networks which are actually active with the other funds should be promoted in order to bring about the best coordination possible.

> *Networks support policy implementation and all concerned actors should be using the available platforms for thinking on how simplicity can be achieved*

Reflecting on the activities of the ENRD, Mr Sousa Uva noted that the Coordination committee and LEADER subcommittee enabled the network to set up open platforms for all those bringing genuine rural development expertise. He pointed out the very good work done in the four thematic working groups initiated since 2009 on rural areas typologies and targeting, agriculture and rural economy, public goods and EAFRD delivery mechanisms, and the latest work of the focus groups - which became a part of the network's way of doing business with a much more participatory approach - looking at innovation, diversity, climate change and the environmental services. LEADER focus groups were also indicated as valuable tool for developing recommendations with a view to improve implementation.

Special mention was deserved for activities related to LEADER which have contributed to capitalise on local potential through some 500 cooperation projects. Finally, the importance of the website and Information Technology was recognized in support of the interactions within the network, and the language coverage ensured by the ENRD

> *The network is not a static entity but a dynamic entity and its performance depends on connecting local roots and generally acting as a catalyzer.*

website regarded as effort to address language diversity that is still a major challenge for EU-wide cooperation.

Closing remarks

In his concluding speech **Aldo Longo**, DG AGRI Director for General aspects of rural development and research, pointed out that although there has not yet been a rigorous evaluation of the results achieved by the ENRD, the number and quality of activities are promising. The perception of the network by local actors, public authorities, EU institutions and evaluation experts is generally positive, and it is commonly agreed that the network is a powerful tool for rural development, or at least it has the potential to be. Concerning expectations for the future the network must achieve a "qualitative leap" (or "network 2.0") that cab be characterised in three key concepts:

- *A fully interactive network which allows all stakeholders to participate as content creators.* The ENRD will be called to enter the era of the 'interactive community' through enhanced cooperation and go beyond the opposition of top-down / bottom-up approaches; as will the cooperation promoted by the EIP-AGRI network.

- A result-oriented network whose main mission is to improve the implementation of programs by helping to achieve concrete and verifiable results in reasonable time. The added value of the network is twofold: firstly in defining the needs of stakeholders and secondly in designing solutions that are shared and adapted to local situations. Simplification and transparency are also important as is limiting the margin of error [in programme implementation]. The European Evaluation Network, operating within the framework of the ENRD, will provide valuable methodological support for accomplishing this task.

- *A network which interacts with urban actors* and integrates the rural-urban perspective in all activities in support to program implementation, and not just limited to local development initiatives undertaken by local actors (CLLD).

The event concluded with a screening of the video "A day in the life of the ENRD".

And special thanks are due to all of the National Rural Networks and other stakeholders of the ENRD who have contributed to the first six years of its operations.