

# **2014 Common Network Statistics Report**

Synthesis Report 2007 – 2013

*26 March 2014*

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## **1. Introduction**

It has often been stated that the work of the National Rural Networks (NRNs) is diverse, complex and due to its nature sometimes difficult to quantify. Therefore, in 2012 a joint NRN initiative, with the support of the ENRD Contact Point, made a first attempt to collect headline quantitative information, covering the activities carried out by Network Support Units (NSUs) over the period 2007 to 2011. Thereafter, the common framework for network statistics was developed further, and six key elements of rural networking were agreed upon. This resulted in the first consolidated NRN Common Networking Statistics report (2007-2012) in its present form, which was finalised in June 2013.

The purpose of this report is to provide interested stakeholders with an updated overview of some of the more 'tangible' and quantifiable aspects of networking, on the basis of the information the ENRD Contact Point has gathered from the NSUs for the period 2007 to 2013.

## **2. The survey**

### **2.1 Framework for common network statistics**

The current (2007-2013) framework for common network statistics is based on the "six key elements" of networking, initially developed to reflect the proposed operational objectives of National Rural Networks for the next programming period (2014-2020). In February 2014, a survey was launched in order to update previous results with 2013 data and to complete the picture with regards to NRNs, which had previously not replied.

The key elements of networking considered include:

1. Effective stakeholder engagement;
2. Building common understanding of common policies;
3. Collection, analysis and dissemination of good practice, success stories and relevant experience;
4. Exchange of relevant experience and know how among stakeholders;
5. Capacity building and training;
6. Support for cooperation and joint actions.

A total of fourteen questions were asked, which aimed to explore these six elements of networking in more depth. Data from January 2007 to December 2013 (see questionnaire in annex 1) was requested from those networks, which did not respond to last year's request. All other networks were invited to critically review the data

previously provided, and to furnish and update with regards to their 2013 activities.

## 2.2 Limitations of the survey

There are a number of limitations of the NRN statistics survey and data analysis, namely:

- Collection of the NRN statistics is not a mandatory activity for NSUs (i.e. it is not part of the formal monitoring process). Several networks did not regularly collect such data, and therefore, the data collected and provided by NSUs has often been fragmented. For instance, data for certain types of activities were not provided by some of the networks, which may be either due to the lack of data or due to the absence of that activity in the given year (the survey did not capture the reasons for limited data provision). It is therefore possible that in some cases the statistical data provided may not be fully reliable or weak.
- Networks started their activities at different points of time (as Annex 3 demonstrates). This also meant that not all the networks provided data for all of the years.

## 3. Results

This year's survey obtained responses from twenty-three of thirty-one NSUs contacted (see annex 2 for a detailed list of those NSUs who returned questionnaires)<sup>1</sup>, representing a response rate of over 74%. Inputs were received from all those 17 NSUs, which were already responsive last year (therefore complementing their existing 2007-2012 data with an update for 2013), and in addition from 6 NSUs, which responded for the first time (hence providing data for the entire 2007-2013 period).

### 3.1 Key element one: Effective stakeholder engagement

#### 3.1.1 Network meetings

The first two questions sought to identify:

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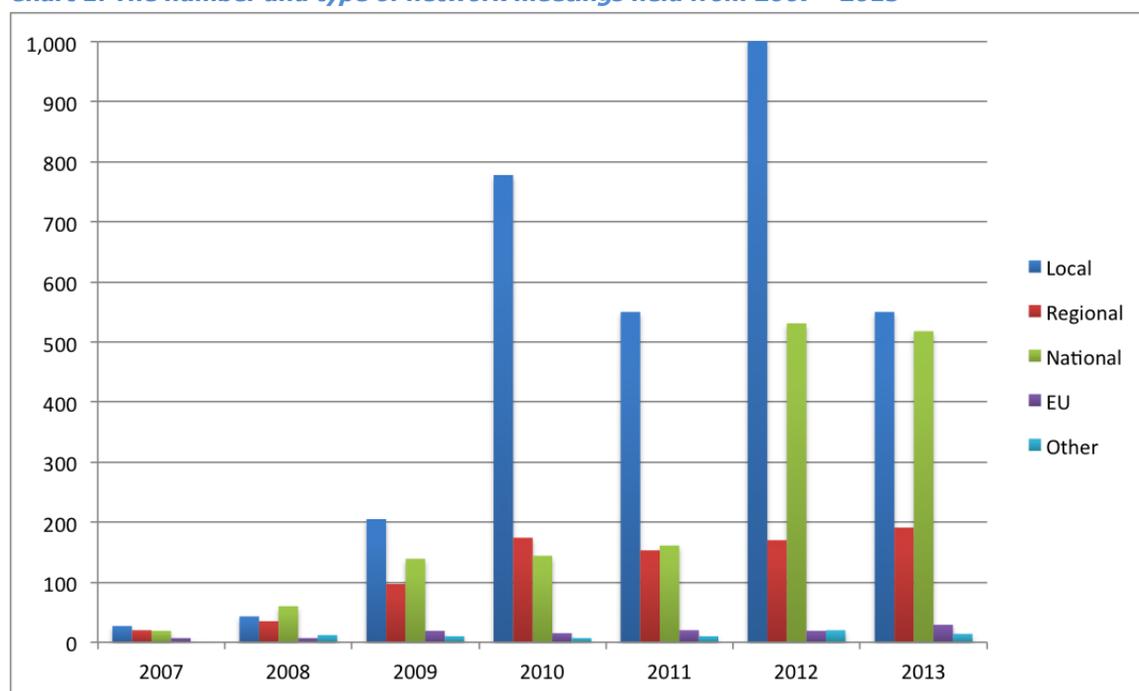
<sup>1</sup> For the purpose of this survey 25 national NSUs were contacted and 6 regional NSUs in BE and UK (UK and BE in the programming period 2007-2013 did not have a national support unit). The Croatian NSU was not contacted for the purpose of this survey because it started its operation in 2013 only. Therefore the total number of NSUs contacted is 31. In the case of France, two regional Network Support Units supplied additional data. However, only the inputs of the French national NSU were considered, as the individual data provided by the regional units from Auvergne and Languedoc-Roussillon represented just a fraction of all the regional NSUs actually operational in France.

- The **number of network meetings** held at local, national and EU levels, which had supported participants to learn more about their work, to network together, to engage groups in specific activities or to encourage participants to become involved with the NRN and the Rural Development Programme in their country;
- The **number of participants** for each type of event.

By the end of 2013, the NSUs who responded had held a total of 5,758 network meetings. Starting off with an annual number of network meetings of 73 in 2007 (1% of all meetings held), the number of annual meetings held reached a total of 1,302 during 2013 (23%). With 1,744 network meetings, the highest overall number was held in 2012 (30%).

Just over half of these meetings (55%) were held at a local level, 27% were national meetings, while 15% were held regionally<sup>2</sup> and 2% were held at a European level. These results are broken down further in Chart 1 below.

*Chart 1: The number and type of network meetings held from 2007 - 2013*



These most recent results highlight the significant work carried out to support networking and involvement of rural communities at the local level. It has been noted though that the annual number of network meetings addressing the local level declined in 2013 (by almost half, compared to 2012). This may indicate that there are less animation needs for supporting implementation under the 2007-2013 period, while the

<sup>2</sup> As far as the French region of Languedoc-Roussillon is concerned (not included in these statistics), 63 meetings involving the participation of 2,100 stakeholders were reportedly held between 2007 and 2013.

focus shifts towards preparations for implementing measures under the 2014-2020 period. As the reported proportions of this type of activity at European and national levels display little change over the past two years, the role of rural networks in the Member States and the role of the European Network for Rural Development are deemed to remain separate and complementary.

Although records about the total number of participants were not kept in all cases, it can be determined on the basis of aggregate data that a minimum of 835,483 persons attended these meetings. Of these, 600,367 attended national meetings, with more than 169,158 additional participants at local events. An average of 55 people attended each local meeting, 75 the regional meetings, and 404 the national meetings, dropping down to 60 for European-level meetings.

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*With an average attendance of 404 persons, national networking meetings are held at a much larger scale than any other type of meeting. The fact that more than half of the overall 5,758 networking meetings were held to address the local level, however, underlines the significant work carried out to support local networking and involvement of local communities.*

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### **3.1.2 Networking tools**

With regard to networking tools the survey requested information on:

- The **networking communication tools developed** by NSUs, which are directly related to networking and used by their stakeholders. NSUs were asked to count individual telephone help lines, whole websites rather than website pages, single publications, the number of social media accounts they held, and any other promotion tools not included in the previous options.
- The **number of users**, which has been recorded for each of these tools.

Following this year's survey responses from twenty-three NSUs a total number of 1,580 different networking communication tools has been established. At the end of 2013, these had been used almost 11.6 million times. With the production of 970 different brochures, reports, leaflets and other types of documentation, publications continue to be the communication tool most frequently used for the dissemination of information. The number of websites developed by NSUs continuously increased to now 228, which so far have received more than 7.5 million hits to their home pages. Thus, websites and publications are by far the two largest forms of communication tool used, with websites already achieving more than double the number of 'users' compared to publications (2.92 million disseminated copies). The steady use of both means of communication

since 2010 (see chart 2 below), however, shows the importance of both of these tools for the dissemination of information, and demonstrates how they are complementary in nature.<sup>3</sup>

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*In terms of outreach, the national rural networks' websites and publications are by far the most effective communication tools, with website home pages having achieved more than 7.5 million hits and publications having reached out to a readership of 2.9 million.*

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Helplines have been reportedly set up by ten of the NSUs who responded; however, of these only five had data available on the number of calls (64,765) made to the main helpline number. However, the available data does not promote any conclusions (94% of these calls were made to the Hungarian NSU) other than that the majority of assistance required must be covered through the most popular communication tools discussed in this section. According to earlier findings, anecdotal evidence also suggests that many NSUs provide advice and guidance ad-hoc over the phone, which has not been delivered through and - as such - was not statistically monitored as a dedicated telephone helpline service.

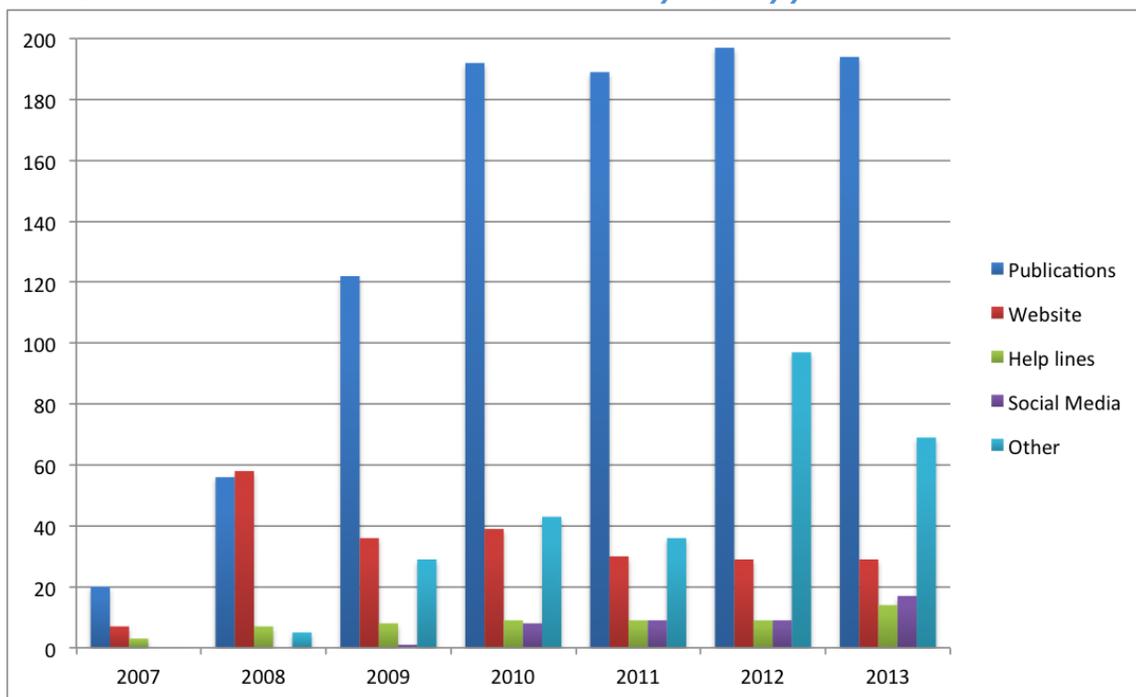
The use of new social media is established within eleven NSUs, of which 8 maintain a Facebook page, 7 run Twitter accounts and 2 are networking via LinkedIn. Some utilised all three social media communication tools; however, surprisingly the majority were using only one or two of these three vehicles. The combined number of total users captured via the 8 Facebook pages has increased over time to 12,579 persons, the number of those following the Twitter accounts of 7 NSUs has reached 19,692. Although only exploited by 2 NSUs, 3,333 users make use of the opportunity to network via LinkedIn. Accordingly, social media accounts maintained under Twitter attracted so far the highest average of stakeholders per NSU (2,813 persons).

Several NSUs also listed tools under 'other'. These were primarily YouTube, video clips utilised through other medium and road shows undertaken in specific rural areas.

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<sup>3</sup> This holds also true for the regional level in France (which was not included in these statistics), as e.g. the network of Languedoc-Roussillon recorded 7,660 visits on its website and reported a readership of 5,600 rural actors for its six publications.

*Chart 2: The number of communication tools utilised by NRNs by year first established*



The data is reflected on an annual basis in Chart 2 above. During 2007 the only communication tools utilised were 20 publications, 7 websites and 3 telephone helplines, receiving a combined total usage of about 187,000. By 2010, social media had been introduced by a number of NSUs with the combined total usage of all the communication tools reaching its first annual peak at over 2.7 million hits, reads and follows. This was followed by a decline to 2 million in 2011, but the same annual figure in 2012 once more peaked at 2.7 million hits, reads and follows, before slightly falling to 2.6 million in 2013. Chart 2 also displays a sudden increase of the numbers of help lines and social media between 2012 and 2013 (compared to their steady occurrence between 2010 and 2012), which may again indicate a shift of focus and increasing interest towards preparations for implementing measures under the 2014-2020 programming period.

### *3.1.3 Engaging hard to reach groups*

NSUs were asked to provide information on:

- The **activities delivered in order to engage hard to reach groups**, who otherwise might not participate in the programme. This included specific workshops, conferences or training initiatives or an innovative activity undertaken to involve a specific group. NRNs were asked to include the actual number of initiatives delivered, and;
- The **number of participants** from each group.

Many of the NSUs have delivered specific initiatives focused on engaging groups within their countries, which have been historically harder to involve with the NRN and the opportunities available to them through Rural Development Programmes. This area of activity did not fit within the remit of all the NSUs who responded, with four of the twenty-three not involved in delivering these types of initiatives. Of the remaining some appear very heavily involved with a variety of hard to reach groups, while others have seemingly focused on one particular area, most importantly the rural youth and the farming community.

*Between 2007 and 2013, a total of 358 initiatives have been developed to engage hard to reach groups, working with the farming community, young people, women, ethnic groups and to support equal opportunities. The majority of these initiatives engaged with farmers and young people (85%).*

A total of 358 different initiatives have been developed over the seven-year period working with a number of different groups. With 200 (56%), the number of initiatives aimed at the farming community is the largest, while 105 (29%) focused on activities to engage youth in rural areas. While NSUs reported more farming than youth sector initiatives, the participant figures display a reverse trend: those initiatives focusing on the farming community have directly engaged with 30,450 farmers; while youth initiatives have engaged with 58,833 young people. This trend seems to confirm that farming initiatives are more bespoke in nature and therefore work with smaller groups at any one time. As more than half (104) of the NRN's initiatives addressing the farming community were held in 2013 one may also speculate, whether a good part of these were held in preparation for the year 2014, which the United Nations (UN) General Assembly declared the International Year of Family Farming.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, it has been observed, that youth activities first picked up in 2010 and 2011 (6 and 13 initiatives respectively), following the launch of the International Year of Youth in August 2010, reaching highest numbers in 2012 and 2013 (41 and 44 initiatives respectively).

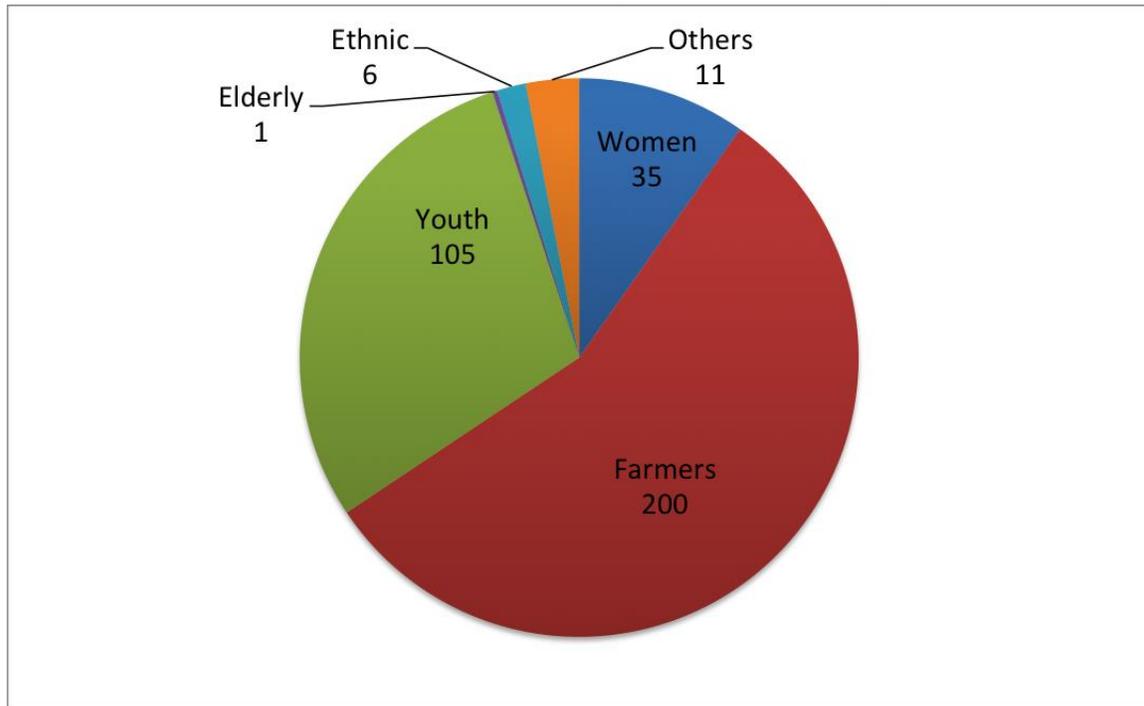
Less significant, with a total of 35 (10%), initiatives developed to engage women are the third most important. Altogether 2,131 women participated in these, with first events recorded in 2009. Starting off with 32 participants, their numbers peaked in 2010 (660) and 2012 (674). Three NSUs reported six initiatives (2%) developed specifically to engage with ethnic groups, while only one NSU implemented an activity focusing on

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<sup>4</sup> Compare European-level support for the international year of family farming, e.g. events ([http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/events/family-farming-conference-2013\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/events/family-farming-conference-2013_en.htm)) and publications ([http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app\\_templates/enrd\\_assets/pdf/publications-and-media/eu-rural-review/PublicationENRDperiodical-17\\_en.pdf](http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/enrd_assets/pdf/publications-and-media/eu-rural-review/PublicationENRDperiodical-17_en.pdf)).

elderly people. Other NSUs reported an additional number of 11 activities (3%), which addressed specific issues, engaging altogether 245 people. Six of these were launched by one NSU, and dealt with equal opportunities in rural areas, involving 115 participants. These results are displayed in chart 3 below.

*Chart 3: The number of activities delivered to engage with hard to reach groups*



### 3.2 Key element two: Building common understanding of common policies

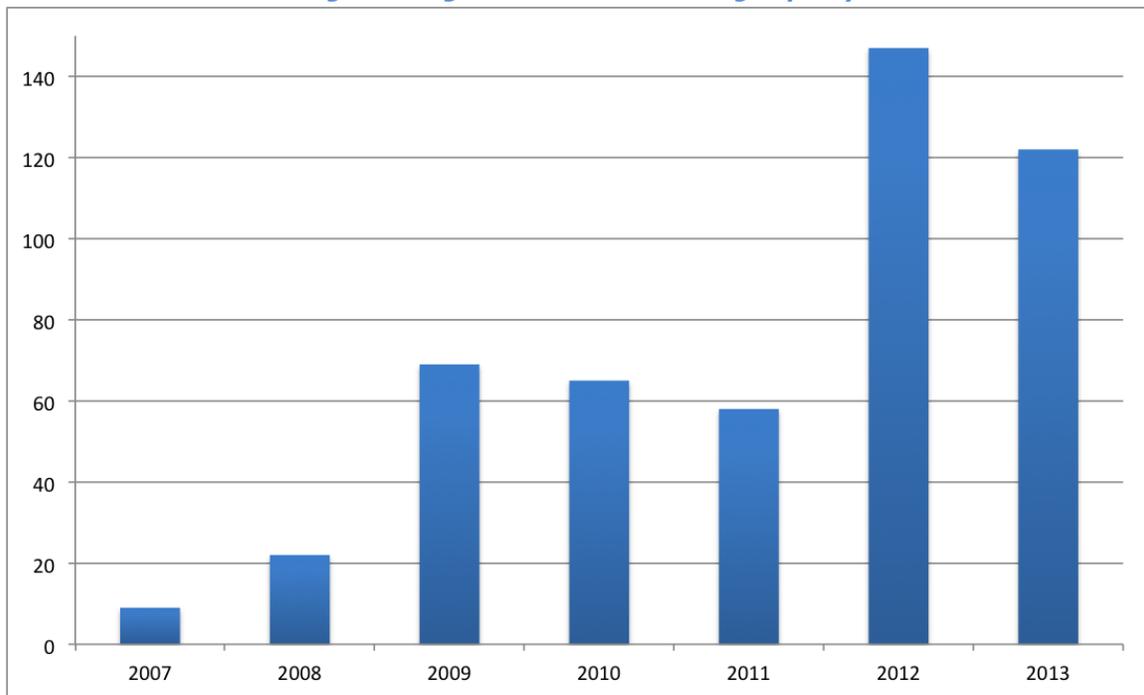
#### ***Bringing people together over policy***

The NSUs were asked to provide data on the following questions:

- The **number of meetings or events** they held, which supported participants to work together to understand and learn more about a specific policy or work together to refine, develop or build upon that policy, and;
- The **number of people participating** in these meetings.

All but one of the NSUs who replied had delivered work in this area, providing support to a range of stakeholders and facilitating a process, which enabled them to work more effectively together. They reported to have held a total of 492 meetings between 2007 and 2013. Annual meeting figures are displayed in chart 4 below, according to which the highest numbers of meetings were held in 2012 and 2013.

*Chart 4: Number of meetings building a shared understanding of policy*



The recent reporting by those NSUs, who provided information about the number of participants engaged in these meetings, established the total figure with 34,941 stakeholders, which corresponds to an average participant rate of 71 persons per meeting. Between 2007 and 2009, annual attendance numbers rose quite significantly to about 3,900, from where they slightly declined before taking two very sharp climbs to reach 5,973 in 2011, peaking at 10,749 in 2012 and at 9,599 in 2013.

Possible reasons for significantly increased NRN meeting frequencies in 2009 and 2010 may include (1) events supporting the dissemination of information related to the consequences of the CAP Health Check, which was completed in late 2008; and (2) the organisation of meetings supporting the post-2013 CAP public debate, which were conducted in the spring of 2010.

While this confirms the suggestion that the greatest need for this type of networking exists during the first few years of programme implementation (i.e. 'policy makers' and 'practitioners' work together on delivery challenges), it also shows that during the final years such kind of meetings enable capitalization, analysis and understanding, in order to support the development of new programme policies.

### 3.3 Key element three: Collection, analysis and dissemination of good practice, success stories and relevant experience

#### ***Sharing examples***

The survey next explored the number and means of dissemination of a range of useful examples drawn from activity within the Rural Development Programmes:

- The **number of individual best practice examples, success stories and relevant experiences NSUs** had collated and shared; broken down by the primary means by which they were communicated. If, e.g. they were collated to be used at a conference but, however, were also published on a website then they were only counted in the conference section.

All NSUs who responded were able to provide information for this question. The results showed that these twenty-three NSUs had collected, analysed and disseminated 17,118 examples from across the Rural Development Programmes of their countries, which corresponds to a calculated annual average of 106 examples per NSU.

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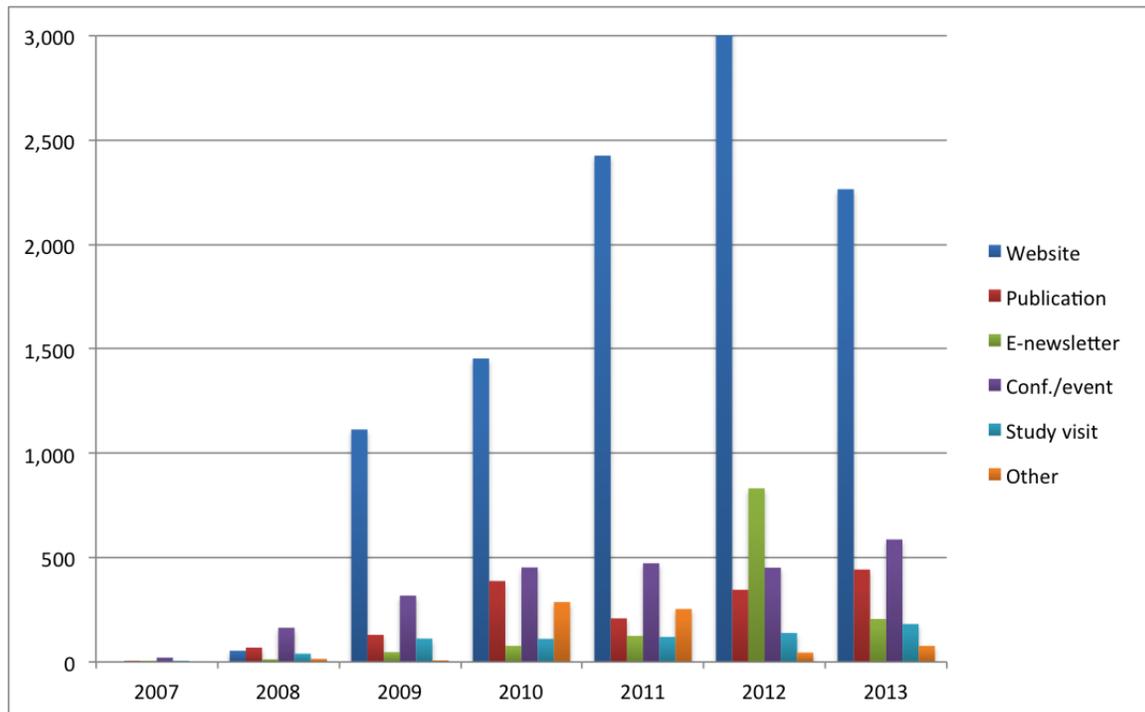
*Between 2007 and 2013 NSUs collected 17,118 examples, which corresponds to an annual average of 106 per NSU. 61% of these examples were disseminated through websites, and 14% delivered through conferences and events, 9% in publications, 8% in e-newsletters and 4% during study visits.*

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The dissemination via websites is the by far most frequently used form to communicate individual best practice examples, success stories and relevant experiences (10,365 examples). A further 2,468 examples were primarily distributed through conferences or events demonstrating the significant role sharing good examples plays at these types of activities. A total of 1,588 examples were collected for use in publications (an additional 1,304 were used in e-newsletters), while 707 were prepared in relation to the conduct of study visits.

The remaining 686 were listed under the category of 'other' and where further information was provided these included those posted on YouTube, short films distributed via DVD and those collected to be used during NRN road shows. The NSUs' annual achievements are detailed in the chart below.

*Chart 5: Number of stories collated and shared, and nature of dissemination*



### 3.4 Key element four: Exchange of relevant experience and know how amongst stakeholders

#### *Electronic discussion groups*

The survey then requested information on:

- The **number of individual electronic discussion groups and web fora** the NSUs had established, counting the individual groups not the individual themes discussed,
- The **number of people that had joined** these groups.

Eleven NSUs have established the method of electronic group discussion. Where they had been set up, electronic discussion groups have proven themselves as a successful form of networking: the number of groups known to have launched jumped from 1 to 24 between 2007 and 2008, and from thereon NSUs reported the annual operation of 14 to 19 groups up to the year 2011. With 39 and 29 groups in 2012 and 2013 respectively, these NSUs have organised a total number of 143 different e-mail discussion groups or web based fora. Over the 2007 - 2013 period 54,315 stakeholders reportedly engaged in these discussion fora, which corresponds to a calculated average number of participants

per group of 380 persons.

Notes previously provided by some of the NSUs clarified that not all these groups ran indefinitely, as many were established to discuss a specific issue or challenge. The peak numbers of discussion groups, which were reported for 2012 and 2013, may once more be linked to the NRNs' attempt to facilitate capitalization, analysis and understanding, thus representing their effort to support the development of new programme policies.

In any case, the improved data coverage from about one third of NSUs, validate the suggestion that this form of networking has proven useful with good numbers of stakeholders participating where these types of groups are available.

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*Electronic 'discussion' groups are used by about one third of all NSUs, and the 143 electronic groups or web-based fora identified by the survey experience significant levels of participation, as they have facilitated discussions among 54,315 individuals on both specific and general topics.*

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### **3.5 Key element five: Capacity building and training**

#### **3.5.1 Training activities**

The NSUs were then asked to provide information on:

- The number of **training activities organised** counting the individual training actions (not the individual training days or sessions), listed by the main theme of the training delivered, and;
- The **number of people participating** in the training.

Not all of the NSUs have training delivery within their remit, which was the case for three of the NSUs who responded to the survey. Between 2007 and 2013, the majority of them, however, delivered 4,139 training activities to 171,886 persons. This results in an approximate average participation rate of 42 trainees per activity.<sup>5</sup>

When broken down by type, about 25% of the training activities were delivered around the areas of management and communication to groups averaging 24 in size. Training targeted at Axis 3 and 4 accounted for 13% and 14% each, displaying an average group size of 34 and 55 respectively. Axis 1 training accounted for 11%, with an average group

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<sup>5</sup> Regional-level training in France (not included in these statistics) displays a comparable trend, with 41 training events in Languedoc-Roussillon followed by 1,435 participants (an average of 35 trainees per activity).

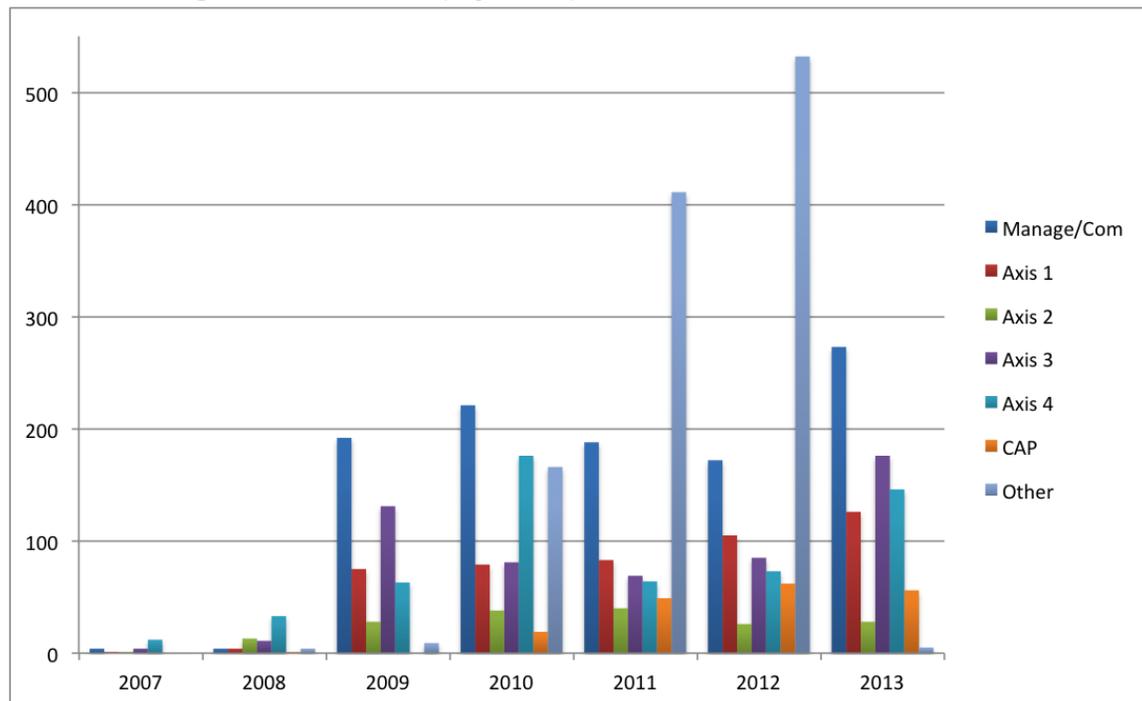
size of approximately 30 persons, and 4% of the training delivered focused on the theme of Axis 2, with an average group size of 43. Another 5% of training activities were finally associated with the Common Agricultural Policy, however, involving much larger group sizes of 134 trainees.

*'Management and communication' training remains the most common theme of training activities organised by NSUs. Training with a focus on the four axes still mostly covers axes 1, 3 and 4 of the EARDF.*

NSUs also listed an important number of 1,127 training activities under the category of 'other' training, which were attended by almost 50,000 participants. Additional information previously obtained suggests that this training category included measures fostering participatory processes and encouraging innovation. Annual participant figures in this category reached their peak in 2010 and 2011 with 17,558 and 18,637 trainees (in 166 and 411 events respectively), and have been in decline since, achieving a participation of 7,084 persons (in 532 activities) in 2012 and of 499 persons (in just 5 events) in 2013.

Chart 6 below represents an annual breakdown of the NSUs' varied training offer, which also demonstrates that the need of the members of the rural network constituency for this kind of service is a fairly continuous and steady one.

**Chart 6: Training activities delivered, by theme, from 2007 - 2013**



### *3.5.2 Study visits*

The survey then requested data on:

- The number of **study visits and field trips** organised by the NSUs counting the individual visits or trips rather than the individual visit days or sessions, and;
- The **number of people participating** in these visits.

The total number of study visits and field trips organized by NSUs between 2007 and 2013, as captured by the current survey effort, amounts to 760. These attracted 21,520 participants, who thus had opportunity to discover project examples first hand both at home and abroad. The latest registered annual data shows that a small first number of 3 international visits involving 36 interested stakeholders took place as early as 2007. The first four in-country study trips for 271 persons followed in 2008. Numbers peaked in 2011 with 116 foreign study trips (3,734 participants) and in 2012 with 109 in-country field visits (2,946 participants) respectively, before dropping down again.

## **3.6 Key element six: Support for cooperation and joint actions**

### *3.6.1 Cooperation and joint action events organised*

In the final section of the survey NSUs were asked to provide information on:

- The **number of events they had organised to promote cooperation** and to support groups to find potential cooperation partners. It was suggested that these could be events specifically developed to encourage cooperation and joint actions as well as workshops or other activities delivered within other events, and;
- The **number of people** who participated in these events.

While two NSUs were unable to provide data, all others who responded to this question reportedly have delivered a combined total of 298 events engaging 14,505 participants.<sup>6</sup> Interestingly the number of events held peaked in 2009 at eighty-five; however, attendance at these events was at its highest during 2011 (3,728 participants). This may suggest that the NSUs chose to provide this networking activity early on in the programme period. However, many of the groups endeavouring to develop joint actions

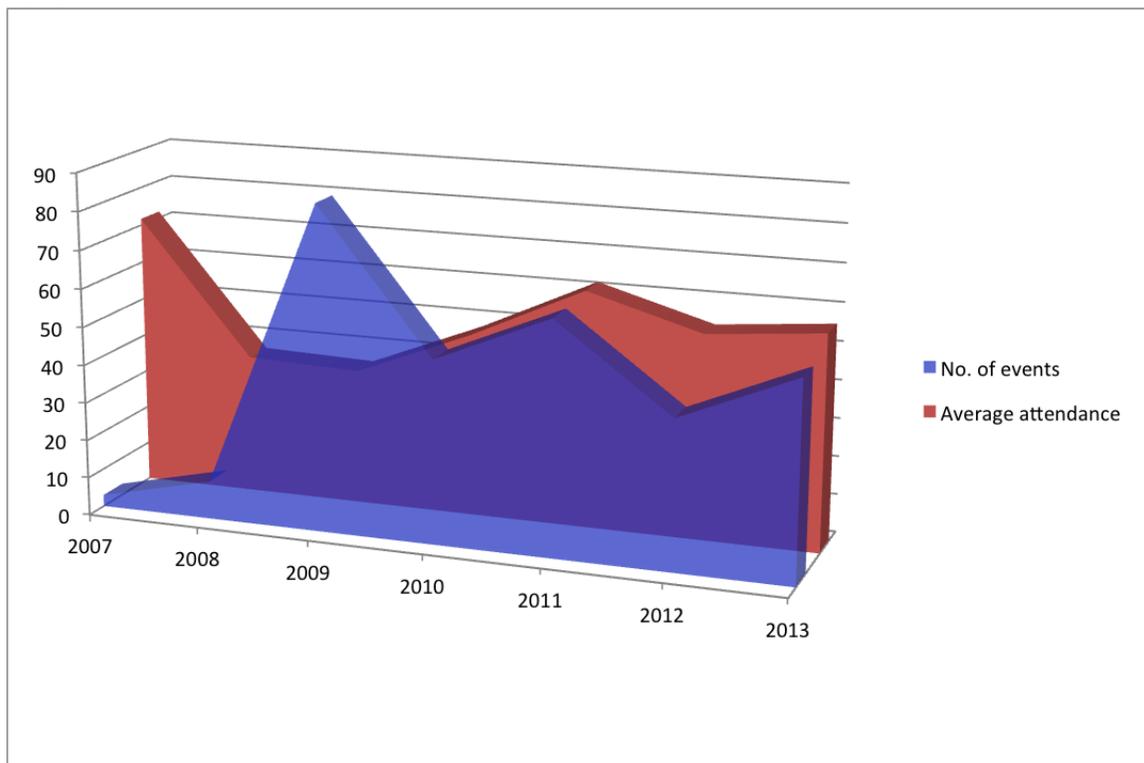
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<sup>6</sup> Additionally nine cooperation events organised by two French regional NSUs (not included in these statistics) attracted the participation of 395 persons (i.e. 44 persons on average).

were not active in this area until later on in the programming period. These results are laid out in Chart 7 below.

*Although the annual frequency of the NSUs' events promoting cooperation reached its high in 2009 (85 cooperation events), attendance in terms of their average number of participants peaked as early as in 2007 (72 participants) and, later on again in 2011 (62 participants).*

**Chart 7: Number of cooperation and joint action events and average attendance, from 2007 to 2013**



### **3.6.2 Cooperation projects**

The NSUs were then asked to identify:

- The number of **cooperation projects and joint actions, which were developed with their support**. This could for example have been through an event they organised, a workshop they facilitated or by providing contact and other information directly to groups. There were, however, asked to only include those projects where they felt they could clearly identify an NSU input.

Many of the NSUs felt that it was impossible to capture this information accurately, as in

the large majority of cases they do not have the resources to follow up on the development of contacts and facilitation work they carry out. Twelve NSUs were able to provide relevant data, and the number of cooperation projects in relation to which NSUs claim their intervention had been instrumental to the realisation of a joint action was established with 298 (corresponding to an average of nearly 25 projects per NSU).<sup>7</sup>

#### 4. Conclusions

Compared to last year's 2007-2012 survey, to which 55% (17 NSUs) responded, this year's 2007-2013 survey exercise achieved an improved 74% return rate (23 of the 31 NSUs contacted<sup>8</sup>), including updated inputs from all NSUs which responded last year. The ENRD Contact Point's follow-up activity included individual exchanges and reminders, and each NSU's feedback was responded to. Once more, a good cross section of responses was received, with six NSUs returning data for the first time adding both to the northern and southern Europe dimension, as well as to the groups of old (France, The Netherlands, Ireland and Spain) and new Member States (Hungary and Romania). Among the four NSUs from the old Member States responding for the first time were most notably two large networks from the south (France and Spain), a fact that further enhances the assessment of the scope and magnitude of activities carried out by National Rural Networks.

The present exercise's significantly improved data basis (compared to last year's return) enabled the ENRD Contact Point to verify and – in most cases – to actually confirm the past survey's suggestions and findings:

- An absolute majority of 55% of all network meetings addressed the local level, directly engaging local communities with networking activities and raising awareness of the opportunities available to them through the Rural Development Programmes. However, in 2013 their number declined by almost half, while the meeting frequency at regional, national and European levels displayed little change.
- Websites and publications remain the NSUs' most effective network communication tools.
- A mostly steady group of networks has been exploiting social media since the programme period's mid-term, with Twitter representing the medium that displayed the most remarkable user uptake.

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<sup>7</sup> Two French regional NSUs (not included in these statistics) between 2007 and 2013 have reportedly contributed to the realisation of a total of 35 cooperation projects.

<sup>8</sup> For more explanations see page 4 and Annex 2.

- The most common hard to reach groups, which NSUs engage with are the farming community and the rural youth. Although the number of initiatives addressing farmers dominates over those organised for the rural youth, the participation of young people by number is far higher than attendance by farmers.
- NSUs have engaged participants for policy events throughout the programme period, with events reaching both their maximum frequency and peak in terms of attendance in 2012 and 2013.
- NSUs have collected more than 17,000 examples of good practice, relevant experience and success stories. This corresponds to an annual average of 106 per NSU. 61% of these examples were disseminated through websites, and 14% delivered through conferences and events.
- Electronic 'discussion' groups are used by about one third of all 31 NSUs, and they also enjoy a significantly high intensity of participation, successfully facilitating discussions among 54,315 individuals on both specific and general topics.
- 'Management and communication' training remains the most common theme of training activities organised by NSUs. Training with a focus on the four axes still mostly covers axes 1, 3 and 4 of the EARDF.
- A high number of study visits have been delivered by NSUs to share best practices and develop joint actions inter-regionally and transnationally.
- NSUs are delivering activities to support the development of cooperation projects and joint actions early in the programme period, although average attendance increases and peaks once more around mid-term. Even with the data collected through this exercise the true value of the work of the NRNs remains somewhat elusive as there are no common systems of data collection for quantitative information, so much is lost within the confines of commonality. More significantly however, much of the NSUs role is focused on networking, facilitation and enablement, which results in many indirect benefits that cannot be quantified and captured through this process.

Quantification remains an important element in understanding the value of the rural networks. Providing supporting evidence to highlight the outputs of the NRNs, it presents an indication of what has been achieved. In addition, this approach can help networks to see how other networks operate and understand their scale of activity, and it also helps to clarify what can be measured to support their self-evaluation exercises.

It does, however, provide only minimal insight into the medium to long-term results and outcomes of the NRNs' work, and what the impact was that the networking activities have achieved. These quantitative results therefore have to be seen in the wider context

alongside qualitative information, which explores these elements of networking in more depth and within the specific framework of individual NSUs.

It may be therefore useful to keep the common lessons in mind, which have already been drawn from last year's data-collection exercise:

- National Rural Networks are active in carrying out some 'typical' activities that are common to the work of most networks and can offer useful lessons with regard to the next programming period. These activities are in line with the proposed key network functions.
- Setting quantifiable indicators for the 'typical activities' of NSUs can help to better understand the scope of individual network's operations, as well as their 'cumulative' achievements at the European level. For instance, it can help to establish the main scope of networking activities and allow for comparisons with the scope of activities of similar networks. Data will also allow wider conclusions to be drawn for instance on how, when and why the NSU aimed to address its stakeholders with certain types of activities, in order to achieve its stated objectives.
- Quantitative data can serve as indications for the overall achievements of the NSU and can be used as supporting evidence in terms of the NSU achieving its initial objectives. For instance, if the NSU set as an objective to 'contribute to better exchange among key rural stakeholders'; quantification of the number of events may provide one possible indicator on how far this objective has been achieved. However, quantitative output indicators are generally not sufficient to support the main findings on the results achieved by networks. For this NSUs need to support quantitative findings with qualitative evidence such as case studies, focus groups and surveys.
- The assessment of quantitative data is most relevant in the light of 'stated objectives', i.e. the purpose of using quantitative data is to understand if the activities carried out by the NSU and more in general by the network contributed to the stated objectives of the network. Therefore, it is suggested that more speculative, wider conclusions are drawn from the quantitative information, whenever it is reasonable and justifiable, with regard to the achievement of the results of the network. In this sense the assessment of quantitative data is rather a tool than a 'purpose' in itself.

In conclusion, the updated results of this survey have, once more, helped to identify the nature and type of the work of the NSUs, demonstrating their pivotal role in engaging stakeholders in the Rural Development Programmes. The work of NSUs continued being instrumental in ensuring the spread of good practice as well as enabling stakeholders to

share their experience and knowledge, building their skills and capacity and facilitating opportunities for the development of joint cooperation projects.

These essential ingredients of networking have gone a long way to supporting the successful delivery of the individual Rural Development Programmes, through a broad range of support to a diverse set of varied stakeholders. The nature of networks implies that many of the results of their work are intangible, increasing the need for qualitative evidence to complement the quantitative collected.

The collection of updated data has, however, provided a better insight into the importance of the work of the NRNs and once more highlighted the need for this to continue, properly resourced and evaluated, into the next programme period.

## Annex 1: Survey form

### Element one: Effective stakeholder engagement

Please read the guidance note supplied to help you complete this survey

<b>A. Number of network meetings held</b>		Local	Regional	National	EU	Other		Total
<b>GUIDANCE:</b> This should include all the meetings you've held which have supported participants to learn more about your work, to network together, to engage groups in specific activities or to encourage participants to become involved with the NRN and RDP. Please list these by individual year and ensure the total reflects the total number of meetings overall. Please also categorise these by the 'level' at which they were held - either at a specific local level, a regional meeting, a meeting for participants at a national level, EU level or other level.	2007							0
	2008							0
	2009							0
	2010							0
	2011							0
	2012							0
	2013							0
	<b>TOTAL</b>		0	0	0	0	0	

<b>B. Number of people participating in network meetings</b>		Local	Regional	National	EU	Other		Total
<b>GUIDANCE:</b> Please include all the people that have participated in the meetings you have listed above. Once again please do not use cumulative totals, list totals by individual year.	2007							0
	2008							0
	2009							0
	2010							0
	2011							0
	2012							0
	2013							0
	<b>TOTAL</b>		0	0	0	0	0	

<b>C. Type of communication tool developed</b>		Help lines	Website	Publications	Twitter	Facebook	LinkedIn	Other tools
<b>GUIDANCE:</b> These are all the communication tools you have developed which are related to networking and used by your stakeholders. Please count individual help lines, whole websites rather than website pages, single publications, the number of social media accounts you hold and any other promotion tools not already counted.	2007							
	2008							
	2009							
	2010							
	2011							
	2012							
	2013							
	<b>TOTAL</b>		0	0	0	0	0	0

<b>D. Number of people using communication tool</b>		Help lines	Website	Publications	Twitter	Facebook	LinkedIn	Other tools
<b>GUIDANCE:</b> Please include the number of people you know have used these tools - number of calls to the help line, number of visits to the website home page, number of <b>new</b> followers on social media and the number of publications distributed.	2007							
	2008							
	2009							
	2010							
	2011							
	2012							
	2013							
	<b>TOTAL</b>		0	0	0	0	0	0

<b>E. Number of initiatives developed to engage with hard to reach groups</b>		Women	Farmers	Youth	Elderly	Ethnic	Others	
<b>GUIDANCE:</b> This should include any activities you have delivered in order to reach groups who otherwise might not engage in the programme. It could be specific workshops, conferences or training initiatives or an innovative activity you've undertaken to involve a specific group. Please include the actual number of initiatives by each hard to reach group rather than the number of individual people. Please also list by individual year without accumulating the numbers.	2007							
	2008							
	2009							
	2010							
	2011							
	2012							
	2013							
	<b>TOTAL</b>		0	0	0	0	0	0

<b>F. Number of people participating in initiatives developed to engage with hard to reach groups</b>		Women	Farmers	Youth	Elderly	Ethnic	Others	
<b>GUIDANCE:</b> Please include all the people that have participated in the activities delivered in Question 1E above. Please only count individuals once and where they have been involved in a long term initiative please count them in the year their participation first began.	2007							
	2008							
	2009							
	2010							
	2011							
	2012							
	2013							
	<b>TOTAL</b>		0	0	0	0	0	0

## Element two: Building common understanding of common policies

Number of meetings or events held focused on building a shared understanding of policy		No. of meetings	No. of people					
<b>GUIDANCE:</b> This should include all the meetings or events you've held which have supported participants to work together to understand and learn more about a specific policy and/or work together to refine, develop or build upon that policy. Please list these by individual year and ensure the total reflects the total number of meetings overall. Please then also include all the people that have participated in the meetings you have listed.	2007							
	2008							
	2009							
	2010							
	2011							
	2012							
	2013							
	<b>TOTAL</b>		0	0				

## Element three: Collection, analysis and dissemination of good practice, success stories and relevant experience

Number of examples collated and shared, and nature of dissemination		Website	Publication	E-newsletter	Conf./event	Study visit	Other	
<b>GUIDANCE:</b> Please include the number of individual best practice examples you've collated and shared listed by individual year. Please also break them down by the primary means by which they were communicated. So for example if they were collated to be used at a conference however you also published them on your website then please only count them in the conference/event section.	2007							
	2008							
	2009							
	2010							
	2011							
	2012							
	2013							
	<b>TOTAL</b>		0	0	0	0	0	0

### Element four: Exchange of relevant experience and know how amongst stakeholders

Number of e-mail discussion groups and web fora established		No. of groups	No. of people					
<b>GUIDANCE:</b> Please include the number of individual electronic discussion groups and web fora you have established counting the individual groups not the individual themes discussed. Please once again list by individual year and check the total is the overall number you are expecting. Please include all the people that have joined the electronic discussion groups and web fora you have listed, whether they are active members or not.	2007							
	2008							
	2009							
	2010							
	2011							
	2012							
	2013							
	<b>TOTAL</b>		0	0				

### Element five: Capacity building and training

Number and type of training activities organised		Manage/Com	Axis 1	Axis 2	Axis 3	Axis 4	CAP	Other
<b>GUIDANCE:</b> Please include the number of training activities you have organised counting the individual training actions not the individual training days/sessions. Please list these by type of training, counting each action only once and listing it under the main theme of the training. Once again list by individual year and check the total is the overall number you are expecting.	2007							
	2008							
	2009							
	2010							
	2011							
	2012							
	2013							
	<b>TOTAL</b>		0	0	0	0	0	0

<b>Number of people participating in training activity organised</b>		Manage/ Com	Axis 1	Axis 2	Axis 3	Axis 4	CAP	Other
<b>GUIDANCE:</b> Please include the number of people who participated in the training sessions listed above.	2007							
	2008							
	2009							
	2010							
	2011							
	2012							
	2013							
	<b>TOTAL</b>		0	0	0	0	0	0

<b>Number of study visits/field trips organised and the number of people participating</b>		National	No. of people	Inter- national	No. of people			
<b>GUIDANCE:</b> Please include the number of study visits and field trips <b>you have organised</b> counting the individual visits or trips not the individual visit days/sessions. So for example a two day study visit involving three different site visits would count as one. Please list these by year, whether they took place in your country (national) or wholly or partly in another country (international) and include the number of people who participated on these visits/trips.	2007							
	2008							
	2009							
	2010							
	2011							
	2012							
	2013							
	<b>TOTAL</b>		0	0				

## Element six: Support for cooperation and joint actions

Number of cooperation events organised and attendees		No.of events	Local rep.	Regional rep.	National rep.	European rep.	Other	
<b>GUIDANCE:</b> Please include the number of cooperation events you have organised. Please list these by year and include the number of people who participated broken down by their location - local to the event, from the region, from the country or from other areas in Europe. Please only count people once and include them in the section they were representing.	2007							
	2008							
	2009							
	2010							
	2011							
	2012							
	2013							
	<b>TOTAL</b>		0	0	0	0	0	0

Number of cooperation projects developed with the support of NRNs								
<b>GUIDANCE:</b> Please include the number of cooperation projects and joint actions which were developed with your support. This could be through an event you organised, a workshop you facilitated, by providing contact and other information directly to groups. These should only be those projects you can clearly identify an NRN input into the development of.	2007							
	2008							
	2009							
	2010							
	2011							
	2012							
	2013							
	<b>TOTAL</b>		0					

## Annex 2: Survey methodology and National Rural Networks' response

Following the positive feedback to the survey's piloting and subsequent implementation in 2013 (covering the period 2007-2012), the present exercise was carried out to update the last survey's results with 2013 data and to complete the picture with regards to NSUs, which had previously not replied.

As shown in table 1 below, all of the previously responsive 17 Network Support Units were able to provide 2013 data. On the other hand, 6 NSUs responded for the first time to this exercise, which also improved significantly the situation of data availability for the period between 2007 and 2012.

Not all NSUs answered all the survey questions, as in some cases the data was not available or had been collected in a format different from what was requested. Equally, not all of the NSUs were active for the entire period data was requested for.

The NSUs' activities have been analysed with the help of their responses to 14 questions, which were designed to explore the six key elements of networking in more depth.

*Table 1 – NSUs who returned part or wholly completed surveys (2013 vs. 2014)*

<b>Response 2013</b>	<b>Response 2014</b>	<b>Remarks (2014)</b>
Austria	Austria	-
Belgium – Flanders	Belgium – Flanders	Complete review (all years)
Belgium – Wallonia	Belgium – Wallonia	-
Czech Republic	Czech Republic	-
Denmark	Denmark	-
Estonia	Estonia	-
Finland	Finland	-
	France (NSU +2)	Representing only a fraction of the existing regional networks, data received from the regions of Auvergne and Languedoc-Roussillon could not be considered
Germany	Germany	-
Greece	Greece	-
	Hungary	-
	Ireland	-

Latvia	Latvia	-
	The Netherlands	-
Poland	Poland	2012-2013 info does not include regional antennas (NSU data only)
Portugal	Portugal	-
	Romania	Only operational during 2012
Slovakia	Slovakia	-
Slovenia	Slovenia	-
	Spain	-
UK – England	UK – England	-
UK – Northern Ireland	UK – Northern Ireland	-
UK – Scotland	UK – Scotland	-

### Annex 3: Start date of NSU operations

NRN	National Authority	CODE	Launch of operations
Austria		AT	Dec 2008
Belgium	Flemish	BE-FL	Dec 2007
	Walloon	BE-WAL	April 2009
Bulgaria		BG	Dec 2012
Cyprus		CY	Nov 2008
Czech Republic		CZ	Nov 2008
Denmark		DK	March 2007
Estonia		EE	May 2007
Finland		FI	Dec 2008
France		FR	April 2008
Germany		DE	Feb 2008
Greece		EL	Nov 2008
Hungary		HU	Oct 2008
Ireland		IE	Dec 2008
Italy		IT	April 2007
Latvia		LV	July 2008
Lithuania		LT	Dec 2008
Luxembourg		LU	June 2008
Malta		MT	July 2009
Netherlands		NL	Oct 2007
Poland		PL	Dec 2008
Portugal		PT	March 2009
Romania		RO	Dec 2011
Slovakia		SK	Oct 2008
Slovenia		SI	April 2008
Spain		ES	July 2008
Sweden		SE	May 2007
United Kingdom	England	UK-EN	April 2008
	Northern Ireland	UK-NI	Sep 2008
	Scotland	UK-SCO	April 2009
	Wales	UK-WAL	April 2008

Source: ENRD NRN profiles