European Network for
Rural Development

Thematic Group

Improving RDP Implementation

Background &
Scoping Paper

V1 – April 2015

European
Commission

Contents

About this paper

This paper aims at:

i)   providing a conceptual framework for the work of the ENRD Thematic Group (TG) on '*Improving Rural Development Programmes implementation*', outlining its scope and expected outcomes in the wider context of the current ENRD activities;

ii)   providing a working framework and a reference tools for the members of the TG.

It builds upon preliminary working documents outlining the scope of the TG[1] and on the outcomes of the first meetings of the EU Rural Networks' Assembly[2] (26 January 2015) and Steering Group (25 February 2015)[3].

I.   Overall scope and specific objectives of the Thematic Group

"*Improving the quality of implementation of rural development programmes*" is one of the common objectives of National Rural Networks (NRNs) and the European Network for Rural Development (ENRD).

The overarching scope of the ENRD thematic work on 'improving RDP implementation' is to *provide those directly or indirectly involved in RDP implementation with knowledge and tools to address key challenges and improve programmes' performance from the outset of the 2014-2020 programming period.* The outcomes of this work will also inform key priority themes to be addressed by the work of the ENRD in the coming year(s).

Within this scope, the thematic group's **specific objectives** are to:

- Identify **key priorities and challenges** in terms of programmes' delivery and performance.

- Identify and illustrate **possible approaches and solutions** to be adopted for addressing the recognised needs and opportunities, highlighting the possible **role of rural networks**.

---

[1] 'Indicative work plan for the Thematic Group on RDP implementation' (internal working document, 02.12.14); 'TG RDP implementation - Summary for RN Assembly' (circulated at the RN Assembly Meeting of 26.01.15).
[2] http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/en/en-rd-events-and-meetings/rural-network-assembly-%E2%80%93-26-january-2015-%E2%80%93-brussels-be
[3] http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/en/en-rd-events-and-meetings/rural-networks%E2%80%99-steering-group-%E2%80%93-25-february-2015-%E2%80%93-brussels-be

- Raise awareness of **practical and administrative constraints** to delivery and highlight needs for further action.

- **Share experiences in delivering approaches** and distil factors for success (or failures).

Finally, drawing from the exchanges and the practices shared, the TG will attempt to **provide concrete recommendations** to ENRD stakeholders implicated in the implementation of RDPs in order to get the most out of the programmes from the outset of the programming period.

II. How the TG fits into the wider ENRD activities

The ENRD integrated work package

The TG is a central element of an *Integrated Work Package* (IWP) launched by the ENRD in order to address opportunities for improving the Implementation of RDPs. The theme of the IWP is articulated along one of the main objective set by the Rural Development Regulation for 2014-2020, for both the ENRD and NRNs.

Alongside with the TG a number of activities are carried out by the ENRD that contribute to the objectives of the work package, namely (see also Annex 1: Roadmap for the Thematic Group):

Training sessions and workshops	A series of events addressing aspects related to the good management and performance of RDPs. These concern: - The use of Simplified Cost Options (SCOs) - Aspects related to ensuring the reasonableness of costs of RDP-financed operations and, public procurement - Result-base agri-environment payment schemes
EU Rural Review	A publication dedicated to the theme of improving the implementation and ensuring a successful start of RDPs, which is envisaged to be a practical reference tool for RDP managers
ENRD Seminar	Expected to be held on June 2015, ideally brining forward experiences collected through the activities carried out within the work package to encourage further exchanges, reflections and practical suggestions for the implementation of RDPs.

In this context, the TG plays a pivotal role in two ways:

1) Allowing effective exchanges among EAFRD stakeholders and across Member States and providing **input and examples** to feed concrete recommendations.
2) **Linking** the different elements of the integrated work package ensuring that outcomes are relevant to the concerned stakeholders.

The wider strategic framework

An additional element should be considered that provides the ground for the work of the TG, namely the strategic input provided by the Rural Networks' Assembly and Steering Group.

As main governance body of the EU Networks, the Rural Networks Assembly (RNA) provides the strategic framework for the activities of the ENRD and the EIP-AGRI networks, including thematic work. In accordance with this framework, the Rural Networks Steering Group (SG), working on an operational level, coordinates the work of the Networks.

At the first meeting of the RNA (26 January 15) discussions were held around priorities topics for the thematic work of EU networks (Workshops 4 & 5 on the agenda)[4]. On 25 February, the Steering Group members took this initial input forward to provide further indications on priority themes for 2015. In this exercise, **four criteria** guided the selection of themes. According to these, selected themes should:

- Raise a **wide interest** across the EU
- Be relevant with respect to the programming cycle (**time-relevance**)
- Build on **past lessons**, avoiding repetitions
- Ensure **balance** between 'methodological' and 'topic-based' issues and between rural development objectives.

The discussions highlighted a set of ten topics bearing, in the Members' view, a different degree of urgency (Picture 1).

The indications emerged from these discussions have a great relevance for shaping the mandate of the TG in consideration of its objectives. Particularly, the conclusions from the SG meeting[5] highlighted that:

---

[4] EU Rural Networks Assembly – Report of the first meeting, 26 January 2015:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/sites/enrd/files/rural_networks_assembly_26_jan_2015_-_final_report.pdf
[5] EU Rural Networks Steering Group - Report of the 1st Steering Group Meeting, 25 February 2015:
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/sites/enrd/files/150317_sg-report_websitev.pdf

Picture 1 – Priority topics emerged from the SG discussions

N*	Selected topic (not ranked)	Priority
1.	Simplification (for all, in order to achieve the relevant objectives)	++
2.	Empowering advisory services – Knowledge transfer – Broader innovation	++
3.	Local food – Short Supply Chain – Rural-urban partnership – Small farms	+
4.	Pillar 1-Pillar 2 linkages	++
5.	Demographic change & social inclusion	+
6.	Multi-fund approaches	+
7.	Green economy related to job and growth	+
8.	Starting-up the NRNs	+
9.	Evaluation of networking activities - NRNs	+
10.	Climate change	+

- There is a clear interest and urgency to focus on relevant aspects for the successful **launch of the new RDPs** (time relevance).

- There is scope for further **sharpening the focus of the selected themes** and articulating the specific issues.

- Particularly, there is more work to be done to choose **the best 'packages' of networking tools** (also considering limitations) to address the priorities identified.

Links to the Integrated Work Package on Stakeholders involvement

The TG (and the Integrated Work Package as a whole) has strong links to the *ENRD Integrated Work Package on Stakeholders Involvement*. While the work on 'stakeholders involvement' primarily aims to contribute on 'how' rural networks should engage with stakeholders, the thematic work on 'RDP implementation' provides a better understanding on 'what' (which themes, measures and issues) networks should focus on. Therefore, the two integrated work packages work in tandem, both aiming to contribute to the development of the future work of ENRD and NRNs.

III.   Members of the Thematic Group

The membership of the TGs has an **open, voluntary and evolving** character. Participation is encouraged based on specific interest in the topic and readiness to actively contribute to the work.

Invitation to join the TG was originally addressed to all the members of the RNA. An initial group of some 35 interested stakeholders answered to the call, but it is expected that the composition of the group evolves according to increased interest and based on recommendations from TG members.

In the light of its objectives the TG aims to reach and involve:

Stakeholders directly or indirectly affecting the design and the implementation of RDPs

Managing Authorities, Paying Agencies, other delegated implementing bodies, National Support Units and members of NRNs, Local Action Groups, EC policy officers tasked with single RDPs (desk-officers), organisations sitting in programmes' Monitoring Committees

Stakeholders concerned by RDP implementation on the ground

Local Action Groups, members of organisations providing support to project/scheme implementation, project holders, advisors, etc.

IV.   Work methodology and expected contribution from Members

The work of the TG is based on the active **exchange of view and experiences** among its members through both **face-to-face meetings** and **online discussions**.

The ENRD Contact Point (CP) provides support and animation to the work of the TG, mostly through: providing the space for and facilitating discussions; analysing information both independently collected and provided by the TG members; formalising the outcomes of the group's work in meeting reports, discussion papers, final reports; disseminating the results of the TG at the EU level.

The **commitment and active participation of the TG members** is key to move forward with the work and achieve concrete and relevant outcomes. In particular, members are expected to:

- share their experiences, specifically with regards to main challenges and opportunities for the effective implementation of RDPs;

- bring concrete examples, relevant practices or approaches they have knowledge about or are dealing with, especially those that can hold a potential for learning or can suggest effective ways to deal with recognised bottlenecks;

- if necessary, provide evidence and data to support background analysis and recommendations;

- contribute to review interim outcomes, providing suggestions and recommendations for improvements and contribute to make the TG work relevant to stakeholders' needs and result-oriented;

- ensure – as far as possible – continuity in meetings and exchanges in-between meetings, reacting to discussions and contributing to the flow of information among members;

- inform and disseminate the knowledge gained among their organisations and invite those interested to join/contribute to the work of the TG

- use and disseminate more broadly the outcomes of the TG work.

V.   Expected outcomes and their dissemination

Table 1 summarises the expected outcomes of the TG work and outlines the links with: i) the specific TG outputs and; ii) other elements of the work package on 'improving RDP implementation'.

As stated in the overarching objective of the TG, the work of the group is expected to contribute to the successful implementation of the RDPs from the outset of the current programming period. Therefore, **dissemination** of the TG outcomes to the relevant stakeholders groups are an integral part of the whole work package (e.g. social media and website channels).

In addition, targeted dissemination activities are planned, which include:

- Target dissemination of the final report and examples of relevant practices to stakeholders who expressed interest in the thematic work such as Managing Authorities, Paying Agencies, advisors and others who are involved in the actual delivery of RDPs
- Targeted dissemination to Network Support Units to raise awareness about issues and possible strategies to effectively improve the quality of implementation of RDPs.

Table 1 – Thematic Group outcomes and link to relevant activities

Thematic Group Outcomes	Specific TG outputs		Other elements of the Integrated Work Package						
	TG Final report	**Examples** of practices and approaches	RN Assembly & Steering Group	ENRD Seminar	Rural Review	NRN meetings	Good practices	Trainings & Workshops	Social Media & Website
Opportunities for improving RDP management and performance are identified and shared	X	X		X	X		X	X	X
Awareness is raised about constraints and bottlenecks affecting the successful delivery of RDPs	X		X	X		X		X	
Recommendations are drawn for concerned stakeholders to be put in place at the outset of the programming period	X			X	X				
Suggestions are put forward for Rural Networks' action	X	X				X	X		
Suggestions are gathered to inform the focus of future ENRD work and possible support from the Contact Point	(informing the ERND CP work plan for 2015-2016)		X						
A community of practices for improving RDPs is established	(face to face meetings)		X	X		X		X	X

VI. Work plan

See also Annex 1: Roadmap for the Thematic Group

Milestones/activities	Objective	Timing (2015)
1st TG Meeting	• Identify what's urgent for improving RDP implementation: issues, possible NRNs support, examples • Refine priority themes • Initial planning of ENRD Seminar	17 March
Launch of online discussion group for TG members	Ensure exchanges in-between meetings (ENRD LinkedIn sub-group)	March
Collection of examples and online exchanges with members	• Discussion on results from 1st meeting • Collection of further examples from TG members	April
2nd TG Meeting	• Take stock of concrete cases and experiences • Formulate initial recommendations on improving RDP implementation • Second round of discussion about priority themes • Preparation to ENRD seminar	7 May
ENRD seminar	• Discuss identified issues and opportunities with a wider set of stakeholders • Inform recommendations for TG work.	11 June
3rd TG meeting	• Reflect on ENRD seminar outcomes • Finalise recommendations for stakeholders • (Third round of discussions about priority themes)	23 June
TG Final Report	(Informed by TG discussions and the conclusion of the seminar)	July 2015

Annex 1: Roadmap for the Thematic Group

European Network for Rural Development

Workshop
Reasonableness of costs
Public procurement
17 March 2015

Workshop
Simplified cost options 2
29 May 2015

Workshop
Results-based agri-environment payments
14 April 2015

Workshop
Simplified cost options 1
26 February 2015

2nd ENRD Seminar on 'Improving RDP implementation'
11 June 2015

3rd TG meeting

1st TG Meeting

- Presentation of **Thematic Group concept**

RN Assembly
26 January 2015

- **Brainstorming**
- Challenges and priorities; examples; planning of the 2nd ENRD Seminar

- **Taking stock**
- Concrete cases and experiences, Initial recommendations; preparations for 2nd ENRD Seminar

2nd TG Meeting

Final TG Report

- TG findings & recommendations

- **Refining and concluding**
- Reflecting on seminar's outcomes, drawing recommendations, preparing final report

2nd Rural Review on 'Improving RDP implementation'

RN Steering Group
25 February 2015

RN Steering Group
12 June 2015

| 2015 | Jan | Feb | Mar | Apr | May | Jun | Jul |